

# Theosis (Deification) as a Biblical and Historical Doctrine

Goran Medved  
Beatus, Zagreb  
goranmedved@bizg.hr

UDK: 27-1:27-23  
Original scientific paper  
<https://doi.org/10.32862/k.13.1.1>

## Summary

*This is the first of the two articles by this author that research the doctrine of theosis, sometimes also called deification or divinization. The second article presents theosis as a New Testament and evangelical doctrine. This first article presents theosis as a biblical and historical doctrine. The first major section of this article analyzes the main biblical texts for the doctrine of theosis; their interpretation and appropriation for theosis. The second major section of this article gives an overview of historical development of the doctrine of theosis, from the beginning of Christian thought to modern era. It shows that theosis was not limited to Eastern theologians but was also represented in the West in certain mainstream theologians and movements. Because of its biblicality and historicity, theosis should be considered an essential historical doctrine of the Church.*

Key words: *theosis, deification, divinization, imago Dei, image, likeness, restoration, patristic theosis, medieval theosis, protestant theosis*

## Introduction

A careful reader of the Bible, especially of the New Testament, may conclude that Christians are not merely human anymore. For example, after the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, Christians are spoken of as new creation.<sup>1</sup> After the

1 For example, see 2 Cor. 5:17, Eph. 2:10.

pouring out of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, Christians are spoken of as being born again and being filled with God's Holy Spirit.<sup>2</sup> Other New Testament texts speak about Christians being in Christ<sup>3</sup> and being transformed into Christ, who is considered God.<sup>4</sup>

Biblical texts such as these contribute to the Christian concept of theosis – the doctrine that examines how humans are divinized. The word *theosis* is not found in the Bible. It was first used by some early Christian theologians who developed the concept and doctrine of theosis. Theosis is a transliteration of a Greek word, from the root *theos*, which means “god.” So, theosis literally means “being made god” or “being made like god.” Some theologians use the word “deification” or “divinization” instead. The meaning of the word is simple, but explaining deification is complex.

The Church Fathers used a number of words in order to explain the concept of theosis: “It is a transformation, union, participation, partaking, intermingling, elevation, interpenetration, transmutation, commingling, assimilation, reintegration, adoption, recreation. Divinization implies our being intertwined with Christ, an influx of the divine, or the attainment of similitude with God” (Clendenin 1994, 374). Theosis happens through our union with God. The Church Fathers used several illustrations from daily lives to help explain theosis. For example, our union with God can be pictured as a marriage between a man and a woman, where two people become one, but remain separate identities. Or, it can be likened to the grains of wheat that make a loaf of bread, where grains are united together in such a way that they cannot be distinguished; or to the yeast in a lump of dough, working through every segment of it. If we observe a blacksmith forging iron, we can see a red-hot iron in fire, where there is both union and separation of the two, while the iron is being transformed (Clendenin 1994, 374-375).

Besides singular words and illustrations, theological definitions contribute to explaining theosis.<sup>5</sup> Westminster Theological Dictionary provides definitions for all three terms: deification, divinization, and theosis. For deification it says, “In early Eastern church theologians, it is an image for salvation in which through Christ believers can be made like God” (McKim 1996, 73). For divinization it has, “The view of Eastern theologians that sees salvation as the penetration of the

2 For example, see Acts 2:4, 2:33, 4:31, 1 Pt 1:3,23, Eph. 5:18.

3 For example, see Gal. 3:26. The phrase “in Christ” occurs over 100 times in the New Testament.

4 For example, see Rom. 8:28, 2 Cor. 3:18. I will examine this more closely in the following article on theosis under “Theosis in New Testament theology.”

5 A number of theological dictionaries do not contain an entry for theosis, which speaks of the rarity of this term and little knowledge of this doctrine in Protestant and Evangelical Christianity.

human condition by the divine energies (2 Peter 1:4), beginning a process of uniting human and divine that is completed only with the resurrection of the dead” (McKim 1996, 80). And for theosis it reads, “The view held by Eastern Orthodox theologians that salvation from sin consists of the process of ‘deification,’ through which believers become united with Christ’s divine nature and thus with God” (McKim 1996, 282).

This study will show that theosis is not just limited to Eastern theologians. According to Russell, the concept of deification was expressed metaphorically from the beginning of Christian thought, with the first recorded definition appearing in the sixth century by Dionysius the Areopagite: “Deification (θέωσις) is the attaining of likeness to God and union with him so far as is possible” (Russell 2004, 1).

Theosis is difficult to define because it entails several elements. Contemporary thinkers of the doctrine offer slightly different definitions. Rakestraw states that theosis “is the restoration and reintegration of the ‘image’ or, as some prefer, ‘likeness’ of God, seriously distorted by the fall, in the children of God” (Rakestraw 1997, 261). Litwa claims that “deification is the participation in the divine identity of (a particular) God. This particular God for Paul is the one he and his communities worshipped as ‘the Lord Jesus Christ’” (Litwa 2012, 32). Strobel defines theosis as “participation through Christ in God’s Trinitarian life, which causes human nature to take on attributes of the divine nature.” (Strobel 2012, 262, 272). According to Olson, “we are being made partakers of God’s own nature by the energetic presence of Christ and the Spirit within us transforming us into replicas of God that actually bear something of its own being” (Olson 2007, 199). Collins suggests that, “Deification is an expression of the divine purposes in creating and redeeming: and expression of the calling to transformation or transfiguration so that God may be all in all” (Collins 2012, 194). Gorman’s simple definition of theosis is “becoming like God by participating in the life of God” (Gorman 2011, 17), while his fully developed definition, based on Pauline writings, states: “Theosis is transformative participation in the kenotic [self-emptying], cruciform [self-sacrificing] character of God through Spirit-enabled conformity to the incarnate, crucified, and resurrected/glorified Christ” (Gorman 2009, Kindle location 88).

While the short definitions are helpful, they are not sufficient. In order to understand theosis fully, we must consider it biblically and historically. Theosis does not mean “to become God” because that is both impossible and heretical according to the Christian tradition. But it does involve transformation, that is, how we become more like God in his nature and character. With the doctrine of theosis we are not stepping outside the boundaries of the Bible. We are instead surfacing a biblical theology.

This research aims to show how the doctrine of theosis is biblical, historical, and evangelical. In this article, I will show its biblical (relationship to Scripture) through specific biblical texts as well as connections to the broader biblical narrative and I will show its historicity because Christian theologians from the early post apostolic period (early second century) until today have written about it. In the following article, I will show that it is evangelical because it tells the good news of Jesus Christ and of the restoration of humankind and the whole creation, and I will conclude this research with giving a proposal for an evangelical doctrine of theosis.

## Main Biblical Texts for the Doctrine of Theosis

In this section I will examine the doctrine of theosis through main supporting texts in the Bible. Those are Genesis 1:26-27, Psalm 82:6-7, John 10:34-36, and 2 Peter 1:4. This section will identify important issues connected to their appropriation for theosis. I will not delve deeply into exegesis of each text, but will instead address their interpretations, and how they relate to the concept of theosis.<sup>6</sup>

### *Genesis 1:26-27*

One of the main texts in support of theosis is found in the creation story and speaks of the creation of humankind. Genesis 1:26-27 states:

Then God said, "Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the wild animals of the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth. So God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them" (NRSV).<sup>7</sup>

This is when *Elohim* made *Adam*, when *Theos* made *anthropos*. The concept of humankind's creation in the image and likeness of God is repeated in other scriptural texts.<sup>8</sup> Because an important tenet of theosis is the restoration of the image of God in Christians, the image that was lost with the fall of Adam, we need to address this narrative in order to understand the ways humans were created to be like God.

Genesis 1 affirms that humankind was created in *imago Dei*, implying their

6 In the following article, I will treat other biblical texts that imply theosis, such as references to Christians becoming children of God through Christ, and to Christians being transformed into the image of Christ, who is the image of God.

7 All scriptural citations are taken from the New Revised Standard Version, unless indicated otherwise.

8 Gen. 5:1, Gen. 9:6, 1 Cor. 11:7, Jas 3:9.

high status and value. But this text does not explain exactly what “created in God’s image” means. Therefore, theologians throughout church history produced many interpretations (Fretheim 2008, under “Image of God”). According to Closson, they can be classified into three basic groups: structural, relational, and functional interpretations (Closson 2016, under “Different understandings of the image of God”). Structural interpretations emphasize that humans are made in the image of God ontologically. This can be seen in human spirituality and rationality. Relational interpretations emphasize relational features. Humans, for example, were made to live in a relationship with God, other humans, and creation. Functional interpretations emphasize what humans were made to do or to accomplish. For example, they were given authority to rule over creation and represent God in the world. All three categories set apart humankind from the rest of the living creatures and all of other creation. If we put these categories together, we can say that “humans are like God in that they are uniquely gifted intellectually (and in many other ways) so that they may relate to God and to each other as they live as stewards of the world God has given them to manage” (Turner 1996, par. 3). Theosis encompasses the restoration of all of these categories in a person as they are recreated by God and transformed into his likeness.

Being created in God’s image even involves the physical body somehow being created in relation to God’s image. Hartley explains the Hebrew background of this view. They regarded a person as a whole, without separation of spirit and body, and in the Hebrew Bible when God appeared to people visibly on earth, he was recognizable in human form (Hartley 2008, 53). Morris indicates that the Scriptures describe God as being able to see, hear, smell, touch, and speak (Morris 1976, 74). Therefore, in some mysterious way, even the human body reflects the image of God. This is important for the doctrine of theosis because it holds that the process of human deification will be completed when Christian bodies will be transformed into glorious, incorruptible, and immortal bodies at the resurrection of the dead, which are also God’s qualities.

