

Theosis (Deification) as a New Testament and Evangelical Doctrine

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Summary

This is the second one of the two articles by this author, which examine the doctrine of theosis, sometimes also called deification or divinization. The first article presented theosis as a biblical and historical doctrine. This article presents theosis as a New Testament and evangelical doctrine. The first part of this article deals with theosis in New Testament theology. The second part of this article gives a proposal for articulating an evangelical doctrine of theosis. Because of its New Testament support, theosis should occupy a much more prominent place in evangelical theology.

Key words: *theosis, deification, divinization, imago Dei, image, likeness, renewal, Christosis, incarnation, kenosis, identity, new birth, regeneration, unity, filiation, glorification, divine life*

Theosis in New Testament Theology

In this part, I will present Christ's incarnation as the basis and hope for theosis. I will show what theosis looks like in Pauline theology as he writes about the restoration of God's image in us, our shared identity with Christ, our union with Christ, our filiation, and eschatological fulfillment. I will discuss theosis in Petrine theology as he writes about our new birth and sharing in God's nature. I will discuss theosis in Johannine theology as he writes about our new birth and

sharing in the divine eternal life. Finally, I will show how the work of Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit are both crucial for theosis.

Incarnation of Christ and Theosis

Christ becoming human provides the basis and hope for theosis. Incarnation is “the doctrine that the eternal second Person of the Trinity became a human being and ‘assumed flesh’ in Jesus of Nazareth. Jesus Christ was the ‘Word made flesh’ (John 1:14). The doctrine holds that Jesus was one divine person with both a divine and a human nature” (McKim 1996, 140). The question of how the two natures exist together in one person has been central to historical Christology, and important to our discussion of theosis.

As shown in the preceding article, all of the early Church Fathers and other prominent theologians that wrote about theosis emphasized how crucial Christ’s incarnation is for theosis. This prominence goes back to the famous and often repeated exchange statement: Christ became human, so that humans can become divine. Through incarnation, a divine being put on humanity, so that human beings can put on divinity. Thus John states: “And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father’s only son, full of grace and truth... From his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace” (Jn. 1:14-16).

In New Testament theology, Christ’s kenosis leads to Christian theosis. Kenosis is “a theological term for the ‘self-emptying’ of Jesus Christ in which he took the form of a slave or servant (Gr. *doulos*; Lat. *forma servi*) to accomplish the work of salvation through his death and resurrection” (McKim 1996, 153). Jesus Christ “who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, but emptied [*ekenōsen*, from the verb *kenōō*] himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness. And being found in human form, he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death—even death on a cross” (Phil. 2:6-8). The effect of his death on a cross for those who believe is a putting on of Christ, being filled with God’s Spirit and an experience of all the fullness of God. Therefore, the union of the divine with the human is not only found in Christ, but also in Christians, as a result of the work of a Trinitarian Godhead.

Theosis in Pauline Theology

1) Restoration of God’s Image in Humans

In chapter one, I discussed the importance of *Imago Dei* teaching for theosis. Three points from there are particularly important for further discussion:

(1) creation of humankind in the image of God, (2) corruption of that image in humankind due to the fall, and (3) restoration of God's image in humankind. In Paul, the second and the third themes are particularly developed. Humankind has been corrupted by sin and the work of Jesus Christ (who is the image of God) can restore humankind into the image of God.

In Romans 1, Paul describes the downward spiral of the fall of humanity because "though they knew God, they did not honor him as God" (1:21), and "they exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling a mortal human being or birds or four-footed animals or reptiles" (1:23). Those who were created in the image of God started worshipping the images of humans and animals. They rejected the image of the Creator for the images of creation. Paul describes the depth of corruption in humans, that they were "filled with every kind of wickedness" (1:29).

In Romans 5:12-21, Paul describes the fall of humanity in Adam and its restoration in Christ. He states that sin (corruption) and death (mortality) came into the world through Adam. This is when humankind lost crucial elements of God's image – holiness and immortality. He goes on to explain the reversal of this terrible loss through Jesus Christ. He contrasts one man, Adam, who brought death to humankind, and another man, Jesus, who brought life, even eternal life, to humankind. Later in this chapter, in describing Johannine theosis, I will argue that this eternal life is the divine life with divine qualities operating in Christians.

According to Paul, Jesus Christ is the proper image of God. While writing to the Colossians, at the beginning of a long paragraph revealing the identity and work of Jesus Christ, he starts with: "He is *the image of the invisible God*..." (Col. 1:15). In 2 Corinthians, Paul writes about preaching the gospel and why some are unable to see "the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is *the image of God*" (2 Cor. 4:4). It is interesting to note that the same word *eikōn* is used in Genesis 1:26 in the Septuagint and in these two passages in the Greek.

In Pauline writings, we find the theme of the restoration of God's image in humans through Jesus Christ. In Romans 8:28-30, Paul writes about the grand purpose¹ that God has for his people:

We know that all things work together for good [*or* God makes all things work together for good, *or* in all things God works for good] for those who love God, who are called according to his purpose. For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn within a large family. And those whom he predestined he also called; and those whom he called he also justified; and those whom he justified he also glorified.

1 The Greek word *telos* is often used in theological discussions referring to the ultimate goal or purpose.

The good that God is working toward is for his people to be conformed to the image of Jesus Christ, to restore righteousness and glory in them. The Greek word for “conformed” is *summorphos*, which is defined as “properly, conformed, by sharing the same inner essence-identity (form); showing similar behavior from having the same essential nature.”² These are strong arguments for a kind of Christosis,³ because Christ is the image of God.

The passage goes on to assert that those conformed to the image of Christ have also been glorified. This brings to mind the idea that Adam was in God’s glory before the fall (covered, encircled or clothed in glory), a concept held by some ancient Jewish and contemporary Christian interpreters (Enns 2010; Litwa 2012, 101-102). Jesus Christ is himself full of the glory of God. “He is the reflection of God’s glory and the exact imprint of God’s very being” (Heb. 1:3). Here we see how “glory” and “imprint” (a word related to “image”) are connected in this verse. Through Jesus Christ, God brings his people back to his glory, the glory that Adam had before the fall. Glory is the property of God, so when humans are brought into this glory, we are speaking about theosis.

