

“I Said, ‘You are gods’”  
Salvation as Deification  
and  
the Early Patristic use of Psalm 82

by

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“I Said, ‘You are gods’”: Salvation as Deification and  
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A thorough treatment of how Christian salvation came to be referred to as deification in the early Greek fathers appears to be lacking. Apparently recent scholarship has been willing to accept the judgment of the nineteenth century that it arose somehow out of hellenistic influences on the church. It is however the contention of this author that in fact the terminology of salvation as “becoming god” was not introduced on account of the influence of hellenistic religions or philosophy but rather because of the influence of the church’s Christological argument primarily with the Jews. The idea of the believer becoming a god was thus so related to the church’s Christology from the beginning that in fact it could arise and did arise only as the church confessed Christ specifically as “God” and gave proof for this in teaching by reference to Psalm 82. This use of Psalm 82 as a Christological proof text provided the church with the language of salvation as “becoming god”. This terminology was then given meaning by reference to various second century soteriological ideas but especially to the idea of participation in the risen Christ through the indwelling Spirit. This paper attempts to trace the development and usage of the idea of Christian salvation as “becoming god” from the apostolic fathers to Athanasius and maintains that it was essentially a natural development from the church’s theological resources of the late first and early second centuries.

Dedicated to

Pastor James D. Bauer

and

Professor Kurt Marquart of Concordia Seminary Ft. Wayne, IN

for taking seriously and encouraging an overly eager student

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## INTRODUCTION

Judaism , the fountainhead from which Christianity flowed, was a religion of historic intervention, divine revelation and human salvation. Christianity, a religious heir begotten from

Judaism, preached an historical divine manifestation bringing about salvation. The church was conceived within and yet separated from Judaism by its confession that Jesus of Nazareth risen from the dead is the Son of God, Lord, and Christ. This was the basis of the Christian “hope of salvation.”<sup>1</sup> The earliest concept of salvation was early dominated by the eschatological expectation of the returning Christ as judge of the living and the dead who would rescue the church from the coming wrath of God. But the second coming did not exhaust the content of the early church's teaching concerning salvation. And as the *parousia* delayed and controversies arose it was the existential and Christological aspects of salvation that were more deeply explored. By the end of the first century the title “God” as applied to the risen Christ was becoming common in the church’s piety; the terminology and concept of deification followed soon thereafter. In the late second century Theophilus Bishop of Antioch, Irenaeus Bishop of Lyons and others gave it a place in Greek Christian soteriology so that when Clement of Alexandria wrote: “The Word of God became man, that you may indeed learn from a man how a man then may become God” in circa 200 AD, he was already making use of established Christian tradition.<sup>2</sup>

The phenomenon of describing Christian salvation as “becoming god” or “deification” has a place in Christian tradition well back into the second century. It has however been in large part long forgotten or ignored in Western dogmatics and theology so dominated by Latin legal thought and Augustinian language and constructs. To modern Western Christian ears the very idea of “deification” being a part of Christian theology is perhaps shocking if not heretical. The treatment of deification in modern Western theology and scholarship has generally been sparse

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<sup>1</sup> 1 Thess. 5:8.

<sup>2</sup> PG 8, 64. “Ο Lovgo" οJ tou' Qeou', a[nqrwpo" genovmeno": i{na dhV kaiV suV paraV ajnqrwvrou mavqh/", ph' pote a[nqrwpo" gevntai Qeov".” In regard to all citation of patristic authors: citation of Latin works follows the method of *A Glossary of Later Latin to 600 AD* (Oxford, 1949). Greek works are cited according to the conventions adopted in G.W.H. Lampe, *A Patristic Greek Lexicon* (Oxford 1961-8), xi-xlv. Editions used are indicated by standard abbreviations and are listed as primary sources in the bibliography.

and unfriendly at best. For example Harnack takes note of its widespread existence in the early authors but praises Augustine for bringing it to an end.<sup>3</sup> A conservative patristic scholar such as Philip Schaff does not even mention deification in his *History of the Christian Church* and passes by the soteriology of this period all together.<sup>4</sup> Seeberg barely mentions it except for a passing reference and a footnote in regard to the Alexandrian fathers.<sup>5</sup> In the Latin West salvation has always been thought of in terms of merit, grace, righteousness and related concepts like justification, a declaring righteous from sins. But in the East the concerns tended to be more concerned with questions of how mankind can be rescued from death and restored to fellowship with God. The issues of mankind as created in the image of God, the restoration of that image, and the destruction of death through the incarnation and resurrection dominate Eastern thought. Here the terminology of salvation never became so narrowly focused and included many different concepts which were part of the larger description of salvation.<sup>6</sup>

The issue continues to be a point of difference between East and West today. In the late 1970's the entire question of deification became an issue in Luther scholarship when representatives from the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland and the Russian Orthodox

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<sup>3</sup> Harnack, *History*, 3, 165 n.2.

<sup>4</sup> Schaff, 2, 588f. He states "The doctrine of the subjective appropriation of salvation including faith, justification and sanctification, was as yet far less perfectly formed than the objective dogmas; ... It was left to modern evangelical theology to develop more fully the doctrines of soteriology and subjective Christianity."

<sup>5</sup> Seeberg, *Lehrbuch*, I, 494.

<sup>6</sup> Lossky, an Eastern theologian, thus criticizes Western soteriology at least in its narrowest form: "It was Anselm of Canterbury, with his treatise *Cur Deus Homo*, who undoubtedly made the first attempt to develop the dogma of redemption apart from the rest of Christian teaching. In his work Christian horizons are limited by the drama played between God, who is infinitely offended by sin, and man, who is unable to satisfy the impossible demands of vindictive justice. The drama finds its resolution in the death of Christ, the son of God who has become man in order to substitute Himself for us and to pay our debt to divine justice. What becomes of the dispensation of the Holy Spirit here? His part is reduced to that of an auxiliary, an assistant in redemption, causing us to receive Christ's expiating merit. ... This redemptionist theology, placing all the emphasis on the passion, seems to take no interest in the triumph of Christ over death. The very work of the Christ-Redeemer, to which this theology is confined, seems to be truncated, impoverished, reduced to a change of the divine attitude toward fallen men, unrelated to the nature of humanity." Lossky points out several other images that form part of the presentation of the "mystery of our

Church engaged in conversations and found common elements in the concepts of deification and justification.<sup>7</sup> Helsinki University Professor Tuomo Mannermaa was the chief Lutheran spokesman and has since published some of the materials resulting from these exchanges. He has suggested that in fact there is common ground in Luther's concept of Christ being present in faith (*in ipsa fide Christus adest*) and the Eastern concept of deification.

With renewed interest in the West in Christian salvation as deification it seems all the more important to understand the origins of this concept. But a thorough treatment of how Christian salvation came to be called "deification" in the Eastern fathers appears to be lacking. Apparently recent scholarship has been willing to accept the judgment of the nineteenth century that it arose out of Hellenistic influences on the church. It is however the contention of this author that in fact the terminology of salvation as "becoming god" arose with the use of Psalm 82 as a Christological proof text and that this terminology was later given meaning by reference to the various second century soteriological models but especially to the idea of participation in the risen Christ through the indwelling Spirit. This paper attempts to trace the development and usage of the idea of Christian salvation as "becoming god" in the early patristic sources from the apostolic fathers to Athanasius. In doing so, it will pay special attention to the patristic use of Psalm 82:6f. which serves as the foremost proof text for Christian deification. The observation of the use of this text reveals not that Psalm 82 was used as an after-the-fact proof for a doctrine already existing but rather that the expression of Christian salvation as "becoming god" arose directly from the use of Psalm 82 as a Christological proof text.

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salvation": Christ as the Good Shepherd, the Victor over Satan and death, the Good Physician, "theology of the image", 99f.

<sup>7</sup> Marquart, 1996.

## **PAGAN PRECEDENTS OF DEIFICATION**

To deify is to make someone or something into a god. Greek contains many synonyms for such an idea: θεοποίησις, θεοποίησις, εἰκθεοποίησις, εἰκθεοποίησις to name a few possibilities. Such talk in the West, influenced by its Latin Christian heritage, most often brings to mind images of pagan religion and idol worship. But deification is ultimately concerned with the ontological, theological and philosophical gulf between God and man, divinity and humanity, the immortal and the mortal, and the possibility of this gulf in some manner being overcome or minimized. And this lies at the heart of most religions including Christianity. The historical question at hand is how it is possible that the Eastern theologians expressed their own soteriological teaching with a terminology of deification borrowed from the pagan nations within the context of Christian monotheism. In the Latin West this was not the case; in the Greek speaking East, however, the concept of deification became part of the accepted expression of the Christian faith within one hundred years of the authorship of the last New Testament documents. Any explanation of the origin of the Greek fathers' doctrine of Christian deification requires an inquiry into their sources of the terminology of deification and its associated ideas.

### **Ancient Cults and Religion**

“Deification” in the first place refers to the establishing of someone or something as an object of veneration and worship as a god. This type of deification was well known in the ancient world. It was recognized already by the Greeks that ancient men had deified objects in nature

giving them names and personalities and in this way the ancient gods were born.<sup>8</sup> But the deification of men, toward which the present topic points us, was also known especially in the deification of powerful rulers. Already in Egypt the Pharaoh was routinely considered a god when performing official acts of office. And the pharaohs quite often encouraged the idea by associating themselves with the gods through dress and art and other ostentation. Accordingly some pharaohs were deified after death and considered worthy of worship.<sup>9</sup> Alexander the Great was considered by some as the “thirteenth god.”<sup>10</sup> In Rome deification of the emperor gave birth to the emperor cult. During his lifetime Julius Caesar claimed the Caesar family had descended from the gods and was therefore worthy of “the reverence due to gods.”<sup>11</sup> After he was murdered at the age of 55 “his immediate deification, formally decreed, was more than a mere official decree since it reflected public conviction.”<sup>12</sup> Augustus was his successor and had a long and illustrious career. While he was still alive the Eastern Greek provinces, traditionally used to worshipping rulers, asked Augustus if they could worship him to which he agreed if only with some reservation.<sup>13</sup> He too received official deification upon his death in 14 AD.<sup>14</sup> And as death drew near, the emperor Vespasian in 79 AD joked, “Dear me! I must be turning into a god.”<sup>15</sup> On this basis it also became common to demand making sacrifice to the image of the ruling emperor as if reverencing a god.