Another important matter to discuss from Genesis 1:26 are the two different words used regarding the creation of humankind based on God’s being. One is “image” (Heb. *tselem*, Gk. *eikōn*) of God, and the other one is “likeness” (Heb. *demuth*, Gk. *homoiosis*) to God. There are different opinions regarding the meaning of these words and the prepositions that come with them (Fretheim 2008, under “C. Meanings and Translations”). The words are considered ambiguous, interchangeable, or having the same meaning (in case of a Hebrew rhetorical device in which synonyms are used for enhanced effect). Hartley’s differentiation is helpful: “Image’ refers to a copy or a close representation... ‘Likeness’ emphasizes the comparison of one object with another or the correspondence between two objects” (Hartley 2008, 47). The prepositions may also be ambiguous – *as* the

image of God or *in* the image of God – which results in two viewpoints on the human being: “the nature of the image (the identity of the human; who the human is) and the purpose of the image (what the human being is to be)” (Fretheim 2008, under “C. Meanings and Translations”).

One interpretive approach is to look at Genesis 1 to see what God is like and therefore derive what his likeness might be. In the story of creation, we find that God is rational, powerful, creative, good, relational, and purposeful. Furthermore, we can look at other characteristics of God, especially those attributes that are most prominent in his dealings with humans, as seen elsewhere in Scripture. God is holy, faithful, just, and loving. This is also what God wants us to be, as expressed through the prophets (e.g. “For I desire steadfast love and not sacrifice,” Hos. 6:6), through Jesus Christ (e.g. “Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly father is perfect,” Mt. 5:48), and through the New Testament authors (e.g. “Instead, as he who called you is holy, be holy yourselves in all your conduct,” 1 Pet. 1:15). All of this is significant for the doctrine of theosis, for our being like God.

In the New Testament, Jesus Christ is proclaimed to be “the image of God” (2 Cor. 4:4), “the image of the invisible God” (Col. 1:15), and “the reflection of God’s glory and the exact imprint of God’s very being” (Heb. 1:3). In the first two verses the Greek word is *eikōn* (image), and in the third one the first word is *apaugasma* (radiance, reflection) and the second is *charactēr* (imprint). The idea is that Jesus Christ, in his identity, nature, and action, displays the image of God. The prologue of John’s Gospel states: “No one has ever seen God. It is God the only Son... who has made him known” (Jn. 1:18), while Jesus states: “Whoever has seen me has seen the Father” (Jn. 14:9). These are obviously claiming to likeness between Jesus Christ and God. Since Christians are transformed into the image of Christ (2 Cor. 3:18, Rom. 8:29, *eikōn*) it means that they are transformed into the image of God.<sup>9</sup>

Another important matter for theosis from this Genesis text is that to have dominion or to rule (Heb. *radah*) is part of God’s image (what God is like and what God does) reflected in humankind. A study of this verb “reveals that it must be understood in terms of care-giving, even nurturing, not exploitation” (Fretheim 1994, under “Genesis 1:1-2:3, The Creation”). In Genesis 1:26, God says to himself, speaking about humans, “let them have dominion” over the animals. The next verse states, “So God created humankind in his image.” Then in 1:28 God says to humans, “Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion” over all animals. All of this conveys that rule, an activity which God commands humans to perform, is part of God’s image in humans.

9 I will address this topic at greater length in the following article, under theosis in Paul’s theology.

“The image functions to mirror God to the world, to be God as God would be to the nonhuman, to be an extension of God’s own dominion” (Fretheim 1994, under “Genesis 1:1-2:3, The Creation”). God is the supreme ruler over the whole universe, and he created humankind, in his image and likeness, to be rulers over the earth. However, with the fall of humankind,<sup>10</sup> God’s ruling image was corrupted in humans, as seen in Genesis 6:5, “The LORD saw that the wickedness of humankind was great in the earth, and that every inclination of the thoughts of their hearts was only evil continually.”

The idea of humanity being created in the image of God is crucial for understanding theosis. It is significant that humankind was made in the image of God *exclusively*, and not in the image of anything else, because theosis centers on the restoration of that identity. Being made in the image and likeness of God, humans then share certain characteristics with God. In part, they were created to represent God on earth and rule the earth. The fall of humankind corrupted this capacity. Thus, the restoration of God’s image and the ruling capacity in Christians through Jesus Christ is significant in the larger doctrine of theosis.<sup>11</sup> In Jesus Christ, God’s ruling image was perfectly restored. He displayed authority and power, and he used it to do good, to restore people. Because of Jesus’ work, God’s ruling image continues to be restored in humans who believe in him and follow him.

### ***Psalm 82:6-7***

Psalm 82:6 states, “I say, ‘You are gods, children of the Most High, all of you.’” This text is “quoted time and again in the later Fathers of the East as showing the ultimate goal of salvation as ‘becoming god’” (Nispel 1999, 292). It is the only text in the Bible that directly calls human beings gods, if indeed “gods” refers to human beings. To interpret this, we must take into account that Psalms are poetry, a literary genre that expresses truths in special ways, often allegorically. Here, we can ask a familiar Croatian question: “What did the poet want to say (what did the poet mean)?”<sup>12</sup> We must also keep in mind that Psalms are sanctioned as God’s word by Jesus and the New Testament authors. Psalm 82 is a plea for justice, where God brings judgment in the divine council<sup>13</sup> against the gods who judge

10 The doctrine of the fall of humankind comes from Genesis 3 and asserts that human disobedience to God brought sin and corruption into human nature and the world.

11 According to Rakestraw, the primary definition of theosis is restoring God’s image in God’s children, because it was ruined by the fall of humankind. See Rakestraw 1997, 261.

12 In my homeland of Croatia, this question is a widely-used idiom, usually expressing confusion with someone’s statement. It originates from the interpretation of poetry in Croatian language classes in early education, where it is a common question, often dreaded by students.

13 This picture is probably taken from Canaanite religion, where the high god El presided over

unjustly. The judgment is their death: even though they are gods, children of the Most High, because of their unjust rule, they will die like mortals. The identity of the “gods” is a crucial question. Different commentators offer different interpretations. “The principal meanings proposed are: the lesser gods and angels; the national gods of the heathen; ‘the wicked governors of the nations holding Israel in subjection’ (Briggs, Psalms, II, 215); kings and those invested with authority; the judges of Israel (so Targ.)” (McCullough 1980, par. 3).

If interpreters offer this text in support of the concept of theosis, they usually assert that “gods” refers to human beings. If instead “gods” refers to angels or gods as celestial spiritual beings, this text could not be used for theosis. Many commentators argue that in this psalmodic context “gods” actually refers to human judges or rulers – those who rule in God’s name and so represent him.<sup>14</sup> Therefore, this would relate to the functional interpretation of humans as the image of God. Some commentators find additional depth and meaning in this statement. For example, Kirkpatrick writes: “The fact that it was possible for men so to represent God as to be called gods or divine was a foreshadowing of the Incarnation. ‘There lay already in the Law the germ of the truth which Christ announced, the union of God and man’” (Kirkpatrick 1906, under “Psalm 82:6”).

Psalm 82:6-7 was used as the main supporting text for theosis in patristic theology. In his article, “The Earliest Patristic Interpretations of Psalm 82, Jewish Antecedents, and the Origin of Christian Deification,” Mosser examines the interpretations of this text in Justin Martyr, Irenaeus, and Clement of Alexandria. He concludes that for them, the chief significance of the psalm was its declaration of divine sonship. The psalm was understood to predict distinctive aspects of Pauline and Johannine soteriology. Moreover, patristic interpretations adapted antecedent traditions that read Ps. 82:1, 6-7 as summarizing salvation history from Adam’s fall to the eschatological restoration of the immortality and glory he lost (Mosser 2005, 30).

In other words, they did not take on the literal interpretation of the text and of the word “gods,” claiming the godhood of humanity. Rather, they interpreted the text prophetically<sup>15</sup> in several ways. First, they believed the text described our creation and fall in a very concise way: God created us in his image to be his

the council of the gods (see also 1 Kgs. 22:19-23; Job 1:6-12; Isa. 3:13-15; Hos. 4:1-3; Mic. 6:1-5). See McCann, Jr. 1996, par. 1.

14 See, for example, Leupold 1974, 592 (Leupold titled this psalm: The judgment of unjust judges or rulers); Spurgeon 1988, 415; Wilcock 2001, 42.

15 This means that they searched for the deeper meaning of the text, an explanation of the significance of the text that comes from the Holy Spirit revealing hidden purposes of God, beyond the ability of human intellect alone.



children (verse 6), but humanity “died” and “fell” (verse 7). They also believed that the text of verse 6 was a declaration of our redemption, a reversal of the fall in second Adam, because in Christ we can regain our immortality and sonship. They believed the text predicted our becoming the sons of God through the work of Jesus Christ, as described in Paul. And they believed the text predicted our regeneration and becoming the children of God, as described in John. While these interpretations may sound strained under our modern Western hermeneutics, Mosser explains that the interpretive views of these Church Fathers were in accordance with the Second Temple Judaism and the rabbinic Jewish writings (Mosser 2005, 60ff).