Another Pauline declaration regarding Christian transformation into the image of Christ states: “And all of us, with unveiled faces, seeing the glory of the Lord as though reflected in a mirror, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another; for this comes from the Lord, the Spirit” (2 Cor. 3:18). In the prior passage from Romans, Paul uses the word “conformed” to the image, while here he uses “transformed” into the image. The Greek verb for “transformed” is *metamorphoumetha*, which is a present indicative middle or passive form of *metamorphoō*. Present indicative tense shows a present continuation of the action, therefore transformation is a process in progress. Passive voice shows that someone else is performing the action, such as the Spirit is transforming us. If we opt for the middle voice, it shows that we participate in our transformation or cooperate with the Spirit. Litwa argues for the full force of Paul’s statement, against those who would downplay it. He asserts that we are being transformed into the same image which Christ himself is, and that we are “spiritually (or even ontologically) unified with Christ” (Litwa 2008, 118).

The Greek noun form of transform is *metamorphosis*, which is the origin of the noun metamorphosis in English.⁴ This word is used as a technical term in

2 HELPS Word-studies, 2011, s.v. “*sýmmorphos*,” Helps Ministries, accessed September 14, 2017, <http://biblehub.com/greek/4832.htm>.

3 “Christosis” is a term used by Ben C. Blackwell in his works on Paul and theosis. For example, see Blackwell 2016, *Christosis: Engaging Paul’s Soteriology with His Patristic Interpreters*.

4 The same Greek word transliterates into many other languages. For example, “*metamorfoza*” in my native Croatian.

several disciplines today. Zoology gives this definition: “(in an insect or amphibian) the process of transformation from an immature form to an adult form in two or more distinct stages.”⁵ This parallels the understanding of theosis in some scholars, e.g., Maximus the Confessor, who explained theosis as the progress of human beings from an immature form to a mature form (Maximus 2015, Kindle location 1841).

A classic biological example of metamorphosis is a caterpillar which undergoes complete metamorphosis, and turns into a butterfly. Biological metamorphosis is an excellent picture of theosis. An insect that crawls and eats leaves, becomes an insect that flies and drinks flower nectar. It remains an insect, but it becomes a new creature; a symbol of beauty, life and hope. Paul states: “So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new!” (2 Cor. 5:17). Another definition of metamorphosis states: “a change of the form or nature of a thing or person into a completely different one.”⁶ I suggest that we can look at theosis from both definitions of the English word metamorphosis: as a change in the spiritual nature of a human being, and a progress in the spiritual growth of a human being.

Some of Paul’s texts indicate that transformation into the image of Christ is a process, like 2 Corinthians 3:18. Paul writes: “[you] have clothed yourselves with the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge according to the image of its creator” (Col. 3:10). This verse is significant for our study because the longer context of Colossians centers on how to live the new life in Christ. The letter exhorts those who have been brought to new life by God’s action (raised with Christ) to continue their transformation by their own actions. Paul commands the Christians to seek the things above, set their minds on things above, put to death what is earthly, get rid of all bad behavior, clothe themselves in virtues, bear with one another, forgive one another, be clothed in love above all, be ruled by Christ’s peace, be thankful, possess God’s word, teach and admonish one another, sing to God, and do everything in Jesus’ name. All of this must be part of their transformation into the image of the Creator (Col. 3:10).

The phrase “being renewed” in Colossians 3:10 is the Greek participle *anakainoumenon* of the verb *anakainoō*. One could translate it in the present middle or passive form. If we opt for the middle voice it would indicate a participation. If we opt for the passive voice, it indicates that someone else is performing the action on us. Paul uses the same verb in 2 Corinthians 4:16, stating “Even though

5 Oxford Dictionary, 2017, s.v. “metamorphosis,” Oxford University Press, accessed September 19, 2017, <https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/metamorphosis>.

6 Oxford Dictionary, 2017, s.v. “metamorphosis,” Oxford University Press, accessed September 19, 2017, <https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/metamorphosis>.

our outer nature is wasting away, our inner nature is *being renewed* day by day.” In both occurrences, the context can help us decipher the meaning. When God is the actor these forms are called “divine passives,” where the passive voice is used to say that God is doing the action, without naming God as the actor.⁷

Transformation into the image of Christ begins with justification and continues through sanctification. As mentioned in the previous article, in the section regarding Luther and justification, I see justification as a real, ontological change in a believer. Justification is the moment when a believer is not only proclaimed righteous but also made righteous. A change in the nature of human being occurs. The new nature is a gift of God enabled by the sacrifice of Christ (Rom. 3). Sanctification is “the process or result of God’s continuing work in Christian believers through the power of the Holy Spirit. In Protestant theology, this occurs after justification and is growth in grace and holiness of life marked by good works” (McKim 1996, 247). Sanctification is living out of our new nature that we received when we were justified. From the point of Christosis, sanctification can be seen as a growth in likeness to Christ. In other words, the image of God in Christians is already restored by justification, while by sanctification we continue to grow in the likeness of God. Justification actualizes the restoration moment of God’s image in us, while sanctification actualizes the restoration process of our likeness to God. This view fits well with the two words used in Genesis 1:26 – image and likeness. Therefore, justification can be viewed as a change in nature, and sanctification as a gradual change in knowledge and behavior.

Some contemporary theologians have distanced themselves from the traditional Protestant definitions of justification and sanctification, which views these as separate and sequential events. A good example is Gorman who sees justification and theosis, as he defines them, describing the same reality. He states that “for Paul justification is an experience of participating in Christ’s resurrection life that is effected by co-crucifixion with him” (Gorman 2009, Kindle location 399). He further asserts that “Paul’s soteriology is best described as theosis, or transformation into the image of the kenotic [self-emptying], cruciform [self-sacrificing] God revealed in the faithful and loving cross of Christ, and that Spirit-enabled theosis is the substance of both justification and holiness” (Gorman 2009, Kindle location 1625). Therefore, “a theological rift between justification and sanctification is *impossible* because the Spirit of Christ effects both initial and ongoing co-crucifixion with Christ among believers... (Gorman 2009, Kindle location 1654).

