Audy Santoso

Union with God

An Assessment of Deification (Theosis) in the Theologies of Robert Jenson and John Calvin

V&R



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Edited by
Herman J. Selderhuis

in Co-operation with
Emidio Campi, Irene Dingel, Benyamin F. Intan,
Elsie Anne McKee, Richard A. Muller, and Risto Saarinen

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Preface

The heart's desire to live the life in God unites all regenerated Christians, and marks the parting of ways from non-regenerated ones. As a third-generation of Chinese migrant planted and rooted in Indonesia, who then had been living and staying in various countries, the feeling of living as an exile has been a constant reminder to seek a permanent home. The more global a person is the more homeless one becomes; one simply needs to find that dwelling in God himself. This in fact should be the common hope for all Christians who live in the world but not of this world. This is the heart of the matter in *theosis*, which was also reflected in Calvin's life and theology.

This book which is the result of my study would not come to its fruition without numerous people who have supported me. I sincerely and overtly grateful to people who have influenced and encouraged me in my doctoral dissertation. To Rev. dr. (h.c.) Stephen Tong, the founder of Reformed Evangelical Movement, whose faithful ministry has never waned to compel my deepest respect. To my gracious mentor and also co-promotor, Rev. Benyamin F. Intan, Ph.D. without whose support and encouragements this study certainly would not be initiated nor completed. To Prof. dr. Herman J. Selderhuis, whose role was not insignificant in establishing relations between IRES and TUA which resulted in my enlisting as one of the first students admitted in TUA's Ph.D. program. He has also endorsed the publication of this book.

Academically, I owe to my beloved main promotor, Prof. dr. Arnold Huijgen, of whom I am honored to be his first graduated Ph.D. student. His patient guidance was done out of a willing heart and a prudent mind. In a great deal this is also true to my other co-promotor, Prof. dr. Kees van der Kooi. His counsels and comments have spurred me on to think critically.

I am also grateful for the people who have supported me either through prayers or finances throughout my study: my fellow ministers, congregations of GRII Pondok Indah and other branches of GRII. When I started my study, I had to leave my pastoral duty from the Pamulang congregation; It was due to the persevere prayers from them and GRII Pondok Indah congregations that this study can be well accomplished.

On the other side of the world, I am also thankful for the given opportunities to minister the European congregations of GRII: twice at the annual European Reformed Evangelical Conference, and a combined seminar and Sunday pulpit ministry at cities like Bern, Hamburg, and Munich. Those visitations have been a source of encouragement in my study. In the Netherlands, I thank Geertje who had

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I cannot be less thankful to my loved ones: Yenny, my wife who endured the periodical separation months, and yet we become so much more united by sharing our common worries and joys in life. Our daughter Anastasia whose birthday celebration had been missed by her father for 3 consecutive years, and yet her Father in heaven has answered her constant prayer for a sibling, who sends Gregory as a surprised joy towards the end of this study.

Mrs. Chrisnah Ruston had done a great deal in editing my English at some chapters of my script, and dr. Jim West had done the same. All remaining errors are my own.

Finally, as I seek to accomplish 'my' John 17:4 fulfillment through this book, may the readers find their john 17:3 fulfillment. *Soli Deo Gloria*.

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1. Introduction

1.1 Object of the present study

Theosis or *deification* is commonly accepted as an Eastern/ Greek Orthodox concept. The hope of partaking in God's divine nature (2 Peter 1:4) has its earliest formulation in Irenaeus' *theologoumenon* in which we become what God is himself.[1] The notion implies at least two stages, the original stage and the final stage. There is a progress that leads to a closer unity from the earlier existing gap between God as Creator and humans as creatures. *Theosis* then describes how a human being in the final stage of salvation participates in God's life or being as Triune. The chief concern of *theosis* relates to the question, "how to do justice to the Creator-creature distinction." The present study discusses this question by means of a systematic-theological evaluation of Robert W. Jenson's concept of *theosis*.

Robert William Jenson (1930–2017), a Catholic-Lutheran American theologian considers *theosis* in his 2 volumes magnum opus, *Systematic Theology*, published in 1997 and 1999. In general, Jenson wrote his Systematic Theology as a Western system but with "some of its key position [as] reinventions of Orthodox wheels."[2] Thus, Jenson's work counts as an important modern Western Systematic Theology that incorporates the notion of *theosis*.

Unlike the later Greek orthodox tradition that often leads to a mystical union (mis-)understood by mixing with God in his essence, the Reformed tradition strongly maintains the Creator-creature distinction. Therefore, in this present study, Jenson's *theosis* is to be evaluated from within a Reformed theological framework. As one of the reformers who has significant influence on later theologians, John Calvin (1509–1564) is chosen to be the representative of Reformed theology.[3] We will critically employ Calvin to prevent a non-objective judgment towards Jenson. The research question in this study is: *to what extent can Jenson's idea of theosis be integrated within the Reformed theology, as exemplified by John Calvin's theology?*

To answer this question, an examination of the historical context of Robert W. Jenson, and John Calvin, is needed in view of the developed interest in *theosis* from the Greek Orthodox tradition. We will offer in section 1.2 a survey of Greek

1 See section 1.2.1.1.a.

2 Robert W. Jenson, *Systematic Theology*, vol. 1: *The Triune God* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), preface. Hereafter abbreviated as *ST* Volume.Part: Chapter.Section.

3 Considering that Reformed theology has never been monolithic from the beginning, we limit our study to Calvin's theology rather than incorporating differences with other reformers or later reformed theology like the Dutch Neo-Calvinism.

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Orthodox concept of *theosis* and its renewed interest in the West, then in section 1.3 understand the historical context of Jenson and Calvin as to their reception of *theosis.* From this general overview and specific historical contexts, to carry on an evaluation, a set of criteria is needed to assess Jenson's *theosis*. In section 1.4, these criteria are to be drawn from Calvin's work in his polemical writing directed to Andreas Osiander's doctrine of essential righteousness. Having established the historical context of Jenson and Calvin, and the criteria set for this evaluation, the method and outline of this study is sketched out in section 1.5.