Before leaving this psalm, one more matter is important for our study: How did these fathers view the phrase “you are gods”? Mosser states that “the patristic writers were happy to apply the word ‘gods’ to glorified believers, but this was done on the basis of Paul’s teaching that believers would be raised to incorruptibility and immortality (1 Cor. 15)” (Mosser 2005, 73). In other words, humans were created “gods, children of the Most High” (verse 6), but they lost that original glory and immortality, and became mortal (verse 7). In Paul’s soteriology, through the work of Christ, glory and immortality are restored to the believers. Since glory, incorruptibility, and immortality are characteristics of God and of humanity before the fall, the restoration of those characteristics in humanity through Christ is also a part of theosis.

### ***John 10:34-36***

If “gods” in Psalm 82:6 refers to human beings, then the passage holds clear implications for understanding theosis. Furthermore, Jesus quotes that psalm in John 10:34 when some Jews accused him of blasphemy by equating himself with God. Jesus answered them: “Is it not written in your law, ‘I said, you are gods’? If those to whom the word of God came were called ‘gods’ – and the scripture cannot be annulled – can you say that the one whom the Father has sanctified and sent into the world is blaspheming because I said, ‘I am God’s Son?’” (Jn. 10:34–36).

Several interpretive issues arise with this passage. First, who are “those to whom the word of God came”? Is Jesus speaking generally about the Old Testament prophets who received the word of the Lord? Is he speaking from the context of Psalm 82 or outside of its context? Is he referring to judges and rulers, as “gods” are usually interpreted, or is he using a rabbinic interpretation and referring to Israel at Mount Sinai?

Several commentators argue for this last reading, which has implications for theosis. Mosser claims that Jesus “referred to Israel at Sinai (recipients of the commandments of the Law), understood as recapitulating the story of Adam and Eve (recipients of the original commandment)” (Mosser 2005, 71). Ackerman

explains the rabbinic mythological interpretation where the nation of Israel was made godlike when God gave them the Law (Ackerman 1966, 187). “Whenever Ps. 82:6-7 is used out of context by the rabbis, as Jesus has done, it always refers to the Israelites’ being named gods when they received the Law at Sinai” (Ackerman 1966, 188). A tradition of rabbinic writings sees the law-giving event at Mount Sinai as the second opportunity for immortality of humans, after the fall of Adam. Furthermore, according to rabbinic interpretations, this opportunity was short-lived, because the Israelites made golden calves and experienced a new fall. Thus, the next opportunity would come in the messianic era (Mosser 2005, 70).

The second issue is the logic of Jesus’ argument, because the Jews are not accusing him for calling himself *a god* but *the God*. Kysar states that “Even though such an argument seems fallacious to us and an abuse of Scripture, such reasoning was a common rabbinic practice” (Kysar 1986, 179). O’Day shows that Jesus uses exegetical techniques common to rabbinic argumentation of first century Judaism (O’Day 1995, under “10:34-36”). In rabbinic exegetical approach “a comparison could be made between two biblical texts simply on the presence of the same word in both texts, even if the words occur in distinct contexts and with quite different meanings” (O’Day 1995, under “10:34-36”).<sup>16</sup> Thus, Jesus is replying in a rabbinic manner within the story.

Some commentaries also offer a functional explanation of this claim, based on “gods” in Psalm 82:6 referring to judges and rulers who function as God’s representatives on earth.<sup>17</sup> If Jesus was speaking only functionally about his role as the one sent by God, why would the Jews want to stone him? John 10:33 suggests more than a functional interpretation. They said to him “It is not for a good work that we are going to stone you, but for blasphemy, because you, though only a human being, are making yourself God.” Jesus concludes the conversation with them by claiming “the Father is in me and I am in the Father” (John 10:38). Therefore, the teaching encompasses both the functional and ontological.

Of course in John, Jesus is not explaining the doctrine of theosis. He is defending himself against the charge of blasphemy. His focus is primarily on who he is, and why he is who he is, rather than on the theological identity of humankind. But his affirmative statements of that phrase from Psalm 82:6, that even humans can be called gods according to the scripture are still significant for the doctrine of theosis. Furthermore, if we interpret John 10:34 in light of the previously discussed rabbinic interpretations of “gods” in Psalm 82, the Johannine text can carry even more import toward the doctrine of theosis.

16 For more comments on Jesus’ argumentation in this verse see also Brown 2008; Brant 2011; Phillips 1989, 405-419.

17 See, for example, Plummer 1902, under “John 10:34”.

## **2 Peter 1:4**

As I conclude this section, I will now turn to a final text from 2 Peter 1:4. “Thus he has given us, through these things, his precious and very great promises, so that through them you may escape from the corruption that is in the world because of lust, and may become participants of the divine nature.” The last phrase in this verse speaks about Christians as participants of the divine nature and is often used as another supporting text for the doctrine of theosis. Some of the key questions I will examine include: Is Peter talking about future participation or present participation? What does he mean by “participants?” What does he mean by “divine nature?” And what does this text imply for Christian being and living?

Watson states that Christians gain some of the ontological characteristics of God and that this will be a future reality. For him,

it is an idea borrowed from Hellenistic Judaism that the soul, having escaped the material world, which is subject to corruption because of lust (evil desires; 2:10, 18-19), either at the parousia or through death, attains immortality and incorruptibility, which characterize God’s nature and the heavenly realm (e.g., 4 Macc. 18:3; Wis. 2:23; a similar idea is found in Rom. 8:18-25; 1 Cor. 15:42-57) (Watson 1998, under “1:4”).

Wolters, on the other hand, offers a covenantal reading of the verse, arguing that the phrase does not have anything to do with “ontological participation in the being of God” (Wolters 1990, 30). The statement can then be interpreted as “partners of the Deity” actually referring to “the believer’s partnership with God in the covenant” (Wolters 1990, 30). Hafemann likewise argues that divine nature does not refer to God’s ontological being, “but to God’s dynamic ‘character expressed in action’ in accordance with his promises. Being a fellow participant (κοινωνός) of this ‘nature’ thus refers to taking part in the eschatological realization of the ‘new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells’” (Hafemann 2013, 99).

“Divine nature” is an unusual expression in the New Testament, yet it is in accordance with other scriptures where the believers truly share in God’s life and qualities.<sup>18</sup> Some commentators indicate that the phrase was common in the Hellenistic philosophies of the time, such as Stoicism and Platonism, and therefore may have been borrowed from them (Barclay 1960, 351-352, and Bigg 1956, 256). While pagan philosophers taught that humans were divine by nature, Peter taught that humans had the possibility of sharing in God’s nature, which could be realized only through Jesus Christ via grace.

Corbin-Reuschling approaches theosis from a broader context – the broader

18 Sharing in God’s life and qualities must not be confused with becoming God in essence. See, for example, Green 1989, 72-74; MacLaren n.d., 25; Reicke 1964, 153.

text of 2 Peter 1:3-11. For her, being participants means “fellowship, partnership and oneness in purpose” and involves “sharing in God’s divine nature and attributes” (Corbin-Reuschling 2014, 279). She suggests that the answer to the question of divine nature in 2 Peter 1:4 is actually the list of virtues in the immediate following context in 1:5-7 (Corbin-Reuschling 2014, 280). These virtues are faith, goodness, knowledge, self-control, endurance, godliness, mutual affection, and love – attributes of God’s nature that Christians can participate in.

I would suggest that 2 Peter 1:4 contains echoes of a theology of human creation, fall, and re-creation. Being participants of divine nature necessitates that human beings are created in the image of God. Corruption in the world, likewise, resembles the fall, and the author is speaking of its reversal. Because of God’s promises, Christians escape the corruption, and are able to share in the divine nature. In other words, the image of God is restored in them. This is a present reality, as evidenced in some translations, such as “so that through them you may participate in divine nature” (NIV), or “These are the promises that enable you to share his divine nature” (NLT). In Greek, in the construction ἵνα γένησθε (in order that you may become), the verb is aorist subjunctive middle. This word choice allows for present understanding because the aorist tense in subjunctive mood does not express time but undefined action (Mounce 2003, 290). Thus, we can now share in the qualities of divine life as described in the list of virtues that follows.

### ***Conclusion Regarding the Biblical Texts***

The four biblical texts we have just examined can be used in support of theosis. That biblical theology can be summarized as follows: Humankind was made in the image and likeness of God (Gen. 1:26-27), the scripture calls humans “gods” (Ps. 82:6-7), Jesus confirms that scripture (Jn. 10:34-36), and Christians are called participants in the divine nature (2 Pet. 1:4). These texts do not stand alone in support of theosis. In the next section I will show how this concept and doctrine developed through history, and in the next article I will present a number of New Testament texts related to theosis.

### **History of the Doctrine of Theosis**

The concept of theosis can be traced back to several major influences in the Greco-Roman world: popular piety, philosophical traditions, and the Jewish and Christian Scriptures (Collins 2012, 12). The extent to which Christian thinkers appropriated certain concepts and terminology is a “matter of debate and interpretation” (Collins 2012, 12). Because this work is focused on the biblical theolo-

gy of theosis, other possible influences such as Hellenistic Platonism and Rabbinic Judaism, are not being treated here.<sup>19</sup> I am more interested in the scriptural texts and the Christian tradition which contributed to the development of the doctrine of theosis. In this chapter I will consider influential early church leaders and theologians called the Church Fathers of the patristic era, including the Apostolic Fathers, the Greek Fathers, and the Latin Fathers. I will then consider prominent medieval theologians, from the early to the late middle ages, including the mystics, and finally the theologians in Protestant traditions and movements up to the modern era.