In the New Testament, *metanoia* leads to *metamorphosis*.⁸ God’s word has the

7 This is possibly due to Jewish reticence to overuse the term “God.” Wallace 2000, 189.

8 Idea taken from Franz Lippi, BLAST ministries (<https://blastministries.net>), from one of his lectures in Graz, Austria.

power to change us. By listening to God's word, our inner person changes according to the Word. We become everything that the Word says that we are because of the saving work of Christ and because of our place in Christ: saved, justified, holy, loved, filled, enabled, authorized, gifted, and sent. Paul formulates it this way, "Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed [*metamorphousthe*, from *metamorphoō*, cf. 2 Cor. 3:18] by the renewing [*anakainōsis*, cf. Col. 3:10] of your minds" (Rom. 12:2). When we renew our minds, we are transformed to be more like Christ or God. Appropriating God's word is crucial to this process.

In Paul, Christ is the image of God. Every transformation of a Christian is a transformation into the image of Christ, who is God. This is theosis, where the image of God is restored in a human being. "Just as we have borne the image of the man of dust, we will also bear the image of the man of heaven" (1 Cor. 15:49). In light of 1 Corinthians 15 and Romans 5, we can view this as a contrast between Adam and Christ. Just as we have borne the corrupted and mortal image of Adam (the fallen image), we will bear the uncorrupted and immortal image of Christ (the glorious image).

Restoration of the image of God in Christians also includes the restoration of the righteous rule of Christians as they participate in and spread the Kingdom of God (cf. Mt. 16:19; Lk. 22:29; Eph. 6:12). This connects with Genesis where humankind was made in the image of God to rule the Earth (Gen. 1:26, 28). Christ came to restore the righteous rule that was lost by Adam. The work that Jesus did during his public ministry was recognized as powerful (Mk. 1:22) and right/good/righteous (Mk. 7:37). Jesus manifested the possibility of reversal of the effects of sin and corruption when he healed the sick, drove out demons, raised the dead, and calmed the storm. Jesus gave power to his disciples, commanded them to do the same, and they did. Today's church follows the example of Christ and his disciples in these matters because the same Holy Spirit with the same power and purpose resides in Christians today.

Furthermore, Paul's writings contain promises to Christians about ruling and judging the world. Litwa indicates that as heirs with Christ:

the destiny of Paul's converts is to own all things (1 Cor. 3:21; Rom 8:32), judge superhuman powers (1 Cor. 6:3), and rule the world (1 Cor. 6:2; Rom. 5:17) as siblings assimilated to the divine Christ (Rom 8:29). They will have victory over the "God of this world" (1 Cor. 4:4), treading him underneath their feet (Rom. 16:20), and "over-conquering" every enemy... (Litwa 2012, 192).

In other words, Jesus restores the ruling image of God in Christians, which is the functional aspect of the image of God.

Jesus restores God's image in Christians ontologically, as they share in his divine being. Jesus also restores God's image in Christians relationally, through

their relationship to God, other Christians, and creation. Because Christians are God's children and are indwelt by God, they functionally live in love and peace with other Christians and rule righteously in their spheres of influence. Thus, Jesus accomplishes all aspects of the restoration of God's image in humankind I described in chapter one.

2) *Shared Identity with Christ*

Regarding the connectedness between Christians and Christ, Paul makes claims that can be summarized as: what happened with Christ happens also with Christians. They share in the death, resurrection, and even ascension of Christ (spiritually, not yet physically). Their identity is tied into Christ's identity, which provides the basis for theosis. I will now examine these in detail.

In Romans 6:3-8, Paul gives the following statements. We have been baptized *into* Christ, which means we were buried with him (*synetaphēmen*); we have been united with him (*symphytoi*) in death like his; we will be united with him in resurrection like his; we were crucified with him (*synestaurōthē*); we died with (*apethanomen syn*) Christ; we will live with him (*syzēsomen*). Notice that most of these Greek terms are compound verbs containing prefix *syn*, meaning "with." Literally we could say we were co-buried, co-crucified, co-joined, and we co-live with Christ. Paul also states that God co-raised us (*synēgeiren*), and co-seated us (*synekathisen*) with Christ, in the heavenly places *in* Christ Jesus (Eph. 2:6). So all these things that happen to Christians are *with* Christ, *into* Christ, and *in* Christ. Christ identified with us so that we could identify with him. As a result, by getting to know Christ, we get to know our new selves. The character traits of Christ are the character traits of those who are new creatures in Christ. Since Christ's character is also God's character, this is theotic in nature.

The Pauline phrase "in Christ" indicates that we do not simply believe in Christ, we also exist in Christ. This phrase occurs 164 times in Paul's letters, according to John Stott (Stott n.d., 1). Such expressions reveals that Christ is our representative and that we are taken up into Christ, which is a process of theosis. For example, we have received eternal life as a free gift from God *in* Christ (Rom. 6:23). When we read those "in Christ" verses, we can conclude that everything that we have received from God (redemption, life, forgiveness, freedom from sin, love), and everything that we are as Christians, is ours because we are in Christ. Our being in Christ indicates our shared identity and participation with him. According to Litwa, "Two beings can participate in a single identity while remaining distinct. In short, then, 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).

Furthermore, Paul states, "I have been crucified with Christ, and it is no lon-

ger I who live, but it is Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me” (Gal. 2:19b-20). The theme of identification with Christ appears again. Paul implies the death of his inner person and the life of the person of Christ in him (cf. Rom. 6:6-11). Sharing in the person of Christ, and sharing in the life of Christ, makes a strong case for Christosis, and therefore theosis. Gorman also highlights the concept of *cruciformity* in Pauline theosis: “For Paul, to be one with Christ is to be one with God; to be like Christ is to be like God; to be in Christ is to be in God. At the very least, this means that for Paul cruciformity – conformity to the crucified Christ – is really theofornity, or theosis” (Gorman 2009, Kindle location 57).

