

Theosis: the Heart of Christianity

1. Definition of *Theosis*

The word *theosis* (Gk.) means “[the process of] becoming like God,”¹ the term itself being derived from *theos*, the Greek word for *God*. The equivalent words derived from Latin are *divinization*, or *deification* (*deus* is the Latin word for *God*). Therefore, *theosis* = *deification*, and *to be deified* is the same as saying *to become like God*. Though the word *theosis* is not found in the Scriptures (like other words, e.g., *Trinity*, *homoousios/consubstantial* [in the Creed²], *catholic*, *Theotokos*,³ or *Orthodox*), *theosis* is used to express the meaning of Scripture in the Church’s confession and practice of the Christian Faith.

The teaching of *theosis* is embedded in the creation of human beings. *Then God said, “Let us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness. Let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of heaven, over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that moves on the earth...Be fruitful and multiply; fill the earth and subdue it”* (Gen. 1:26-28). *Image* (Gk., *eikon*; that is, *icon*) denotes an exact representation containing, or conveying, the qualities of the original. Jesus Christ, the Son of God, *is the image of the invisible God* (Col. 1:15; 2 Cor. 4:4), *the brightness of [God’s] glory and the express image of His person* (Heb. 1:3). Human beings are made *in God’s image*, an *image* of the *Image* who is the Son and Word (Gk., *Logos*⁴) of God. This means that human beings are created with the ability to relate and reflect the things of God *in Christ*.

Likeness (Gk., *homoiosis*; that is, *similitude* [Jam. 3:9]) denotes a dynamic capability in the human person. St. John of Damascus writes: “From the earth [God] formed his body and by His own inbreathing (cf. Gen. 2:7) gave him a rational and understanding soul, which last we say is the divine image – for the ‘according to His image’ means intellect and free will, while the ‘according to His likeness’ means likeness in virtue as is possible” (*An Exact Exposition of the Orthodox Faith* II.12).⁵ God gave the first man, Adam, the command concerning the tree of the knowledge of good and evil to exercise

¹ In the formation of Greek nouns, the *-osis* ending denotes *process*; other examples of nouns with these endings are: *metamorphosis* (the process of change), *necrosis* (the process of death/decay), and *scoliosis* (the process of curvature).

² *Homoousios* is usually rendered with the phrase “of one essence.”

³ The title given to the Virgin Mary meaning “Birthgiver-of-God.”

⁴ Cf. John 1:1-18. The Greek *logos* translated into English as “word” carries the various senses of that term, notably, “reckoning, measure, relation, explanation, principle, reason, or rationale.”

⁵ *Saint John of Damascus Writings*, trans. by Frederic H. Chase, Jr., (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1958), pg. 235.

himself in virtue according to the likeness of God (Gen. 2:15-17). Adam had *dominion over all the earth* as if he were God there; men and women were to *fill the earth and subdue it* according to God's will. God brought all the animals to Adam *to see what he would call them* (Gen. 2:19), an exercise of the wisdom and knowledge of God entrusted to the man.

A person experiences *theosis*, or is *deified*, when he or she lives according to God's original purpose and design. As such, *theosis* is the realization of being a child of God the Father, the source of all being (cf. Luke 3:38); it is living as a reflection of the template of personal existence who is the Son of God, the Image of the Father, and it is continuously seeking perfection in that life by the operation of the Holy Spirit (cf. Gen. 2:7). Concerning this fact, St. Seraphim of Sarov explains: "The point is, that if the Lord God had not breathed afterwards into his face this breath of life (that is, the grace of our Lord God the Holy Spirit who proceeds from the Father and rests in the Son and is sent into the world for the Son's sake), Adam would have remained without having within him the Holy Spirit who raises him to Godlike dignity...when the Lord God breathed into Adam's face the breath of life, then, according to Moses' word, Adam became a living soul (Gen. 2:7), that is, completely and in every way like God, and like Him, forever immortal."⁶

⁶ Quoted in *An Extraordinary Peace St. Seraphim, Flame of Sarov*, by Archimandrite Lazarus [Moore], (Port Townsend, WA: Anaphora Press, 2009), pg. 122.

2. The Biblical Explanation of *Theosis*

a. A Negative Example

The Biblical explanation of *theosis* begins with a negative example. The falsification of *theosis* and its consequences gives way to a restoration of *theosis* and its realization in the life of the Christian person.

After the initial creation of man and woman, and the command by God to abstain from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil in order to exercise themselves in the life given by God, the woman was tempted by Satan to disobey God's command. The devil deceived the woman with the allure of a false *theosis*. *Then the serpent said to the woman, "You shall not die by death. For God knows in the day you eat from it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like gods, knowing good and evil"* (Gen. 3:4-5).

What happened? *So when the woman saw the tree was good for food, was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree beautiful to contemplate, she took its fruit and ate. She also gave it to her husband with her, and he ate. Then the eyes of the two were opened, and they knew they were naked. So they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves coverings* (Gen. 3:6-7). They were ashamed, hid themselves from God and, when confronted by God, blamed the other for transgressing God's command, ultimately shifting responsibility of the fall to God Himself (*Adam said, "The woman You gave me..."*; Gen. 3:8-13).

For God created man for immortality and made him an image of His own eternity. But death entered the world by the envy of the devil, and those of his portion tempt it (Wisdom of Solomon 2:25-26). Rather than becoming like God in grace and virtue, Adam and Eve succumbed to the temptation of envying God's own status. Through greed and self-indulgence, they wanted to be their own gods independent of the Creator. The result was no longer life as given by God, but death from choosing to liken themselves to Satan who rebelled against the true God and arrogated to himself a position of equality with God (cf. Isa. 14:12-15; John 8:44; 2 Cor. 4:4; Rev. 20:2). Thus the devil and his angels were cast out of heaven, and his human followers were cast out of paradise, separated from their former living communion with God.

Professing to be wise, [human beings] became fools, and changed the glory of the incorruptible God into an image made like corruptible man...who exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever. Amen. (Rom. 1:23, 25). Man turned his desire for divinity *to himself* – a creature – and abandoned the only authentic source of divinity, namely, the uncreated God. In other words, man

forsook genuine *theosis* as an *icon* of God, and he chose false *deification* in the service of creation, making himself an *idol* (lit., an idea of godhood contained in created form).⁷

b. The Relationship between Uncreated and Created

God simply reveals Himself as *I AM the Existing One* (Ex. 3:14; lit., *I am, the Being One [the One who Is]*).⁸ He is *eternal, immortal, invisible...who alone is wise...who alone has immortality, dwelling in unapproachable light, whom no man has seen or can see, to whom be honor and everlasting power* (1 Tim. 1:17; 6:16). *Clouds and darkness surround Him* (Ps. 96[97]:2; cf. Ex. 20:21; Deut. 5:22). *The Lord spoke to you from the midst of the fire. You heard the sound of the words, but saw no form; you only heard a voice* (Deut. 4:12).

God *by nature, or essence*, is infinite, invisible, incomprehensible, and ultimately unknowable to any creature because God is uncreated and beyond any created form or concept.⁹ There is no similarity whatsoever between God and anything created, which

⁷ The prohibition of idols is not the prohibition of making images *per se* but the command not to worship any creature *as if it were God*. *You shall not make for yourself an idol or a likeness of anything in heaven above, or in the earth beneath, or in the waters under the earth. You shall not bow down to them or serve them* (Ex. 20:4-5; Deut. 5:8-9). Many images (i.e., *icons*) were permitted, and even commanded, to be made in Israel: the tabernacle and temple, Ark of the covenant (with the lid of cherubim [i.e., angels]; Ex. 25-27), the Altar and Laver (with oxen underneath; 3 Kgs.[1 Kg.] 7:13), the copper (or, bronze) serpent (Num. 21:8), etc. Human endeavor is to be *iconic*, not *idolatrous*. “You see that the law and everything it commanded and all our own practices are meant to sanctify the work of our hands, leading us through matter to the invisible God” (St. John of Damascus, *Second Apology Against Those Who Attack the Divine Icons*, 23). “For nothing else so soils the work of God and makes unclean what is clean as the deification of creation and the worshiping of it as equal to God the Creator and Maker” (St. Symeon the New Theologian, *First Ethical Discourse*, 2).

⁸ Gk., Ἐγώ εἰμι ὁ ὢν (*ego eimi ho ōn*); this was written in Hebrew as *Yahweh*, meaning “He who Is,” and is usually represented in English Bibles with the word LORD (all capital letters; see the introduction, or preface, to the English editions of the Bible). See also Rev. 1:4. Orthodox icons of Jesus Christ have the Greek words ὁ ὢν (*ho ōn* – “He who Is”) around Christ’s head clearly identifying Him as God.

⁹ The Divine Liturgy describes God as “incomparable, incomprehensible, immeasurable, inexpressible, ineffable, inconceivable, invisible, ever-existing and eternally the same, who brought us from non-existence into being” (*The Divine Liturgy According to St. John Chrysostom*, Second Edition, [South Canaan, PA: St. Tikhon’s Seminary Press, 1977], pp. 31, 62-63). “The basic category of Christian thought is the clear distinction between the created and the uncreated together with the teaching that between the created and the uncreated there is absolutely no similarity. This is not only the fundamental doctrine of the Patristic tradition (i.e., the Fathers of the Church), but also of the Jewish tradition until today” (*Patristic Theology*, by Protopresbyter John S. Romanides, trans. Hieromonk Alexis Trader, [Dulles, OR: Uncut Mountain Press, 2008], pg. 71). “Every created nature is far removed from and completely foreign to the divine nature. For if God is nature, other things are not nature; but if every other thing is nature, He is not a nature, just as He is not a being if all other things are beings. And if you accept this as true also for wisdom, goodness, and in general all things that pertain to God or are ascribed to Him, then your theology will be correct and in accordance with the saints” (St. Gregory Palamas, *Topics of Natural and*

includes literally everything else that is; anything other than God has been brought into being by God and is created and defined within the limits of creation. *In the beginning God made heaven and earth* (Gen. 1:1).

Who, or what, God is as the uncreated, incomprehensible Being includes His simple unitary essence and the fact that God is *plural*, that is, *Three-in-One*. Already in the first chapter of Genesis, the *tri-personal* nature of God is revealed. There is God and the Spirit of God (Gen. 1:1-2). God speaking to Himself says, “Let *Us* make man in *Our* image” (Gen. 1:26; italics mine); as stated above (see page 1; John 1:1-3), the image of God is the Son and Word (Gk., *Logos*) of God. Thus God is One *and* Three: God-Word-Spirit.