### ***Theosis in the Patristic Theology***

The doctrine of theosis began with the earliest voices of the post-Apostolic church. The Apostolic Fathers, who belong to the late first century to mid-second century, work out certain themes that would be some of the groundwork of the later developments of theosis. For example, Ignatius of Antioch (c. 35 – c. 108), in his letters to different churches, calls Christians “God-bearers,” “God-runners,” those who “participate in God,” “are wholly of God,” “are full of God” and “have God in themselves” (Russell 2004, 91). In his article, “Emergence of the Deification Theme in the Apostolic Fathers,” Kharlamov examines *the Didache, the Epistle of Barnabas, First Clement, Second Clement*, and the writings of Ignatius of Antioch, and Polycarp of Smyrna. Within his conclusion, he states that “With their exhortational rather than dogmatic theology, the Apostolic Fathers offer an ‘economic’ model of deification [based on the relational aspect of spiritual life], closely linked to soteriology. The imitation of Christ plays an important role in the Apostolic Fathers. To be saved is to be like Christ as much as possible” (Kharlamov 2006b, 65). This becoming like Christ will later change to becoming like God, providing some equivocation of Christification with deification (Kharlamov 2006b, 52).

Kharlamov goes on to examine elements of theosis in the apologists of the second century such as Justin Martyr, Tatian, Theophilus of Antioch, and Athenagoras. He finds that “In Justin, deification is paralleled with divine filiation; in Theophilus, with full maturity that supersedes a human’s original state” (Kharlamov 2006a, 84-85). However, “Theological discourse in the apologists, with the exception of Justin, is less Christocentric and ecclesiastic compared to the Apostolic Fathers. They have more emphasis on speculative reasoning, that lays the groundwork for what would become traditional methodology of Christian theology” (Kharlamov 2006a, 84).

19 To learn more about extra-biblical influences on theosis, see Collins 2012, chapter 2. See also Lenz 2008, 47-67.

The concept of salvation as deification was prominent in the theology of the early Greek fathers.<sup>20</sup> In this section I will focus on Irenaeus and Athanasius.<sup>21</sup> Irenaeus was born in the early second century and died in the end of the second century or the beginning of the third. He was a bishop of Lugdunum in Gaul (modern day Lyon, France), which was the capital city of the Roman province of Gallia Lugdunensis and an important city in the western half of the Roman Empire. He was also a theologian and an apologist, with significant influence in the development of Christian theology. In the second part of the second century, in his best-known work, *Against Heresies, Book III*, Irenaeus wrote:

For it was for this end that the Word of God was made man, and He who was the Son of God became the Son of man, that man, having been taken into the Word, and receiving the adoption, might become the son of God. For by no other means could we have attained to incorruptibility and immortality, unless we had been united to incorruptibility and immortality. But how could we be joined to incorruptibility and immortality, unless, first, incorruptibility and immortality had become that which we also are, so that the corruptible might be swallowed up by incorruptibility, and the mortal by immortality, that we might receive the adoption of sons? (Irenaeus n.d., 183-184)

It seems that Irenaeus was the first church father who explicitly articulated the concept of theosis. It was a leading theme in his writings (Russell 2004, 3). He separated out several of the crucial subjects connected to deification, which will be discussed later in this thesis: incarnation, adoption, sonship, incorruptibility, and immortality. His best known statements about deification come from *Against Heresies, Book V*, "...but following the only true and steadfast Teacher, the Word of God, our Lord Jesus Christ, who did, through His transcendent love, become what we are, that He might bring us to be even what He is Himself" (Irenaeus n.d., 282). A couple of paragraphs later, continuing to write about the work of Jesus Christ, he states:

and [Jesus] has also poured out the Spirit of the Father for the union and communion of God and man, imparting indeed God to men by means of the Spirit, and, on the other hand, attaching man to God by His own incarnation, and bestowing upon us at His coming immortality durably and truly, by means of communion with God (Irenaeus n.d., 282-283).

Finch finds that the theology of Irenaeus already contains all the basic elements

20 Nispel 1999, 289; Williams 1999, Kindle location 484.

21 Two famous phrases by these two early fathers are often quoted in research on theosis. Irenaeus stated that Christ "became what we are, that He might bring us to be even to what He is Himself" (*Against Heresies*, 282), while Athanasius stated that "He [Christ] became man that we might become god" (*On the Incarnation of the Word*, 43).

to be found in the future patristic understanding of theosis:

restoration of prelapsarian [before the Fall] likeness to God and incorruptibility, initiated by the union of human nature with divine nature through the incarnation, life, death, and resurrection of the Eternal Son, appropriated existentially as adoption by God and infusion by the Holy Spirit, and finally perfected eternally through the face to face vision of God (Finch 2006b, 86-87).

To participate in the divine nature, as Finch interprets Irenaeus, “is to receive adoptive sonship to God the Father, which is to be assimilated to God the Son through incorporation to the humanity He assumed, recapitulated, sanctified, and suffused with the Holy Spirit at the incarnation” (Finch 2006b, 103).

Athanasius (296 – 373) also carries significant authority as a church father and a theologian. Like Irenaeus, he had and still has a very good reputation in the church. He was a bishop in Alexandria, one of the major centers of Christianity at the time, and he was an influential participant in the Council of Nicaea.<sup>22</sup> His most famous writing is the *Incarnation of the Word*. In chapter 3, he writes, “The Word of God came in His own Person, because it was He alone, the Image of the Father Who could recreate man made after the Image” (Athanasius n.d., 12). In chapter 8, as he continues to write about Jesus Christ as the Word of God, he states, “He, indeed, assumed humanity that we might become God” (Athanasius n.d., 43).<sup>23</sup> Statements such as these epitomize the concept of theosis.

Finch notes that theosis was the central idea in Athanasius’s theology (Finch 2006a, 104). He concludes that Athanasius’s “soteriology of deification, or participation in the divine nature... was a development and explication of the Pauline and Johannine emphasis on salvation as adoptive sonship to God the Father through incorporation by grace into God the incarnate Son” (Finch 2006a, 121). Yet there is also in Athanasius an emphasis on human cooperation and effort in divinization as he “insisted at every turn that the divine-human exchange of the incarnation must be appropriated to each individual through the obedient imitation of Christ, ascetical practices, and reception of the sacraments” (Finch 2006a, 110). Thus, Athanasius was also one of the first church theologians to describe how the persons of the Trinity contribute to theosis (McGinn 2006, 400), an important theme which will be dealt with later in this thesis.

In addition to these two towering figures, many other Church Fathers wrote about deification. Alexandrian Christian thought gave significant contribution

22 Tremendously significant ecumenical council in the history of the Church, held at the city of Nicaea in 325. It settled the issue of Christ’s divinity and produced the Nicene Creed. Its statements of faith are accepted by almost all Christian denominations.

23 The phrase may contain slight variations, depending on the translation of the Greek (Αὐτὸς γὰρ ἐνηθρώπησεν, ἵνα ἡμεῖς θεοποιηθῶμεν).

to theosis. For example, Clement of Alexandria (c. 150 – c. 215) was the first one to use the verb *theopoiein* (to make god, to divinize) in a Christian writing (McGinn 2006, 398). Origen of Alexandria (c. 185 – c. 254), another prominent figure, wrote:

But both Jesus Himself and His disciples desired that His followers should believe not merely in His Godhead and miracles, as if He had not also been a partaker of human nature, and had assumed the human flesh which ‘lusteth against the Spirit;’ but they saw also that the power which had descended into human nature, and into the midst of human miseries, and which had assumed a human soul and body, contributed through faith, along with its divine elements, to the salvation of believers, when they see that from Him there began the union of the divine with the human nature, in order that the human, by communion with the divine, might rise to be divine, not in Jesus alone, but in all those who not only believe, but enter upon the life which Jesus taught, and which elevates to friendship with God and communion with Him every one who lives according to the precepts of Jesus (Origen n.d., 65).

According to Origen, the Christian life should be more than believing in God and his miracles. There should be the union of the human with the divine because of what Jesus has provided.

Russell devotes special attention to Alexandrians. Summarizing his findings on theosis, he states:

...the Alexandrians used the metaphor of deification to indicate the glorious destiny awaiting human nature in accordance with the divine plan of salvation. The fundamental “moment” is the deification by the Logos of the representative human nature he received at the Incarnation. This has implications for individual human beings. The believer can participate in the deified flesh of Christ – the Lord’s exalted humanity – through baptism, the Eucharist, and the moral life. Such participation leads to deification, not as a private mystical experience but as a transformation effected within the ecclesial body (Russell 2004, 205).<sup>24</sup>

The Cappadocian fathers<sup>25</sup> of the fourth century, Basil the Great, Gregory of Nyssa and Gregory of Nazianzus, also wrote about theosis. Gregory of Nazianzus was the archbishop (patriarch) of Constantinople, who coined the term *theosis* (θέωσις), and its correlated verb *theoō* (θεόω) (Russell 2004, 249). Russell states

24 Russell’s monumental work *The Doctrine of Deification in the Greek Patristic Tradition* is the result of almost twenty years of study of deification in patristic theology. He exposes the writings on deification in Apostolic fathers, Greek fathers, Latin fathers, and Syriac fathers.