1.2 Theosis as Common Tradition

Theosis found its impetus in various nuances from the Church Fathers. While *theosis* seems to be more at home in the Eastern Orthodox tradition, the Western tradition has never really lost its significance in her articulation of the final blessedness as *visio Dei.* The Enlightenment rendered *theosis* dormant until the rediscovery of this common root through the recent interactions between the West and the East in their traditions.[4]

Norman Russell in *The Doctrine of Deification in the Greek Patristic Tradition* has done a survey of *theosis* in at least twenty three theologians from Ignatius of Antioch to Gregory Palamas.[5] This work should be complemented by Hans Boersma's book, *Seeing God: The Beatific Vision in Christian Tradition,* which covers a few Greek theologians like Gregory Nyssa and Gregory of Palamas, the Latin Father Augustine, Medieval theologians like Aquinas and Palamas, and the Reformer John Calvin with more modern theologians from the Calvinist/Reformed tradition; a total of at least seventeen figures.[6] We will be selective in our delineation so as to include only those theologians whose notion of *theosis* is formative and relevant in the development of John Calvin and Robert W. Jenson.

1.2.1 The Eastern Orthodox idea of Theosis

There is a lack of agreed upon definition on *theosis*. Gavrilyuk observes the exalted status of *deification*, and yet there is no explicit mention of it in the dogmatic

4 See Gerald Lewis Bray, *God Has Spoken: A History of Christian Theology* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2014), 1196.

5 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).

6 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2018).

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definitions of the first Seven Ecumenical Councils (325–787).[7] This results, he adds, in a considerable fluid concept of *theosis*. Similarly, Russell notes that *deification* was most often used metaphorically by the earlier patristic writers before Dionysius the Areopagite of the sixth century.[8]

For our initial study, we could engage the issue temporarily by adopting this provisional definition. Russell describes that the doctrine of *theosis* expresses the true fulfillment of our humanity in which

> by sharing in the divine sonship of Christ with all that implies in ecclesial and ascetical terms, our identity can be redefined as "gods by grace" destined to be transformed by divine glory through participation in the triadic fullness of life.[9]

At a glimpse, *theosis* deals with our future life in God that is characterized by grace, related to Christ, such that we can be called as gods through participation. We will first briefly survey how *theosis* is being articulated by the common Greek Fathers of the church: Irenaeus of Lyons, Athanasius of Alexandria, the Cappadocian Fathers, and Cyril of Alexandria; Then, we will go in depth at how *theosis* was being differentiated by some later Greek theologians: Maximus the Confessor, Gregory Palamas and John Zizioulas.

1.2.1.1 The Greek Fathers' teaching

a. Irenaeus of Lyons (130–202)

Irenaeus in *against Heresies* teaches *theosis* Christologically again and again.[10] He writes about our being "one with God (III.18.7)", "been united to incorruptibility and immortality (III.19.1)", "having embraced the Spirit of God (IV.20.4)", and also the oft repeated *theologoumenon*, "Jesus...become what we are, that He might bring us to be even what He is Himself (V. Pref.)." Incarnation then is a pivotal point of one's salvation in becoming divine or godlike. The polemical context Irenaeus theologized was against the Gnostic view of salvation that undermines the material

7 Paul Gavrilyuk, "The Retrieval of Deification: How a Once-Despised Archaism Became an Ecumenical Desideratum," *MT* 25 (2009), 648, cited by Daniel A. Keating, "Typologies of Deification" *IJST* 17, no.3 (July 2015): 281.

8 Norman Russell, *The Doctrine of Deification in the Greek Patristic Tradition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 1.

9 Russell, *Doctrine of Deification*, 320.

10 Irenaeus of Lyons, "Irenæus against Heresies," in *The Apostolic Fathers with Justin Martyr and Irenaeus*, ed. Alexander Roberts, James Donaldson, and A. Cleveland Coxe, vol. 1, *The Ante-Nicene Fathers* (Buffalo: Christian Literature Company, 1885), III.10.2; III.18.7; III.19.1; IV.20.4; IV.33.4; V.Pref.; V.16.2.

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world.[11] As described above, salvation is more than just adoption in Irenaeus' concept.[12] It is about one's union with God in which one is being imbued by the qualities of the divine nature: incorruptibility and immortality, and to be embraced by the Spirit of God.

Irenaeus conceives the Creator-creature distinction; thus Russell notes that Irenaeus employs the accommodation principle: that human begins as created things are inferior to him who created them, and as such we are to grow and mature until we can accept God's gratuitous gift of eternal existence, thus becoming gods.[13] Russell clarifies how Irenaeus maintains the distinction: though the gap between created and uncreated has been achieved historically by the incarnation and potentially by individual Christian baptism, yet we are limited in our ability to attain God's vision rapidly.[14] Irenaeus then has placed the earliest boundaries of *theosis* by maintaining the distinction intact, *finitum non capax infiniti.*

b. Athanasius of Alexandria (296–373)

Athanasius also teaches *theosis* through incarnational Christology (*On the Incarnation of the Word,* § 54).[15] There is a development in the *theologoumenon* where Athanasius specifies the significance to the incarnated body of the Son of God. As he says in the *Letter to Maximus,* "we are deified not by partaking of the body of some man, but by *receiving the Body of the Word Himself*."[16] This contains the germinal seed of *deification* as *totus Christus* before Augustine. In addition to that, as noted by Russel, the sentence may be a veiled reference to the role of the Eucharist in *deification*.[17]

Athanasius spells out the proto *extra-calvinisticum,* "For He was not, as might be imagined, circumscribed in the body, nor, while present in the body, was He absent elsewhere;[…]"[18] As such, the Creator-creature distinction in Christ's two natures is maintained by Athanasius. Athanasius aptly summarizes the difference

11 Hans Boersma, *Heavenly Participation: The Weaving of a Sacramental Tapestry* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2011), 41.

12 Cf. Carl Mosser, "The Earliest Patristic Interpretation of Psalm 82, Jewish Antecedents, and the Origin of Christian Deification," *JTS* 56 (2005): 41, who sees that Irenaeus prefers Pauline notion in terms of adoption rather than Johannine divine sonship.