As the Scriptures unfold, *God* is identified as *Lord* and *Father* (Deut. 32:6; Ps. 88[89]:27; Isa. 63:16). The *Son* is identified as the *Word* (or, *Voice*) and *Angel of the Lord* (Gen. 15:1, 4; 16:7-14; Ex. 3:2, 14; Isa. 9:5). The *Spirit* is the *Holy Spirit* (Gen. 6:3; Ps. 50[51]:13; Ez. 2:2). The *Father* is the source and unity of the Divine Essence (1 Cor. 8:6) from whom the *Son* is begotten (John 1:14, 18), and from whom the *Spirit* proceeds and rests in the *Son* (John 15:26). The *Persons* (Gk., *Hypostaseis*¹⁰) of the *Father*, *Son*, and *Holy Spirit* are distinct yet co-equal and of one essence, fully God, one *Person* neither superior nor inferior to the others in any way pertaining to the Divine Being. “The *Unity* and the *Trinity* are both affirmed and conceived as truly one and the same, the first denoting the principle of essence, the second the mode of existence” (St. Maximos the Confessor, *On the Lord’s Prayer*).¹¹

Though the *uncreated* (i.e., God) and the *created* (i.e., everything else) are completely distinct and have no similarity whatsoever, God enables creatures – in particular, humankind - truly to know Him and participate in His divine life. *For thus says the Lord who made heaven – this is the God who formed the earth and made it. He established it, and did not make it in vain, but formed it to be inhabited – I Am, and there is no other. I have not spoken*

Theological Science, 78 [from *The Philokalia*, Vol. 4, trans and ed. by G. E. H. Palmer, Philip Sherrard, and Kallistos Ware, (London: Faber and Faber, 1981), pg. 382)].

¹⁰ The preferred Church term for *person* is *hypostasis* (sing.; pl., *hypostaseis*). In the ancient world, the word *person* (Lat., *persona*; Gk., *prosopon*) originally referred to an actor’s *mask*, or *characterization*. *Hypostasis*, originally a synonym for the word for *essence* (Gk., *ousia*), referred to a *subsistence*, or *distinct entity*, which shared the same *essence*, not merely something appearing with a certain *persona*. For instance, each human being – John, Mary, Peter, etc. – is a distinct *hypostasis* sharing the same *essence* with every other human being. Eventually according to usage the word *person* became synonymous with *hypostasis*; however, the Church prefers *hypostasis* when confessing the Trinity of *Persons* in God because of the greater precision of the term.

¹¹ Op. cit., *The Philokalia*, Vol. 2, pg. 296.

in secret, nor in a dark place of the earth. I did not say to the seed of Jacob, 'Seek Me in vain.' I Am. I am the Lord who speaks righteousness and declares the truth (Isa. 45:18-19).

Human beings can never see, know, and comprehend God's *nature, or essence*, including God's Trinitarian manner of existence, but they can perceive God according to His *operations, or activities*.¹² *For since the creation of the world [God's] invisible attributes are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead, so that [men] are without excuse, because, although they knew God, they did not glorify Him as God, nor were thankful (Rom. 1:20-21). For from the greatness and beauty of created things the Creator is seen by analogy (WSol. 13:5). The Apostle Paul explained to the Athenians: God, who made the world and everything in it...so that [every nation of men] should seek the Lord, in the hope that they might grope for Him and find Him, though He is not far from each one of us; for in Him we live and move and have our being, as also some of your own poets have said, 'For we are also His offspring' (Acts 17:24, 27-28).*

This knowledge of the incomprehensible is not obtained through human intelligence, reason, philosophical speculation, or observation. It is obtained through experience, that is, through *theosis* itself. Even though God cannot be described, He can truly be known through participation in His divine, uncreated energies.

Consider these examples. *The Lord God commanded Adam, saying... (Gen. 2:16). [Adam and Eve] heard the voice of the Lord God walking in the garden that afternoon (Gen. 3:8). Then God appeared to [Abraham] at the oak of Mamre...he lifted his eyes and looked, and behold, three men stood before him (Gen. 18:1-2). [Moses, Aaron, Nadab, Abihu, and seventy of the elders of Israel] saw the place where the God of Israel stood. Under His feet was, as it were, a paved work of sapphire stone and the appearance of heaven's firmament in its purity...The sight of the Lord's glory was like a burning fire on the top of the mountain (Ex. 24:10, 17). Similar visions, or revelations, of God are witnessed by the Prophets, such as Isaiah (Isa. 6) and Ezekiel (Ez. 1), and the Apostles (Matt. 17:1-8; 2 Cor. 12:1-6; 2 Pet. 1:16-21).*

"We say that we know the greatness of God, His power, His wisdom, His goodness, His providence over us, and the justness of His judgment...The operations are various, and the essence simple, but we say that we know our God from His operations, but do not undertake to approach near to His essence. His operations come down to us, but His essence remains beyond our reach" (St. Basil [the Great] of Caesarea, *Letter 234 [to Amphilochius]*, 1). "What, then, the Prophets and Moses, the Apostles and the Saints of the Church saw is not God's essence, but *God's uncreated glory and natural energy, His*

¹² The Greek term is *energies*, formed from the word *ergon*, that is, "act, work." We distinguish between the uncreated *being (essence)* of God and His uncreated *activities (operations)*.

*grace and kingdom...The catechized believer receives, through baptism, the betrothal of the Spirit. Following his baptism, the believer moves into marriage through ascending towards perfection and participating in the grace of God, which is uncreated, as well as in the rest of God's energies. This is the way, according to the Church's teaching, that man is deified and becomes God's friend, and not by participating in God's essence, which would lead to pantheism, as everyone can ascertain" (italics original).*¹³

The supreme instance of participation of creation in the divine, uncreated life is the Person of Jesus Christ, the God-man. *"Behold the virgin shall be with child and bear a Son, and they shall call His name Immanuel," which is translated, "God with us" (Matt. 1:23; Isa. 7:14). And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth (John 1:14). For in Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily (Col. 2:9). And without controversy great is the mystery of godliness. God was manifested in the flesh, justified in the Spirit, seen by angels, preached among the Gentiles, believed on in the world, received up in glory (1 Tim. 3:16). And we know that the Son of God has come and has given us an understanding, that we may know Him who is true, and we are in Him who is true, in His Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God and eternal life (1 John 5:20).*

"For just as we confess that the Incarnation was brought about without transformation or change,¹⁴ so also do we hold that the deification of the flesh was brought about...For not by its own operation does the flesh do divine works, but by the Word united to it, and through it the Word shows His own operation. Thus, the steel which has been heated burns, not because it has a naturally acquired power of burning, but because it has acquired it from its union with fire" (St. John of Damascus, *An Exact Exposition of the Orthodox Faith* III.17). "When the Logos (i.e., Word) of God became man, He filled human nature once more with the spiritual knowledge that it had lost; and steeling it

¹³ *An Outline of Orthodox Patristic Dogmatics*, by Protopresbyter John Romanides, (Rollinsford, NH: Orthodox Research Institute, 2004), pp. 7, 9. Also on page 9: "The distinction, then, between essence and energy in God, man's participation in the uncreated energies of God and his theosis, and the relation of God to His creatures through the uncreated energies constitute basic doctrines of the Church." Concerning pantheism (the teaching that everything [Gk., *pan*] is God), in order for something to know, or participate in, the essence of God, that something would have to be God *itself*. Such a teaching obliterates the distinction between everything *created* and the *uncreated* God. "Further, that which participates in something according to its essence must necessarily possess a common essence with that in which it participates and be identical to it in some respect. But who has ever heard that God and we possess in some respect the same essence?" (St. Gregory Palamas, *Topics of Natural and Theological Science*, 111; op. cit., *The Philokalia*, Vol. 4, pg. 397).

¹⁴ *Incarnation* refers to the Son of God becoming, or taking on, flesh; in this mystery, neither was the divine nature transformed, or changed, into the human nature, nor was the human nature transformed, or changed, into the divine nature. Each nature remains what it is, completely intact, yet in union with one another.

against changefulness, He deified it, not in its essential nature but in its quality. He stamped it completely with His own Spirit, as if adding wine to water so as to give the water the quality of wine. For He becomes truly man so that by grace He may make us gods" (St. Maximos the Confessor, *Second Century of Various Texts*, 26).¹⁵

c. Restoration of Theosis in the Incarnation of the Son of God

The counterfeit *theosis* of the devil, which is idolatry, leads to sin and death. The incarnation of the Son of God redeems mankind to genuine *theosis* through communion with Him, the God-man. God's original plan for all people to be *like Him* is restored by the power, grace, and operation of Christ and the Holy Spirit. In the Incarnation of the Son of God, God becomes *like us* in every way – except sin (Rom. 8:3; Heb. 4:15) – in order to deify our nature and lead us back to the divine life of God. *For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be firstborn among many brethren. Moreover whom He predestined, these He also called; whom He called, these He also justified, and whom He justified, these He also glorified* (Rom. 8:29-30).

This marvelous transformation was indicated immediately after Adam and Eve disobeyed God and fell into sin and death. Speaking of the consequences of the fall, God said to the serpent (i.e., the devil): *I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her seed. He shall bruise your head, and you shall be on guard for His heel* (Gen. 3:15). The promise of the *seed* continues throughout the Old Testament beginning in the book of Genesis in the genealogical record of the people of blessing, from Adam to Noah and then to Abra(ha)m, Isaac, and Jacob (Gen. 15:4-5; 17:7; 22:17-18; 26:4; 28:14). Both in the Greek and Hebrew languages, the word for *seed* is singular and masculine, that is, *a male child*. Therefore the Apostle Paul writes: *Now to Abraham and his Seed were the promises made. He does not say, "And to seeds," as of many, but as of one, "And to your Seed," who is Christ* (Gal. 3:16).

From the inception of sin and delusion of evil, God being born from the woman was the remedy promised by God to bruise the devil's head, crushing the power of death, and to renovate human nature in communion with the pre-fallen, divine life. *Inasmuch then as the children have partaken of flesh and blood, [Jesus] Himself likewise shared in the same, that through death He might destroy him who had the power of death, that is, the devil, and release those who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage* (Heb. 2:14-15). *He who sins is of the devil, for the devil has sinned from the beginning. For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that He might destroy the works of the devil. Whoever has been born of*

¹⁵ Op. cit., *The Philokalia*, Vol. 2, pg. 193.

God does not sin, for His seed remains in him; and he cannot sin, because he has been born of God (1 John 3:8-9).