25 These are also called the Three Cappadocians, named after the Roman and Byzantine province of Cappadocia in Asia Minor.



that these Cappadocian theologians “take the doctrine of deification from the Alexandrians and adapt it to a Platonizing understanding of Christianity as the attainment of likeness to God as far as is possible for human nature” (Russell 2004, 232).<sup>26</sup>

The concept of theosis is also found in the writings of Latin or Western Church Fathers. Tertullian (c. 155 – c. 240) was the first Latin theologian to write about theosis (Collins 2012, 61). Augustine of Hippo (354 – 430), one of the best known Latin Church Fathers and one of the most prominent theologians in the development of Western Christianity also attended to the doctrine. Augustine spoke of deification rarely, but explicitly. He used the Latin term *deificare* which means “to deify.” For example, in his exposition on Psalm 50, he draws an argument from Psalm 82:6-7, and states:

It is evident then, that He has called men gods, that are deified of His Grace, not born of His Substance. For He does justify, who is just through His own self, and not of another; and He does deify who is God through Himself, not by the partaking of another. But He that justifies does Himself deify, in that by justifying He does make sons of God. ‘For He has given them power to become the sons of God.’ John 1:12. 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 (Augustine 2007, 315).

The language of theosis is also found in some of Augustine’s sermons. He preaches: “God, you see, wants to make you a god; not by nature, of course, like the one whom he begot; but by his gift and by adoption. For just as he through being humbled came to share your mortality; so through lifting you up he brings you to share his immortality” (Augustine 1992, 209). Recent theological research posits that theosis is one of Augustine’s major metaphors for Christian life. Contrary to much of the previous scholarship on Augustine, Meconi claims:

Deification of a human person is central to how St. Augustine presents a Christian’s new life in Christ. Augustine accordingly presents the Christian life in terms of the Son of God’s becoming human so humans can become God. This transformative union thus allows the bishop of Hippo to exhort his congregation: “Let us thus rejoice and give thanks, for we have been made not Christians, but we have been made Christ” (Meconi 2013, xi).

The publisher’s book description provides an insightful summary of Meconi’s research on Augustine’s theology of theosis:

Provocative passages on deification abound in St. Augustine of Hippo. He relies on the term “deification” far more than other Latin fathers do. Even more

26 See more in McGuckin 2008, 95-114.

important, the reality of the deified life runs throughout every major aspect of Augustine's presentation of Christianity... For Augustine, the Christian life is essentially an incorporation of the elect into the very person of Christ... where Christ and Christian become one through the charity of the Holy Spirit and the church's sacraments that elevate and enable men and women to participate in God's own life... the human person alone bears the *imago Dei*, and emerges as the one called to appropriate God's life freely. For this purpose, the Son becomes human (Meconi 2013, publisher's book description).

Williams points out that Augustine's writing on deification "far more resembles both earlier and later theology than what we found in the Cappadocians. Drawing on the ubiquitous Psalm 82, he speaks of a deification by grace, carefully distinguishing this from the possession of divine substance. He differentiates also between the One who deifies and those who receive deification" (Williams 1999, Kindle location 533). Puchniak summarizes his research on theosis in Augustine's work: "Augustine reminded people that deification was a divinely granted *possibility*, ecclesial in its dimensions, and the *telos* of present aspirations" (Puchniak 2006, 132).

So far, we have noted a number of Church Fathers and their contribution to theosis. Let us now consider a few paragraphs that endeavor to summarize the concept and the doctrine of theosis during the patristic era. Collins offers the following summary:

There are five basic components used in the patristic era to express the metaphor of deification. Three are pairs of opposites and two are pairings from the philosophical/theological tradition. The pairs of opposites are uncreated and created, immortal and mortal, divine and human, and the pairs of concepts are image and likeness, and *ousia* [essence] and *energeia* [energy]. The conceptuality of deification is also constructed around a variety of formulae. The philosophical tradition of ancient Greece provides at least three of these: (1) imitation of the divine, (2) participation in the divine and (3) the ascent of the soul to the divine. Each of these relates to the immortal-mortal pairing. Imitation relates closely to the practice of the virtues. Participation and ascent relate to a concept of contemplation or their contemplation or *theoria* [vision], which suggests an encounter with divine light (Collins 2012, 49-50).

After an extensive treatment of Church Fathers and theosis in the first part of her book, Williams provides this valuable summary of patristic deification theology:

This, then, is the patristic tradition of deification. While we find few actual definitions of the term, a clear enough pattern has emerged that we may make some generalizations. It asserts the *imago Dei* and the Incarnation as the basis of deification and construes theosis overwhelmingly in terms of knowledge, virtue, light and glory, participation and union. In some authors, the sacraments are important tradents of divinization; more often, human faculties such as the intellect and the ability to love are significant. While emphasis on the physical

dimension varies, there is a broad consensus that participation in divine nature entails bodily incorruptibility. Above all, the Fathers point to the distinction between Uncreated and created, along with the Creator's desire that his creatures partake of his own life and goodness. Thus theosis, while entailing a degree of human striving towards virtuous assimilation to God and love of God remains always a divine gift, a gift of grace. The idea of uninterrupted progression towards God, a seamlessness between this life and the next, appears in the work of most of the Fathers, but hints of theosis in its fullness flowering in this life are rare (Williams 1999, Kindle location 573-579).

Mannermaa states the basic idea of patristic understanding of theosis can be briefly described like this: "Divine life has manifested itself in Christ. In the church, understood as the body of Christ, human beings participate in this life and thereby partake of 'the divine nature' (2 Pet. 1:4). This 'nature,' or divine life, permeates the being of humans like leaven permeates bread, in order to restore it to its original condition as *imago Dei*" (Mannermaa 1998, Kindle locations 327-329).

Thus, in the patristic era, it is important to note that several components of the doctrine of theosis were found in the writings of Christian communities all over the early Christian world, communities that spoke Greek, Latin, Syrian, Coptic and Chaldean language (Collins 2012, 60). According to Collins, "It is possible to see a common thread across the different linguistic communities expressed in the exchange conceptuality used by Irenaeus. The Son of God had become human so that human beings might become divine" (Collins 2012, 60).

### ***Theosis in Medieval Theology***

In the early Middle Ages, we initially see a decreased emphasis on a theology of a theosis, to be followed by a sharp increase at the end of that period. Collins explains this occurrence:

By the late fifth century the language of deification and its underlying conceptuality were not much in use in theological discourse, for the appeal to deification as a metaphor for salvation was no longer in vogue. The reason for this is mainly to be found in the suspicion surrounding the teachings of Origen and those who shaped theological reflection along similar lines" (Collins 2012, 102).

However, at the beginning of the sixth century, the influence of Dionysius the Areopagite<sup>27</sup> caused an increased attentiveness to theosis. His writings "brought the conceptuality of deification into the mainstream of theological discourse" (Collins 2012, 106). Dionysius was the first Christian theologian to formulate a

27 This significant theologian took the name of Paul's Athenian convert in Acts 17:34. He is therefore also identified as Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite, or Pseudo-Denys. His identity is disputed but his works are well documented and dated.

definition of theosis, as late as the sixth century AD. It states: “Now the assimilation to, and union with, God, as far as attainable, is deification” (Dionysius the Areopagite 1897, 189). Dionysius was also the one who popularized the term *theosis* (Williams 1999, Kindle location 544).<sup>28</sup>

In the seventh century, Maximus the Confessor (c. 580 – 662), emerged as a major theologian attending to theosis. His contributions are significant. For the first time he presented the doctrine of theosis in its own right. He not only expressed it as a metaphor for salvation, but as the purpose of creation of humankind and he established it as a foundational doctrine in Eastern Orthodoxy (Collins 2012, 106-108). Russell claims: “The Irenaean and Alexandrian principle that God became man in order that man might become god receives in his [Maximus’s] hands its greatest elaboration and most profound articulation” (Russell 2004, 262). An excerpt from Maximus’ writings on theosis states:

A sure warrant for looking forward with hope to the deification of human nature is provided by the incarnation of God, which makes man god to the same degree as God Himself became man. For it is clear that He who became man without sin (cf. Heb. 4:15) will divinize human nature without changing it into the divine nature, and will raise it up for His own sake to the same degree as He lowered Himself for man’s sake (Maximus 2015, Kindle location 2513).

Russell summarizes Maximus’ theology of deification in the following way:

The kenosis of the Word is followed by the theosis of the believer, God’s accommodation to the constrictions of human life by man’s expansion, within the limitations of his creaturely capacity, to the infinity of the divine life. Deification is not simply another expression for salvation, the repair of the damage done by sin. It is the final end of salvation, the attainment of the destiny originally intended for humankind that Adam had in his grasp and threw away. It may be anticipated in some degree in this life, but it reaches its fulfillment in the next in the fullest possible union with the incarnate Word. It involves not only man but his whole world. For deification is in the end the goal, the *skopos*, of the entire cosmos (Russell 2004, 262).<sup>29</sup>

Another important contribution to theosis comes from John of Damascus (c. 676 – 750),<sup>30</sup> who “sets out a theological anthropology in which deification is understood to be the goal of human life” (Collins 2012, 109). According to Collins, the last

28 For the Greek vocabulary of deification, see Russell 2004, appendix 2. He concludes that “Christian authors show a marked preference for the verbs θεοποιέω and θεόω and the nouns θεοποίησις and θέωσις, both nouns being late coinages found almost exclusively in Christian writers” (343).