An exchange of life with Christ is an important concept in theosis, because it involves abandoning our corrupt human life and receiving Christ’s divine life. Pauline exchange formula is found in several of his texts. He speaks of Christ becoming cursed for us, so that we can be blessed: “Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us – for it is written, ‘Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree’ – in order that in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles, so that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith” (Gal. 3:13-14). He speaks of Christ becoming sin, so that we might become righteous: “For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God” (2 Cor. 5:21). He speaks of Christ becoming poor, so that we might become rich: “For you know the generous act of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that by his poverty you might become rich” (2 Cor. 8:9). And he speaks of himself, and therefore of all Christians, exchanging our lives with Christ: “and it is no longer I who live, but it is Christ who lives in me” (Gal. 2:20a).

According to Paul, we are to put on Christ and to behave like Christ. This is sometimes called deification by moral assimilation (Litwa 2012, 217). In baptism, we had already *put on* Christ (*enedysasthe*, aorist indicative middle, Gal. 3:27) and as we live, we are commanded to again *put on* Christ (*endysasthe*, aorist imperative middle, Rom. 13:14). We are to imitate Paul as he imitates Christ (1 Cor. 11:1). We are also to imitate God, following the example of Christ (Eph. 5:1-2). Many different Pauline behavior commands are based on imitating God, imitating Christ, and living out the new life. Long passages on the new life in Christ are found in Romans 12, Colossians 3 and Ephesians 4. In other words, we can cooperate in our transformation into the image of Christ, by behaving like Christ.

We can delineate from Paul’s writings in which ways we are already transformed, in which ways we are being transformed, and in which ways we will be transformed. Paul speaks of a human being consisting of three parts: spirit, soul,

and body (1 Thess. 5:23).⁹ The human spirit is divinized at the moment when a person becomes a Christian because it becomes united with and filled with God's Spirit. The soul (mind, emotions and will) enters into a process of divinization as it learns to think, feel and make decisions according to God's ways. The body is able to receive divine healing provided by the cross of Christ,¹⁰ but it is perishable and mortal because of the fall. The body must die, but it will be resurrected and divinized at the second coming of Christ.

Other passages of Paul imply that humans are either in Adam or in Christ. Paul even calls Christ "the last Adam" (1 Cor. 15:45). Being in Adam suggests that humans share the identity and curses of Adam. Humanity is fallen, corrupted, condemned, and mortal. Being in Christ suggests that Christians share the identity and blessings of Christ. They have been raised up to new life. They are saved, holy, justified, and immortal. They enjoy a familial relationship with God. Paul continues his thought on Adam, and Christ as the last or second Adam: "The first man was from the earth, a man of dust; the second man is from heaven. As was the man of dust, so are those who are of the dust; and as is the man of heaven, so are those who are of heaven. Just as we have borne the image of the man of dust, we will also bear the image of the man of heaven" (1 Cor. 15:47-48). He again affirms that Christian identity is based in Christ and shared with Christ.

3) Union with Christ

In his correspondence with the Corinthian church, Paul states: "But anyone united to the Lord becomes one spirit with him" (1 Cor. 6:17). A Christian is united (*kollōmenos*, present participle middle of *kollaō*, literally: glued together) and one spirit with Christ. Litwa suggests that "The pneuma 'living in' (Rom. 8:9; cf. 1 Cor. 3:16; 6:19) the self of the believer at least indicates a high degree of integration of the divine and human selves" (Litwa 2012, 162). Maximus the Confessor spoke of this as a perichoretic union. Perichoresis is "a term used in the theology of the Trinity to indicate the intimate union, mutual indwelling, or mutual interpenetration of the three members of the Trinity with each other. Also used for the relation of the two natures of Christ" (McKim 1996, 207). However, the concept also signifies the "perichoresis of God and the believer, which has its prototype in the perichoresis of the hypostatic union in the person of the Logos..." (Vishenskaya 2008, 132). In other words, in Christians there is an intimate union, indwelling and interpenetration of human and divine nature.

9 In theological anthropology, this view is called trichotomism, from Greek *trichotomia*, "division into three."

10 "By his wounds we were healed" (Isa. 53:5, 1 Pet. 2:24).

4) Filiation (*Becoming God's Children*) and Theosis

The identity and union themes lead us to another idea, filiation, which is where humans become God's children. The filiation concept is prominent in Pauline epistles. Ephesians 1:5 states that God "destined us for adoption as his children through Jesus Christ," while 5:1 states "Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children." The first statement speaks about our identity as God's children, while the second speaks about our behavior based on that identity. As we have discussed previously, the shared identity of Christians with God, of children with their Father, provides scaffolding for theosis. Here we see a family metaphor used to describe a spiritual reality.

In the physical world, we have identity according to our parents. We share the identity of our parents, the people who physically conceived us and gave birth to us. Children carry the genes of their parents. In spiritual terms, we are also given identity according to our parent – God the Father. Spiritually, we only carried the genes of Adam, but now we carry the genes of our Father God. Paul explicitly writes about the kinship of God, Jesus, and Christians. "These kinship metaphors seem to express a kind of relatedness which is rightly called 'genetic' i.e., having to do with the γένος – the race or class into which two entities belong. In short, Christ and believers as kin belong to the same class of beings, namely divine 'sons of God'" (Litwa 2012, 12).

In Galatians and Romans, Paul explains in more detail the metaphor of adoption:

But when the fullness of time had come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, in order to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as children. And because you are children, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, "Abba! Father!" So you are no longer a slave but a child, and if a child then also an heir, through God (Gal. 4:4-7).

For all who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God. For you did not receive a spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received a spirit of adoption. When we cry, "Abba! Father!" it is that very Spirit bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs, heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ – if, in fact, we suffer with him so that we may also be glorified with him (Rom. 8:14-17).

Christ has redeemed us from being slaves under the Old Testament law in order to become God's children. Because of the work of Christ, we have received the Holy Spirit who makes us God's children, and the Spirit makes known to us that we are God's children. Being his children means we are God's heirs together with Christ. Being God's children and heirs implies theosis – we are what he is, we have what he has, we can do things that he does. We share identity with

Christ (co-heirs, *synkleronomoi*). We share destiny with Christ, and we imitate him through suffering. Galatians 3:26 affirms “for in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith.”