The Son of God assumed our human nature, sick and corrupt with sin, and renewed it, uniting it with His divine nature in His person. Christ assumed our mortal nature now subject to death and experienced death in His own, which is our, flesh, triumphing over the power of sin and death by His glorious resurrection on the third day. By taking our nature corrupted with sin and making our death His own on the Cross, His life becomes our life. *[He] bore our sins in His own body on the tree, that we, having died to sins, might live for righteousness (1 Pet. 2:24). Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new (2 Cor. 5:17).* The Scriptural language of Christ's sacrificial saving work – e.g., redemption (Rom. 3:24-25; Heb. 9:11-15), ransom (Mk. 10:45), reconciliation (Rom. 5:10; 2 Cor. 5:18-21), propitiation/expiation (1 John 2:2) – all describes the restoration of our nature through union with the divine in the Incarnation of the Son of God (that is, deification).¹⁶

¹⁶ St. Gregory the Theologian (d. 391) anticipated and responded to a view of redemption, or atonement, made popular in the medieval West which exclusively emphasized the sacrifice of Christ as a *satisfaction* for the debt of sin so as to appease the just wrath of God toward man. While the Fathers of the Orthodox Church speak of Christ's sacrifice as a *satisfaction*, this concept is always understood within the wider context of Christ's work of *restoring* human nature to communion with God, not restricted to a juridical concept. St. Gregory writes: "We were detained in bondage by the Evil One, sold under sin, and receiving pleasure in exchange for wickedness. Now, since a ransom belongs only to him who holds in bondage, I ask to whom was this offered, and for what cause? If to the Evil One, fie upon the outrage! if the robber receives ransom, not only from God, but a ransom which consists of God Himself, and has such an illustrious payment for his tyranny, a payment for whose sake it would have been right for him to have left us alone altogether. But if to the Father, I ask first, how? For it was not by Him that we were being oppressed; and next, on what principle did the blood of His only-begotten Son delight the Father, Who could not receive even Isaac when he was being offered by his father, but changed the sacrifice, putting a ram in the place of the human victim (see Gen. 22:11ff.)? Is it not evident that the Father accepts Him, but neither asked for Him nor demanded Him; but on account of the Incarnation, and because humanity must be sanctified by the Humanity of God, that He might deliver us Himself, and overcome the tyrant, and draw us to Himself by the mediation of His Son Who also arranged this to the honor of the Father, Whom it is manifest that He obeys in all things?" (*Oration 45.22 [Second Oration on Pascha]*). St. Gregory Palamas (d. 1359) also writes: "Man was led into his captivity when he experienced God's wrath, this wrath being the good God's just abandonment of man. God had to be reconciled with the human race, for otherwise mankind could not be set free from the servitude. A sacrifice was needed to reconcile the Father on high with us and to sanctify us, since we had been soiled by fellowship with the evil one...This is why Christ was revealed, who alone is undefiled and presented Himself as an offering and a sacrifice of firstfruits to the Father for our sake, that all we who look towards Him, believe in Him and attach ourselves to Him through obedience will appear through Him before the face of God, obtain forgiveness and be sanctified" (Homily 16.20-22; in *Saint Gregory Palamas the Homilies*, ed. and trans. by Christopher Veniamin [Waymart, PA: Mount Tabor Publishing, 2009], pp. 124-125).

St. Gregory Palamas explains: “But Christ came, setting human nature free and changing the common curse into a shared blessing. He took upon Himself our guilty nature from the most pure Virgin and united it, new and unmixed with the old seed, to His divine person. He rendered it guiltless and righteous, so that all His spiritual descendants would remain outside the ancestral curse and condemnation. How so? He shares His grace with each one of us as a person, and each receives forgiveness of sins from Him. For He did not receive from us *a human person*, but *assumed our human nature* and renewed it by uniting it with His own person” (Homily 5.2; italics mine). “Since the only-begotten Son of God *did not take a human person* from us, *but our nature*, and made it new, being united with it in His own person, does He not impart His grace to each person, and does not each of us receive the forgiveness of sins from Him?...He has not merely renewed the nature of each of us who believe, but also our person, and granted us remission of sins through divine baptism, through the keeping of His commandments, through the repentance which He bestowed on the fallen, and through the communion of His own body and blood” (Homily 60.18¹⁷; italics mine).

This means that in becoming man the Son of God did not merely save *one human person* – Jesus of Nazareth; rather, taking our flesh, our created nature, the Son of God makes salvation possible *for every person having the same flesh* by renewing that created nature shared in common by each person. *For if by the one man’s* (i.e., Adam’s) *offense death reigned through the one, much more those who receive abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness will reign in life through the One, Jesus Christ* (Rom. 5:17). *For since by man came death, by Man also came the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ all shall be made alive* (1 Cor. 15:21).

In His person Christ Jesus united our created nature with His divine nature thus deifying our nature and becoming the source of eternal life for all who are *in Christ*. Restoration of *theosis* in the Incarnation of the Son of God is the fulfillment of all Messianic hopes through participation in the reign of Christ which consists in the peace and blessings of paradise experienced once again (cf. 2 Kgs.[2 Sam.] 7:10-13; Mic. 5:1-4; Isa. 9:5-6; 11:1-10; 65:17-25; Matt. 6:31-33; 19:27-30; Lk. 22:28-30; 23:42-43; Eph. 2:13-18; Rev. 22:1-5). Jesus Christ is the New, Perfect Man (Eph. 4:13, 24), the second, heavenly Adam (1 Cor. 15:47-48), the Head of His body, the church (Eph. 1:22-23; Col. 1:18), the Firstborn of many brothers (Rom. 8:29; Col. 1:18; Heb. 2:10-11, 17; 12:23; Rev. 1:5).

¹⁷ Op. cit., *Saint Gregory Palamas the Homilies*, pp. 34, 501.

d. Created for Kinship and Communion with God

Likeness to God enables human beings to be called *sons of God* (Gen. 6:2), that is, those who *hope[d] in the Lord God and call[ed] upon His name* (Seth and Enosh; Gen. 4:26¹⁸), who *[are] well-pleasing to God* (Enoch; Gen. 5:24), *righteous and perfect in his generation* (Noah; Gen. 6:9). The opposite to likeness with God is murder, wickedness, evil intent, corruption, and unrighteousness (Gen. 4:10, 23-24; 6:5, 11); these are characteristics of the children of the devil, the enemy of God. Christ said to the Jews who rejected Him: *If God were your Father, you would love Me... You are of your father the devil, and the desires of your father you want to do. He was a murderer from the beginning... he is a liar and the father of it* (John 8:42, 44).

Throughout the history of God's people, likeness to God enabled them truly to be called the children of God. *You are the children of the Lord your God... For you are a holy people to the Lord your God, and the Lord chose you to be a people for Himself, a special people above all the nations on the face of the earth* (Deut. 14:1, 2). *As a father has compassion on his children, so the Lord has compassion on those who fear Him... To such as keep His covenant and remember His commandments to do them* (Ps. 102[103]:13, 18). Whereas those claiming the name, yet disobeying Him, forfeit their status as the children of God. *They sinned: the blameworthy children are not His, a generation twisted and perverse... for they are a perverse generation, sons in whom is no faith* (Deut. 32:5, 20). *"Woe to the apostate children," says the Lord! "You made counsel, but not through Me, and covenants, but not of My Spirit, so as to add sins to sins"... For this is a disobedient people, false children, children who are unwilling to hear the law of God* (Isa. 30:1, 9).

Our Lord points out this teaching that *theosis = divine sonship, or kinship with God*, showing from the Psalm that all human persons are called to be divine in a relative

¹⁸ St. Gregory Palamas draws out the implications of the text further: "The first to be called sons of God in the Scriptures are the descendants of Enos, who was the first to hope to be called by the Name of the Lord (cf. Gen. 4:26 Septuagint [Greek] text). Enos was the son of Seth whose family was separate from the accursed family of Cain, and lived chastely. For their sake the world continued until, according to the Scripture, they saw the daughters of men, that is, the women of Cain's stock, that they were fair (Gen. 6:2). Overcome by their corrupt beauty, they took wives of all whom they chose, and learnt their ways. Then evil increased on earth and the flood came and swept them all away (Gen. 6:17ff.). If on earth in those days Noah and his sons had not been found to be chaste – as shown by the fact that each man had one wife with whom he went into the ark (Gen. 7:13) – there would have been no root or source from which a second world could begin." (Homily 5.15; op. cit., pg. 38). See also St. John Cassian, *The Conferences* 8.21, for further discussion concerning the division of the sons of Seth (i.e., sons of God) and the offspring of Cain (i.e., sons of men) "because of their own of their ancestors' wickedness and because of their worldly deeds" (*John Cassian: The Conferences*, trans. by Boniface Ramsey, [New York: Newman Press, 1997], pp. 304-307).

sense just as He is divine by essence, or nature. *Jesus answered [the Jews], "Is it not written in your law, 'I said, "You are gods"' (Ps. 81[82]:6¹⁹)? If He called them gods, to whom the word of God came (and the Scripture cannot be broken), do you say of Him whom the Father sanctified and sent into the world, 'You are blaspheming,' because I said, "I am the Son of God? (John 10:34-36). St. John writes: Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us, that we should be called children of God. Therefore the world does not know us, because it did not know Him. Beloved, now we are children of God, and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is (1 John 3:1-2).*

All people created according to the image and likeness of God are brought into being to be the children of God, an awesome reality! "When you hear about the dignity of humanity, how it has substantially been endowed with intellect, do you not understand that God had spoken these words, not of angels, but of human nature: 'Let us make man according to our image and likeness' (Gen. 1:26), and that Heaven and earth would pass away, but you have been called to immortality, to be a son, a brother, and a spouse of the King?" (Pseudo-Macarius, *Homily 16.13*).²⁰

Divine sonship is fulfilled and restored in the Person of the God-man, Jesus Christ, and in all who are in Christ. *For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ...But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of the woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, that we might receive the adoption as sons. And because you are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into your hearts, crying out, "Abba, Father!"²¹ Therefore you are no longer a slave but a son, and if a son, then an heir of God through Christ (Gal. 3:26-27; 4:4-7). But as many as received [God the Word], to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name: who were born, not of blood, not of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God (John 1:12-13).*

Theosis is both the result and expression of divine adoption, divine kinship. Thus Christ teaches His disciples to pray: *Our Father in heaven, hallowed be Your name. Your kingdom come. Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven (Matt. 6:9, 10);* the sons (i.e., children) of God address God the Father who is now their mutual Father with the Son from all eternity, Jesus Christ. "For hidden within a limited compass this prayer contains the whole purpose and aim of which we have just spoken," namely, "the deification of our

¹⁹ The entire verse reads: *I said, "You are gods, and you are all sons of the Most High."*

²⁰ In *Pseudo-Macarius The Fifty Spiritual Homilies and the Great Letter*, trans. and ed. by George Maloney, S. J., (New York: Paulist Press, 1992), pp. 134-135.