29 For more detailed analysis of theosis in Maximus, see Vishnevskaya 2006, 134-145.

30 John of Damascus is the last of the so-called Greek Fathers.

three theologians mentioned (Dionysius, Maximus and John), “have had enormous influence on the reception of the Tradition within Eastern Christianity” (Collins 2012, 109). A significant development in the early middle ages is that the doctrine of theosis, which had been expressed metaphorically in the first several centuries, was now expressed “conceptually and dogmatically” (Russell 2004, 1).

After the Great Schism of 1054, when the western churches separated from the eastern churches, the doctrine of theosis during the high and late middle ages can still be seen. In this period, the most prominent and influential theologian of the Western church was Thomas Aquinas (1225 – 1274), while in the Eastern church it was Gregory Palamas (1296 – 1359). A. N. Williams has extensively analyzed the contributions of these two theologians in her book *The Ground of Union: Deification in Aquinas and Palamas*. Williams examines the texts where Aquinas speaks directly of deification (or deformity, participation, union), and the implications in Aquinas’ theology, anthropology, epistemology, Christology, ethics, etc. She concludes that Aquinas “takes theosis for granted and assumes his readers will also” (Williams 1999, Kindle location 1652) and that “the Summa’s theology portrays a God intent upon drawing creatures into his own life” (Williams 1999, Kindle location 1033).<sup>31</sup> In her treatment of image and likeness to God, she states that “Aquinas here traces a three-step process of likening to God, from a likeness embedded in our nature, to a likeness that increases in this life through grace, to a likeness in the next life, when the human imitation of the Trinity’s knowing and loving will be perfected” (Williams 1999, Kindle location 1325). In conclusion, “To look to God is therefore to understand both what we are and what we are meant to be, both our natural condition and what we are to become” (Williams 1999, Kindle location 1341).

The theology of Gregory Palamas has had tremendous influence in the Orthodox Church, especially his doctrine of theosis. The Orthodox Church regards him as “the consummate codifier of a long tradition, the thinker who gathers up strands stretching as far back as Irenaeus, giving them their coherent, authoritative and final expression” (Williams 1999, Kindle location 2653). Williams finds that Palamas consistently uses ten images to describe theosis: “the first three (virtue, knowledge and vision) represent the foothills of deification, while the next four (contemplation, light, grace and glory) are nearer equivalents, and three (adoption, participation and union) function virtually as synonyms for it” (Williams 1999, Kindle location 1981-2). In Palamas’ writings on grace, Williams finds “the central principle of theosis: the bestowal of the divine gift transforms its recipient, and through this transformation is wrought a likening to God that can alone enable true fellowship” (Williams 1999, Kindle location 2359).

31 *Summa Theologiae* is Aquinas’ best-known and tremendously influential work.

Palamas is best known for his theological point on the distinction of divine essence and energies,<sup>32</sup> which is his way of explaining how a union between the uncreated divine being and created human beings is possible, without removing the borderline between the two. God remains separate in his essence, while through his energies he communes with human beings. God's essence is his being while his energies are those things through which he acts in the world. God's energies are, for example, power, love, grace, etc. According to Lossky, grace is another name for "the deifying energies which the Holy Spirit communicates to us" (Lossky 2002, 86). We can participate in his energies, but not in his essence. God is transcendent in his essence and immanent in his energies (Cheng n.d., 98). God's essence is unapproachable, inaccessible, and imparticipable for us while his energies are approachable, accessible, and participable for us. However, this does not mean that God is somehow divided in two parts, as stated here: "Wholly unknowable in His essence, God wholly reveals Himself in His energies, which yet in no way divide His nature into two parts – knowable and unknowable – but signify two different modes of the divine existence, in the essence and outside of the essence" (Lossky 2002, 86).

In her research on theosis in the writings of the Church Fathers, Thomas and Gregory, Williams concludes: "Not only the basic means of describing divinization but also the majority of specific images and concepts used to do so concur in the works of the Fathers, Aquinas and Palamas" (Williams 1999, Kindle location 3129). She presents another significant conclusion, that theosis is for every Christian: "One important consonance among all these writers is that none is speaking of what we would properly call mystical experience – that is, an extraordinary apprehension limited to the exceptionally holy few. These authors present deifying union, as opposed to mystical rapture, as the norm of Christian growth into God" (Williams 1999, Kindle location 3138).

While theosis became a major and foundational doctrine in Eastern theology, it conversely became marginalized in Western theology. Collins analyzes the elements of the metaphor of deification in the West and concludes that the doctrine did not occupy a major place but finds "constant traces... both within the mainstream as well as in what are perceived to be the 'peripheral' traditions" (Collins 2012, 111). There are also elements of deification in the scholastics and in the mystics.

32 Williams believes this distinction in Palamas' writings is only nominal but not real (Williams 1999, Kindle location 2687). However, large majority of scholars interpret the distinction in palamistic thought as real, and only several consider it to be nominal. Essence-energies distinction is also a point of debate between Western and Eastern scholars.

One of the major representatives of scholasticism<sup>33</sup> is Thomas Aquinas. Just like Williams, Collins concludes that Aquinas “uses the language and imagery of the patristic account of deification” (Collins 2012, 117). In conclusion to his research on the scholastics, Collins writes:

The exploration of the metaphor of deification in medieval “Mystical Theology” in the schools and universities is focused mainly on the ascent of the soul to God and the attainment of mystical union. This is not simply predicated on the categories of Platonism but is also constructed around an appeal to the “exchange formula” and, therefore, rooted in the Incarnation. The metaphor is explored in terms of filiation: a being “in Christ” achieved through participation in the sacraments of Baptism and the Eucharist. Elements of the metaphor relate to the processes of sanctification and include the doctrines of the Holy Spirit and of grace (Collins 2012, 120-121).

In analyzing elements of deification in mystical theology, Collins also examines mystics such as Bernard of Clairvaux, Meister Eckhart, Julian of Norwich, Teresa of Avila and John of the Cross. He concludes the following:

The writings of the medieval and early modern mystics follow the classical pattern of the process of divine-human union: purification, illumination, and divinization. The soul cleansed of sin through Baptism and living a good moral life is led to a deep and intimate communion with God by letting go of one’s will and egotistic desires, rising above all creatures in the world, and by turning inwards in a state of inner unity, calm and silent contemplation. Several of these authors draw not only on personal mystical experience but also draw upon the experience of suffering of one kind or another which informs and possibly “allows” the mystical experiences which they have (Collins 2012, 136-137).

### ***Theosis in Protestant Traditions***

The same lack of emphasis on theosis in the Western Church may also be applied to Protestant traditions. Theosis was not formulated as a whole doctrine nor did it occupy a major place in theology. But elements of the doctrine are found in major theologians and movements as well as in marginal traditions. Theosis does not seem to play an explicit role in the five Protestant *solae* (*sola scriptura, sola fide, sola gratia, solus Christus, soli Deo gloria*) nor in the idea of a priesthood of all believers. According to Collins, there is a perceived problem of incompatibility between theosis and the doctrines of justification and grace, whi-

33 Scholasticism is “the system and method of learning for philosophy and theology during the medieval period as developed in European university contexts. It relied on philosophical methods and the use of reason to make clear divisions and distinctions within a body of knowledge” (McKim 1996, 250).

ch is “premised on the understanding that a doctrine of deification is constructed around notions of divine-human ‘likeness’ and of a synergy of wills, which are considered ‘impossible’ in relation to a Protestant understanding of the holiness of God and the sinfulness of the human person” (Collins 2012, 145).

Martin Luther (1483 – 1546) was the instigator of the Protestant Reformation and a major Protestant theologian. Theosis ideology is found in some of Luther’s sermons. For example, here is an excerpt from a sermon where Luther speaks on Ephesians 3:13-21, and explains what being filled with all the fullness of God means:

...filled with everything God’s bounty supplies, full of God, adorned with his grace and the gifts of his Spirit – the Spirit who gives us steadfastness, illuminates us with his light, lives within us his life, saves us with his salvation, and with his love enkindles love in us; in short, it means having God himself and all his blessings dwelling in us in fullness and being effective to make us wholly divine – not so that we possess merely something of God, but all his fullness (Lenker n.d., 236).

Luther’s major theological themes were often justification and grace, which some theologians consider incompatible with theosis (Mannermaa 1998, Kindle locations 320-321). Others offer a different interpretation. For example, one of the traditional interpretations of Luther’s doctrine of justification is a legalistic law court approach where God proclaims a person just based on the atonement, grace provided by Christ, and on that person’s faith in Christ. A person is then seen as covered by the blood of Christ, a sinner justified by grace through faith. This remains a central doctrine in Lutheranism, the basis of the doctrine of salvation by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone. The point of contention in view of theosis is that the teaching of a righteousness comes from outside and remains outside – it is Christ’s righteousness imputed to a believer, not infused. Therefore, a person remains a sinner saved by grace. However, a different and more recent interpretation of Luther states that “for Luther faith is a real participation in Christ, that in faith a believer receives the righteousness of God in Christ, not only in a nominal and external way, but really and inwardly” (Braaten and Jenson 1998, Kindle locations 25-26).