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<sup>8</sup> Jaeger, *Theology of the Early Greek Philosophers*, 179.

<sup>9</sup> Wildung, *Egyptian Saints*, 3; 13ff. Even a few non pharaonic yet outstanding individuals like Imhotep achieved such a reputation as to be deified after death. See pp. 31ff.

<sup>10</sup> Clement, *Exhortation to the Heathen*, ANF 2, 199. See also Helmut Koester, *History, Culture and Religion of the Hellenistic Age*, Walter De Gruyter, NY: 1980. p. 33f.

<sup>11</sup> Suetonius, *The Twelve Caesars*, 1.6.

<sup>12</sup> Suetonius, *The Twelve Caesars*, 1. 88.

<sup>13</sup> Jones, *Augustus*, 150.

<sup>14</sup> Suetonius, *The Twelve Caesars*, 2.97.

The church sharply opposed this rather crude form of deification on the basis of its clear conflict with its monotheistic confession. And it was the Christians' refusal to venerate the gods and worship the emperor that at times provoked persecution. Pliny, writing to emperor Trajan in 113 AD, reported that he was dealing with those accused of being Christians by demanding they worship the image of the emperor with wine and incense.<sup>16</sup> From the document the Martyrdom of Polycarp, written in the mid second century, we read that the oath, "Caesar is Lord" (Kuvrio" Kai'sar) was demanded of the Christians, who were thereafter to offer incense and to denounce Christ.<sup>17</sup> As a result of the Christians' refusal to agree to this type of deification the Roman masses called them "ajqevoi", literally those without the gods or atheists.<sup>18</sup> In contrast, Clement of Alexandria's *Exhortation to the Heathen*, written shortly after 200 AD, can be read as a stark comparison between what he considers to be this impious pagan deification on the one hand and Christian deification on the other.<sup>19</sup> He concludes "those you worship are not gods"; on the contrary, "the Word of God became man, that you may learn from man how man may become god."<sup>20</sup> And so after revealing the immoral nature of the Greek religions Clement turns the epithet back upon the pagans: "Such are the mysteries of the atheists."<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Suetonius, *The Twelve Caesars*, 10.23.

<sup>16</sup> Coleman-Norton, *Roman State*, 2.

<sup>17</sup> Martyrdom 8. The oath here is "Ceasar is Lord" which is directly antithetical to the confession of the church: Kuvrio" jIhsou" (Jesus is Lord).,

<sup>18</sup> Martyrdom 9.

<sup>19</sup> He uses ejkqeivazein and qeivazein for pagan deification in many places such as ANF 2,175 (PG 8,75); 2,179 (PG 8,105); 2,186; 2, 190 (PG 8,164-165). At ANF 2,178 (PG 8, 96) in a particularly rich passage Clement uses qeopoiei'n, ajnadwlopoiei'n (making idols), and ejkqeiei'n. But this is simply a case of rhetorical *variatio* taking precedence over his preference for ejkqeiazei'n which also appears here. On the other hand Clement in this work only uses qeopoiei'n and gevnesqai qeov" to indicate Christian deification.

<sup>20</sup> ANF 2,182; 2,174.

<sup>21</sup> ANF 2, 177.

But if the Christians rejected such deification on the basis of monotheism which required veneration and worship of one God alone, it was suspect in a certain sense even in ancient times. Exalting a man to a place of divine worship was in some sense only a superficial deification. Great rulers might be considered worthy of some of the honor and veneration usually reserved for the gods and might even be called a god, but ultimately to the ancients a man clearly lacked the fundamental characteristic that distinguished a true god from a man: immortality. In this point, even those men called gods were not really considered completely divine. The pharaohs who declared themselves divine were nevertheless considered of a lesser divinity by the people “because the Egyptians held steadfastly to the fact that the position of an Egyptian god cannot be occupied by a mortal.”<sup>22</sup> The distinguishing characteristic even of the Greek gods of Olympus was not their knowledge or power or goodness, but their immortality. In Homer the “eternal gods” (aijeigenetavi qeoi) are synonymous with the “immortals” (ajqanavtoi). And “immortals” is used as the antonym of both “mortal men” (qnhtovi a[ndre]) and simply “men” (a[ndre]).<sup>23</sup> The Homeric man was completely mortal, resigned to meet dark Fate and have his soul flee to the shadowy underworld with no hope of immortality. And although the heroes might be “godlike” in appearance<sup>24</sup>, fierceness of battle<sup>25</sup>, and in other ways, ultimately complete mortality kept men distinct from the gods with no hope of being truly like them.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Wildung, 27.

<sup>23</sup> See for example Iliad I, 339. Also Iliad V, 441f. quoted below.

<sup>24</sup> e.g. Paris is qeoeidhv" (Il. 3.16); Telemachus is devma" ajqanavtoisin oJmoi'o" (Od. 3.468); Ganymede is ajntivqeo" (Od. 3.468). See Roloff, 1-13.

<sup>25</sup> e.g. Patroklos is daivmoni i\so" (Il. 16.768); Aias is ajntivqeo" (Il. 9.622).

<sup>26</sup> So Apollo warns even fierce “godlike” Diomedes: “ou[pote fu'lon oJmoi'on ajqanavtwn te qew'n, camaiV ejrcomevwn t j ajnqrwvpwn.” Roloff shows that the gods apparently had the power to remove mortality at least from the heroes and in this way make them divine but that this very rarely actually happened. *Gottähnlichkeit*, 83ff;

## The Mystery Religions

If Homer's Olympian gods did not suffer from a lack of immortality as did deified rulers, nevertheless, in the eyes of later Greek thinkers they lacked other characteristics which were expected of the gods. Even more, the Olympian gods had characteristics thought unfitting for deities. This impression led Xenophanes as early as the 6th century BC to criticize the epic portrayal of the gods by denying that a god's form is human as though possessing organs of sense, and by denying that the gods move here and there as Homer depicts them.<sup>27</sup> He and others laid the foundations for a massive change in Greek thought that led away from the epic mythology to the beginning of Greek natural philosophy. One of the most important developments along the way was the idea that man has an immortal soul that would permit him not so much to be set up as an object of worship as to become like God himself.

In Homer the dying hero "breaths out" his *yuchv*, soul or breath, which then flies to Hades where it has only a shadowy gloomy existence. In the sixth century BC, natural philosophy seems to have encountered a rise in the popularity of the mystery religions which emphasized a type of escape from everyday life and a potential immortality in humanity. The Elusinian mysteries promised the initiate a blessed existence. The Orphic mysteries too seem to have included promises for its adherents of a better state after death.

With this eschatology the mystics associated a call for purity of life in accordance with certain specified rules. ... Man sees himself as responsible for the future fate of his soul in the beyond and no longer feels fully at home in this world, whether he expects to obtain his salvation by mere adherence to outward ritual or rather by some ethical sanctification in the course of his wanderings. His soul, which has come from a higher and diviner sphere, is a transient guest in the house of the body. Only in dreams and in the hour of death, when released by the body, is it ever completely itself.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Jaeger, *Theology*, 43ff.

<sup>28</sup> Jaeger, *Theology*, 87.

It is here for the first time that the concept of the divinity of the soul makes a serious impact upon Greek thought. Thus it is possible for the first time to experience the divine in the inner soul, as in the Mysteries of Dionysus, where one sought to be possessed by the god himself. This in fact represents a type of deification which minimizes the gulf between the divine and human.

### **Greek Philosophy - Plato**

These ideas influenced the philosophers. And it is in Platonism that we clearly encounter a second type of deification. The Platonic system is built upon two basic concepts. The first is that of the archetypal Ideas or Forms which are the supreme elements of Being. All things in the world that are perceived by our senses are in a state of Becoming, imperfect images of the perfect Ideas. It is knowledge of the Ideas which is the highest good. Secondly, for Plato man has a divine soul or “potentiality for divinity” which is realized through “likeness to God” (οἰμοίωσις). In the most popular proof text later produced to demonstrate the concept of Platonic deification it is stated:

Therefore we ought to try to flee from hence as quickly as possible. Now to flee thus is likeness to God as far as possible; and this likeness is to be just and holy by means of prudence.<sup>29</sup>

Fleeing of the world and purification leads to likeness to God. Through study and contemplation the philosopher is to come to a knowledge based on the beholding of the eternal ideas. This practice leads him to think thoughts that are immortal and divine (ἀθάνατα καὶ θεῖα) and in this way lay hold of his share of immortality as far as he is able.<sup>30</sup> It is only the philosopher who truly accomplishes this goal. And so deification for Plato is not being set up as

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<sup>29</sup> Theaet. 176AB. Quoted in Norman, *Deification*, 20. cf. Rep. 613Af., 510B; Phdr. 252D, 253B, 247Ef.; Eim. 28C, 29E; Lg. 716Bf.

<sup>30</sup> Rist 17.

an object for worship by others but rather becoming like god in so far as we are able, kataV toV dunatovn.

The above examples reveal a number of different concepts from the pre-Christian centuries that could be classified as deification: the exaltation of rulers to worship, the partial union of divine and human through the practice of the mysteries, and finally a type of growing in likeness to the gods through intellectual contemplation. Yet none of these phenomena are as explicit in language as the Christian fathers in explaining salvation as “becoming god.” They do not provide ample explanation why the church, which earnestly opposed the idea of deification as a form of creature-worship, should in remarkable fashion turn about and describe Christian salvation as deification. The motivation for such a remarkable teaching is not found primarily in the pagan culture in which the church lived. Instead, we must turn to inner motivations within the church itself to find the cause of this unique soteriology.