²¹ *Abba* is an Aramaic term of intimate endearment equivalent to our term "Daddy."

nature”; “we are taught to proclaim the grace of our adoption, since we have been found worthy of addressing our Creator by nature as our Father by grace...showing ourselves to be His children through our actions, and through all that we think or do glorifying the author of this adoption, who is by nature Son of the Father” (St. Maximos Confessor, *On the Lord’s Prayer*).²²

Likeness to God is also expressed in terms of the ability of human beings to be in union, or communion, with God. *[God’s] divine power has given to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him who called us by glory and virtue, by which have been given to us exceedingly great and precious promises, that through these you may be partakers (lit., communicants) of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust (2 Pet. 1:3-4; see also 2 Cor. 6:14-7:1). Our Lord prayed for His disciples before His crucifixion: That they all may be one, as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You; that they also may be one in Us, that the world may believe that You sent Me. And the glory which You gave Me I have given them, that they may be one just as We are one (John 17:21-22).*

Man’s union, or communion, with the divine causes a profound transformation of the human person resulting in the glorification, or perfection, of the one experiencing *theosis*. Enoch was translated from this earthly life (Gen. 5:24). God would speak with Moses *face to face, as a man speaks to his friend*, so that his face shone – *the skin of his face was glorified while God talked with him* (Ex. 33:11; 34:29). Joshua, Elisha, and Daniel conversed with angels (Josh. 5:13-15; 4 Kgs.[2 Kg.] 6:17; Dan. 8:16-17). Elijah was taken to heaven in a fiery chariot (4 Kgs.[2 Kg.] 2:11). The Virgin Mary became the Mother of God and held the Son of God within her womb (Lk. 1:31-32, 35, 42-43). The martyr Stephen, who had *the face of an angel...being full of the Holy Spirit, gazed into heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God* (Acts 6:15; 7:55). The Apostle Paul *was caught up to the third heaven...to Paradise* (2 Cor. 12:1-6).

²² Op. cit., *The Philokalia*, Vol. 2, pp. 286, 291. “First of all, [the Lord Jesus Christ] leads us not to a mountain but to Heaven itself, which He has rendered accessible to all men by virtue. Secondly, He gives them not only the vision of, but a share in, the Divine power, bringing them as it were to kinship with the Divine Nature...For Truth does not teach us to deceive, to say we are what we are not and to use a name to which we have no right. But if we call God our Father Him who is incorruptible and just and good, we must prove by our life that the kinship is real...Now the way which leads human nature back to Heaven is none other than that of avoiding the evils of the world by flight; on the other hand, the purpose of fleeing from evil seems to me precisely to achieve likeness with God. To become like God means to become just, holy, and good and suchlike things” (St. Gregory of Nyssa, *The Lord’s Prayer, Sermon 2*, in *St. Gregory of Nyssa The Lord’s Prayer The Beatitudes*, trans. by Hilda C. Graff, [New York: Paulist Press, 1954]), pp. 35, 39-40, 42).

Theosis constitutes the actual experience of God, by grace of course, that is, a real participation in the energies of God in Christ. This experience changes a person causing them to become more divine, more like God. After reflecting on Moses' communion with God so that his face shone, the Apostle Paul writes: *But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image (Gk., eikon) from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord (2 Cor. 3:18). [The Father] would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with might through His Spirit in the inner man, that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the width and length and depth and height – to know the love of Christ which passes knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God (Eph. 3:16-20).* The Apostle John writes of this experience: *The life was manifested, and we have seen, and bear witness, and declare to you that eternal life which was with the Father and was manifested to us – that which we have seen and heard we declare to you, that you also may have fellowship (Gk., koinonia, that is, communion) with us; and truly our fellowship (Gk., koinonia) is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ (1 John 1:2-3).*

From the beginning, this experience of communion, or union, with God, clearly beyond description but nonetheless real, has been expressed in a twofold way: the sharing of food (and drink), and the indissoluble love in marriage. Ultimately, both of these expressions are joined together as one complete image of a person's union with God, for instance, the Holy Communion of the Lord's Supper referred to as *the marriage supper of the Lamb* (Rev. 19:9).

Not only did God give man *every seed-bearing herb...and every tree whose fruit yields seed* for food, but He especially *planted a garden with the tree of life* for mankind (Gen. 1:29; 2:8, 9). The tree of life, when eaten, enabled man *to live forever*, but having fallen into sin by eating of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, man was prevented from eating its fruit and was expelled from the garden (Gen. 2:16-17; 3:11, 22-24). "If the serpent had been rejected along with sin, Adam and Eve would have eaten from the tree of life and the tree of knowledge would not have been withheld from them; from the one they would have gained infallible knowledge, and from the other they would have received immortal life. They would have acquired divinity with their humanity, and if they had acquired infallible knowledge and immortal life, they would have possessed them in those same bodies" (St. Ephrem of Syria, *Commentary on Genesis II.23*).²³

²³ St. Ephrem the Syrian *Selected Prose Works [Fathers of the Church Vol. 91]*, trans. by Edward G. Matthews, Jr. and Joseph P. Amar, ed. by Kathleen McVey, (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1994), pg. 114. St. Ephrem remarks that "When God created Adam, He did not make him mortal, nor did He fashion him immortal, so that Adam, by keeping or transgressing the commandment, might acquire from one of the trees, the [life] that he preferred. God created the tree of life and *hid it from Adam*

By eating all that God had given for food, and by abstaining from the tree of knowledge in accordance with God's command, God was calling man to participate in His superabundant life beyond the confines of material creation. Through the icon of food, God was inviting man to share in a communion with divine life itself. *O taste and see that the Lord is good; blessed is the man who hopes in Him* (Ps. 33[34]:9). Our Lord said, *I have food to eat of which you do not know...My food is to do the will of Him who sent Me, and to finish His work* (John 4:32, 34).

Meals both confirm and manifest the blessing of God, especially within the covenant between God and His people (Gen. 14:18-20; Ex. 24:9-12; Deut. 26:1-4, 11). Both priests and people share the meat of the various sacrifices offered to God as a seal of reconciliation with God (see Lev. 6:19; 7:7, 9, 15-16). The Kingdom of God in Christ is described as a banquet on Mount Zion in Jerusalem: *They shall drink in gladness; they shall drink wine; they shall anoint themselves with ointment on this mountain* (Isa. 25:6, 7; Amos 9:13-15; Joel 2:23-26; Prov. 9:1-6). Specifically in the Church, the Body and Blood of Christ is called the New Testament (covenant), *the Communion* (Lk. 22:20; Acts 2:42; 1 Cor. 10:16), and the participation of the faithful in this Lord's Supper is the essence of the worship of God on earth (1 Cor. 11:17ff.).

Concerning His Body and Blood, Christ says, *Unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you have no life in you...He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood abides in Me, and I in him. As the living Father sent Me, and I live because of the Father, so he who feeds on Me will live because of Me* (John 6:53, 56-57). Likeness to God by communion in the divine life is possible because participation in the Bread of Life, Jesus Christ, is granted in the Church.

The same intimate communion is expressed as the love experienced between husband and wife, and like eating and drinking (i.e., tasting), this love is an icon of the ineffable

and Eve. This was so that the tree would not cause any great struggle within them by its beauty and thus double their agony. In addition, it was not right that they heed a commandment from Him who could not be seen for the sake of a reward that was before their eyes. Even though God, in His goodness, had given them everything else, He wanted, in His justice, to give them immortal life that was to be conferred by their eating from the tree of life. Therefore, God set down for them a commandment" (italics mine; *Commentary on Genesis II.17.3-5, ibid., pg. 100*). Thus, "The tree that is called the Tree of Knowledge symbolizes the gate of Paradise: it is through the gate of knowledge that one is able to enter in; it is the likeness of its glorious Creator, in whose hidden abode through the gate of knowledge all who are perceptive may approach His hiddenness...So likewise that Wood, which is the Tree of Knowledge, can, with its fruit, roll back the cloud of ignorance, so that eyes can recognize the beauty of that Tabernacle hidden within; but because Adam and Eve ate it in sin, the vision that should have caused joy of heart resulted in grief of heart" (St. Ephrem the Syrian, *Hymns on Paradise XV.2, 5*, trans. by Sebastian Brock, [Crestwood, New York: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1990], pp. 182, 183).

and all-encompassing desire for God, the truly Beloved. *And the Lord God said, "It is not good for man to be alone. I will make him a helper comparable to him. And after the creation of the woman from the rib of the man: Adam said, "This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh. She shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man.²⁴ For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh (Gen. 2:18, 23-24).*

The unique relationship between God and His people within the covenant is expressed in terms of the union of marriage first manifested between Adam and Eve. *You shall fear the Lord your God; you shall serve Him, and hold fast to Him, and take oaths in His name...For if you carefully keep all these commandments I command you today – to love the Lord your God, to walk in all His ways, and to hold fast to Him (Deut. 10:20; 11:22).* The verb *to hold fast to God* is identical with that of *being joined to one's spouse*. The Lord says: *I will betroth you to Myself forever; yes, I will betroth you to Myself in righteousness and justice, and in mercy and compassions. I will betroth you to Myself in faithfulness, and you shall know the Lord (Hos. 2:19-20).* Again: *As a young man lives in wedlock with a virgin, so shall you sons dwell with you, and as a bridegroom rejoices over his bride, so the Lord shall rejoice over you (Isa. 62:5).*

Explicitly in the Gospel, Christ Jesus refers to Himself as *the bridegroom* (Matt. 9:15; Mk. 2:19). The Kingdom of God is likened unto a *marriage for his son* (Matt. 22:2). And in the Wedding Epistle reading concerning the spiritual significance of marriage, the groom is likened unto Christ, and the bride is likened unto the Church, so that human marriage in its pure experience is an icon of the love between God and His people (Eph. 5:21-33). Thus *marriage is honorable among all, and the bed undefiled; but fornicators and adulterers God will judge (Heb. 13:4),* precisely because the love exemplified in marriage manifests fidelity and communion with God.