Revised interpretations like this provide a closer connection to the Orthodox understanding of theosis. “Righteousness as an attribute of God in Christ cannot be separated from his divine being. Thus, Luther found it appropriate to say that through faith in Christ a real exchange occurs, the righteousness of God in exchange for the sinfulness of human beings. The righteousness of God that is ours by faith is therefore a real participation in the life of God” (Braaten and Jenson



1998, Kindle locations 28-30). Proponents of this view include Tuomo Mannermaa and his Finnish school.<sup>34</sup> Mannermaa states, “Central in Luther’s theology is that in faith the human being *really* participates by faith in the person of Christ and in the divine life and the victory that is in it. Or, to say it the other way around: Christ gives his person to the human being through the faith by which we grasp it” (Mannermaa 1998, Kindle location 396-398). Mannermaa continues to explain that because believers participate in Christ, they participate in the divine life, in the fullness of God, in the nature of God, that is, in the essence of God which contains the properties of God, such as “righteousness, wisdom, power, holiness, joy, peace, eternal life – and especially love” (Mannermaa 1998, Kindle location 434).

Alongside mainline Protestant reformers and churches, we can also consider other churches and movements born in or from the Reformation. Tracing theosis in Western theology, Collins goes on to write about the Radical Reformation movement (such as Anabaptists and Mennonites in the 16th century), the English Reformation (16th century), the Great Awakening (18th and 19th century), the Oxford Movement (19th century) and the Holiness Movement (19th and 20th century). The Radical Reformation developed understanding of salvation which involves real righteousness, union with the divine, and participation in the divine nature (Collins 2012, 151-152). Some scholars in the Church of England used the metaphor of deification. “They bear witness to an ongoing reception of deification within the context of the English Reformation, which fed into the revival movements of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries” (Collins 2012, 152-155, 156).

In the period of the Great Awakening, we also find the works of John Wesley, and his teachings on Christian perfection<sup>35</sup> and entire sanctification,<sup>36</sup> “which he understood as a movement toward final unity with God” (Collins 2012, 159).

34 Tuomo Mannermaa (1937 – 2015) was professor emeritus of ecumenical theology at University of Helsinki in Finland. He was an internationally recognized scholar on Luther, and the leader of “The New Finnish Interpretation of Luther” which argues that Luther’s views on salvation are closer to the Orthodox doctrine of theosis than to the Protestant forensic justification.

35 Christian perfection is “the view that human perfection is possible whereby Christian believers no longer sin” (McKim 1996, 207). The emphasis is on union with God, maturity, and perfection in love for God and people.

36 Entire sanctification is “a view found in the Wesleyan and Holiness traditions which teaches that a Christian can attain a freedom from sin and full sanctification or holiness in this life” (McKim 1996, 90). The emphasis is on union with God, maturity, and perfection in love for God and people.

The leaders of the Oxford Movement<sup>37</sup> discovered again the doctrine of theosis from older traditions and propagated it as an ecclesial, sacramental, and collective doctrine (Collins 2012, 159-163). The Holiness movement<sup>38</sup> is important for our survey of theosis because “it is premised on the understanding that fallen human nature can be cleansed through faith in Jesus Christ and by the power of the Holy Spirit. In this state the believer is endowed with spiritual power and able to maintain purity of heart” (Collins 2012, 163).

## Conclusion Regarding the History of the Doctrine of Theosis

The doctrine of theosis was constructed during the period of patristic theology. It began its development with the Early Fathers and was explicitly formulated by some of the Late Fathers. The doctrine was present in varying degrees in various Christian centers all over the Christian world at the time of the Roman Empire. In the middle and late medieval period, Eastern theologians embraced theosis as a central teaching. It became the main doctrine of salvation, including the goal of humankind and the whole cosmos. Theosis did not become a main doctrine in the West, but the concept was always present, even in mainstream theologians of different Western traditions. In light of the Christian thinkers I have reviewed, theosis can be considered an essential historical doctrine of the Church.

## Bibliography

- Ackerman, James S. 1966. “The Rabbinic Interpretation of Psalm 82 and the Gospel of John.” *Harvard Theological Review* 59, no. 2 (April): 186-191. Accessed May 22, 2017. *ATLA Religion Database with ATLASerials, EBSCOhost*.
- Athanasius. n.d. *On the Incarnation of the Word*. Grand Rapids: Christian Classics Ethereal Library. Accessed July 3, 2017. <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/athanasius/incarnation.pdf>.
- Augustine, Saint. 1992. *Sermons on the New Testament* (vol. III/5). In *The Works of Saint Augustine: A Translation for the 21st Century*. Hyde Park: New City Press.

37 The Oxford Movement was “a 19th-century movement for church renewal within the Church of England and within Anglicanism... that sought to recover the ‘catholic’ elements in the church’s doctrine and piety” (McKim 1996, 198).

38 The Holiness movement refers to “nineteenth-century American religious groups that sought to perpetuate Methodist views of entire sanctification and the concept of Christian perfection as understood by John Wesley” (McKim 130).

- Augustine, St. Aurelius. 2007. *Expositions on the Psalms*. Digital version. Compiled by Ted Hildebrandt. Accessed July 2, 2017. [https://faculty.gordon.edu/hu/bi/ted\\_hildebrandt/otesources/19-psalms/text/books/augustine-psalms/augustine-psalms.pdf](https://faculty.gordon.edu/hu/bi/ted_hildebrandt/otesources/19-psalms/text/books/augustine-psalms/augustine-psalms.pdf).
- Barclay, William. 1960. *The Letters of James and Peter*. Philadelphia: Westminster Press.
- Bigg, Charles. 1956. *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistles of St. Peter and St. Jude*. Edinburgh: T & T Clark.
- Braaten, Carl E., and Robert W. Jenson. 1998. "The Finnish Breakthrough in Luther Research." In *Union with Christ*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans. Kindle.
- Brant, Jo-Ann A. 2011. *John*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic.
- Brown, Raymond E. 2008. *The Gospel According to John (I-XII)*. The Anchor Yale Bible. New Haven and London: Yale University Press.
- Cheng, John. n.d. "The Distinction between God's Essence and Energy: Gregory Palamas' Idea of Ultimate Reality and Meaning." 91-117. Accessed July 17, 2017. <http://catholic-church.org/grace/ecu/v/4.pdf>.
- Clendenin, Daniel B. 1994. "Partakers of Divinity: The Orthodox Doctrine of Theosis." *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 37, no. 3 (September): 365-379. Accessed November 13, 2017. *ATLA Religion Database with ATLASerials, EBSCOhost*.
- Closson, David. 2016. "What Does It Mean to Be Made in God's Image?" *Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission* (May 4). Accessed May 10, 2017. <http://erlc.com/resource-library/articles/what-does-it-mean-to-be-made-in-gods-image>.
- Collins, Paul M. 2012. *Partaking in Divine Nature: Deification and Communion*. London: Bloomsbury T & T Clark.
- Corbin-Reuschling, Wyndy. 2014. "The Means and End in 2 Peter 1:3-11: The Theological and Moral Significance of Theōsis." *Journal of Theological Interpretation* 8, no. 2 (September): 275-286. Accessed May 26, 2017. *ATLA Religion Database with ATLASerials, EBSCOhost*.
- Dionysius the Areopagite. 1897. *Ecclesiastical Hierarchy*. In *Dionysius the Areopagite, Works (1897)*. Grand Rapids: Christian Classics Ethereal Library. Accessed July 10, 2017. <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/Dionysius/works.pdf>.
- Finch, Jeffrey. 2006a. "Athanasius on the Deifying Work of the Redeemer." In *Theōsis: Deification in Christian Theology*, 104-121. Eugene: Pickwick Publications.
- Finch, Jeffrey. 2006b. "Irenaeus on the Christological Basis of Human Divini-

- zation.” In *Theōsis: Deification in Christian Theology*, 86-103. Eugene: Pickwick Publications.
- Finlan, Stephen, and Vladimir Kharlamov, eds. 2006. *Theōsis: Deification in Christian Theology*. Princeton Theological Monograph Series. Eugene: Pickwick Publications.
- Fretheim, Terence E. 1994. “Genesis 1:1-11:26, The Primeval Story.” In *The Book of Genesis, The New Interpreter’s Bible*, vol. I. Nashville: Abingdon Press. Accessed May 15, 2017. <http://www.ministrymatters.com.vwproxy.lipscomb.edu/library/#/tnib/df3e531e83bd95992b9aa6486a7f6508/genesis-11-1126.html>.
- Fretheim, Terence E. 2008. “Image of God.” In *The New Interpreter’s Dictionary of the Bible*. Nashville: Abingdon Press. Accessed May 10, 2017. <http://www.ministrymatters.com.vwproxy.lipscomb.edu/library/#/nidb/12016fd65c14a542e811a8194fb4357/image-of-god.html>.
- Gorman, Michael J. 2009. *Inhabiting the Cruciform God: Kenosis, Justification, and Theosis in Paul’s Narrative Soteriology*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans. Kindle.
- Gorman, Michael J. 2011. “Romans: The First Christian Treatise on Theosis.” *Journal of Theological Interpretation* 5, no. 1: 13-34. Accessed September 21, 2017. *ATLA Religion Database with ATLASerials, EBSCOhost*.
- Green, Michael. 1989. *The Second Epistle General of Peter, and the General Epistle of Jude*. Rev. ed. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans.
- Hafemann, Scott J. 2013. “‘Divine Nature’ in 2 Pet 1,4 within its Eschatological Content.” *Biblica* 94, no. 1: 80-99. Accessed May 26, 2017. *ATLA Religion Database with ATLASerials, EBSCOhost*.
- Hartley, John E. 2008. *Genesis*. New International Biblical Commentary 1. Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers.
- Irenaeus, Saint. n.d. *Against Heresies*. New Advent: Online Content. Accessed July 3, 2017. <https://archive.org/details/SaintIrenaeusAgainstHeresies-Complete>.
- Kharlamov, Vladimir. 2006a. “Deification in the Apologists of the Second Century.” In *Theōsis: Deification in Christian Theology*, 67-85. Eugene: Pickwick Publications.
- Kharlamov, Vladimir. 2006b. “Emergence of the Deification Theme in the Apostolic Fathers.” In *Theōsis: Deification in Christian Theology*, 51-66. Eugene: Pickwick Publications.
- Kirkpatrick, A. F. 1906. “Psalm 82.” In *Psalms, The Cambridge Bible for Schools and Colleges*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. Accessed May 18,