13 Russell, *Doctrine of Deification*, 107.

14 Ibid.

15 In *NPNF* 2.4, 65, "For He was made man that we might be made [θεοποιηθῶμεν] God."

16 Athanasius of Alexandria, "Personal Letters," in *NPNF* 2.4, 578–579. *Italic* is added.

17 Russell, *Doctrine of Deification*, 176.

18 "On the Incarnation of the Word," 45, § 17 subtitle "How the Incarnation did not limit the ubiquity of the Word, nor diminish His Purity. (Simile of the Sun.)"

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between Christ and us as gods, "We are made by God first, begotten next; creatures by nature, sons by grace. Christ begotten first, made or created afterwards."[19]

Apart from defending the humanity of Christ in the incarnation, Athanasius spends his lifetime fighting against the heretical Arianism whose best view of Christ is only as a creature. The importance of the outcome is not simply to defend the deity of Christ, but it also lies in our salvation as *deification*. Thus, Athanasius states his *soteriological concern*,

> For man had not been deified if joined to a creature, or unless the Son were very God; nor had man been brought into the Father's presence, unless He had been His natural and true Word who had put on the body. And as we had not been delivered from sin and the curse, unless it had been by nature human flesh, which the Word put on (for we should have had nothing common with what was foreign), so also the man had not been *deified*, unless the Word who became flesh had been *by nature* from the Father and *true and proper* to Him.[20]

This understanding of *deification* based on the *hypostatic union* of Christ's two natures is not only held firm by Athanasius who represents Eastern/ Greek theology, but also by his contemporary Western theologian *Hilary of Poitiers (ca. 300–ca. 367)*.[21]

c. The Cappadocian Fathers

The Cappadocian Fathers: *Gregory of Nazianzus (329–390)*, *Basil of Caesarea (330–379),* and *Gregory of Nyssa (335–395)* contribute to the *theosis theologoumena* further. Their concern is more focused on the trinitarian *theologoumena* that would avoid polytheism, modalism, and subordinationism.[22] In their time, the doctrine of the Spirit received its proper attention. This is found in Basil's expression in *On the Spirit;* of the *visio Dei,*

19 Athanasius of Alexandria, "Four Discourses against the Arians," in *NPNF* 2.4, II.XXI., p. 379.

20 Ibid. 2.70, p. 386, italics added.

21 Hilary of Poitiers, "On the Trinity," in *NPNF* 2.9a, 8.14, p. 141–142. "there might be taught a perfect unity through a Mediator, whilst, we abiding in Him, He abode in the Father, and as abiding in the Father abode also in us; and so we might arrive at unity with the Father, since in Him Who dwells naturally in the Father by birth, we also dwell naturally, while He Himself abides naturally in us also."

22 Jenson, *ST* 1.II: 6.III.

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> And He [the Spirit], like the sun, will by the aid of thy purified eye show thee in Himself the image of the invisible, and in the blessed spectacle of the image thou shalt behold the unspeakable beauty of the archetype.[23]

Then, it is through the Spirit's shining, dwelling, and illuminating,

> […] comes foreknowledge of the future, understanding of mysteries, apprehension of what is hidden, distribution of good gifts, the heavenly citizenship, a place in the chorus of angels, joy without end, abiding in God, the being made like to God, and, highest of all, *the being made God*.[24]

Thus we have found the emphasis made by Basil on *theosis* as the perfecting work of the Spirit; for it is impossible for the fallen creature to be perfected without the work of the Spirit when even for the unfallen angels to be sanctified and continued in it requires the holiness perfected in the work of the Spirit.[25]

Gregory of Nazianzus speaks on the equality of the Son with the Father that "Sonship is not a deficiency".[26] Like the Son, the Spirit is God because he is consubstantial, springing from the same source of the Father; thus one substance with the Source.[27] Gregory has a clear explanation concerning the relation among the three *hypostasis,*

> For one is not more and another less God; nor is One before and another after; nor are They divided in will or parted in power; nor can you find here any of the qualities of divisible things; but *the Godhead* is, to speak concisely, *undivided in separate Persons*;[28]

Not only does Gregory reject subordinationism, he too rejects any sequential temporality in eternity in understanding the begotten and proceeding that characterize the *propium* of the Son and the Spirit. In other words, eternity cannot be understood in a temporal 'before and after' manner. Lastly, Gregory concludes that the *ousia* of God are fully present in each *hypostasis*.[29] Gregory of Nazianzus believes that what we receive in our salvation, through the incarnation, is God who imparts himself as the integral unity of the Father, the Son, and the Spirit:

---

23 Basil of Caesarea, "The Book of Saint Basil on the Spirit," in *NPNF* 2.8, 9.23.

24 Ibid. *Italic* added.

25 Ibid., 16.38.

26 Gregory Nazianzen, "Select Orations of Saint Gregory Nazianzen," in *NPNF* 2.7, 31.9, p. 320.

27 Ibid., 31.10, p. 321.

28 Ibid., 31.14, p. 322.

29 This is the *autotheos* notion of Trinity in Calvin, that later expressed by T.F. Torrance as *in solidum*. See section 3.1.1.2.

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> But if all that the Father has belongs likewise to the Son, except Causality; and all that is the Son's belongs also to the Spirit, except His Sonship, and whatsoever is spoken of Him as to Incarnation for me a man, and for my salvation, that, taking of mine, He may impart His own by this new commingling;[30]

Gregory of Nyssa contributes to the understanding of the oneness in God, in which he understands it is not of nature, but of operation/*energy*. His formulations brought to the *theologoumenon opera ad extra indivisa,* that "every operation which extends from God to the Creation,[…] has its origin from the Father, and proceeds through the Son, and is perfected in the Holy Spirit."[31]

However, Gregory of Nyssa does not reject the idea that there is a divine nature in God, which he holds to be unlimited and infinite.[32] Anyone who participates in the goodness of God who is himself the Good, will have his/her desire stretched out limitlessly.[33]

> This truly is the vision of God: never to be satisfied in the desire to see him. But one must always, by looking at what he can see, rekindle his desire to see more. Thus, no limit would interrupt growth in the ascent to God, since no limit to the Good can be found nor is the increasing of desire for the Good brought to an end because it is satisfied.[34]

This participation is termed *epektasis*, and is described by Anthony Meredith as "the eternal growth of the human person towards and into God."[35] As to God's nature, Meredith notes that Nyssa differentiates between divine incomprehensibility and divine infinity.[36] In divine incomprehensibility, the emphasis lies on the weakness of the human mind to know God in his divine majesty; but in divine infinity, the mysteriousness lies in God himself who is limitless as the source of all and can be limited by none.[37] Thus, God's *ousia* is inaccessible, but his *energeia* can be known.[38]

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30 "Select Orations of Saint Gregory Nazianzen," 34.10, p. 337.