This all-encompassing love as union between God and His people, specifically between Christ and "the soul betrothed to God,"²⁵ is overwhelming desire for the Beloved. *The watchmen who do their rounds in the city found me, and I said to them, "Have you seen him whom my soul loves?" Scarcely had I departed from them when I found him whom my soul*

²⁴ In Hebrew the phrase reads: "She shall be called *Ishah*, because she was taken out of *Ish*," verbally demonstrating the unique complementarity of the man and woman. "Eve was inside Adam, in the rib that was drawn out from him. Although she was not in his mind she was in his body, and she was not only in his body with him, but she was also in soul and spirit with him...After the extracted rib had been fashioned with all sorts of beautiful things to adorn it, God then brought her to Adam, who was both one and two. He was one in that he was Adam and he was two because he had been created male and female" (St. Ephrem the Syrian, *Commentary on Genesis* I.29.2, II.12, op. cit., pp. 94, 105).

²⁵ Op. cit., *Saint Gregory Palamas the Homilies*, pp. 146, 159, 227.

loves. *I held him and would not let him go until I brought him to my mother's house, into the chamber of her who conceived me. I implore you, O daughters of Jerusalem, by the hosts and powers of the field, that you rouse not nor wake my love until he wishes...I sleep but my heart keeps watch; the voice of my beloved – he knocks at the door! (SS 3:3-5; 5:2). My sister, my bride, you ravished my heart; you have ravished my heart with one look from your eyes, with one jewel of your necklace...My sister, my bride, is an enclosed garden; an enclosed garden, a sealed fountain...You are beautiful, my companion, you are my good pleasure; you are as beautiful as Jerusalem; you are awesome as an army set in array. Turn away your eyes from before me, for they have ravished me (SS 4:9, 12; 6:4-5).*

“God is said to be the originator and begetter of love (Gk., *agape*) and the erotic force (Gk., *eros*). For He externalized them from within Himself, that is, He brought them forth into the world of created things. This is why Scripture says that *God is love* (1 John 4:16), and elsewhere that He is *sweetness and desire* (cf. Song of Songs 5:16), which signifies the erotic force...You should understand that God stimulates and allures in order to bring about an erotic union in the Spirit; that is to say, He is the go-between in this union, the one who brings the parties together, in order that He may be desired and loved by His creatures. God stimulates in that He impels each being, in accordance with its own principle, to return to Him. Even though the word ‘allurement’ signifies something impure to the profane, here it stands for the mediation which effects union with God” (St. Maximos the Confessor, *Fifth Century of Various Texts*, 87, 88).²⁶

In the end as with actually tasting and sharing food, the experience of communion as love constitutes true knowledge of God. *Knowledge puffs up, but love edifies. And if anyone thinks that he knows anything, he knows nothing yet as he ought to know. But if anyone loves God, this one is known by Him (1 Cor. 8:1-3). Love never fails. But whether there are prophecies, they will fail; whether there are tongues, they will cease; whether there is knowledge, it will vanish away...Now I know in part, but then (i.e., when that which is perfect has come) I shall know just as I also am known (1 Cor. 13:8, 12). Christ said, By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another (John 13:35). And, O righteous Father! The world has not known You, but I have known You; and these have known that You sent Me. And I have declared to them Your name, and will declare it, that the love with which*

²⁶ Op. cit., *The Philokalia*, Vol. 2, pp. 281-282. “Such an experience seems to me to belong to the soul which loves what is beautiful. Hope always draws the soul from the beauty which is seen to what is beyond, always kindles the desire for the hidden through what is constantly perceived...This truly is the vision of God: never to be satisfied in the desire to see Him. But one must always, by looking at what he can see, rekindle his desire to see more. Thus, no limit would interrupt growth in the ascent to God, since no limit to the Good can be found nor is the increasing of desire for the Good brought to an end because it is satisfied” (St. Gregory of Nyssa, *Life of Moses*, 231, 239, trans. by Abraham J Malherbe and Everett Ferguson, [New York: Paulist Press, 1978], pp. 114, 116).

You loved Me may be in them, and I in them (John 17:25-26). No one has seen God at any time. If we love one another, God abides in us, and His love has been perfected in us...And we have known and believed the love that God has for us. God is love, and he who abides in love abides in God and God in him (1 John 4:12, 16).

God is known in His love for all mankind, in His creation and preservation of the world, in His wise providence granting the blessings of life, and in His condescension providing restoration to eternal life in the sacrifice of the Son of God, Jesus Christ. So all persons are granted the true knowledge of God in their love of Him, very simply acknowledging God's love for them and desiring above all else to know God in the keeping of the God-given life. Our Lord says, *He who has My commandments and keeps them, it is he who loves Me. And he who loves Me will be loved by My Father, and I will love him and manifest Myself to him (John 14:21).*

3. Achieving *Theosis*

How do we summarize all of the above? How do persons achieve *theosis* and attain to the likeness of God for which they were created? First, because of sin and death, a person must be restored to their created purpose through incorporation *into Christ*. This action restores the person in the image of God by cleansing and reactivating the intellect and free will according to God's direction. Second, because of the ongoing struggle against sin and the deception of demons, a person must strive to keep the commandments of God according to His eternal will. This activity confirms the person in the likeness of God through the freedom of grace and love. Confirmed in the likeness of God, a person attains to the vision of God, that is, partakes of the glory of God and is perfected.

a. Restored in the Image *in Christ*

As was the man of dust (i.e., Adam), so also are those who are made of dust; and as is the heavenly Man (i.e., Christ), so also are those who are heavenly. And as we have borne the image of the man of dust, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly Man (1 Cor. 15:48-49). Therefore if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new (2 Cor. 5:17).

Mankind has grown old in sin and death. *In the sweat of your face you shall eat bread till you return to the ground from which you were taken. Earth you are, and to earth you shall return (Gen. 3:19).* In the genealogy of Adam through Seth, despite their almost millennial lifespans, the constant refrain concludes each generation: *and he died (Gen. 5:5, 8, 11, etc.).* Because of his rebellion against God in the pursuit of a false *theosis*, man has become corrupt in his own desires, and the original image has been obscured and must be renewed.

The image of God is renewed in the Person of the God-man, Jesus Christ. In Christ, death is overcome, and sin is cleansed away – He is the new Man. *Put off, concerning your former conduct, the old man which grows corrupt according to the deceitful lusts, and be renewed in the spirit of your mind, and that you put on the new man which was created according to God, in true righteousness and holiness (Eph. 4:22-24). Since you have put off the old man with his deeds, and have put on the new man who is renewed in knowledge according to the image (Gk., *eikon*) of Him who created him, where there is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcised nor uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave nor free, but Christ is all and in all (Col. 3:9-11).*

The first aspect of achieving *theosis* is actual incorporation *into Christ* which is accomplished in and through the Church, His body (cf. Eph. 1:22-23). Just as Christ Himself *became flesh and dwelt among us* (John 1:14; Bar. 3:38), so those who are *in Christ* are joined to Christ as members of His body – not only in name, or mental construct, but in reality; therefore, this incorporation occurs at Baptism (and Chrismation), and it manifests itself at Holy Communion which entails every other facet of life in the Church, both ascetic and contemplative. For this reason the Church is necessary for the salvation and *theosis* of every person.²⁷

Our Lord says, *unless one is born again,*²⁸ *he cannot see the kingdom of God...unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God* (John 3:3, 5). John the Baptizer said of Christ, *I indeed baptize you with water unto repentance, but He who is coming after me is mightier than I, whose sandals I am not worthy to carry. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire* (Matt. 3:11). On the Day of Pentecost, the Apostle Peter declared, *“Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit...those who gladly received his word were baptized; and that day about three thousand souls were added to them”* (Acts 2:38, 41).

Baptism by definition is endowed with the grace of the Holy Spirit, not as an act effective merely in its performance, but it is effective because of the promise of Christ received in faith. *Buried with [Christ] in baptism, in which you also were raised with Him through faith in the working of God, who raised Him from the dead* (Col. 2:12). *For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have*

²⁷ The Greek word translated as “church” is *ekklesia*, meaning “assembly” (see Acts 19:32; 1 Cor. 14:23). The Church is always a concrete, local reality manifested in the assembly of the faithful around Jesus Christ, specifically at the Divine Liturgy in Holy Communion. Likewise the word *catholic* literally refers to the Church as “whole, or entire,” that is, each local assembly (if it is the Church) is completely the Church. “See that you all follow the bishop, as Jesus Christ follows the Father, and the presbytery (i.e., Priests) as if it were the Apostles. And reverence the deacons as the command of God. Let no one do any of the things appertaining to the Church without the bishop. Let that be considered a valid Eucharist which is celebrated by the bishop, or by one whom he appoints. Wherever the bishop appears let the congregation be present; just as wherever Jesus Christ is, there is the Catholic Church. It is not lawful either to baptize or to hold an ‘agape’ (i.e., meal of love; cf. Jude 12) without the bishop; but whatever he approve, this is also pleasing to God, that everything which you do may be secure and valid.” (St. Ignatios of Antioch, *Smyrnaeans* 8.1-2; *The Apostolic Fathers*, Vol. 1, trans. by Kirsopp Lake, [Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1985], pg. 261.) The bishops are the successors to the Apostles and the chief pastors of the Church; they are icons of the Archpastor and Bishop, Jesus Christ (1 Pet. 2:25; 5:4). Therefore, bishops maintain the unity of the Church. See *The One and the Many*, by John D. Zizioulis, (Alhambra, California: Sebastian Press, 2010) for an excellent explanation of this entire subject matter.

²⁸ The Greek word – *anōthen* – translated as “born again” also means “from above.”

put on Christ (Gal. 3:26-27). There is also an *antitype*²⁹ which now saves us – baptism (not the removal of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God), through the resurrection of Jesus Christ (1 Pet. 3:21). Thus Baptism is truly life-giving.

For as the body is one and has many members, but all the members of that one body, being many, are one body, so also is Christ. For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body – whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free – and have all been made to drink into one Spirit (1 Cor. 12:12-13). Therefore we were buried with [Christ Jesus] through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life (Rom. 6:4). [God] saved us through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit, whom He poured out on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Savior (Titus 3:5, 6). *Theosis* cannot be achieved without Baptism as its foundation.

Along with incorporation into Christ, Baptism bestows and makes one receptive to the enlivening grace of the Holy Spirit, which is further manifested in the act of Chrismation, that is, anointing with the seal of the Holy Spirit. Now He who establishes us with you in Christ and has anointed us is God, who also has sealed us and given us the Spirit in our hearts as a guarantee (2 Cor. 1:21-22). But you have an anointing (Gk., *chrisma*) from the Holy One, and you know all things...But the anointing which you have received from [Jesus] abides in you, and you do not need that anyone teach you, but as the same anointing teaches you concerning all things, and is true, and is not a lie, and just as it has taught you, you will abide in Him (1 John 2:20, 27; cf. John 14:26; 16:13).