2017. <http://biblehub.com/commentaries/cambridge/psalms/82.htm>.
- Kysar, Robert. 1986. *John*. Augsburg Commentary on the New Testament. Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House.
- Lenker, John Nicholas, ed. n.d. *Sermons by Martin Luther*, vol. 8. Accessed July 20, 2017. [http://www.martinluthersermons.com/Luther\\_Lenker\\_Vol\\_8.pdf](http://www.martinluthersermons.com/Luther_Lenker_Vol_8.pdf).
- Lenz, John R. 2008. "Deification of the Philosopher in Classical Greece." In *Partakers of the Divine Nature*, 47-67. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic.
- Leupold, H. C. 1974. *Exposition of the Psalms*. Grand Rapids: Baker Book House.
- Litwa, M. David. 2012. *We Are Being Transformed: Deification in Paul's Soteriology*. Berlin: De Gruyter.
- Lossky, Vladimir. 2002. *The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church*. Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press.
- Mannermaa, Tuomo. 1998. "Justification and Theosis in Lutheran-Orthodox Perspective." In *Union with Christ*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans. Kindle.
- Maximus, Saint. 2015. *The Writings of Saint Maximus the Confessor*. Philadelphia: R.P. Pryne. Kindle.
- MacLaren, Alexander. n.d. "2 Peter i.4 – Partakers of the Divine Nature." In *Expositions of Holy Scripture*, vol. 17, 25-32. Accessed May 26, 2017. <http://www.gracebooks.com/library/Alexander%20Maclaren/17%20%20Expositions%20of%20Holy%20Scripture.pdf>.
- Meconi, David Vincent. 2013. *The One Christ: St. Augustine's Theology of Deification*. Washington: Catholic University of America Press.
- McCann, J. Clinton Jr. 1996. "Psalms 82:1-8, Show Justice to the Weak." In *The Book of Psalms, The New Interpreter's Bible*, vol. IV. Nashville: Abingdon Press. Accessed May 18, 2017. <http://www.ministrymatters.com.vwproxy.lipscomb.edu/library/#/tnib/d2e753edde57c9df82e385297df0bc13/psalms-821-8-show-justice-to-the-weak.html>.
- McCullough, W. Stewart. 1980. "LXXXII. A Scene in Heaven (82:1-8)." In *The Book of Psalms, The Interpreter's Bible*. Nashville: Abingdon Press. Accessed May 18, 2017. <http://www.ministrymatters.com.vwproxy.lipscomb.edu/library/#/ibnew/cd33e0cc02e48ee2fcac332cef172428/lxxxii-a-scene-in-heaven-821-8.html>.
- McGinn, Bernard. 2006. *The Essential Writings of Christian Mysticism*. New York: Modern Library.
- McGuckin, J. A. 2008. "The Strategic Adaptation of Deification in the Cappa-

- docians.” In *Partakers of the Divine Nature*, 95-114. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic.
- McKim, Donald K. 1996. *Westminster Dictionary of Theological Terms*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press.
- Morris, Henry M. 1976. *The Genesis Record*. Grand Rapids: Baker Book House.
- Mosser, Carl. 2005. “The Earliest Patristic Interpretations of Psalm 82, Jewish Antecedents, and the Origin of Christian Deification.” *The Journal of Theological Studies* 56, no. 1 (April): 30-74. Accessed May 18, 2017. *ATLA Religion Database with ATLASerials, EBSCOhost*.
- Mounce, William D. 2003. *Basics of Biblical Greek Grammar*. 2nd ed. Grand Rapids: Zondervan.
- Nispel, Mark. 1999. “Christian Deification and the Early Testimonia.” *Vigiliae Christianae* 53, no. 3 (January 1): 289-304.
- O’Day, Gail R. 1995. “John 10:22-42, Jesus at the Feast of Dedication.” In *The Gospel of John*, The New Interpreter’s Bible, vol. IX. Nashville: Abingdon Press. Accessed May 22, 2017. <http://www.ministrymatters.com.vwproxy.lipscomb.edu/library/#/tnib/492e34a93b440c6734e13eb2593746f9/john-1022-42-jesus-at-the-feast-of-dedication.html>.
- Olson, Roger E. 2007. “Deification in Contemporary Theology.” *Theology Today* 64, no. 2 (July 1,): 186-200.
- Origen. n.d. *Contra Celsus*. Accessed July 10, 2017. [http://www.documenta-catholica.eu/d\\_0185-0254-%20Origene%20-%20Contra%20Celsus%20-%20EN.pdf](http://www.documenta-catholica.eu/d_0185-0254-%20Origene%20-%20Contra%20Celsus%20-%20EN.pdf).
- Phillips, W. Gary. 1989. “An Apologetic Study of John 10:34-36.” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 146, no. 584 (October): 405-419. Accessed May 22, 2017. *ATLA Religion Database with ATLASerials, EBSCOhost*.
- Plummer, Alfred. 1902. “John 10.” In *John*, The Cambridge Bible for Schools and Colleges. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. Accessed May 22, 2017. <http://biblehub.com/commentaries/cambridge/john/10.htm>.
- Puchniak, Robert. 2006. “Augustine’s Conception of Deification, Revisited.” In *Theōsis: Deification in Christian Theology*, 122-133. Eugene: Pickwick Publications.
- Rakestraw, Robert V. 1997. “Becoming Like God: An Evangelical Doctrine of Theosis.” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 40, no. 2 (June 1): 257-269.
- Reicke, Bo. 1964. *The Epistles of James, Peter and Jude*. The Anchor Bible. Garden City: Doubleday.

- Russell, Norman. 2004. *The Doctrine of Deification in the Greek Patristic Tradition*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. Kindle.
- Spurgeon, C. H. 1988. *The Treasury of David*. Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers.
- Strobel, Kyle. 2012. "Jonathan Edwards and the Polemics of Theosis." *Harvard Theological Review* 105:3: 259-279.
- Turner, David L. 1996. "Image of God." In *Baker's Evangelical Dictionary of Biblical Theology*. Grand Rapids: Baker Books. Accessed May 15, 2017. <http://www.biblestudytools.com/dictionaries/bakers-evangelical-dictionary/image-of-god.html>.
- Vishnevskaya, Elena. 2006. "Divinization and Spiritual Progress in Maximus the Confessor." In *Theōsis: Deification in Christian Theology*, 134-145. Eugene: Pickwick Publications.
- Watson, Duane F. 1998. "2 Peter 1:3-11." In *The Second Letter of Peter*, The New Interpreter's Bible, vol. XII. Nashville: Abingdon Press. Accessed May 26, 2017. <http://www.ministrymatters.com.vwproxy.lipscomb.edu/library/#/tnib/05d4c7ca74b1813c1ab505369084a11e/2-peter-13-11.html>.
- Wilcock, Michael. 2001. *The Message of Psalms 73-150*. Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press.
- Williams, A. N. 1999. *The Ground of Union: Deification in Aquinas and Palamas*. New York: Oxford University Press. Kindle.
- Wolters, Albert M. 1990. "'Partners of the Deity': A Covenantal Reading of 2 Peter 1:4." *Calvin Theological Journal* 25, no. 1 (April): 28-44. Accessed May 26, 2017. *ATLA Religion Database with ATLASerials, EBSCOhost*.

Goran Medved

## **Teoza (pobožavanje) kao biblijska i povijesna doktrina**

### Sažetak

Ovo je prvi od dva članka od ovoga autora, koji istražuju doktrinu teoze, ponekad također zvanu pobožavanje, deifikacija ili divinizacija. Drugi članak predstavlja teozu kao novozavjetnu i evanđeosku doktrinu. Prvi članak predstavlja teozu kao biblijsku i povijesnu doktrinu. Prvi dio ovog članka analizira glavne biblijske tekstove za doktrinu teoze; njihovo tumačenje i usvajanje za teozu. Drugi dio ovog članka pruža pregled povijesnog razvoja doktrine teoze, od početka kršćanske

misli do modernog doba. Pokazuje da teoza nije bila ograničena na Istočne teologe nego je također bila zastupljena na Zapadu kod određenih vodećih teologa i pokreta. Zbog njezine bibličnosti i povijesnosti, teozu treba smatrati ključnom povijesnom doktrinom Crkve.