31 Gregory of Nyssa, "On 'Not Three Gods,'" in *NPNF* 2.5, 334.

32 Gregory of Nyssa, *The Life of Moses* trans. Abraham J. Malherbe and Everett Ferguson (New York: Paulist Press, 1978), I.7, p. 31; "Gregory of Nyssa against Eunomius," in *NPNF* 2.5, § 15, p. 51 where he says that "the unlimited is the same as the infinite." Or a better term, 'divine inexhaustibility' Cf. John Meyendorff, introduction in *The Triads,* ed. John Meyendorff (New York: Paulist, 1983), 14.

33 Ibid.

34 Ibid., II.239, p. 116.

35 Anthony Meredith, *The Cappadocians* (Crestwood: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1995), 12; *Gregory of Nyssa* (London and New York: Routledge, 1999), 22.

36 Meredith, *Gregory of Nyssa*, 13.

37 Ibid.

38 Ibid., 14.

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Nyssa's *epektasis* respects the *finitum non capax infiniti* that assures a progress of ascent of the saints without end to God.[39]

d. Cyril of Alexandria (378–444)

Cyril of Alexandria goes beyond Athanasius, who emphasized the Word's body or the incarnation. Cyril shows the importance of the sacraments in our *deification*.

> And as the Body of the Word Himself is Life-giving, He having made it His own by a true union passing understanding and language; so we too who partake of His holy Flesh and Blood, are quickened in all respects and wholly, the Word dwelling in us Divinely through the Holy Ghost, humanly again through His Holy Flesh and Precious Blood.[40]

This is in line with his commenting on John 6:35 where he sees that the partaking of the divine nature (2 Peter 1:4) is conceived in the sacrament as the holy partaking of Christ so that we can ascend to life and incorruption.[41] We also see how Cyril holds to the significance of Christ's two natures in our *deification,* his divine indwelling through the Spirit and his human body as life-giving.

As reflected in his *commentary on John* 1:12, Cyril remarks that we ascend to a dignity that transcends our nature on account of Christ; yet we are called sons by adoption and by imitation, in grace rather than naturally like the Sonship that Christ is in reality.[42] Yet, commenting on the next verse, Cyril takes a further step of interpretation that "[w]e are therefore called gods, not simply by grace […] but because we already have God dwelling and abiding within us, […]"[43]

The intricate relationship among the Father, the Son, and the Spirit are explained clearly in the commentary on the phrase in verse 14, "and dwelt in us." First, Cyril portrays the resurrection of Christ (Romans 1:4) as the result of our raised status and designation as gods and sons of the Most High (Psalm 82:6); Then through our mystical union in Christ, we are given the gift (2 Corinthians 8:9) to attain the likeness to him to his own proper and superlative good; Lastly, this God's own 'good' means sonship, that with the Son's dwelling in us, we in his Spirit can cry Abba! Father![44] The Trinitarian expression of our union in Christ becomes clearer in Cyril's.

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39 Meredith, *The Cappadocians*, 77.

40 Cyril of Alexandria, *Five Tomes Against Nestorius*. LFC 47 (1881) Book 4.§5, www.ccel.org/ccel/pearse/morefathers/files/cyril_against_nestorius_04_book4.htm (accessed April 20, 2020).

41 Norman Russell, *Cyril of Alexandria* (London: Routledge, 2000), 325c, p. 111.

42 Ibid., 91c, p. 101.

43 Ibid., 93d, p. 103.

44 Ibid., 96e–97b, p. 107.

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1.2.1.2 Differentiation in Greek Orthodox Tradition

a. Maximus the Confessor (590–662)

In Philokalia, we find three accounts of *deification* by Maximus the Confessor: *On the Lord's Prayer, Two Hundred Texts on Theology and the Incarnate Dispensation of the Son of God: Written for Thalassios, and Various Texts on Theology, The Divine Economy, and Virtue and Vice.*[45]

As discussed in *On the Lord's Prayer,* the *deification* of human nature is found in the counsel of God the Father, in which the unfathomable self-emptying of the Son is its content.[46] The outcome of that counsel is our adoption through the agency of the Logos who "grants us birth and deification which, transcending nature, comes by grace from above through the Spirit."[47] In Maximus, we also note the importance of the Eucharist as a means for us to participate in the divine life.[48] Then towards the end, Maximus gives a *kataphatic* description of *deification* in the active role of Christ who makes us co-worshippers with the angels, which he then leads up still further on the supreme ascent of divine truth to the Father of lights, and makes us share in the divine nature through participation by grace in the Holy Spirit.[49]

In *on Theology and the Incarnate Dispensation of the Son of God,* Maximus understands the saints as the body of Christ in a soteriological sense, to be conformed to the likeness of the Lord's flesh by shaking off the corruption of sin.[50] Unlike Gregory of Nyssa's *epektasis*, Maximus does not see the state of the perfection of the saints in the kingdom of God as a growth that consists of progress and change, but in sustenance in godlike perfection, a state of eternal well-being.[51] Yet the end that Maximus conceives is described in a poetical manner that characterizes music and worship figures of speech:

> He who through virtue and spiritual knowledge has brought his body into harmony with his soul has become a harp, a flute and a temple of God. […] a harp by preserving the harmony of the virtues; a flute by receiving the inspiration of the Spirit through divine

45 "St Maximos the Confessor: Introductory Notes," in *Philokalia* vol. 2, 49–50.