## THE EARLY CHRISTIAN THEOLOGICAL CONTEXT

In order to observe the annexation of the concept of deification into the landscape of Christian theology it is necessary to examine the early second century doctrinal context of the church. It is further necessary to contemplate even what is meant by “Christian doctrine” so early in the history of the church. The age of councils and dogmatic decrees had not yet arrived. Nevertheless, examination of the sources reveals that the church believed, taught, and confessed in such a way that separation from Judaism and rejection of paganism was ultimately inevitable. That which was expressed in worship, prayers, and hymns demonstrated what the church believed. That which was believed was taught in the church’s preaching, catechesis, missionary kerygma, and in anti-heretical tracts. Finally, the short Christological confessional formulas served as standards for right faith and teaching and served to distinguish between orthodoxy and heresy. “Christian doctrine” can be found then in the continuous process of interplay of worship, teaching, and confession as these were drawn from the scriptures.<sup>31</sup> Here we need not discern so much the shadowy details of the period’s doctrine but rather the central issues which concerned the church and its teachers at this time. Afterwards, we will then turn to Irenaeus and the Alexandrian fathers in order to observe how deification terminology came to serve as the vessel for bearing forth the contents of the Greek fathers’ soteriology.

### **Monotheistic Ground**

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<sup>31</sup> “What the church of Jesus Christ believes, teaches, and confesses on the basis of the word of God: this is Christian doctrine.” Pelikan, *Catholic Tradition*, 1.

Monotheistic devotion to Yahweh and the corresponding rejection of all other gods was the foremost characteristic of the Hebrew religion.<sup>32</sup> In the Old Testament, this devotion is commanded by God, preached by the prophets, and expressed by Israel's only creed the Shema: "Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God is one Lord."<sup>33</sup> Later this was expressed in even shorter formulas using the phrases "one God" or "one Father." So toward end of the prophetic period Malachai cries out: "Have we not all one father? Has not one God created us?" in order once again to admonish Israel to turn away from the pollution of false gods.<sup>34</sup>

The church's inheritance of the monotheistic faith of Israel can be seen on the pages of the New Testament in language and content. In Mark 12:29 Jesus is quoted as giving the Shema and its explanation as the "first of all the commandments" upon which the scribe answers that he agrees that "there is one God; and there is none other but he."<sup>35</sup> The influence of the Shema's creedal strength is found otherwise in the New Testament in the substitutionary form of "God is one" or "one God".<sup>36</sup> "We know that an idol is nothing in the world," says Paul, "and that there is none other God but one. For though there be that are called gods, whether in heaven or in earth, (as there be gods many, and lords many), but to us there is but one God, the Father, of whom are

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<sup>32</sup> The main themes that run through the great monotheistic texts of the Old Testament are that: 1 - the Lord God is one Lord beside him there is no other and therefore all other gods are idols, 2 - the Lord is the Maker of the heavens and the earth and all the hosts in them, and 3 - the Lord is Israel's God and Savior and they must not worship other gods.

<sup>33</sup> kuvrio" oJ QeoV" hJmw'n ei|" ejstin (Deut. 6:4). Neufeld, 35.

<sup>34</sup> Mal. 2:10. The Septuagint reads: "OujciV qeoV" ei{" e[ktisen uJma"; oujciV pathVr ei{" pavntwn uJmw'n;" cf. the response given by Jerusalem's religious leaders in John 8:41: "We be not born of fornication; we have one Father, even God. (e{na patevra e[comen toVn qeovn.)"

<sup>35</sup> Dt. 6:4-5.

<sup>36</sup> "ei|" oJ QeoV"". Neufeld, *Earliest Christian Confessions*, 38 ff. See Mk. 10:18; Rom. 3:30; Gal. 3:20; Eph. 4:6; James 2:19.

all things.”<sup>37</sup> As it moved out into the Hellenistic Greek world filled with known and unknown gods, the church accepted and used the current phraseology of Judaism to express its monotheistic faith.

In the battle against the synagogue, the apostolic fathers and apologists openly confessed their agreement with the monotheism of the Jews even while rejecting Judaism.<sup>38</sup> In the battle against paganism, the church confessed One God, the Creator of all things, against the gods of the nations. And in their works, the apologists tried to show that the philosophers too at times had put forward monotheistic ideas.<sup>39</sup> The traditional confession of “one God” was a fundamental element of the church’s catechesis and rule of faith.<sup>40</sup> It served as a basic datum in faith, teaching, and confession and thus in the development of Christian doctrine.<sup>41</sup> Monotheism was the soil upon which the edifice of the church would be built. Any doctrine of Christians “becoming gods” would have to be expressed in such a way as to be reconciled with the monotheistic confession of only One God.

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<sup>37</sup> The juxtaposition here of the expressions “one God” and “one Father” follows Old Testament precedent and is found again in Ephesians 4:6. cf. “ei|” gavr ejstin u|mw'n o| pathVr o| oujravnio.” in Mt. 23:9.

<sup>38</sup> cf. *Diogn.* 3, 2; *Just. dial.* 11. At the end of the first century the word *pantokrator* (Almighty) suddenly takes its own place as a shorthand expression of the monotheistic content of the Christian faith. Having been used only one time in the rest of the New Testament documents the word finds use nine times in the Apocalypse. Its appearance there in the circumstances of heavenly worship and doxology indicates that the word had found its way into the church’s liturgy by influence from the Old Testament. The word is used often in the LXX to translate the Hebrew *toab\*x+* in the monotheistic phrases “God of Hosts”, “the Lord God of Hosts” or “Lord of Hosts”. Already in the earliest of the apostolic fathers, “Almighty” has become a common title and not limited strictly to monotheistic confession.

<sup>39</sup> cf. *Just. coh. Gr.* 15ff.

<sup>40</sup> See *Iren. Proof* 3. where the baptismal faith is explained as being that “the eternal and everlasting One is God.” In chapter 4 Irenaeus says that on the basis of the creation “one must believe that there is one God, the Father.” See again in chapters 5 and 6. Again in *haer.* 1.10.1 Irenaeus says that the faith in “one God, the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven, and earth” is part of the faith of the church. cf. *haer.* 3.4.2; 3.16.6. Tertullian in *de praescriptione* says that in the rule of faith is that “there is one, and only one, God, and He the creator of the world ...”, CCL 1, 197f., (see Kelly, *Early Christian Creeds*, 85).

## The Old Testament and the Christological Hermeneutic

The other great inheritance that Christianity received from Judaism was its Hebrew Bible, the Old Testament scriptures. But the church did not simply accept and use the Old Testament traditionally as it had the expressions of monotheism. Luke tells us that after the resurrection the risen Jesus demonstrated to his disciples from the Old Testament that the Christ had “to suffer these things,” “and beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the scriptures concerning himself.” (Lk 24:27). Examination of the New Testament and post-apostolic period shows that the church read the Old Testament in a new way and found therein prophetic proof of their faith. The first Christians were convinced that the risen Jesus was the Christ and the Son of God and, examining the Old Testament in accordance with the *analogia fidei*, they found there the fundamental basis for their worship, proclamation, and confession.<sup>42</sup>

The results of this new reading can be seen already in the first recorded sermons of the church. In Acts 2 it states that Peter preached to a crowd of the people gathered in Jerusalem for the festival of Pentecost. He explained to them that the strange behavior of his fellow Christians was not drunkenness but rather was in accordance with the Joel 2:28-32 which speaks of the Lord God pouring out his Holy Spirit on all people. The prophetic text speaks of men and women

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<sup>41</sup> Thus Kelly states: “The doctrine of one God, the Father and creator, formed the background and indisputable premise of the Church’s faith. Inherited from Judaism it was her bulwark against pagan polytheism, Gnostic emanationism and Marcionite dualism.”, *Early Christian Doctrines*, 87.

<sup>42</sup> So Harnack: “The origin of a doctrine concerning the Messianic hope, in which the Messiah was no longer an unknown being, but Jesus of Nazareth, along with the new temper and disposition of believers was a direct result of the impression made by the person of Jesus. The conception of the Old Testament in accordance with the *analogia fidei*, that is, in accordance with the conviction that this Jesus of Nazareth is the Christ, was therewith given. Whatever the sources of comfort and strength Christianity, even in its New Testament, has possessed or does possess up to the present, is for the most part taken from the Old Testament, viewed from a Christian stand-point in virtue of the impression of the person of Jesus.”, *History of Dogma*, I, 42. So also Goppelt: “The disciples had confessed him [Jesus] as the Christ without demonstrable proofs, since they recognized in faith that his work was the work of the God of the Covenant and since they had found through him the eschatological fellowship with God which had been promised for the time of salvation. This confession of faith now required conscientious rescrutiny. Consequently, the attention of the disciples shifted from the incarnation of Jesus back to the scriptures, and after gaining support from this source they turned again to the present.”, *Apostolic Times*, 39.

receiving the Spirit, of signs and wonders before the great Day of the Lord, and finally concludes with the statement that “all who call on the name of the Lord will be saved.” Peter then presents his audience with the recent events of the death and the resurrection of Jesus. He introduces the text of Ps. 110:1 to show that the title “Lord” was an appropriate title for the risen Jesus (Acts 2:34-36; Cf. Mt. 22:43; Mk 12:36). And finally Peter called for repentance and baptism whereby the Holy Spirit would be received.<sup>43</sup> Examination of other texts confirms that these elements stood in the closest connection during the church’s earliest days: the church’s kerygmatic preaching of Jesus’ death and resurrection, the confession of the risen Jesus as “Christ” and “Lord”, the keen awareness of the promised Holy Spirit working among all who were baptized, and the expected return of the risen Lord as Judge of the world and Savior of his people. All of this, however, the church demonstrated from the Old Testament as that which had to take place as the fulfillment of the Hebrew scriptures leading to the final eschatological establishment of the kingdom of God.<sup>44</sup>

The conviction of the correctness of this reading of the Old Testament would remain the source of strength for Christian doctrine for years to come. The opposition of the Jews would lead Paul to write that their “minds were made dull, for to this day the same veil remains when the Old Testament is read. It has not been removed, because only in Christ is it taken away.” (2 Cor. 3:13ff.) One hundred years later Justin in the same spirit could tell Trypho the Jew that the passages about Christ “are contained in your Scriptures, or rather not yours, but ours.”<sup>45</sup> Thus the Old Testament with the Christological hermeneutic would remain the rule and norm of Christian doctrine beyond the second century and would give the church the source material for its first

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<sup>43</sup> Critical scholars such as Goppelt and Dodd agree that “Peter’s sermons in Acts ii-v, being based on tradition, reproduce correctly the outlines of the earliest apostolic *kerygma*.”, Goppelt, *Apostolic Times*, 37.