In Ephesians, Paul claims that we were “by nature children of wrath, like everyone else” (2:3). He also writes: “For once you were darkness, but now in the Lord you are light. Live as children of light – for the fruit of the light is found in all that is good and right and true” (5:8-9). This change of nature is radical and significant; from darkness to light, from children of wrath to children of light. Theosis starts with a change of nature in a human being; from the fallen, darkened one in Adam, to the regenerated, enlightened one in Christ. It continues with a lifestyle rooted in the new nature which manifests itself by doing what is “good and right and true.” That is the character of God, and of Christ. When Christians do what is good and right and true, they demonstrate theosis, the change of nature and behavior according to the image of God.

5) *Eschatology and Theosis*

Paul speaks of eschatological events concerning the body which could be considered completion of theosis. Thus far we have been discussing spiritual theosis, our inner person becoming like God. However, Paul also states that Christ will transform [*metaschēmatisei*, future indicative active of *metaschēmatizō*] Christian bodies, and have them conformed [*symmorphon*, adjective] to his body of glory (Phil. 3:21). In 1 Corinthians 15, Paul speaks of the resurrection of Christ, of the resurrection of the dead, and in detail about the resurrected body (15:35-55). He claims: “Just as we have borne the image of the man of dust, we will also bear the image of the man of heaven” (15:49), and “the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed [*allagēsometha*, future indicative passive of *allassō*]. For this perishable body must put on imperishability, and this mortal body must put on immortality” (15:52b-53). In 2 Corinthians, Paul addresses this theme again when he speaks of our body as an earthly tent, and our longing for its replacement with God’s eternal, heavenly dwelling (5:1-2). His hope is that “what is mortal may be swallowed up by life” (5:4). Incorruptibility and immortality will consume the whole human being. Theosis will be finished. Thus, theosis is “a continuous process from earthly inception to eschatological completion, but it clearly has two stages, or dimensions, the temporal and the eschatological” (Gorman 2015, Kindle location 6945).

Gorman thinks theosis might be the best term to describe Paul’s anthropology and soteriology. He calls Paul’s letter to Romans “the first Christian treatise on theosis” (Gorman 2011, 13). He presents the human condition as lacking righteousness and glory. God’s solution is the gift of righteousness and glory to humans in Jesus Christ in order to form communities of righteousness and glory which

are enabled by the Spirit to manifest Christlike godliness (Gorman 2011, 20-32). “For Paul, the solution to the human condition of sin and death, of unrighteousness and un-glory, is new and eternal life by participation in Christ. This participation effects the ethical and eschatological transformation that human beings need” (Gorman 2011, 23).

Litwa provides a description of theosis in Paul’s theology:

For Paul, Jesus Christ mediates human transcendence as one who is himself “born of woman” (Gal. 2:4) and then “appointed son of God,” and “Lord” (Rom. 1:4; Phil. 2:9-11; cf. Acts 2:36). In his resurrection, Christ already exhibited a universal power and immortal corporeality that proleptically united heaven and earth, the human and the divine. Paul envisions a “glorification” of those who, due to the sin of the first Adam, fell short of the glory of God (Rom. 8:29; 3:23). He preaches that the divine spirit or *pneuma* of Christ has been unleashed into the flesh of those “in Christ,” a down payment of their own new corporeality (Rom. 8:1-11; 2 Cor. 4:16-17). Through Christ’s *pneuma*, humans have the promise of attaining the transcendence of the immortal, incorruptible (and thus superhuman) state of Christ. As those assimilated to the power and immortality of the divine Christ, such human beings gain the power to be called “children of God” (Rom. 8:15-16) and owners of all things (Rom 8:32; 1 Cor 3:21-23). One way to understand this complex of ideas is through the category of deification – a native category pervasive in Paul’s culture (Litwa 2012, 5).

This summary by Litwa is interwoven throughout with the works of Jesus Christ. It shows how crucial Christ is for theosis of human beings. Concerning theosis, everything happens because of what Christ has done, and everything happens through Christ’s spirit to those who are in Christ in order to achieve the divine state of Christ.

Theosis in Johannine and Petrine theology

New Birth and Theosis

To summarize my discussion of Pauline theology, I primarily dealt with the themes of restoration, identity, participation, Christosis, filiation, union, and eschatology as they relate to theosis. As we turn to John’s writings, we encounter the theme of new birth. None of the benefits that Paul describes can be received without new birth. New birth is a precondition or starting point for theosis. Paul uses the new birth terminology in Galatians 4, in an illustration with Isaac and Ishmael. “Now you, my friends, are children of the promise, like Isaac. But just as at that time the child who was born according to the flesh persecuted the child

who was born according to the Spirit, so it is now also” (Gal. 4:28-29). Paul here contrasts Judaizers (born according to the flesh), and Christians (born according to the Spirit). John will have more to say about the new birth concept.

In John 1, becoming children of God and being born of God are connected: “But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God, who were born, not of blood or of the will of the flesh or of the will of man, but of God” (1:12-13). In John 3, the writer conveys to us the words of Jesus regarding the new birth: “Very truly, I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God without being born of water and Spirit. What is born of the flesh is flesh, and what is born of the Spirit is spirit” (Jn. 3:5-6). New birth is a prerequisite for a human being. It happens to a human spirit and the Holy Spirit is the one who performs it. In 1 John, the expression “born of God” (*ek tou Theou gegenētai*) or “born of him [God]” refers to Christians seven times.¹¹ According to 1 John, those who have been born of God do what is right (2:29), do not sin (3:9 and 5:18), love others (4:7), believe that Jesus is the Christ (5:1), and conquer the world (5:4). John states that those traits are passed directly from God into those who are born of him. Those who do right do so because God is righteous (2:29). Those who do not sin do so because God’s seed is in them (3:9). Those who love do so because God is love (4:7). Humans who are born of God inherit the traits of God.

In the physical world, we gain our identity by birth. In the spiritual world, we gain our identity by rebirth. In the physical world we share the identity of our earthly parents, because they conceived us and gave birth to us. We receive our parents’ family name as well as our own name. We are connected by blood and we share the same DNA. Sometimes, if the parent-child heredity is questioned, it is checked through DNA tests.