46 Maximos the Confessor, "On the Lord's Prayer: A Short Interpretation Addressed To a Devout Christian," *Philokalia* vol. 2, 286.

47 Ibid., 287.

48 Ibid., 288.

49 Ibid., 303–4.

50 Maximos the Confessor, "Two Hundred Texts on Theology and the Incarnate Dispensation of the Son of God: Written for Thalassios," in *Philokalia* vol. 2, Second Century, 84, p. 158–9.

51 Ibid., Second Century, 88, p. 160.

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> contemplation; and a temple by becoming a dwelling place of the Logos through the purity of his intellect.[52]

In *Various Texts on Theology, The Divine Economy, and Virtue and Vice*, the cosmic and Platonic description of *theosis* is found. Maximus describes *deification* as the encompassing and fulfillment of all times and ages, and of all that exists.[53] He fully describes it in this manner:

> This encompassing and fulfillment is the union, in the person granted salvation, of his real authentic origin with his real authentic consummation. This union presupposes a transcending of all that by nature is essentially limited by an origin and a consummation. Such transcendence is effected by the almighty and more than powerful *energy* of God, acting in direct and infinite manner in the person found worthy of this transcendence. The action of this divine *energy* bestows a more than ineffable pleasure and joy on him in whom the unutterable and unfathomable union with the divine is accomplished. This, in the nature of things, cannot be perceived, conceived or expressed.[54]

Maximus explains the supranatural divine realities in an *apophatic* manner. The union itself seems to be impersonal in God's *energy* rather than in relation. This powerful energy results in a mixing (union) of a person with the divine that is just unutterable and unfathomable.

We notice that there are signs of disjuncture between this description and the earlier descriptions by Maximus: *apophatic*/ *kataphatic*, one who is worthy of this transcendence/ by grace; union through energy that leads to union with the divine/ participating in the divine nature of the Son to ascend to the Father in the Holy Spirit; an unutterable and unfathomable union/ a harmony of virtues in divine contemplation of the pure intellect.

In Maximus, we find a perfect example of how the Eastern concept of salvation takes a diverted approach which, despite the common origin from the church Fathers' locus in the incarnation, ends up in an *apophatic* ascent of union. The experiential participation in God's energy which constitutes the *deification* of the saints stated by Maximus would be firmly established by Gregory Palamas who greatly influenced the rest of the Eastern orthodox tradition.

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52 Ibid., Second Century, 100, p. 163.

53 Maximos the Confessor, "Various Texts on Theology, The Divine Economy, and Virtue and Vice," in *Philokalia* vol. 2, Fourth Century, 19, p. 240.

54 Ibid.

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b. Gregory Palamas (1296–1359)

Gregory Palamas has great authority as a figure in the Eastern Orthodox Tradition.[55] Known as a theologian of the glory of God, Palamas focused on the distinction between the essence and energies of God. Palamas taught that God is known through divine revelation and can be experienced in the life of prayer, *Hesychia*; in which we know the uncreated energies of God while his essence remains unknown.[56]

Furthermore, Palamas outlines three realities instead of two that pertain to God: *οὐσία*/ essence, *ἐνέργειαι*/ energy, and the triad of divine *ὑπόστασις*.[57] Palamas thinks that our being united with God in the Spirit (1 Corinthians 6:17) is understood not in οὐσία (that none can participate), but rather with respect to His *energy*, understood as the uncreated energy of the Holy Spirit.[58] *Energies* of the divine Spirit are understood as *ad-extra*, but are uncreated and are to be indivisibly distinguished from the single and wholly undivided essence of the Spirit.[59]

Alexis Torrance observes that it is vitally important to Palamas that the *energies* are uncreated (*anarxos*), and are present in his thought by their 'indivisibility' from the *ousia*.[60] As a result, Torrance notes of this important derivation based on Palamas' three realities, that

> just as the divine simplicity is not compromised by the οὐσία - ὑπόστασις distinction hammered out by the Cappadocians, so too the οὐσία - ἐνέργειαι distinction does not introduce division within the Godhead.[61]

He then draws the consequences from the above; "the deified person is not made a trinitarian ὑπόστασις, nor is he subsumed in God's οὐσία, but he is nevertheless made θεός."[62] Palamas maintains the Creator-creature distinction with his view of the divine simplicity, unity and incomprehensibility of God while at the same time makes possible the *theosis* of the saints by participation through the *energy* of the Spirit.

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55 Robert W. Jenson, "A Decision Tree of Colin Gunton's Thinking," in *The Theology of Colin Gunton*, ed. Lincoln Harvey (London: T&T Clark, 2010), 13, places him on par with Thomas Aquinas.

56 *EEOC*, s.v. "St Gregory Palamas."

57 Gregory Palamas, "Topics of Natural and Theological Science and on the Moral and Ascetic Life: One Hundred and Fifty Texts," in *Philokalia* vol. 4, cap.75, p. 380.

58 Ibid.

59 Ibid., cap. 68, p. 377–8.

60 Alexis Torrance, "Precedents for Palamas' Essence-Energies Theology in the Cappadocian Fathers," *VC* 63 (2009): 50.

61 Ibid., 51.

62 Ibid., 64.

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Another important development that we find in the Eastern orthodox is the emphasis taken on the role of the Spirit as God's *energy* in one's salvation, rather than the Son's role as developed in the Western church. Why does the theological development have taken this direction regarding the Spirit in his divine *energies*? The plausible answer is because the Greek tradition has totally secured Christ's identification with humanity in the incarnation; Thus, they have to ask, "how does salvation come to the saints and not to the whole of mankind?"[63]

John Meyendorff tries to defend the eminent Spirit in Palamas' theology by linking it to Christology through participation in the Eucharistic communion.[64] Meyendorff describes that illumination as the shining of *uncreated* light—the very divinity of Christ—through his humanity which works from within the human soul which has been mingled and exists in Christ, and no longer from without through the intermediaries of the physical eyes like it was in the Mount Tabor transfiguration.[65] But Palamas himself does not link the illumination directly to Christ nor the eucharist; and this *hypostatic* light illumination may be differently experienced from one person to the other.[66] Palamas describes Paul's *visio Dei* account in 2 Corinthians in a speculative manner,