<sup>44</sup> Acts 1:3; 1:6; 3:18; 8:12.

hymns and liturgical expressions of faith which would remain an ever powerful influence in the development of Christian doctrine.<sup>46</sup>

### **Christological Foundation**

If monotheism was the ground upon which it was constructed, the church stood upon the foundation of its faith in the person of the risen Jesus.<sup>47</sup> It was originally this faith that led to the church's unique understanding of the Old Testament which in turn supplied the terminology and conceptual framework for the church's Christological faith. It was this faith which it expressed in its teaching and confession and soon in the liturgy of its corporate worship.

The church's teaching about Christ came to be known as the "Gospel" or good news about Christ.<sup>48</sup> In the early preaching of the gospel, essential elements of Jesus' earthly ministry were lumped together in various presentations.<sup>49</sup> We can see this already in the first and most simple sermons recorded in Acts.<sup>50</sup> The persistence of such preaching can be seen also in Paul's

<sup>45</sup> Just. *dial.* 29.2. Accordingly Pelikan states that "what the Christian tradition had done was to take over the Jewish Scriptures as its own.", *Catholic Tradition*, 19.

<sup>46</sup> It is in fact a fault that while many scholars have recognized the importance of the Christian reading of the Old Testament in the development of Christian liturgy and doctrine, those few who have commented on deification have little recognized how difficult it would have been for the concept of deification to have been introduced into the second century church without strong Old Testament support.

<sup>47</sup> So the Pauline imagery: 1 Cor. 3:10ff.; Eph. 2:20.

<sup>48</sup> This term permeates the New Testament and is modified in various places with the genitives tou' qeou' and tou' Cristou' (or tou' kurivou) ("of God" and "of Christ") as indicating the subject and object of the gospel (Mk. 1:14; Rom. 1:1; 15:16; 2 Cor. 11:7; 1 Co. 9:12; 2 Co. 9:13; 1 Th. 3:2). The corresponding verb eujaggelivzomai means to proclaim good news and takes as its direct object Christ, Jesus, Jesus and the resurrection or the Son of God (Neufeld, p.21). Related word families are khruvssw ( khruvgma, kh'rux ), kataggevlw, ajpaggevlw, martuvromai, and lalevw.

<sup>49</sup> Scholars call this the *kerygmatic* preaching of the church.

<sup>50</sup> By comparison of Acts 2:22ff., 3:13ff., 4:11ff., 5:30ff. it has been shown that the earliest preaching consisted of a central proclamation, "You put Jesus to death, however God raised him and by doing so exalted him to be the Christ", evidence from the scriptures for these ideas, reference to the eyewitnesses of the resurrection, a call to repentance and an offer of salvation and finally, most likely, a reference to the end judgment and restoration of all things (Acts 3:19ff; 10:42ff.) (Goppelt, *Apostolic Times* 37). This basic outline of preaching is often reflected in the New Testament by bipartite formulas

epistles.<sup>51</sup> And Kelly demonstrates that the influence of such *kerygmatic* preaching continued well into the second century in the catechetical teaching of the church and finally was combined with the trinitarian outline of the baptismal interrogations and thus began the formation of the later Trinitarian creeds.<sup>52</sup>

Even more important to the topic of deification are the primitive Christological confessions. The church came to ascribe to Jesus the titles of Christ and Lord from its earliest days.<sup>53</sup> The title “Christ” or Messiah was one that was not well defined in first century Judaism

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with different motifs of contrast such as descending/ascending, death/resurrection or death/life (Neufeld, *Earliest Confessions*, 46). In other places formulaic expressions are used to portray basic elements of the Gospel such as God sending his Son, the Son dying, being killed or crucified, sometimes with a phrase indicating “for whom” he died, and a last phrase concerning God raising him from the dead (ejgeivrw, or ajnivsthmi). In the first sermon of Peter on Pentecost we read: “This man was handed over to you by God's set purpose and foreknowledge; and you, with the help of wicked men, put him to death by nailing him to the cross. But God raised him from the dead” (o}n oJ qeoV" ajnevsthse) (Acts 2:23). In the second sermon of Peter in Acts we see: “You killed the author of life, but God raised him from the dead” (o}n oJ qeoV" h[geiren ejk nekrw'n) (Acts 3:15). In Acts 4:10 Peter states: then know this, you and all the people of Israel: “It is by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified but whom God raised from the dead, that this man stands before you healed.” See also Acts 10:39f. In Acts 13 Paul says: “When they had carried out all that was written about him, they took him down from the tree and laid him in a tomb. But God raised him from the dead” (oJ deV qeoV" h[geiren aujtoVn ejk nekrw'n).

<sup>51</sup> Even when Paul is speaking about some other topic he will introduce these common formulae into his text. For example Paul writes in Romans 8:34: “Who is he that condemns? Christ Jesus, who died -- more than that, who was raised to life (CristoV" jlhsou" oJ ajpoqanwvn, ma'llon deV ejgerqeiv" ) -- is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us.” In 1 Thess. 4:14 Paul writes in c. 51 AD: “We believe that Jesus died and rose again.” (pisteuvomen o{ti jlhsou" ajpevqanene kaiV ajnevsthe). In 1 Cor. 15:3ff., Paul explicitly denotes the main content of his “gospel” which he preached by reference to an earlier hymn:

that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures,  
and that he was buried,  
and that he was raised according to the scriptures  
and he appeared.

Regarding this text Kelly concludes, “This is manifestly a summary drawn up for catechetical purposes or for preaching: it gives the gist of the Christian message in a concentrated form.”, 17.

<sup>52</sup> See the examples given in Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines*, 62ff.

<sup>53</sup> cf. Acts 2:36. The titles “Lord” and “Christ” occur together with “Jesus” over 90 times in the New Testament and especially in the Pauline corpus including the earliest books. The usage there is indicative of usage that has gone on for a long time which would easily take us back into the earliest days of the church.

although there was a general Messianic expectation.<sup>54</sup> But the church used the title of Christ (indeed the title became part of Jesus' proper name in Hellenistic Christianity at a very early date) and defined it in terms of their new reading of the Old Testament. Jesus was taught to be the Anointed One sent by God who had fulfilled the scriptures by dying "for us" and by being raised from the dead.<sup>55</sup>

The title "Lord" came to serve in one of the church's basic confessions, "Jesus is Lord".<sup>56</sup> This confession did not intend a simple equating of the Old Testament *kyrios* (kuvrio", Lord) and Jesus as a numerical identity. Instead it showed that the exalted Jesus as Lord of the church (1 Cor. 1:2; Romans 10:12; cf. "our Lord"), Lord of Creation (1 Cor. 8:6), Lord of all (Acts 10:36), Lord of glory (1 Cor. 2:8; James 2:1) and Lord of lords (Rev. 17:14; 19:16) should be ascribed

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<sup>54</sup> Charlesworth, *The Messiah*, 11. Also Neufeld: "Thus, the term messiah, when used in the first Christian century of the expected deliverer, ... did not in itself convey any specific meaning, except that the one so designated was a special appointee of God, consecrated for some specific task. Therefore, the precise meaning of the title when applied to Jesus by Christian writers, must be sought from the context in which the word is used rather than from its established significance.", *Earliest Christian Confessions*, 93.

<sup>55</sup> One of the earliest and most enduring criticisms of the church's confession of Jesus as the Christ was that the church at the same time taught that he suffered and died (Pelikan, *Catholic Tradition*, 174). As undefined as "Christ" was, it was entirely unacceptable to the Jewish faith that the Christ should suffer and die (cf. Cullmann, *Baptism*, 19). In the New Testament as well as in the mid second century, the church tried to prove that the Christ had to suffer and die according to the scriptures. cf. Acts 3:18; 13:29; 17:3; 26:23; Just. *1 apol.* 48 and 50. Already in Mark 8:31 Jesus is predicting his suffering. In Luke 24 Jesus explains to his followers that the Christ had to suffer. We see these ideas of suffering ( *paqei'n* ) or dying ( *ajpoqnhvskw* ) and the Christ connected in many places in the New Testament from the earliest bipartite formulas to the later books (e.g. Rom. 8:17; 8:34; 14:9; 1 Cor. 8:11; 15:3; 2 Cor. 1:5; Phil. 3:10; Hebr. 9:26; 1 Pet. 1:11; 2:21; 4:1) Compare the second century Jew Trypho being portrayed as convinced that the Christ had to suffer but still objecting that this ought not happen by crucifixion, and also Justin's subsequent attempt to convince him: Just. *dial.* 89ff.

<sup>56</sup> cf. Rom. 10:8; 1 Cor 12:3; Phil. 2:11. This is true at least among the Hellenistic Christians for whom the Jewish concept "Christ" meant little. Texts such as Acts 2:36 and Romans 1:1ff. show how closely the confession of Jesus as Lord is related to the content of the resurrection and ascension proclaimed in the *kerygmatic* preaching. *jhsou" Kuvrio"* is a confession of the gospel essentials *o{ti jhsou" ajpevqanen kaiV ajnevsth* (1 Thess. 4:14).

the divine name as the “image” of God the Father (2 Cor. 4:4; Col. 1:5). Jesus accordingly received the corresponding praise, worship and prayer appropriate to the divine name.<sup>57</sup>

The full force of the church’s worship of Jesus as Lord can be seen in the way that the Old Testament was used in the church to establish its hymns and prayers to Christ. It has been recognized by scholars for quite some time that the New Testament contains pieces of the early church’s hymns sung to Christ of which Philippians 2:6-11 is a prime example.<sup>58</sup> Here the clearly monotheistic text of Isaiah 45:22ff. in which every knee bows to the “Lord God” has been used in striking fashion for the church’s worship to indicate that every knee will bow and confess “Jesus is Lord.” A similar liturgical use of the eschatological text of Joel 2:32 is found in Romans 10:13 and Acts 2:16ff. In these texts we see that the church applied the Old Testament’s “calling on the name of the Lord” to the risen Jesus. The church’s conviction of the propriety of ascribing the divine name to Christ also combined with the church’s hope for the return of the risen Lord by

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<sup>57</sup> Compare Marshall, *Origins*, 37ff. Moule, *Christology*, 36ff. Neufeld, *Earliest Christian Confessions*, 51ff.