In the spiritual world, it is God the Father who gives us birth. By being born of him, we receive God’s spiritual DNA. We carry his spiritual genes, so to speak. God’s genes, so to speak, produce holiness, righteousness, mercy, love, joy, and peace. We are connected through the blood of Christ. We are God’s children and joined to his family. He is our Father. While we receive this identity, we maintain our own individuality.

Peter speaks about the new birth twice in the first chapter of his first letter. At the beginning, he states: “By his [God’s] great mercy he has given us a new birth¹² into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead” (1 Pet. 1:3). God is the one who has enabled us to be born anew, through the resurrecti-

11 One time “born of him [God]” plus six times “born of God” refers to Christians, and one time “born of God” refers to Christ (1 Jn. 5:18b).

12 Greek *anagennēsas*, aorist participle active of the verb *anagennaō* (to beget again).

on of Christ. Peter's thought here is similar to Paul's in Romans 6. We can have a new life because Christ rose from the dead. His resurrection enables our rebirth. What happened with him, happened with us. We have been raised to new life. Our identity and life are tied to Christ's identity and life.

Later in the same chapter Peter states "You have been born anew,¹³ not of perishable but of imperishable seed [*sporas*], through the living and enduring word of God" (1 Pet. 1:23). We were conceived and born from the seed that is God's word. When John talks about us being born of God, he uses a different term for God's seed, *sperma* (1 Jn. 3:9). In the physical world, a man deposits his seed in a woman's womb and a new life is conceived and born. In the spiritual world, God deposits his word in our spirit and a new life is conceived and born (Vincent 2008, 36). Vincent explains the result: "In this way, God creates in us a new person that has our personality but also has the nature and life of God. When God has finished His good work in us, we are going to have our humanity impregnated with God's incorruptible nature" (Vincent 2008, 36). These concepts are important for theosis because they show the spiritual heredity, identity and likeness between Christians and God.

Johannine Theosis: Divine Life in Believers

Finally, regarding divine life in Christians we have John's phrases, "whoever believes in the Son has eternal life" (Jn. 3:36), and "whoever has the Son has life" (1 Jn. 5:12). In Johannine Christology, the eternal word became incarnate in order to bring divine life to humans (Russell 2004, 6). "In him was life" (Jn. 1:4), "that whoever believes in him may have eternal life" (Jn. 3:15). He is life (Jn. 14:6), and he gives eternal life (Jn. 17:2). John writes about divine life being available to Christians through Christ and in Christ. He calls it "eternal life" or just "life," or "life abundant."¹⁴

Sometimes Christian theology talks about eternal life starting after our death, or after the resurrection of our bodies. In John, however, eternal life is a present possession for Christians. Eternal life is not confined to the quantity of life, but it is the quality of life.¹⁵ It is Christ's life. It is divine life. And if we possess the divine life, then we are in the process of being divinized.

John says that believers can receive the Spirit (Jn. 7:38-39), and be united with the Father and Son (Jn. 14:20, 15:5, 17:21). The Father and Son can indwell

13 Greek *anagegennēmenoi*, perfect participle middle or passive of the verb *anagennaō* (to beget again).

14 "Eternal life" (Jn. 3:15,16,36; 5:24,39; 6:27,40,47,54; 10,28; 12:50; 17:2,3; 1 Jn. 2:25; 3:15; 5:11,13). "Life" (Jn. 5:40; 6:53; 1 Jn. 3:14; 5:12). "Life abundant" (Jn. 10:10).

15 See, for example, Roberts 1963: 186-193.

a believer (Jn. 14:23). John tells us that: “As he is, so are we in this world” (1 Jn. 4:17). This also points to Christian union with God, to participation in the divine life, to identification with Christ – all theotic activities.

Conclusion

After my examination of New Testament teachings related to theosis, we found that Paul speaks about the restoration of God’s image in humans through several mechanisms: transformation into the image of Christ; our shared identity with Christ; our being in Christ; our imitation of Christ; our union with Christ; our being children of God in Christ; and our future bodily transformation according to Christ’s glorified body. Peter and John speak about the new spiritual birth, the starting point of theosis, which enables us to experience everything else. John speaks about the divine life operating in us now, and about our union with God. He sees us as possessors and participators of eternal life.

The person and work of Jesus Christ and of the Holy Spirit are both crucial for theosis. Theosis “is possible only because of the Incarnation, which made divinity available to humanity, and through the Holy Spirit, who communicates it to people” (Olson 2007, 190). Christ, who was God from eternity, became incarnate and possessed and manifested two natures – one human and the other divine. “Even the humanity of Jesus Christ, illumined as it was by union with the divine, remained finite and creaturely. Yet it was divinized by union with the divine, which means it received immortality and supernatural qualities that belong to God alone... The same can be true in some measure of every saint” (Olson 2007, 190).

Christ’s death and resurrection provided not only forgiveness of sins, but also new life for human beings. He enabled humans to become new creatures. By his incarnation, life, death, resurrection, and ascension, Christ actualized redemption and reconciliation for humanity, and enabled the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. The Father is the one who sent the Spirit. Therefore, all of the Trinity is involved in theosis. Although the New Testament never uses the word “theosis,” the concept is often articulated in the canon. As Litwa remarks: “even though Paul avoids the specific vocabulary of deification – the language of his soteriology has long suggested a form of deification at work in his thought” (Litwa 2012, 10). Gorman likewise affirms that “Paul’s soteriology is best described as theosis” (Gorman 2009, Kindle location 1625).

Ultimately, it is the Holy Spirit who enables theosis for those who believe in Christ. Those who are baptized in the name of Jesus Christ are able to receive the Spirit, and the Spirit is able to indwell them. The Holy Spirit then continues to transform those whom he indwells. Litwa asserts that “the divine element dominates the mortal body and becomes the perceived true self... [and] the re-

deemed are deified by a divine *pneuma* which defines their identity (Litwa 2012, 163). Furthermore, Christians are not only indwelt by God, but they also dwell in God.