Christians are *kings and priests to our God* (Rev. 5:10), made by anointing according to the ancient law (see 1 Kgs.[Sam.] 16:13; 3 Kgs.[1 Kg.] 3:39; Ex. 29:7; Ps. 132[133]:2). They are *christs* (lit., “anointed ones”) in communion with *the Christ* (lit., the Anointed One; Heb., *Messiah*) who has been anointed with the Holy Spirit (Isa. 61:1; Acts 10:38). “When, however, flesh was deified and human nature gained possession of God Himself by hypostatic union,³⁰ the former barrier opposed to God became joined to the Chrism (lit., “ointment, anointing”). The difference gave way when God became man, thus removing the separation between Godhead and manhood. So chrism represents Christ

²⁹ The *type* (Gk., *typos*) is the example, or pattern, found before – in this case salvation from the Flood in the ark of Noah; the *antitype* (Gk., *antitypos*) is the corresponding event in the Kingdom of Christ (e.g., baptism) which is the fulfillment of the *type*. In the Divine Liturgy of St. Basil the Great, the sanctified Gifts – the bread and wine become the Body and Blood of Christ – are referred to as “the antitypes of the holy Body and Blood of Thy Christ”; thus the Gifts given in Holy Communion are not merely empty symbols of the Body and Blood of Christ, but they are the present fulfillment in reality of Christ’s Body and Blood born of the Virgin Mary and given at the Lord’s Supper to His apostles. See *The Divine Liturgy according to St. John Chrysostom*, op. cit., pg. 134.

³⁰ I.e., the *personal union*, in the Person of the Incarnate Lord Jesus Christ, the God-man.

as the point of contact between both natures; there could be no point of contact were they still separate.”³¹

In completion of Baptism and Chrismation, reception of Holy Communion with its attendant life provides the necessary means of achieving *theosis*. Not only is Holy Communion literal incorporation into Christ by the eating of His body and the drinking of His blood (Lk. 22:19-20; 1 Cor. 10:16-17), but it is “the medicine of immortality, the antidote that we should not die, but live forever in Jesus Christ” (St. Ignatios of Antioch, *Ephesians* 20.2).³² Weekly reception of Holy Communion, particularly on the Lord’s Day of Resurrection (Acts 2:42; 20:7; 1 Cor. 16:2; Rev. 1:10), determines the Christian’s way of life before God and one’s fellow human beings. Having been baptized into Christ and sealed with the Holy Spirit, the Christian desires, is nourished with, and continues in the strength of *the Bread of Life*, the true food which gives eternal life (John 6:35, 53-57).

All the disciplines of the Christian life: fasting, prayer, works of service, acts of mercy, humility, obedience, etc.; all the mysteries (i.e., sacraments) of the Church: Confession, ordination, Holy Unction (healing), Marriage, the funeral services, monasticism, the Divine Liturgy, etc. – all of these prepare a person to receive Holy Communion worthily and beneficially “in the fear of God, and with faith [and love]”³³ (see 1 Cor. 11:27-34); conversely, all of these disciplines and mysteries can only be accomplished in an on-going God-pleasing manner in the strength provided by Holy Communion itself. As Christ says, *Without Me you can do nothing* (John 15:5); and, *The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all. Amen* (2 Cor. 13:14).

Holy Communion is therefore received by the Baptized and Chrismated who, with all their being and powers, want to be more like God. By all its means, the Church is the location of this possibility *in Christ*, and the essence of the Church is the Eucharist, that is, the celebration of the Lord’s Supper. “That of which we partake is not something of [Christ’s], but Himself. It is not some ray and light which we receive in our souls, but the very orb of the sun. So we dwell in Him and are indwelt and become one spirit with Him (cf. 1 Cor. 6:17). The soul and the body and all their faculties forthwith become spiritual, for our souls, our bodies and blood, are united with His...Wherefore the Eucharist, alone of sacred rites, supplies perfection to the other Mysteries. In the act

³¹ *The Life in Christ*, by Nicholas Cabasilas, trans. by Carmino J. deCatanaro, (Crestwood, New York: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1974), pg. 105.

³² *The Apostolic Fathers*, Vol. 1, trans. by Kirsopp Lake, (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1985), pg. 195.

³³ *The Divine Liturgy according to St. John Chrysostom*, op. cit., pg. 80. The last words: “and love” are frequently said by the Priest, although they are not actually printed in the text of the Divine Liturgy.

of initiating it comes to their aid, since they cannot be completed otherwise. It assists the initiates after their initiation, when the ray of light derived from the Mysteries must be revived after having been obscured by the darkness of sins. To revive those who fade away and die because of their sins is the work of the sacred table alone."³⁴

After the fall into sin and death, man still is created in and retains the image of God. *Whoever sheds man's blood, by man his blood shall be shed, because I made man in God's image* (Gen. 9:6). However, "Adam, when he transgressed the commandment, lost two things. First he lost the pure possession of his nature, so lovely, created according to the image of and likeness of God. Second, he lost the very image itself in which was laid up for him, according to God's promise, the full heavenly inheritance...We nevertheless do not say he was totally lost and was blotted out of existence and died. He died as far as his relationship with God was concerned, but in his nature, however, he still lives" (Pseudo-Macarius, *Homily 12.1, 2*).³⁵

Sinful man lost the pure possession of God's image in which he is created, by which he would have enjoyed unbroken communion with God. Incorporation *into Christ* through Holy Baptism and Chrismation, and the ongoing communion with Christ and the Holy Spirit in the Eucharist, restores the full capacity of the image of God and thus subsequently renews the capability for *theosis*. The soul's powers darkened by sin and death become enlightened again and pursue the things of God with complete devotion. *For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light (for the fruit of the Spirit is in all goodness, righteousness, and truth), finding out what is acceptable to the Lord* (Eph. 5:8-10).

The process of *theosis* works through the cleansing of man's spiritual (or, *noetic*) faculties, the highest powers of the soul. *These things we also speak, not in words which man's wisdom teaches but which the Holy Spirit teaches, comparing spiritual things with spiritual...For "who has known the mind of the Lord that he may instruct Him?" But we have the mind (Gk., nous) of Christ* (1 Cor. 2:12, 16). *For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds, casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought (Gk., noēma) into captivity to the obedience of Christ* (2 Cor. 10:4-5).³⁶ *And do not be conformed to this world (lit., age), but be transformed by the renewing of your mind (Gk., nous), that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God* (Rom. 12:2).

³⁴ *The Life in Christ*, op. cit., pp. 115-117.

³⁵ Op. cit., pg. 97.

³⁶ For lack of better terms, the Greek word *nous* is usually translated into English as "mind" or "intellect." The Greek word *noēma* denotes the movement, or operation, of the *nous*, that is, a "thought." *Noetic* simply means "pertaining to the *nous*."

“God the Word, then, wishing to restore that which was in His image, became man. But what is in His image, if it is not the mind (Gk., *nous*)? Did He, then, disregard what was better and assume what was worse? For mind stands midway between God and the flesh as being a companion of the flesh on the one hand and on the other an image of God. Thus, mind is associated with Mind and the mind holds the middle place between purity of God and grossness of the flesh” (St. John of Damascus, *An Exact Exposition of the Orthodox Faith* III.18).³⁷

When our Lord began His public ministry, He *began to preach and to say, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand* (Matt. 4:17; Mark 1:14). After His resurrection from the dead, Christ *opened [the apostles’] understanding* (Gk., *nous*), *that they might comprehend the Scriptures. Then He said to them, “Thus it is written, and thus it was necessary for the Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead the third day, and that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem* (Luke 24:45-47).

Importantly, the Greek word for *repent/repentance* is *metanoiein/metanoia* which literally means to *change the mind*, that is, to re-orient the *nous* back to God. This is the essence of *theosis*, that having been restored to the image of God *in Christ*, the person is free to pursue once again the things of God in faith and in truth according to the direction of the Holy Spirit now that the *nous*, the faculty of spiritual perception, has been restored to health and functions properly directing the soul – the person – in a God-like way.

Another way of stating this reality is with the language of the heart. *Although [men] knew God, they did not glorify Him as God, nor were thankful, but became futile in their thoughts, and their foolish hearts were darkened...Therefore God also gave them up to uncleanness, in the lusts of their hearts* (Rom. 1:21, 24). *No longer walk as the Gentiles walk, in the futility of their mind* (Gk., *nous*), *having their understanding³⁸ darkened, being alienated from the life of God, because of the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart; who being past feeling, have given themselves over to lewdness, to work all uncleanness with greediness...be renewed in the spirit of your mind* (Gk., *nous*; Eph. 4:17-19, 23).

The *nous*, then, is the eye of the heart, and the heart – both physiologically and spiritually – is the center of the human person. Christ says, *For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies* (Matt. 15:19); and, *Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God* (Matt. 5:8). Therefore the heart *thinks and sees*; it also *feels and desires*. All these powers of the soul – the person – are

³⁷ Op. cit., pg. 319.

³⁸ The Greek word here translated as “understanding” is *dianoia*, a cognate of *nous*, meaning “rational thought.”

renewed *in Christ* and act according to the knowledge of God by the prompting of the Holy Spirit. This knowledge is not primarily rational, gained by logical deliberation, but it is experiential, gained by the experience of the truth of God in trust and love because Christ and the Holy Spirit are living and dwelling in the hearts of the faithful. *But you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you. Now if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he is not His. And if Christ is in you, the body is dead because of sin, but the Spirit is life because of righteousness* (Rom. 8:9-10).

The cleansing of the *nous*, or purification of the heart, is the beginning of *theosis*. Herein the person's thinking, mental (i.e., *noetic*) sight, feelings, and desires are stripped of all that opposes God, and the person – both soul and body, because the heart acting by the *nous* directs the whole person – is re-oriented toward God to pursue life according to God's design.

The cleansing and purification of the *nous* and heart is also known as guarding the heart, or watchfulness. *Keep your heart with all watchfulness, for from these words are the issues of life* (Prov. 4:22). *Therefore gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and rest your hope fully upon the grace that is to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ* (1 Pet. 1:13). The process of *theosis* consists of the discernment and purification of thoughts in order for the person to war against the passions³⁹ and be attentive in seeking the will of God, which is prayer. Thus a person is liberated from slavery to sensuality, reason, and fantasy, and the energies of the soul are free to know God without distraction.⁴⁰

Purification leads to illumination, and illumination leads to sanctification, or glorification, that is, continual union with God. This way of *theosis* is demonstrated throughout the Scriptures and actualized within the Church, for it is the goal of our Faith, all the mysteries (i.e., sacraments) of the Church, and all our spiritual disciplines of body and soul.

³⁹ Lusts, desires, and habits contrary to the will of God.