<sup>58</sup> The existence of such hymns at the beginning of the second century is confirmed by the pagan author Pliny who in 112 AD mentions such hymns in a letter to Emperor Trajan, saying that Christians “were accustomed to meet before daybreak, and to recite a hymn antiphonally to Christ, as to a god.” (Pliny, *Letters*, 10). Many New Testament scholars are convinced that in the New Testament we have fragments of some early “Christ-hymns.” These include Phil. 2:6-11; Eph. 5:14; 1 Tim. 3:16; Heb. 1:2-3. Of these at least Phil. 2:6-11 is generally acknowledged to be pre-Pauline. Hurtado gives the following summation of the New Testament evidence in regard to Christ-hymns:

There are several good reasons to think that the practice of singing hymns in Christ’s honor goes back to the earliest stratum of the Christian movement. First, the religious enthusiasm, involving eschatological joy and excitement arising from the conviction that Jesus had been exalted to heavenly glory, which generated such compositions seems to have characterized Christian groups from the very beginning. Furthermore, several New Testament passages (e.g., Phil. 2:5-11) can be taken as glimpses of the worshipping life of Jewish Christian groups. This means that the hymnic celebration of Christ cannot be restricted to gentile churches. Moreover, nothing indicates any awareness by Paul that the worship practices in his churches were essentially different from what was familiar among Jewish churches, including those in Palestine. If the worship of the risen Christ was an innovation of the gentile churches, and completely impossible and unacceptable among Palestinian Jewish Christians (as Bousset claimed), then where is the evidence of any criticism of the supposed innovation from the later groups? There is well-known evidence of differences between Paul and some in Jerusalem over other aspects of his gentile mission (e.g., circumcision of Gentiles), but there is no hint that the veneration of Christ reflected in the singing of hymns devoted to him was regarded as strange or suspicious. (Hurtado, *One God One Lord*, 102ff.)

means of the Aramaic prayer *Maranatha*, which means “Our Lord, Come.”<sup>59</sup> Thus the church offered prayer and worship to the risen Jesus demonstrating in what sense they ascribed the Old Testament name “Lord” to him. With Jesus being worshipped as Lord and ascribed divine worship it was but a small step for the church to call him “God.”

The question of when and in what manner the church started calling Jesus “God” and its subsequent development is fundamental for any discussion of the church’s later use of deification terminology as there first had to be a confession of Jesus as God before there could be a doctrine of Christians becoming gods.<sup>60</sup> The confessions of Jesus as Christ and Lord surely found it difficult to keep their full context and meaning as the church spread out into the non-Jewish world. More and more in the second century in the interest of communicating to a Hellenistic world, the teachers of the church described the risen Jesus as “God” and “Logos” (Word) which were terms of divinity in Greek religion and thought. The real question here is not whether that which the church had accomplished with its confession and worship of Jesus as Lord was equivalent to calling him “God.”<sup>61</sup> The question is at what point did the piety of the church commonly include the practice of addressing Jesus as “God.”

<sup>59</sup> This very important phrase indicates that already in the early Aramaic speaking Christian communities in the first decade after the crucifixion Jesus was addressed in prayer as Lord. In the *Didache*, which if not itself quite early certainly contains very early material and seems to have been written in Palestine, the phrase “Maranatha” appears in the context of the Lord’s Supper as part of the prayers of the liturgy (Did. 10). (Marshall, *Origins*, 102) This corresponds with Paul’s “until he comes” (1 Cor. 11:26) in his description of the Lord’s Supper. This would suggest that the word played a part in the early liturgy of the church and for this reason was known even to the Greek speaking churches of Paul and perhaps used by them. It was common enough to be referred to twice in the New Testament. (1 Cor. 16:22; Rev. 22:20).

<sup>60</sup> Pelikan, *Catholic Tradition*, 155.

<sup>61</sup> The ascription of divinity in the earliest Christological titles is now generally accepted. But the difficulty in reconciling Jesus as “God” with the monotheistic confession of “One God” who is the Father became clear only after the practice had become commonplace in the church and gave rise to the subsequent monarchian and Arian heresies that only became settled by the council of Nicea of 325 AD and the half century thereafter. Afterwards, the predication of the title “God” to the risen Jesus and the technical description of what was meant by the *homoousios* gave rise to the Christological controversies of the following centuries.

Despite the divine honor ascribed to the risen Lord as already demonstrated and the confession of Thomas recorded in John 20:28, there is little indication that Jesus was commonly addressed as “God” in the Pre-Pauline church. From the earliest date Jesus was known as the “Son of God” and this title permeates the New Testament documents from early to late.<sup>62</sup> But in only a handful of instances is he referred to as “God”.<sup>63</sup> At some point in the late first century, however, the practice became much more common among the churches. Though Harnack is eager to prove that “qeov”, even without the definite article, was not a usual designation for Jesus, he himself shows that Jesus is not uncommonly called “qeov”, in the early second century and that this comes not unexpectedly from the influence of the Old Testament upon the liturgical worship of the church.<sup>64</sup> The early genesis and wide acceptance of this practice is demonstrated especially from the remnants of the battle between the church and Judaism over the suffering Christ. This conflict led very early to the union of the concepts of Jesus as God and as the “suffering Servant.” In this way the early Christian tradition became rich with expressions such

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<sup>62</sup> Harnack: “The earliest tradition not only spoke of Jesus as kuvrio", swthvr, and didavskalo", but as “oJ uJioV" tou' qeou"“, and this name was firmly adhered to in the Gentile Christian communities.”, *History of Dogma*, I, 186. In examining the title Son of God as applied to Jesus one gets the feeling that he has come to the bedrock of New Testament Christology. For without it there is no confession of Jesus as Lord or Christ. Luke places the origin of this title already at Jesus’ birth at the announcement of the angel (Lk 1:32ff) and otherwise there is broad agreement concerning the proclamation of the Father at Jesus’ baptism at the beginning of his ministry (Matt. 3:17, Mark 1:11, John 1:34ff., 2 Pet. 1:17). It is thus the only one of the main Christological titles divinely attributed to Jesus in the New Testament. Its close association with the title “Christ” is seen in those locations where the New Testament writers almost make them synonyms. For example, in Matthew’s reporting of Peter’s confession we have: “Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God.” (Matt. 16:16; cf. John 6:69; Jn 11:27). Likewise the high priest asks Jesus if he is the “Christ, the Son of God.” (Matt. 26:63; cf. Mk 14:61) We also find the two in parallel coming from the mouths of demons and of Satan (Matt. 4:3; Lk 4:41). And in the epistles the phrase “Jesus Christ, the Son of God” or some close variant (e.g. 1 Cor. 1:9; 2 Cor. 1:9; Rom. 1:3; Heb. 5:5; 1 Jn 1:3) occurs several times.

<sup>63</sup> Theologians commonly refer to 1 Tim. 3:16; Acts 20:28; John 1:1; John 20:28; Heb. 1:8; Rom. 9:5. The claim that the New Testament never refers the title “God” to Jesus reflects the model developed by the *Religionsgeschichtliche Schule* of an evolutionary Christology which starts with the man Jesus and results in the title “God” being ascribed to Jesus only in the second century.

<sup>64</sup> Harnack I, 187 n. 1. Also there: “It is manifestly therefore in liturgical formulae of exalted paradox, or living utterances of religious feeling that Christ is called God.” cf. the Didache’s “Hosanna to the God of David” (10) in the Eucharistic liturgy as an example. (Bouyer, 117)

as “the blood of God” (Acts 20:28), “the crucifying of God”, “the flesh of God”, and “the death of God”<sup>65</sup> It was thus by the mid second century that the church had so firmly established the practice of calling Jesus “God” that it could describe salvation as “becoming god.”<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>65</sup> An examination of the New Testament shows how much influence the “Servant” chapters of Isaiah had upon the early church. Isaiah 42:1 is a “Servant” text closely related to Jesus’ baptism and contains the Father’s declaration of Jesus as his Son. Isaiah 52:13ff. is the classic expression of the “Suffering Servant.” Harnack admits that “precisely the union of suffering (blood, death) with the concept “God” - and only this union - must have been in Christendom from a very early period.” *History of Dogma*, I, 187 n. 1. Pelikan states that “such phrases as “God is born,” “the suffering God,” or “the dead God,” had so established themselves in the unreflecting usage of Christians that even Tertullian, for all his hostility to the Monarchians, could not avoid speaking this way.” *Catholic Tradition*, 177. cf. *Ign. Rom.* 6.3; *Eph.* 1.1; *Tat. orat.* 13; *1 Clem.* 2.10.

<sup>66</sup> For examples of calling Christ “God” see: *Diogn.* 7; *Ign. Eph.* 1; 7; 18; 19; *Rom.* 1; 3; *Smyrn.* 1; 10; *Polyc.* 8; *Just. 1 apol.* 63; 64; *dial.* 34, 56, 59ff.

### **Christian Salvation and the Eschatological Hope**

From its inception a fundamental part of the Christian faith and message was that of salvation through Jesus as the Christ. From the Old Testament the church showed that all who called upon the name of Jesus would be saved (Joel 2:32; Acts 2:21). And so the early preaching emphasized repentance and being baptized in the name of Jesus the Lord as bringing forgiveness of sins and thus preparation for entering the kingdom when Christ returned. All eyes were looking for the return of Christ and the establishment of his kingdom. The eschatological hopes of the church were fundamental in that they were founded on the preaching of Christ himself and the messianic passages of the Old Testament.<sup>67</sup> They were universal in that the church everywhere was originally focused on the imminent return of the messiah. Jesus was expected to return from the right hand of the Father, raise the dead, and carry out his appointment as “judge of the living and the dead” (Acts 10:42) “that each one may receive what is due him for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad.” (2 Cor 5:10). For the righteous this meant a participation in the messianic kingdom which had been promised as an inheritance to the believers (1 Cor. 6:9; Gal. 5:21; 1 Th. 2:12). When he comes, Christ, who conquered death by his resurrection and became the “firstfruits”, would also raise those “who belong to him” (1 Cor. 15:20ff.). Salvation was ultimately then described as the defeat of death and the reception of the kingdom and eternal life.<sup>68</sup> In this hope the church was united. Any doctrine of salvation as deification would in some way have to be reconciled with this basic Christian hope.