> He saw absolutely no limit to his vision and to the light which shone round about him; but rather it was as it were a sun infinitely brighter and greater than the universe, with himself standing in the midst of it, having become all eye.[67]

Palamas differentiates between sensible light and the light of the intellect; the saints see both with the sense of sight and with the intellect, which surpasses both sense and intellect in the manner that "God alone knows and those in whom these things are brought to pass."[68] Palamas' description of *deification* is Christlike in his two natures:

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63 This may be originated earlier in Origen. Cf. Martien Parmentier, *St Gregory of Nyssa's Doctrine of the Holy Spirit,* Reprinted from *Ekklesiastikos Pharos* vol. 58 (1976), 59 (1977) and 60 (1978), 47, "The Spirit is subordinated under the Son, because he "sanctifies the saints", a more limited operation than that of the Son, who "works in all rational beings". The Son, in his turn, is subordinated under the Father, who works everywhere in creation." (n.19 Cf. Kreschmar, *Trinitätstheologie,* p. 63 and B. Drewery, *Origen and the Doctrine of Grace*, London 1960, p. 170–199.)

64 John Meyendorff, introduction in *The Triads*, ed. John Meyendorff (New York: Paulist, 1983), 19.

65 Ibid.

66 Gregory Palamas, *The Triads,* 57. As in the case of Stephen, Moses, or Paul.

67 Ibid., 38.

68 Gregory Palamas, "The Declaration of the Holy Mountain in Defence of Those who Devoutly Practise a Life of Stillness," in *Philokalia* vol. 4, 424, quoting Gregory of Nazianzus.

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> he remains entirely man by nature in his soul and body, and becomes entirely God in his soul and body through grace, and through the divine radiance of the blessed glory with which he is made entirely resplendent.[69]

Palamas defends *deification* as seeing God in the *hesychasts*, as the occurrence where there is mutual interpenetration between God and the saints, each in their entirety; "[God] embraces [the saints] as the soul embraces the body, enabling them to be in Him as His own members."[70] This interpenetration then explains the participation in the *energy* of the Spirit as the illuminating light that would be impossible to be sensed by sight or intellect without God himself giving, by grace, someone the ability to know it by transcending both his body and soul. Palamas' account nuances the eminent role of the Spirit in illumination.

c. John Zizioulas (b. 1931)

Some recent Greek Orthodox theologians whose emigration from Russia between World War I and World War II have brought the influence of their teaching to the Western church.[71] In this study we focus particularly on *John Zizioulas,* whose works bear some similarities with Jenson's.

Unlike Maximus or Palamas, whose views have led Greek orthodox tradition to a more spiritual or mystical understanding of *theosis*, Zizioulas contributes by redirecting *theosis* to its Christological locus coupled with the importance of the Eucharist. In his *Being as Communion: Studies in Personhood and the Church*, Zizioulas states that the being or substance of God has no ontological content apart from communion.[72] He sees love—identified as God's ontological freedom/supreme ontological predicate—as the mode of existence that 'hypostasizes' God or constitutes His being.[73] With ontology being defined in a personal manner, Zizioulas understands *theosis* in a more acceptable manner:

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69 Palamas, *Triads,* 109–10.

70 Palamas, "Declarations" in *Philokalia*, 421.

71 Meyendorff, introduction in *The Triads*, xiii, mentions Vladimir Lossky (1903–1958) in Paris and himself (John Meyendorff, 1926–1992) in the US. Bray, *God Has Spoken,* 1196, mentions John Zizioulas (b.1931) in the UK. There are still others like Georges Vasilievich Florovsky (1893–1979) in Paris (1920–1949) and New York (1949–1979), or a Romanian, Dumitru Stăniloae (1903–1993) who remained in his country under the communist regime.

72 (New York: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1985), 17.

73 Zizioulas, *Being as Communion*, 46.

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> *Theosis* means participation not in the nature or substance of God, but in His personal existence. The goal of salvation is that the personal life which is realised in God should also be realized on the level of human existence.[74]

Zizioulas proceeds to see a person as an 'image and likeness of God' who can be seen in two modes of existence: *hypostasis of biological existence* and *hypostasis of ecclesial existence*.[75] Christ as a man has no *hypostasis of biological existence*, but rather *hypostasis of the Son of the Trinity,* according to Chalcedon.[76] Defending Cyril's, contra Leo I, approach to the *hypostatic union* as the starting-point of Christology, Zizioulas identifies Christ's hypostasis as 'perfect man' not seen in his nature, but as freedom and love.[77] So, 'God as a person' and 'man as a person' are identified in the same manner; as freedom and love that hypostasizes/ constitutes a person's being.

Zizioulas steers away from the usage of *energies* (understood substantially in God's *ad-extra*) to Christ's *hypostatic* manner that describes the God-world relationship.[78] In the note, Zizioulas puts the blame on modern Orthodox interpreters who fail to see how Maximus and Palamas bridged the gap between created and uncreated being by the Incarnation.[79]

As for the role of the sacraments, baptism is understood by Zizioulas as one's *hypostasis* taking place in the identification of one's *hypostasis* with the Son of God's *hypostasis*,[80] whereas the Eucharist makes the future ontological *hypostasis* of human an *ecclesial* being, realized in the resurrection of Christ, to be tasted and experienced in the present.[81] The work of the Spirit is brought to significance primarily in communion, that "there is no Kingdom of God outside the work of

74 Ibid., 50.

75 Ibid.

76 Ibid., 55.

77 Ibid.

78 John Zizoulas, *Communion and Otherness: Further Studies in Personhood and the Church,* ed. Paul McPartlan (New York: T&T Clark, 2006), 30.