⁴⁰ For a comprehensive summary of this teaching, see *Orthodox Psychotherapy*, by Bishop of Nafpaktos Hierotheos, trans. by Esther Williams, (Levadia, Greece: Birth of the Theotokos Monastery, 1994), and a shorter work by the same author, *The Illness and Cure of the Soul in the Orthodox Tradition*, trans. by Effie Mavromichali, (Levadia, Greece: Birth of the Theotokos Monastery, 1993).

b. Confirmed in God's Likeness by Keeping His Commandments

"We believe, in accord with the Fathers' teachings, that the image of God is the potential likeness of God and the likeness of God is the image in action. In the same way man, created by God and re-created through holy baptism by the Church, is potentially a person. And when, through personal struggle and mainly by the grace of God, he attains the likeness, then he is an actual person."⁴¹ Our Lord said, *For whoever does the will of God is My brother and My sister and mother* (Mk. 3:35). And in another place, *Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven. Many will say to Me in that day, 'Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?' And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from Me you who practice lawlessness'* (Matt. 7:21-23).

Participation in the divine life must be proven. *We glory in tribulations, knowing that tribulation produces perseverance; and perseverance, character; and character, hope. Now hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us* (Rom. 5:3-5). *My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience. But let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing...Blessed is the man who endures temptation; for when he has been approved, he will receive the crown of life which the Lord has promised to those who love Him* (Jam. 1:2-4, 12).

"For whom the Lord loves He chastens, and scourges every son whom He receives" (Prov. 3:12). *If you endure chastening (Gk., paideia), God deals with you as with sons; for what son is there whom a father does not chasten?...Now no chastening seems to be joyful for the present, but painful; nevertheless, afterwards it yields peaceable fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it* (Heb. 12:6-7, 11). The term *paideia* literally means "child-rearing," referring specifically to the correction necessarily given to children so that they mature and grow in the likeness of God the Father. The children of God engaged in *theosis* accept that correction and prove their desire to become more God-like through humility, obedience, and love.

Summarizing the experience of the spiritual life, the Elder Sophrony (1896-1993) described the process of *theosis* in terms of the history of the people of God, Israel (i.e., deliverance from Egypt, testing in the wilderness, and entrance into the Promised Land), concentrating especially on the second stage or aspect, the "long and difficult struggle" of life in which the believer "express(es) to God, under adverse conditions,

⁴¹ Op. cit., *Orthodox Psychotherapy*, pg. 162.

[his] appreciation of the wonderful gift of His grace.” “Man is deified according to how deeply and thoroughly he has lived through God’s ‘abandonment,’ that is, through the withdrawal of His grace (i.e., the withdrawal of the initial overwhelming experience of God’s grace, usually with great joy and peace). According to the Elder, the fullness of perfection must be preceded by the fullness of self-emptying.”⁴²

Continuing on this same theme after illustrating its reality from the parable of the Prodigal Son (Luke 15:11-32): “The general purpose of the second stage of the spiritual life is for us to prove that we are true children of the Heavenly Father...One way or another we must undergo this phase and suffer it, but there are two ways of doing so. One way is the lawful and therefore godly way; the other is the way of despondency, negligence, self-will, and pride...The wise way out of our desolation is to react after the manner of Abraham: to hope in God where, humanly speaking, there is no hope, and to humble ourselves under His mighty hand...Man is called to redeem the gift of life by offering a sacrifice – the sacrifice of his own corrupted will through obedience (cf. Rom. 12:1).”⁴³

God’s children prove their communion with Him in the keeping of God’s commandments. Jesus said: *If you love Me, keep My commandments...He who has My commandments and keeps them, it is he who loves Me. And he who loves Me will be loved by My Father, and I will love him and manifest Myself to him...If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our home with him* (John 14:15, 21, 22). *Circumcision is nothing and uncircumcision is nothing, but keeping the commandments of God is what matters* (1 Cor. 7:18). *Here is the patience of the saints; here are those who keep the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus...Blessed are those who do His commandments, that they may have the right to the tree of life, and may enter through the gates into the city* (i.e., the new, heavenly Jerusalem, that is, Paradise; Rev. 14:12; 22:14).

“Life of the soul is union with God, as life of the body is its union with the soul. As the soul was separated from God and died in consequence of the violation of the commandment, so by obedience to the commandment it is again united to God and is quickened.” (St. Gregory Palamas, *To the Most Reverend Nun Xenia*, 12).⁴⁴ Having been restored to life in Christ – through Holy Baptism, Chrismation, and Holy Communion – by being incorporated into Christ’s death and resurrection in forgiveness and newness of life, Christians demonstrate that they are, in fact, alive in the keeping of God’s

⁴² *Remember Thy First Love*, by Archimandrite Zacharias, (Dalton, Pennsylvania: Mount Tabor Publishing, 2010), pp. 37, 47.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, pp. 145, 146, 147.

⁴⁴ *Op. cit.*, *The Philokalia*, Vol. 4, pg. 297.

commandments! This is, after all, the Great Commission of our Lord: *Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you* (Matt. 28:19-20).

Do you see that faith was working together with [Abraham's] works, and by works faith was made perfect? (Jam. 2:22). *Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure* (Phil. 2:12-13). *Therefore, brethren, be even more diligent to make your call and election sure, for if you do these things you will never stumble* (2 Pet. 1:10).

What are these commandments? *'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.'* This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like it: *'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.'* On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets (Matt. 22:37-40). Christ says, *A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, as I have loved you, that you also love one another* (John 13:34). From the comprehensive command to love, all other commandments follow. "Almsgiving heals the souls incensive (i.e., feeling) power; fasting withers sensual desire; prayer purifies the intellect (Gk., *nous*) and prepares it for the contemplation of created beings. For the Lord has given us commandments which correspond to the powers of the soul" (St. Maximos the Confessor, *First Century on Love*, 79).⁴⁵

The person is proven in *theosis* by carrying out the entire ascetic and sacramental (i.e., mystical, or worship) life of the Church. Crucially, this life is fulfilled only when done *in love*, that is, by grace through faith in the love of God in Christ. *In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins. Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another* (1 John 4:10-11; cf. Eph. 2:4-10). "In everything that we do God searches out our purpose to see whether we do it for Him or for some other motive" (St. Maximos the Confessor, *Second Century on Love*, 36).⁴⁶

"We avoid evil through fear of punishment and take the attitude of a slave; or, seeking to obtain the reward, we observe the commandments for our own advantage and in this we are like hirelings; or else, for the sake of the virtuous act itself and out of love for [God] who gave us the law, we rejoice to be deemed worthy to serve a God so good and so glorious and we are thus in the dispositions of sons" (St. Basil the Great, *The Long*

⁴⁵ Op. cit., *The Philokalia*, Vol. 2, pp. 61-62.

⁴⁶ Ibid., pg. 71.

Rules, Preface).⁴⁷ Thus confirmation in God's likeness is a freely chosen service rendered to God out of love, especially considering the trials and hardships involved in such a task. Yet only through such struggle does the child of God attain complete purification from sin and passion becoming prepared to receive the vision of God's glory in permanence as the summit of all desire.

The way of *theosis* outlined above is the God-given way of realizing the goal of our existence: to be complete (i.e., perfect) in the image and likeness of God. "Bit by bit, by steps that appear insignificant, we shall make progress toward greater perfection, and ascend to become perfect men in Christ...The continual quest for penitence and compunction, the search for aids and means for affliction, weeping, and compunction, the zealous practice of these things without any way preferring oneself or performing the will of the flesh, quickly bring a man to make progress and to attain purification and impassibility...If I were to practice all the things that I have mentioned, I would receive the Holy Ghost, for He is the seed of Christ, through which we poor mortals become Christ's kin. When it falls into the good soil it 'bears fruit thirtyfold and sixtyfold and hundredfold' (Mk. 4:20), and this very thing is the kingdom of heaven. Apart from this all other things are useless" (St. Symeon the New Theologian, *The Discourses*, XXX.1, 10, 12).⁴⁸

Theosis, then, is the heart of Christianity; it is salvation and eternal life.

⁴⁷ *Saint Basil Ascetical Works*, trans. by Sister M. Monica Wagner, C.S.C., (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1962), pg. 227.

⁴⁸ *Symeon the New Theologian The Discourses*, trans. by C. J. deCatanzaro, (Mahwah, New Jersey: Paulist Press, 1980), pg. 318, 325, 327.

4. Samples of the Teaching of *Theosis* in the Writings of the Church Fathers

a. Justin Martyr (110-165)

“But as my discourse is not intended to touch on this point (i.e., the fall of Satan), but to prove to you that the Holy Spirit reproaches men because they were made like God, free from suffering and death, provided that they kept His commandments, and were deemed deserving of the name of His sons, and yet they, becoming like Adam and Eve, work out death for themselves; let the interpretation of the Psalm (i.e., 81[82]) be held just as you wish, yet thereby it is demonstrated that all men are deemed worthy of becoming ‘gods,’ and of having power to become sons of the Highest; and shall be each by himself judged and condemned like Adam and Eve. Now I have proved at length that Christ is called God.” (*Dialogue with Trypho*, 124)

b. Theophilus of Antioch (115-168)

“But someone will say to us, Was man made by nature mortal? Certainly not. Was he, then, immortal? Neither do we affirm this. But one will say, “Was he, then, nothing? Not even this hits the mark. He was by nature neither mortal nor immortal. For if [God] had made him immortal from the beginning, He would have made him God. Again, if [God] had made him mortal, God would seem to be the cause of [man’s] death. Neither, then, immortal nor yet mortal did [God] make him, but, as we have said above, capable of both; so that if [man] should incline to the things of immortality, keeping the commandment of God, he should receive as reward from Him immortality, and should become God (i.e., *a god*); but if, on the other hand, he should turn to the things of death, disobeying God, he should himself be the cause of death to himself. For God made him free, and with power over himself.” (*To Autolytus* II.27)

c. St. Irenaeus of Lyons (120-202)

“[God] declares, ‘I have said, You are gods; and you are all sons of the Highest.’ (Ps. 81[82]:6) But since we could not sustain the power of divinity, He adds, ‘But you shall die like men’ (Ps. 81[82]:7), setting forth both truths – the kindness of His free gift, and our weakness, and also that we were possessed of power over ourselves. For after His great kindness He graciously conferred good upon us, and made men like to Himself, that is in their own power; while at the same time by His prescience He knew the infirmity of human beings and the consequences which would flow from it; but through His love and His power, He shall

overcome the substance of created nature. For it was necessary, at first, that nature should be exhibited; then, after that, that what was mortal should be conquered and swallowed up by immortality, and the corruptible by incorruptibility, and that man should be made after the image and likeness of God, having received the knowledge of good and evil." (*Against Heresies* IV.38.4)