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<sup>67</sup> “Eschatology” derives from the Greek *toV e[scaton* meaning the last or final thing.

<sup>68</sup> See Harnack, *History of Dogma* I, 84f.

## THE PRIMITIVE ELEMENTS OF THE DEIFICATION TRADITION

It is a commonplace in the West for those who criticize the Eastern theologians for their doctrine of deification to blame this concept on the incorporation of Hellenistic ideas into Christian doctrine. Such critics of the East are able to point in particular to the Greek philosophic and religious concepts examined earlier which closely parallel this doctrine of the Eastern Fathers. The History of Religions School thus put the entire notion under the category of the Hellenization of Christianity.<sup>69</sup> On the other hand, some scholars who have studied the concept of deification in specific fathers have desired to present some type of defense for them and tried to point out as it were a biblical basis for this doctrine.<sup>70</sup> But I am aware of no one who has actually attempted to trace the historical development of the concept of deification in the fathers as a natural development from the church's theological resources of the late first and early second centuries.<sup>71</sup> And yet by the beginning of the fourth century the doctrine is so firmly established as traditional that Athanasius can refer to it as a known truth in the Arian controversy in order to argue that Christ had to be *ὁμοούσιον* with the Father because only by being God could he make men gods. Despite the lack of scholarly precedent, it is possible to discover the likely source of origin of the terminology of deification and at least sketch the formation of this

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<sup>69</sup> Harnack is well aware of it and traces it from Theophilus onward. He produces several passages in 3, 164 n. 2. He states that the main points of deification are: "(1) that redemption, as seen in its final effect, was conceived to be the abrogation of the natural state by a miraculous transformation of our nature; that accordingly (2) the supreme good was definitely distinguished from the morally good; and that (3) and atonement was not included in it.", *History of Dogma*, 3, 165.

<sup>70</sup> Norman, *Deification*, 25ff.; Rines, *Concept of Deification*, 44ff.

<sup>71</sup> Lattey, in response to Butterworth, has pointed out that deification as presented in Clement of Alexandria is based upon the earlier Christian tradition but provides no real proof of this statement. Lattey, "The Deification of Man", 260-262.

tradition from its elemental parts as found already at the beginning of the second century up to Athanasius' day.

### **Introduction of the Terminology and Concept of “Becoming a god”**

In light of the church's active monotheistic confession against the Greek religions and the Roman emperor cult any use of deification terminology by the church would seem to have been entirely unlikely.<sup>72</sup> The Epistle to Diognetus bids the pagans to “come and contemplate, not with your eyes only, but with your understanding, the substance and the form of those whom ye declare and deem to be gods” and concludes that “for this reason you hate the Christians, because they do not deem these to be gods.”<sup>73</sup> So the crowds cry out against Polycarp “this is the teacher of Asia, the father of the Christians, and the overthrower of our gods.”<sup>74</sup> Justin Martyr roundly decries pagan deification when he points to the temptation of the devil in Paradise of Adam and Eve that “you will be like gods” as the original source of pagan polytheism. He says that in addition to disobedience it was the belief in other gods and the desire that Adam and Eve “themselves could become gods” which burdened “the soul of man like a disease.”<sup>75</sup> Thus Clement of Alexandria simply follows the tradition before him when he completely rejects the pagan deification of the heavens, of people, of passions, and of bodily shapes and calls it all “the manufacturing of gods.”<sup>76</sup>

However, in spite of this explicit rejection of the pagan desire to make gods and become gods, by Clement of Alexandria's day, less than 150 years after the work of Paul, Christian

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<sup>72</sup> It is in fact chiefly monotheistic concerns to this day which rule out the use of such language in Western Christendom.

<sup>73</sup> *Diogn.* 2.1 and 2.6. (ANF 1, 25).

<sup>74</sup> *M. Polyc.* 12.2 (ANF I, 41).

<sup>75</sup> *Just. coh. Gr.* 21. (ANF 1, 281). “οἱ ἀνακρωποῦντες ἐαυτοὺς θεοὺς γενέσθαι θέλουσιν πιστεῦσαι:”

salvation was already able to be described, without charge of innovation, as “to be deified.”

Justin Martyr, a mere 100 years after Paul, is the earliest extant author to use this terminology and yet in such a way as to suggest its even earlier usage. It is precisely in the context of rejecting the deification of the emperors “who die” and live immoral lives that he goes on to claim that “those only are deified who have lived near to God in holiness and virtue.”<sup>77</sup> The idea of the making of new gods was well-known to the Hellenistic mind, nevertheless, within the boundaries of the church which so earnestly maintained a monotheistic confession and so vehemently denounced pagan deification, the use of the idea as a doctrine would have been shocking as an innovation. It therefore seems highly unlikely that Justin would simply introduce it casually where unnecessary under those circumstances. However, as much as Justin would seem to follow a precedent, the phraseology “to be deified” can not be traced back any earlier and presents an apparent dead end.

This would be the end of our historical search except that there are indications that the use of “to be deified” is derived directly from the earlier and more wide spread practice of describing Christian salvation as “to become a god.” The use of technical deification terminology such as “qeopoiē'n” and “qewsiv” to refer to Christian salvation is really a later phenomenon. It is seen once in Justin as already examined and then not until Clement of Alexandria at the beginning of the third century.<sup>78</sup> And significantly, salvation as “to be deified” is all but unknown among the Latin authors until much later. However, it appears that the idea of Christian salvation as “becoming god” is an earlier and more wide spread phenomenon within the teaching of the church. In Theophilus, Bishop of Antioch (d. 181) we find nothing of “deification” but we read what seems to him to be quite a natural statement:

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<sup>76</sup> Clem. *prot.* 2. (ANF I, 178) “qew'n peripoihtikoV” (PG 8, 96).

<sup>77</sup> Just. *1 apol.* 21. (ANF I, 170).

<sup>78</sup> All other occurrences of this terminology are in the context of rejection of pagan deification.

But some one 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 He had made him immortal from the beginning, He would have made him god. Again, if He had made him mortal, god would seem to be the cause of his death. Neither, then, immortal nor yet mortal did He make him, but, as we have said above, capable of both; so that if he should incline to the things of immortality, keeping the commandment of God, he should receive as reward from Him immortality, and should become 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.<sup>79</sup>

Similar statements of “becoming a god” are found in Irenaeus, Clement, and the authors who follow them. When we look for statements of “becoming a god” in the authors before Justin, however, explicit evidence of the terminology is slight. But important and impressive evidence is found among the Latin authors. The West is in fact aware of a “becoming a god” terminology. This indicates that this was accepted earlier and to a wider extent than the strictly technical terminology of “deification” found later in the East. In fact it is the Latin evidence that demonstrates how it became possible to speak of salvation as “becoming gods.” For the Latin reticence toward such language has limited its use to the context of the original traditional source of such language. In each case the description of Christians “becoming gods” is found in the context of a defense of the divinity of Christ through use of Psalm 82.

John 10 indicates that Psalm 82 played a role in applying the title “Son of God” to Jesus. In that chapter the Jews approach Jesus to stone him because by claiming he was “one with the Father” and the “Son of God” he made “himself God” (10:33).<sup>80</sup>

Jesus answered them, “Is it not written in your Law, ‘I have said you are gods’? If he called them gods, to whom the word of God came -- and the scripture cannot be broken -- what

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<sup>79</sup> *Autol.* 2.27 (ANF 2, 105). Also: “And God having placed man in Paradise, as has been said, to till and keep it, commanded him to eat of all the trees,--manifestly of the tree of life also; but only of the tree of knowledge He commanded him not to taste. And God transferred him from the earth, out of which he had been produced, into Paradise, giving him means of advancement, in order that, maturing and becoming perfect, and being even declared a god, he might thus ascend into heaven in possession of immortality. For man had been made a middle nature, neither wholly mortal, nor altogether immortal, but capable of either.” (*Autol.* 2.24).

<sup>80</sup> ο{ti suV a[nqrwpo" w]n poiei!" seautoVn qeovn.

about the one whom the Father set apart as his very own and sent into the world? Why then do you accuse me of blasphemy because I said, 'I am God's Son'?"<sup>81</sup>

When the church came to regularly call Jesus "God" in the late first and early second century this was challenged especially by the synagogue. Under these circumstances this Psalm quickly found its place again as a proof text. By following the very argument of the Lord Himself the teachers of the church could insist that this form of address was scriptural. Thus in his argument against the heretic Praxeas Tertullian quotes the common proof text and says: "if the scripture has not been afraid to designate as gods human beings, who have become sons of God by faith, you may be sure that the same scripture has with greater propriety conferred the name of the Lord on the true and one-only Son of God."<sup>82</sup> Likewise the Pseudo-Cyprianic work *Against the Jews*, written before the middle of the fourth century, lines up a long list of traditional proof texts including Psalm 82 in proving from the Old Testament that Christ is God and comments: "Because if those who were just and complied with the divine precepts are able to be called gods, how much more then Christ the Son of God is God."<sup>83</sup> Irenaeus too shows Christ is God by quoting Psalm 82: "'God stood in the congregation of the gods, He judges among the gods.' He [here] refers to the Father and the Son, and those who have received the adoption; but these are

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<sup>81</sup> Jn 10:34ff. "Oujk e[stin gegrammevnon ejn tw'/ novmw/ u]mw'n o{ti jEgwV ei\pa, QeoiV ejste; eij ejkeivnou" ei\pen qeouV" proV" ou}" o] lovgo" tou' qeou' ejgevneto, kaiV ouj duvntai luqh'nai h] grafhv,"