Christ as a representative human incorporates all the believers in him and divinizes them in his epoch-making acts (obedience, death, resurrection) because he himself is divine. Believers participate in that divinization by faith in Christ, by appropriating what the New Testament describes as the effects of the acts of Christ, by renewing their minds according to the Word (of Christ), and also by imitating Christ. God dwelling in Christians, Christians dwelling in God, and the mutual union or interpenetration of the two, suggests that we are not fallen human beings anymore, but that we have begun divinization. This process will be completed at the second coming of Christ when we will receive glorified, immortal, uncorrupted bodies.

Toward the Development of an Evangelical Doctrine of Theosis

In the preceding article, I have argued that theosis is a biblically grounded theology that has been historically resourced by the great traditions. In the first section of that first article, I presented the main biblical texts for theosis and discussed how they contribute to the doctrine. These included Genesis 1:26-27 where God made humans in his image and likeness. Humans share in the nature of God as we are spiritual, rational, relational, and ruling beings. I then turned to Psalm 82:6-7 where God explicitly refers to humans as “gods” and God’s “children” and talked about humanity’s power to judge and execute justice. I discussed the text in John 10:34-36 where Jesus quotes from Psalm 82, confirming that humans were called “gods.” I also reviewed 2 Peter 1:4 and the possibility for Christians to participate in the divine nature.

In second part of the first article, I have established that theosis is a historical doctrine. The concept of theosis has been present from the time of the early church to the modern church. It has been present, in varying degrees, through all historical periods of Christianity: the early post-apostolic period, the patristic period, the medieval period, the reformation, and the modernity. In some Christian circles it was dominant, in others marginal, but nevertheless traceable through history of Christianity. Where it was dominant, it was developed into a doctrine; where it was marginal, it was only conceptual. For evangelical Christianity, it is important that significant elements of theosis are found in its predecessors – the reformation, the radical reformation, and the revival movements.

In the first part of this article, I examined how theosis has been treated in New Testament theology and discussed many more texts that contribute to the

doctrine of theosis in the writings of Paul, Peter and John. I highlighted how the incarnation of Jesus Christ, a divine being becoming human, provides hope that human nature can be united with divine nature. In Pauline theology the possibility of restoration of God's image in human beings is through Jesus Christ, who is the perfect image of God. Paul explicitly asserts that God's purpose for us is to be conformed to, or transformed into, the image of Christ. Therefore, theosis is a type of Christosis. Paul emphasizes that we share identity and destiny with Christ. We participate in the death, resurrection and ascension of Christ. We exist in Christ and put him on. This unites us with Christ in spirit, a union and interpenetration of the human and divine nature in us. In Paul's writings, we are God's children through Christ and in Christ. Paul talks about the radical change of nature in us – from darkness to light, from the fallen nature in Adam to the regenerated one in Christ. He proclaims the eschatological fulfillment of our Christosis (and therefore theosis) when our bodies will be transformed according to Christ's glorious body.

In Peter and John the crucial event is called the new birth. Being born of God is the starting point of theosis. By being born of God we inherit the traits of God and we are like God. We carry his spiritual genes which then develop his spiritual traits in us. This manifests in behavior that reflects Christ's character. John repeatedly refers to believers as those who possess the divine life because of their faith in Christ. Peter reminds us that we participate in divine nature, which means that we can share in God's life and qualities.

Theosis is theological because it relates to other significant Christian doctrines. In this article, we have seen that theosis interacts with doctrines such as anthropology, Christology, pneumatology, salvation, justification, sanctification, and eschatology. A developed understanding of theosis can clarify ideas in these other areas. Corbin-Reuschling says that theosis “has implications for other theological frameworks: the purposes of creation, the nature of our humanity, the impact of sin, Christology, the involvement of the Trinity in the work of redemption, Christian formation, the shape and mission of the church, the sacraments, and eschatological hope” (Corbin-Reuschling 2014, 276). Gorman suggests that “Kenosis, justification, holiness, cruciformity, theosis – these are all of a piece because they all refer to the single soteriological reality of inhabiting the cruciform God revealed in Christ by the power of the Spirit, from the first moment of faith to the eschatological goal of complete glory” (Gorman 2009, Kindle location 1708).

Theosis is an evangelical concept because it explains the Gospel and the Salvation. It should be accepted as an evangelical doctrine because it contains the good news of Jesus Christ, it encompasses the whole story of God and human-kind (from creation to restored creation), it promotes the main purpose of God

for humankind, it describes the role of the Father, Son and Spirit in the restoration of humankind, and it focuses on the relationship of God and humans. Evangelicalism puts an emphasis on the authority of the Bible, on a personal relationship with God in Jesus Christ, and on spreading the Gospel. Authority of the Bible is evident in the concept of theosis because the doctrine is based on biblical teachings and the biblical narrative. Personal relationship with God is crucial for theosis because divinization of a believer can only happen through a personal relationship in which a believer is progressively transformed into the likeness of Christ. Finally, teaching theosis can be an excellent tool for sharing the good news because it tells the good news, the whole story, the restoration of humankind and all things.

Articulating a Doctrine of Theosis for Evangelical Theology

My two articles on theosis have identified numerous doctrinal components and provided a justification for theosis to be incorporated into evangelical theology. I will now review those contributions and then end this chapter with some comments on the benefits of this teaching.

Theosis is becoming like God, a restoration of the image of God and likeness to God in Christians. Theosis happens through the work of Christ and through the process of Christosis. We are saved by Christ, adopted as God's children in Christ, given Christ's divine life, and transformed into the image of Christ. Christosis happens through the work of the Holy Spirit in a believer through regeneration and transformation.

God created human beings in his image and likeness. They were like God structurally or substantively (spiritual, rational, immortal, incorrupt, glorious), relationally (created for close relationship with God, other humans, and creation), and functionally (created to rule the earth as God's representatives). Humans corrupted that image through their fall. Their nature was ruined, their relationships were broken (with God, other humans, and creation), and they became unrighteous rulers. In the Old Testament we saw some examples of partial restoration. This happened mainly through the individuals whom God called and anointed with his Spirit for a certain task during periods of faithfulness of his chosen people. However, a time of restoration was prophesied to come fully through the future new covenant, the coming of the Messiah, and the pouring out of the Holy Spirit.

The incarnation of Christ provides the basis and hope for theosis. A divine being becoming a human being opens up a possibility that human beings can be divinized. Because the divine nature joined the human nature in Christ, human nature can join divine nature in human beings. Christ's kenosis enables Christian theosis.