79 Ibid., 243 who argues that in the Western theology *theosis* cannot be accepted without reservation due to the conception of union in terms of nature, instead of person. But this is Zizioulas unique standpoint that does not truly or fully represent the Greek tradition. Cf. Aristotle Papanikolaou, "Divine Energies or Divine Personhood: Vladimir Lossky and John Zizioulas on Conceiving the Transcendent and Immanent God," *MT* 19, no.3 (2003): 358, quoted by Roger Olson, "Deification in Contemporary Theology," *TT* 64 (2007):191; and Pitts, "Theosis," 40.

80 Zizioulas, *Being as Communion*, 56.

81 Ibid., 59, 64–5.

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the Holy Spirit."[82] Creaturely truth is a fact in *communion by participation*, in God who is truth as *communion without participation*.[83]

Zizioulas understands the incarnate Christ as the purpose of history.[84] But history itself is understood in three stages, following Maximus, "The things of the Old Testament are shadow (σκιά); those of the New Testament are image (εἰκών); and those of the future state are truth (ἀλήθεια)."[85] It is not certain whether Zizioulas' answer can truly satisfy the critic as he himself is aware that the incarnation is somehow a less true reality than Christ's second coming.

In his other work, *Communion and Otherness: Further Studies in Personhood and the Church,* Zizioulas brings into focus the possibility of the church or of the human being lies in their relation to the Trinitarian God.[86] *Theosis* has been reshaped by Zizioulas as relational instead of participation in God's glory and other *natural* qualities.[87] The Creator-creature distinction of *theosis,* so as not to be absorbed by the divine nature, is safeguarded in the Chalcedonian two natures in Christ 'without confusion'.[88] Zizioulas has chosen the better path in his Christology.

1.2.2 Renewed Interest in the Western Tradition

Before the Palamites revival by the Greek contemporaneous theologians, modern Western tradition's view of *theosis* was seen as a familial metaphor of adoption.[89] Abraham Kuyper, for example, says that "what St Peter calls 'to become partaker of the divine nature' (2 Pet. 1:4) is called in another place, to become *the children of God*."[90] To become children of God does not mean we are the *essential* children

82 Ibid., 205. Zizoulas, *Communion and Otherness,* 85, remarks "[t]here is no *theosis* outside the Eucharist, for it is only there that communion and otherness coincide and reach their fullness."

83 Ibid., 94.

84 Ibid., 97.

85 Ibid., 99., Maximus, *Sch. in eccl. hier.* 3, 3:2.

86 ed. Paul McPartlan (New York: T&T Clark, 2006), 4.

87 Ibid., 31, n.51.

88 Ibid., 37. This revision comes after Zizioulas' 20 years earlier interpretation wherein he neglected two natures doctrine by Leo I.

89 Cf. Olson, "Deification," 188. In a relatively recent survey of contemporary theologians by Olson, *theosis* has gathered great interest across the denominations: from Catholic theologians of Catherine Mowry LaCugna, Hans Urs von Balthasar; Lutherans Tuomo Mannermaa, Carl Braaten and Robert W. Jenson; Methodist Bruce Marshall, Thomas Oden; Anglican and Episcopalians Richard Hooker, Lancelot Andrewes, A. M. Allchin, F. W. Norris; German Reformed Jürgen Moltmann, Wolfhart Pannenberg; and also Evangelicals Clark Pinnock, Stanley Grenz, Robert Rakestraw, Daniel Clendenin, Veli-Matti Kärkäinen.

90 Abraham Kuyper, *The Work of the Holy Spirit* (New York; London: Funk & Wagnalls, 1900), 333.

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of God, rather we are His *adopted* children.[91] Nevertheless, as the Greek tradition sprang up in the West and became more ecumenical, Western contemporary theologians have started to dig up our own traditions to find the notion and vocabularies of *theosis* that are closer to home.

1.2.2.1 Augustine on Deification

Augustine (354–430) undoubtedly is the most authoritative Latin Father who has left his indelible mark on the Western church, whether Roman Catholic, Lutheran or Reformed. The question at present is whether or not Augustine endorses the notion of *theosis* or *deification* in his writings.

Jenson, who defends *theosis* in his Lutheran tradition, argues that the notion exists in Augustine as *totus Christus* (where Christ is viewed totally as the head and body, Christ and His church) but is considered only recently rediscovered after being ignored for quite some time.[92] Perhaps one of the earliest modern interlocutors of Augustine is S. Joseph Cyrillus in his work *"Totus Christus" in Saint Augustine's "Enarrationes in Psalmos"*.[93] In a more recent work by David Vincent Meconi, *The One Christ: St Augustine's Theology of Deification* (2013), he notes that Augustine also coined his own term, '*totus homo deificatus*' which means 'one who is completely and wholly godly'; *deification* is explicated in terms of God's gift and adoption.[94] Hans Boersma's work, however, focuses on another aspect, trying to find in Augustine the theme of seeing God (Matthew 5:8).[95]

As shown by Cyrillus, in various Psalms we can find Augustine's understanding of Christ as the whole, head and body (*caput et corpus*, Psalm. 80:1), based on Paul's inspiration in 1 Corinthians 12:27 (Psalm 59:2).[96] The union of Christ and the church results in the mystical body of *totus Christus*, where this union is different from the incarnation (the Word and Humanity) or from the union in nature between the Word and the Father.[97] The incarnation itself lies within the corridor of

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91 Ibid., 334. Cf. Hans Boersma, "Christ and Vision: Puritan and Dutch Reformed Articulations of the Beatific Vision," in *Seeing God: The Beatific Vision in Christian Tradition* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2018), 338–346 highlights the ignored "mystical" aspect of Kuyper.

92 Robert W. Jenson, "Response to Mark Seifried, Paul Metzger and Carl Trueman on Finnish Luther Research," *WTJ* 65 (2003): 247.

93 (Trivandrum: St Joseph's Press, 1966).

94 (Washington: Catholic University of America Press, 2013), 107.

95 Boersma, "Anticipation and Vision: Augustine on Theophanies and Ecstasy," in *Seeing God*, 96–126.

96 Cyrillus, "*Totus Christus" in Saint Augustine's "Enarrationes in Psalmos"*, 16–7, quotes Augustine of Hippo, "Expositions on the Book of Psalms," in *NPNF* 1.8. To number a few: Psalms 18:51, 80:1, 141:3, 63:2, 59:2. Note that the chapters and verses number may be a number lower in the Latin version. Cf. Augustine of Hippo, "On the Catechising of the Uninstructed," *NPNF* 1.3, 19.33, p. 304.