<sup>82</sup> *Prax.* 13. (ANF 3, 608). "ut si homines, per fidem filios Dei factos, deos Scriptura pronuntiare non timuit, scias illam multo magis vero et unico Dei Filio Dei nomen iure contulisse" (PL 2, 169). Tertullian later quotes John 10:34f., including the quote of Psalm 82, in this same work while discussing the relationship of Christ as God to the Father as God. *Prax.* 22 (ANF 3, 618). In rather the opposite sense from the above Tertullian, by the figure of *sermocinatio*, puts Psalm 82 in Marcion's mouth in order to argue that since mere men are called "gods" it means nothing that Christ should also be called such. Tertullian then presents a counter-argument showing that Christians confess Christ to be God on account of his common nature with the Father unlike these "gods" in the Psalm. Even with this turn of logic it is clear that Psalm 82 had an undeniable place in the Christological argument of the church, even in the West. It appears to have been an argument well enough known that it had to be countered by Marcion and perhaps others. *Marc.* 1, 7. (PL 2, 253).

the Church. For she is the synagogue of God, which God - that is, the Son Himself - has gathered by Himself.”<sup>84</sup> Scholars have long noted the quotation of Psalm 82 by the later fathers as a biblical proof text for their doctrine of deification. But without exception, as far as this author has seen, this has been viewed as searching for a proof text for an already accepted teaching. None have sufficiently considered the use of this text in the early Christological argument of the church and the possibility that the Old Testament itself gave rise to the speaking of Christians as gods because this was the premise of a common Christological argument. Because of the combined authority of the Old Testament and the argument of the Lord, as quoted in the Gospel of John, it would only be a matter of time before the premise of the Christological argument was able to take its own place in the church’s teaching. Thus the evidence indicates that the Psalm’s first use was Christological in nature and that it was a result of this use that Christian salvation came to be expressed as “becoming god.”

Viewed with this insight and the evidence produced we can approximately date the rise of the use of the concept of Christian salvation as “becoming god.” Psalm 82 must have become important as a Christological proof text already by the late years of the first century as its inclusion in the Gospel of John shows. The evidence would seem to suggest then that the “become god” phraseology arose in the first half of the second century and that this expression was fairly wide spread and used quite often by late in that century. The fact that Irenaeus and Theophilus do not use technical “deification” terminology and the use of Psalm 82 by Justin, Irenaeus, Tertullian, Marcion, and Ps. Cyprian points to the validity of this conclusion. However, even having traced the origin of the explicit statement of deification to something as fundamental as the Christological proof text of Psalm 82 does not in itself explain the rise of an entire theology

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<sup>83</sup> Ps. Cypr. *adv. Iud.* 2.6. (PL 4, 702) “Quod si iusti qui fuerint et praeceptis divinis obtemperaverint dii, dici possunt, quanto magis Christus Deus Dei Filius?” Date given in *A Glossary of Later Latin to 600 AD*. Souter, Alexander. Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1949. xiv.

in the East. While the Psalm would allow Christian teachers to speak of “becoming god” without charge of innovation, and in fact required them to do so, it does not explain the content of such a statement.

The phraseology of “becoming a god”, while unquestionably valid in the minds of the fathers on account of its source, was without a specific meaning. Only the terminology itself could have come from the Psalm. There were in fact no other texts and no other pieces of the apostolic tradition which spoke directly of “becoming a god” (other than Jesus’ own use of the text in John 10) which could supply a meaning for this text within the monotheistic and Christological matrix of the church’s faith. The result of this situation was that the Christological use of Psalm 82, as a side effect, introduced the terminology of “becoming god” into the church in reference to believers. This terminology was without specific meaning but was clearly required by the use of the Psalm. Teachers then explained the meaning of this terminology with content borrowed from existing soteriologies. But the soteriological models of the second century were not monolithic. Thus the meaning of deification was never truly monolithic. In fact at least three different soteriological models can be explicitly identified giving meaning to what exactly it meant to “become a god.”<sup>85</sup>

### **“Becoming a god” through Immortality**

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<sup>84</sup> *haer.* 3.6.1. (ANF 1, 419).

<sup>85</sup> See Harnack, *History of Dogma*, 2, 244 where among other places he discusses the three prevailing second century models of salvation as the eschatological, the rational, and redemptive. Harnack considers the eschatological as the earliest and regarded salvation as closely tied to the return of Christ and the establishment of the messianic kingdom. The rational derives directly from Greek thought and views salvation as in some way coming through knowledge and contemplation. In this view Christ is emphasized as teacher and revealer of truth. Finally, Harnack considers the third model as a salvation of redemption or a real change of nature whereby death is put away and immortality is gained. Here Christ’s death, resurrection and the sacramental presence in the church is emphasized. While Harnack’s view may be questioned at some points, it can not be denied that these basic descriptions of salvation are primary in the early authors and each have their own related terminology. However, all three are often found in individual authors. It is precisely these three ideas that are expressed as “becoming god” in the second century fathers as we will see.

The first and most simple idea that gave meaning to Psalm 82:6 appears to have been the early Christian eschatological hope for resurrection and the inheritance of the messianic kingdom. The translation of this to “becoming a god” amounts in fact to little else than the connection of a Greek concept with the terminology of salvation. What had been expressed in the New Testament as resurrection from the dead, life, and eternal life (hJ aijwvni" zwhv) had quickly become signified with a term common in Greek religion and philosophy, “immortality” (ajqanasiva).<sup>86</sup> Immortality was the goal of the mystery religions and in a sense the objective of the philosophers but now this was realized through Christ’s own victory over death and his impending return.<sup>87</sup> By the late first or early second century “immortality” had become an accepted shorthand expression of Christian salvation in the Greek churches.<sup>88</sup> But to the Greek mind “immortality meant divinization, and things immortal were called qeov” (god).<sup>89</sup> Thus to

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<sup>86</sup> In all of the New Testament this word appears in only one place in relation to salvation. Paul in speaking of the return of Christ says: “Behold, I show you a mystery; We will not all sleep, but we will all be changed, In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet: for the trumpet will sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality. So when this corruptible will have put on incorruption, and this mortal will have put on immortality, then will be brought to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory.” 1 Cor. 15:51-54. This text ties together the ideas of immortality and “incorruption” (ajfqarsiva) which also became a synonym for salvation. For example, the martyr Polycarp gives thanks that he has a part in “the resurrection of eternal life, both of soul and body, through the incorruption [imparted] by the Holy Ghost.” (*M. Polyc.* 14.2). The opposite of “incorruption” is “corruption” (fqorov) which Paul uses to describe the natural state of man (1 Cor. 15:42; 15:50; Rom. 8:21). Importantly a compound form of the word diafqorav comes into the New Testament from the LXX and Psalm 16 in relation to Christ’s resurrection where it is stated to God that “you will not let your Holy One see decay.” (Ps. 16:10).

<sup>87</sup> Ignatius speaks of Christ’s “abolition of death” (qanavtou katavlusi) (*Eph.* 14.3) and states that he “died for us, in order, by believing in His death, you may escape from death.” (*Tral.* 2.1).

<sup>88</sup> Clement in c. 96 AD speaks of “Life in immortality” (35.2) (zwhV ejn ajqanasiva/). Ignatius in c. 112 AD says that “For this end did the Lord suffer the ointment to be poured upon His head, that He might breathe immortality into His Church.” (*Eph.* 17.1). cf. *Magn.* 6.2; *Philad.* 9.2; *Polyc.* 2.3. In the middle of the second century the martyr Polycarp is described as “now crowned with the wreath of immortality.” (*M. Polyc.* 17.1) and as having “acquired the crown of immortality” (19.2). This word is quite common in Justin and later authors.

<sup>89</sup> Burnaby, J. *Amor Dei*. London 1938. Quoted by Rist, John M., 216f. Also Linforth: “If by any process, a mortal becomes ajqavnato" it is immaterial whether you call him immortal or divine.”, 26.

become “immortal” was in fact to be deified.<sup>90</sup> It is not surprising then that the resonance in Greek thought created between immortality and being divine should cause the church at a very early date to supply the meaning for Psalm 82 simply with reference to the fundamental Christian hope of eternal life or becoming immortal.<sup>91</sup> This in fact appears to be the case in two of the earliest deification texts from Justin and Theophilus of Antioch which were previously considered where being deified and being made a god correspond simply to becoming immortal.

### **“Becoming a god” through Knowledge and Contemplation**

A second explanation of what “becoming a god” meant could be provided by reference to Greek natural theology which held great influence over some of the philosophically minded fathers. This theology presents human beings as having an immortal soul and thus as in some way inclined by nature to the divine. Man is created rational and of free will and thus requires only these attributes to choose between good and evil and realize the potential of the divine inherent in human nature. “Such a being has really to do with God only in his capacity of *creator* and *rewarder*. ... the whole of religion could be, - as already in the case of the Apologists - and was, looked at from the point of view of *knowledge* and *law*.”<sup>92</sup> Man thus was responsible for whatever he could earn. The only divine assistance he might receive is knowledge whereby his free will might make the right choice. This general idea of salvation through knowledge (gnw'si", gnosis) was in fact destined to play a large role in the development of Christian doctrine. The concept appears to have resonated with the Old Testament idea of the knowledge of God and thus

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<sup>90</sup> cf. 1 Tim. 6:16 where God is described as “He who alone has immortality.” (ο[μ] μόνος ε[σ]τιν α[ι]ωνίου ζ[ω]ης.)