"...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." (*Against Heresies* V, Preface)

d. Clement of Alexandria (153-217)

"And now the Word Himself clearly speaks to you, shaming your unbelief; yea, I say, the Word of God became man, that you may learn from man how man may become God." (*Exhortation to the Heathen*, 1)

"It is then, as appears, the greatest of all lessons to know one's self. For if one knows himself, he will know God; and knowing God, he will be made like God, not by wearing gold, or long robes, but by well-doing, and by requiring as few things as possible." (*The Instructor* III.1)

"To be ignorant of the Father is death, as to know Him is eternal life, through participation in the power of the incorrupt One. And to be incorruptible is to participate in divinity; but revolt from the knowledge of God brings corruption." (*Stromata* V.10)

"And as, if one devote himself to Ischomachus, he will make him a farmer; and to Lampis, a mariner; and to Charidemus, a military commander; and to Simon, an equestrian; and to Perdices, a trader; and to Crobylus, a cook; and to Archelaus, a dancer; and to Homer, a poet; and to Pyrrho, a wrangler; and to Demosthenes, an orator; and to Chrysippus, a dialectician; and to Aristotle, a naturalist; and to Plato, a philosopher: so he who listens to the Lord, and follows the prophecy given by Him, will be formed perfectly in the likeness of the teacher – made a god going about in the flesh." (*Stromata* VII.16)

e. Hippolytus of Rome (170-236)

"And you shall be a companion of the Deity, and a co-heir with Christ, no longer enslaved by lusts or passions, and never again wasted by disease. For you have become God (i.e., *a god*); for whatever sufferings you underwent while being a

man, these He gave to you, because you were of mortal mold, but whatever it is consistent with God to impart, these God has promised to bestow upon you, because you have been deified and begotten unto immortality." (*Refutation of All Heresies* X.30)

f. Athanasius of Alexandria (297-373)

"For [the Son of God] was made man that we might be made God; and He manifested Himself by a body that we might receive the idea of the unseen Father; and He endured the insolence of men that we might inherit immortality." (*On the Incarnation of the Word*, 54)

"Therefore, if even before the world was made, the Son had that glory and was the Lord of glory and the Highest, and descended from heaven, and is ever to be worshiped, it follows that He had not promotion from His descent, but rather Himself promoted the things which needed promotion; and if He descended to effect their promotion, therefore He did not receive in reward the name of the Son and God, but rather He Himself has made us sons of the Father and deified men by becoming Himself man. Therefore He was not man and then became God, but He was God and then became man, and that to deify us. Since, if when He became man, God called the ancient people sons and made Moses a god of Pharaoh (Ex. 7:1; and Scripture says of many, 'God stands in the congregation of gods' [Ps. 81{82}:1]), it is plain that He is called Son and God later than they." (*Against the Arians* I.39)

"So I became free from [affections], being no more abandoned to their service because of the Lord who has made me free from them. For if you object to my being rid of that corruption which is by nature, see that you object not to God's Word having taken my form of servitude; for as the Lord, putting on the body became man, so we men are deified by the Word as being taken to Him through His flesh, and henceforward inherit life everlasting." (*Against the Arians* III.34)

g. Gregory [*the Theologian*] of Nazianzen (329-390)

"But the scope of our art is to provide the soul with wings, to rescue it from the world and give it to God, and to watch over that which is in His image, if it abides, to take it by the hand, if it is in danger, or restore it, if ruined, to make Christ to dwell in the heart by the Spirit, and, in short, to deify and bestow heavenly bliss upon one who belongs to the heavenly host." (*Oration 2 [In Defense of His Flight to Pontus]*, 22)

“Now the Creator Word, determining to exhibit [the whole riches of goodness], and to produce a single living being out of both – the visible and the invisible creations, I mean – fashions man; and taking a body from already existing matter, and placing in it a breath taken from Himself (cf. Gen. 2:7) which the Word knew to be an intelligent soul and the Image of God, as a sort of second world. He placed him, great in littleness on the earth; a new angel, a mingled worshipper, fully initiated into the visible creation, but only partly into the intellectual; king of all upon the earth, but subject to the King above; earthly and heavenly; temporal and yet immortal; visible and yet intellectual; halfway between greatness and lowliness; in one person combining spirit and flesh; spirit, because of the favor bestowed on him; flesh, because of the height to which he had been raised; the one that he might continue to live and praise his Benefactor, the other that he might suffer, and by suffering be put in remembrance and corrected if he became proud of his greatness. A living creature trained here and then moved elsewhere; and, to complete the mystery, deified by its inclination to God. For to this, I think, tends that Light of Truth which we here possess but in measure, that we should both see and experience the Splendor of God, which is worthy of Him who made us, and will remake us again after a loftier fashion.”
(Oration 38 [On the Theophany, or Birthday of Christ], 11)

h. Gregory of Nyssa (335-395)

“But, ‘the Mediator between God and men’ (1 Tim. 2:5), who through Himself joins the human being to God, connects to God only that which is worthy of union with Him. For just as He in Himself assimilated His own human nature to the power of the Godhead (i.e., the divine nature), being a part of the common nature, but not being subject to the inclination to sin which is in that nature (for it says: ‘He did no sin, nor was deceit found in His mouth’ [1 Pet. 2:22; Isa. 53:9]), so also, will He lead each person to union with the Godhead if they do nothing unworthy of union with the Divine.” *(On Perfection)*

i. Cyril of Alexandria (378-444)

“As it is said: ‘If we have been conjoined with him in the likeness of his death, so also shall we be in the likeness of his resurrection’ (Rom. 6:5). It follows, therefore, that He Who Is, the One Who Exists (cf. Ex. 3:14; John 8:58), is necessarily born of the flesh, taking all that is ours into himself so that all that is born of the flesh, that is us corruptible and perishing beings, might rest in him. In short, he took what was ours to be his very own so that we might have all that

was his. 'He was rich but he became poor for our sake, so that we might be enriched by his poverty' (2 Cor. 8:9). (*On the Unity of Christ*)

j. Maximos the Confessor (580-662)

"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. This is what St. Paul teaches mystically when he says, 'that in the ages to come He might display the overflowing richness of His grace' (Eph. 2:7)." (*First Century on Various Texts*, 62)

"The plan was for [God] to mingle, without change on His part, with human nature by true hypostatic (i.e., personal) union, to unite human nature to Himself while remaining immutable, so that He might become a man, as He alone knew how, and so that He might deify humanity in union with Himself. Also, according to this plan, it is clear that God wisely divided 'the ages' (Gk., *aiones*) between those intended for God to become human, and those intended for humanity to become divine...Since our Lord Jesus Christ is the beginning, middle, and end of all the ages, past and future, it would be fair to say that the *end of the ages* (1 Cor. 10:11) – specifically that end which will actually come about by grace for the deification of those who are worthy – *has come upon us* in potency through faith...For nothing created is by its nature capable of inducing deification, since it is incapable of comprehending God. Intrinsically it is only by the grace of God that deification is bestowed proportionately on created beings. Grace alone illuminates human nature with supernatural light, and, by the superiority of its glory, elevates our nature above its proper limits in excess of glory." (*To Thalassius* 22)

"If then the realization of the divine counsel is the deification of our nature, and if the aim of the divine thoughts is the successful accomplishment of what we ask for in our life, then it is profitable to recognize the full import of the Lord's prayer, to put it into practice, and to write about it properly." (*Commentary on the Our Father*, 1)

k. Symeon the New Theologian (949-1022)

“Let no one deceive you! God is light (1 John 1:5), and to those who have entered into union with Him He imparts of His own brightness to the extent that they have been purified. When the lamp of the soul, that is, the mind, has been kindled, then it knows that a divine fire has taken hold of it and inflamed it. How great a marvel! Man is united to God spiritually and physically, since the soul is not separated from the mind, neither the body from the soul. By being united in essence man also has three hypostases by grace. He is a single god by adoption with body and soul and the divine Spirit, of whom he has become a partaker. Then it is fulfilled what was spoken by the prophet David, ‘I have said, you are gods, and you are all sons of the Most High’ (Ps. 81[82]:6), that is, sons of the Most High according to the image of the Most High and according to His likeness (Gen. 1:26). We become the divine offspring of the Divine Spirit (John 3:8).” (*The Discourses* XV.3)

l. Gregory Palamas (1296-1359)

“All things participate in God’s sustaining energy, but not in His essence. Hence the theologians say the divine omnipresence also constitutes an energy of God. If we have conformed ourselves to God and have attained that for which we are created, namely, deification – for they say that God created us in order to make us partakers of His own divinity (cf. 2 Pet. 1:4) – then we are in God since we are deified by Him, and God is in us since it is He who deifies us. Thus we, too, participate in the divine energy – though in a different way from the universe as a whole – but not in the essence of God. Hence the theologians say that ‘divinity’ is also an appellation of the divine energy.” (*Topics of Natural and Theological Science*, 104, 105)

“By becoming the Son of man and sharing our mortality, [the Son of God] made men sons of God and partakers of divine immortality. Human nature was shown to have been created in the image of God, unlike the rest of creation, and this kinship with God was such that human nature could be joined to Him in one person. He honored this mortal flesh so that the proud spirits should not consider themselves, or be considered, favored above mankind or as deified because of being without bodies and apparently immortal. He united men and God, who were by nature separate, becoming a mediator through His twofold nature. What more can be said? If the Word of God had not been made flesh, the Father would not have been shown to be truly Father, nor the Son to be truly Son, nor would the Holy Spirit have been shown to be essence and hypostases

(i.e., personal), but would have seemed to be merely some sort of energy observed in creatures." (*Homily 16 [On Holy and Great Saturday]*, 19)

m. Nicodemus of the Holy Mountain (1749-1809)

"When our mind (Gk., *nous*; that is, the organ of spiritual perception) seeks to imitate these divine perfections, it will never neglect to walk in the endless way of godly progress and ascent. We will be ever stretching to reach those things that are ahead, and forgetting those things that are left behind, according to St. Paul (cf. Phil. 3:13). He who imitates these divine perfections, that is, he who is naturally in the image of God, will become willingly also in the likeness of God. For St. Gregory of Nyssa said: 'You possess the image of God by being rational; you receive the likeness of God by acquiring virtue. In creation I have the image, but I become through the exercise of my free will in the likeness of God.' Through this likeness, the mind is united with God; the image is united with the prototype and is deified or, what amounts to the same thing, is saved." (*A Handbook of Spiritual Counsel* XI.6)