97 Ibid., 41.

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Chalcedon with no monophysite signification despite Augustine's earlier expression of Christ as *homo dominicus*.[98]

Augustine too understands the *theosis theologoumenon* that has its locus in incarnation, for example in Psalm 71:10:

> In His person according to His weakness, not according to His power; according to that whereby He had transformed us into Himself, not according to that wherein He had Himself come down. […] He rose Himself the third day, promised a resurrection at the end of the world. Already there hath gone before the Head, the members are to follow.[99]

In his treatise on *The Trinity* (14.17.23–18.24), Augustine too connects our *deification* to the resurrection of Christ that we too, having been perfected in God's likeness, will be immortal in our body like God the Son. But in having the Son, we too have the Father, as explained by Augustine that '*Finis Christus est* (Psalm 57:2, 46:1)'. Christ is not the stepping-stone to the Father, but in attaining Christ's likeness we already share the satisfaction and perfection of the Father. Christ is the End, not in the sense of consummation, but in the sense of perfection.[100]

Cyrillus has interpreted Augustine correctly when seeing that reconciliation bears two aspects: the negative in the forgiveness of sins, and the positive in *deification* (Psalm 50:2).[101] In Psalm 50:2, Augustine does not hesitate to use numerous expressions of *deification* while holding the Creator-creature distinction intact: "[we are] deified of His grace, not born of His substance"; "If we have been made sons of God, we have also been made gods: but this is the effect of Grace adopting, not of nature generating"; "The rest that are made gods, are made by His own Grace, are not born of His Substance, that they should be the same as He, but that by favor they should come to Him, and be fellow-heirs with Christ"; "We are therefore in hope, not yet in substance"; "The Only Son is like Him by birth, we like by seeing. For we are not like in such sort as He, who is the same as He is by whom He was begotten: for we are like, not equal: He, because equal, is therefore like."

Deification then is not a foreign notion in Augustine. It was not so much a prominent theme in his twenty years of labor (400–420 A.D.) *On the Holy Trinity.* Nevertheless it is more obvious in his earliest and parallel work *Exposition on the Book of Psalms* which he preached or had written down for twenty six years from

98 Ibid., 40. Augustine later retracts its use.

99 Augustine, "Expositions on the Book of Psalms," 318–9.

100 Cyrillus, "*Totus Christus*", 32. The translation by A. Cleveland Coxe, "Not as one that consumeth, but one that consummateth…"

101 Ibid., 53. Cf. Augustine, "Expositions on the Book of Psalms," 178: "But He that justifieth doth Himself deify, in that by justifying He doth make sons of God."

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392–418 A.D.[102] Since Augustine is not just one of the leading voice in the Roman church, but also for the Reformers, we should take heed of his theology.[103]

1.2.2.2 Finnish Lutheran Interpretation

Since the 1980s there has been a rediscovery of reading Luther spearheaded by Tuomo Mannermaa, a Finnish Lutheran theologian.[104] The Finnish Lutheran has rediscovered in Luther its roots regarding deification, after some interaction with the Russian Orthodox Church.[105]

Mannermaa notes that "[t]he term *deificatio* and/ or *Vergöttlichung* appears in Luther's texts more often than the term *theologia crucis.*"[106] Mannermaa shows that Luther's expression of *Vergöttlichung/ deification* has the same *theologoumenon* of *theosis*: "[…] For the word becomes flesh precisely so that the flesh may become word. In other words: God becomes man so that man may become God. […] in order to impart what is his to us."[107]

The Lutheran *theologoumena* in the *Formula of Concord* (1577) choose to differentiate between the 'righteousness of faith' (justification) and 'eternal and essential righteousness' (thus the indwelling of God/ *inhabitatio Dei*). However, Mannermaa claims Luther sees differently; that in the righteousness of faith we receive

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102 Sabine McCormack, "Augustine on Scripture and the Trinity," in *A Companion to Augustine,* ed. Mark Vessey and Shelley Reid (Blackwell, 2012), 398 quotes Hendrikx 1955:11–13, 557–66. Introduction in *St Augustine on the Psalms,* trans. and annots. Dame Scholastica Hebgin and Dame Scholastica Corrigan (New York: Paulist Press, 1960), 17–19.

103 John Paul II, *Orientale Lumen* (Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1995), 5. Roman church acknowledges the Greek Orthodox church's interpretation of 2 Peter 1:4 as the goal of communion with the mystery of the Holy Trinity.

104 Tuomo Mannermaa, *Christ present in Faith: Luther's view of Justification* (1989), ed. and trans. Kirsi Stjerna (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2005). Carl E. Braaten and Robert W. Jenson, ed. *Union with Christ: The New Finnish Interpretation of Luther* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), Robert W. Jenson, "Response to Mark Seifried, Paul Metzger, and Carl Trueman on Finnish Luther Research," *WTJ* 65 (2003): 245–50, Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen, "Deification View," in *Justification: Five Views*, ed. Paul Rhodes Eddy, James K. Beilby, and Steven E. Enderlein, Spectrum Multiview Book Series (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2011), 221. Risto Saarinen, *Faith and Holiness: Lutheran-Orthodox Dialogue, 1959–1994, KK* 40 (Göttingen: V&R, 1997). Carl R. Trueman, "Is the Finnish Line a New Beginning? A Critical Assessment of the Reading of Luther Offered by the Helsinki Circle," *WTJ* 65 (2003): 231–44.

105 Luther use the term "*Vergottung*" in his *Galatians Commentary* and he referred to the justified Christian as a divine creature (*ein göttliche Creatur*). See Bruce Marshall, "Justification as Declaration and Deification," *IJST* 4, no.1 (2002): 3–28, cited by Olson, "Deification," 186.

106 "Theosis As a Subject of Finnish Luther Research," *PE* 4, no. 1 (Wint 1995): 37.

107 Ibid., 43. The *theologoumenon* can be found in Irenaeus.

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