Through the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, the restoration of the image of God in humans became available. Christ is the perfect image of God, and Christians are changed into his likeness. This transformation starts with justification when those who believe in Christ are made righteous and receive a real change in being. It continues with sanctification, whereby the likeness to God is gradually restored in them.

Since believers become children of God in Jesus Christ, their relationship to God is likened to a parent-child relationship. Because believers are made righteous, the righteous rule for which humankind was created becomes possible again. Christians relate in love and righteousness toward other humans, looking to heal and restore others in their circles of relationships. They start caring for the earth, a part of their original, God-given vocation in Genesis.¹⁶ Thus, Jesus restores God's image in Christians in all aspects – ontological, relational, and functional. The restoration of the image is all encompassing, but not yet complete. It continues to grow progressively in those who are disciples as they grow in holiness through their relationship with God. The restoration will be realized when they receive the glorified body, to live and rule with Christ in eternity. Theosis will be complete.

Theosis is participation in Christ, in his divine identity, life and destiny. Those who believe in him and are baptized into him spiritually die with him and rise with him into the new life. They receive Christ's divine life. They pass from the curse of Adam into the blessing of Christ, from sin and death to holiness and life, from corruption and mortality to incorruption and immortality. They become one spirit with Christ, where human nature and divine nature are in a perichoretic union. Believers participate in the reality of the Trinitarian Godhead.

God the Spirit contributes significantly to theosis of believers. The Holy Spirit empowers regeneration and restoration of believers. When believers are born again by the Holy Spirit, they become new creatures with a new nature. As they are filled with the Spirit, they are filled with God himself. As they continue to be filled with the Spirit through spiritual disciplines, he is the one who transforms the believers into the image of Christ. Divine spirit produces the character of God in Jesus' disciples.

Theosis is also an exchanged life. The fallen existence is replaced by Christ's divine life. Christ became sin, so that we could become righteousness; Christ became poor, so that we could become rich. Christ gave his life for us on the cross, he gives his life to us as we believe in him, and he lives his life through us as we surrender to him. So, a believer no longer lives, but Christ lives in him and

16 Generally speaking, the teaching about taking care of the earth seems to be seriously lacking in evangelical churches.

through him, as Paul comments. Because Christ's life is divine life, it divinizes the recipient.

Theosis encompasses the whole human being: spirit, soul and body. The human spirit is made alive and filled with God's Spirit. It becomes a constant stream of God's life, permeating the soul and the body. As the soul receives God's life from the spirit it starts to think like God. Emotions follow those divine thoughts, and a person starts to make different decisions in accordance with God's will. The soul heals and matures through this lifelong regenerative process. The body also heals as it is permeated by God's life though it dies eventually. The body will ultimately be resurrected and glorified at the second coming of Christ.

Theosis reveals the *telos* of human existence and even all creation. The ultimate goal of human salvation is to be conformed to the image of Christ. The ultimate goal of creation is also to regain its prelapsarian state of glory. The creation is waiting for the glorified children of God, so that the creation itself can experience restoration and glory. Glorified humans are one of the agents of restoring the creation. The final goal, the *telos* and *skopos*, is that "God may be all in all" (1 Cor. 15:28).

The Benefits of a Developed Doctrine of Theosis

One of the strengths of the doctrine of theosis is its emphasis on the new creation instead of the fallen one. This focus can be a powerful motivation for Christians to live out their new life. Theosis encapsulates a noble purpose: transformation into the image of Christ in order to facilitate restoration of humanity and creation. The doctrine of theosis helps us to move away from a version of the "gospel" where a Christian is one thing (a sinner) but must behave like another (a saint). That kind of a viewpoint conveys an impossible and oxymoronic paradigm to live out: "God is holy, you are a sinner, but now you must act holy, and God will judge you for it." I think many Christians have been damaged and discouraged by such messages. The doctrine of theosis helps us to get away from that kind of legalism because it is highly relational. It is not so much about obedience to rules, but rather about our relationship with God, other humans, and creation. The restoration of the image of God in us continues as we interact with God, with other Christians in the Church, and with the world.

The doctrine of theosis also provides a valid platform and possibility for unity with other Christians. Its teachings are central to the story of God and humankind as told in the Bible, something most Christians could agree with. However, the doctrine is so unknown and untaught in evangelical churches that its promotion will take much time and effort. Because it is biblical, historical and evangelical, the doctrine of theosis is able to rise from marginality towards centrality

in evangelical churches, perhaps using it for its own revival and for reaching the lost. As Gorman says: “What humanity needs is a present godly and Godlike life free of Sin, and a future, eternal life free of Death. In other words, humanity needs to share in the divine moral character and the divine eternal character. That is, humans are in need of righteousness and immortality, the chief characteristics of God associated with theosis” (Gorman 2015, Kindle location 7088).

To think in terms of theosis might be a paradigm shift for many Christians. The change will hopefully be positive and encouraging because it emphasizes sharing in the nature and life of God. What greater good can we strive for than for our theosis, and for theosis of the church, the fallen world, and the whole creation? Paul’s perspective mirrors great possibilities. “Clothe yourselves with the new self, created according to the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness” (Eph. 4:24), “for you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ who is your life is revealed, then you also will be revealed with him in glory” (Col. 3:3).

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Goran Medved

Teoza (pobožavanje) kao novozavjetna i evanđeoska doktrina

Sažetak

Ovo je drugi od dva članka ovoga autora, koji istražuju doktrinu pobožavanja, ponekad također zvanu teoza, deifikacija ili divinizacija. Prvi članak predstavio je pobožavanje kao biblijsku i povijesnu doktrinu. Ovaj članak predstavlja pobožavanje kao novozavjetnu i evanđeosku doktrinu. Prvi dio ovog članka obrađuje pobožavanje u novozavjetnoj teologiji. Drugi dio ovog članka daje prijedlog za oblikovanje evanđeoske doktrine o pobožavanju. Zbog svoje novozavjetnosti, pobožavanje bi trebalo zauzeti puno istaknutije mjesto u evanđeoskoj teologiji.