<sup>91</sup> The question may in fact arise as to whether the idea of immortality itself might have given rise to the terminology of “becoming god” rather than Psalm 82. But especially the evidence of the Latin authors, who know of “becoming god” only in the context of the Christological argument of Psalm 82, would indicate that terminology came from the use of Psalm 82. But certainly the idea of immortality must have presented the earliest and most obvious explanation of such terminology to the early church.

found acceptance in the church very early.<sup>93</sup> For example, the eucharistic prayers in the Didache show just how soon and how far this Hellenistic influence came into the church when thanks are given to the Father “for the knowledge and faith and immortality which you have made known unto us through your Son Jesus.”<sup>94</sup> The church was unable to resist the compelling correlation of ideas and the understanding of the gospel as gnosis and baptism as enlightenment became widespread. Teachers in the church soon came to make use of the entire complex of Hellenistic ideas corresponding to the model of salvation by knowledge.<sup>95</sup> Particularly among those authors most influenced by Greek philosophy the focus on rationality, and knowledge became quite narrow.<sup>96</sup> In this way Christ is reduced to little more than the Teacher of Truth sent to make known the “immortal knowledge” and salvation is turned to rationalistic moralism.<sup>97</sup> In the Apologists and in Clement of Alexandria this model reached its greatest influence.

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<sup>92</sup> Harnack, *History of Dogma*, 3, 266f.

<sup>93</sup> This had a messianic connection also through Is. 11:2; 9 which speaks of the Branch of the Lord as full of the Spirit of the knowledge of the Lord. Through him “the earth will be full of the knowledge of the LORD.” (LXX: ejneplhvsqh hj suvmpasa tou' gnw'nai toVn kuvrion).

<sup>94</sup> *Did.* 10.2.

<sup>95</sup> Such as “contemplation”, “ascent” etc.

<sup>96</sup> A glance at Tatian *orat.* 7 for example shows how easily this entire idea could resonate with Hellenistic philosophy and even become dominated by it: “For the heavenly Logos, a spirit emanating from the Father and a Logos from the Logos-power, in imitation of the Father who begat Him made man an image of immortality, so that, as incorruption is with God, in like manner, man, sharing in a part of God, might have the immortal principle also.” This influence is seen in all the second century authors but especially in the apologists reaching a pinnacle in Clement of Alexandria who could in reality be called a Christian philosopher. So Harnack concludes that “the Pauline formula, ‘Where there is forgiveness of sin, there also is life and salvation’, had for centuries no distinct history. But the formula, ‘Where there is truth, perfect knowledge, there also is eternal life’, has had the richest history in Christendom since its beginning.” *History of Dogma*, 1, 170 n.1. The ultimate result, according to Harnack is that “the moralistic view, in which eternal life is the wages and reward of a perfect moral life wrought out essentially by one’s own power, took the place of first importance at a very early period.” *History of Dogma*, 1, 171. Harnack’s comment is somewhat overdone in the interest of amplifying the Hellenization of the church. However, the moralizing tendency is seen in lesser or greater degrees in most of the authors of this period and when we come to the authors among whom the gnosis model was strongest, Harnack’s comment is quite valid.

<sup>97</sup> So Clement: “Through him (Jesus) the eyes of our hearts were opened; through Him our foolish and darkened mind springeth up unto the light; through Him the Master willed that we should taste of the immortal knowledge.” Take for example Justin’s rationalistic explanation of the way of salvation: “We

In some authors, especially Clement of Alexandria, this soteriological model would in fact be used to give meaning to the phraseology of “becoming god.” But the weakness of this theological model is its lack of a place for the historical Jesus Christ and his earthly work. Its enthusiastic optimism in regard to human nature was never lost by the Greek fathers, but its narrow scope could not successfully express the content of what the church believed and confessed concerning Christ. Therefore with time this model lost some of its vigor and became mixed with the idea of salvation as redemption which emphasized more clearly the sinful state of man, the incarnation and the death and resurrection of Christ. Thus despite Clement, a description of deification as ascent to the divine through knowledge could not stand alone and became a lesser part of the tradition of deification.

**“Becoming a god” through Participation in God - Indwelling Christ / Indwelling Spirit**

A third explanation of what “You are gods” might mean was provided by referring to a soteriology focused on the incarnation. This entire soteriology in many ways was opposed to the model of natural theology in that it emphasized the gift of the gracious coming of Christ, his earthly work, the death and resurrection, that is, it in fact views salvation as a redemption from the natural state of corruption in which human nature found itself. Human nature was thus viewed as in a state of bondage to sin, death, and the devil, and was unable to help itself. And salvation was a healing or restoration of human nature. Therefore participation in Christ as God-become-man provides the means for the believer to in fact become god.

The primitive elements of the idea of participation in Christ came from the early doctrines of the adopted sonship of the believer and of the indwelling Christ / indwelling Holy Spirit within

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consider that, in like manner, those who choose what is pleasing to Him are, on account of their choice, deemed worthy of incorruption and of fellowship with Him. For the coming into being at first was not in our own power; and in order that we may follow those things which please Him, choosing them by means of the rational faculties He has Himself endowed us with, He both persuades and leads us to faith.” (*1 apol.* 10 [ANF I, 165]). Notice Harnack’s comments on how in this model the historical Jesus Christ loses all importance and is entirely subjected to the cosmological Logos. Harnack *History of Dogma*, 3, 270f.

the believer. The church taught and confessed that Christ had ascended to the right hand of the Father and that it was from there that he would return. Until then was a time of the “hope of salvation” and waiting (Rom. 8:19-25; 1 Cor. 1:7; 1 Th. 5:8; 1 Pet. 1:3) for the great eschatological event. But this period of waiting was not necessarily a time of separation.<sup>98</sup> The Gospels record Jesus’ promise to be with his church (Matt. 28:20) and the promise to send the Holy Spirit to his church who would not only reveal the truth to them but also dwell with them and be in them (John 15:26; John 14:17). The connection between Christ and God’s Spirit as they would be present in the church takes us back again to the foundations of the church’s faith in Christ as the Messiah. Most important in this regard is the church’s application to Jesus of certain Old Testament texts which demonstrate the extraordinary relationship between God’s Spirit and the Messiah. These texts were fundamental in the development of the church’s faith, worship, and confession in the first century and beyond. One of the most important texts was the “Servant” text of Isaiah 42:1 and its connection with Jesus’ baptism.<sup>99</sup> The Gospels record that after Jesus was baptized a voice was heard from the Father saying: “This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.” This is reported as a fulfillment of Isaiah 42 in order to demonstrate that Jesus was the Messiah-Servant and had received the approval and commission of the Father.<sup>100</sup> But the dove-like descent of the Holy Spirit upon Jesus is also a fulfillment of the

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<sup>98</sup> Some scholars have over emphasized the eschatological nature of the early Christian hope and have missed another central concept in the earliest strata of the New Testament, namely the indwelling Spirit/indwelling Christ.

<sup>99</sup> The text of Isaiah reads: “Behold my servant, whom I uphold; mine elect, in whom my soul delighteth; I have put my spirit upon him: he shall bring forth judgment to the Gentiles. He shall not cry, nor lift up, nor cause his voice to be heard in the street. A bruised reed shall he not break, and the smoking flax shall he not quench: he shall bring forth judgment unto truth. He shall not fail nor be discouraged, till he have set judgment in the earth: and the isles shall wait for his law.”

<sup>100</sup> Mk 1:10f.; Mt. 3:16f.; Lk 3:22. See Cullmann, *Baptism*, 17 for a discussion of *πατήρ* vs. *υἱοῦ* in this text. In discussing the relationship of this text of the Synoptic Gospels to the Isaiah text, Cullmann has demonstrated its import to the messianic office of Jesus: “He is distinguished from the mass of other baptized people, who are baptized for their own sins, as the One called to the office of the Servant of God who suffers for all others. ... Thus the Baptism of Jesus points forward to the end, to the climax of his life,

prophecy which states that God set his Spirit upon his Servant. Jesus' baptism is one of the few events reported in all four gospels indicating that it was a pivotal point in Jesus' earthly ministry and the descent of the Spirit upon him is central in all accounts. In this way the strong connection between the Spirit and the Messiah is first established in the life of Jesus and continues to be an important part of his Messianic identity throughout the Gospels. For the Gospels the Messiah is inconceivable apart from the Holy Spirit.<sup>101</sup>

The fact that the Spirit was with Jesus was not important simply as a fulfillment of the scriptures. It was important in what it meant for the church. The essential connection between the Holy Spirit and the Messianic office of Jesus and secondarily between these to Jesus' baptism foreshadows how closely the Spirit and baptism would be aligned in the life of the Church. The church believed that Jesus, having received the promised Spirit from the Father (Acts 2:33) could promise to give to his Church (John 15:26; 16:13; Gal 3:14; Eph. 1:13) a baptizing "with the Holy Spirit and with fire" (Mt. 3:11; Lk. 3:16). Pentecost was viewed as a fulfillment at least in part of that hope.<sup>102</sup> In Acts 2:38 Peter interprets the manifestation of the Spirit on Pentecost in terms of Joel 2:28ff. and says to the people, Be "baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus

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the Cross, in which alone all Baptism will find its fulfillment. There Jesus will achieve a general Baptism. In his own Baptism in the Jordan he received commission to do this." (Cullmann, *Baptism*, 19f.)

Cf. also Jesus' later use of "baptize" in regard to his death. Mk 10:38; Lk 12:50.

<sup>101</sup> They strive to show that Jesus had received the Spirit even without measure (Jn. 3:34). Jesus is conceived by Mary through the Holy Spirit (Mt. 1:18); he is led into the wilderness by the Spirit (Lk. 4:1); he goes to Galilee in the "power of the Spirit" (Lk 4:14); he is full of joy through the Spirit (Lk. 10:21); and he drives out demons by the Spirit of God (Mt. 12:28). This is demonstrated again in another fulfillment of the Old Testament. Luke presents an episode of Jesus in the synagogue of Nazareth reading the text for the day which came from Is. 61:1-2 (Lk. 4:14-30.). The text reads: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; he hath sent me to heal the brokenhearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised, To preach the acceptable year of the Lord." After the reading of the text Jesus says, "This day is this scripture fulfilled in your ears." These texts demonstrate that there was no doubt in the mind of the church that the Spirit of God had rested upon Jesus as the Messiah-Servant. The connection between Jesus, baptism, and the Spirit has been seen even by scholars such as Morton Smith who on that account try to turn Jesus into a magician with his secret rite of baptism as a mystery in which the baptized becomes possessed by a spirit. *The Secret Gospel*. 1973. pp. 102ff.

<sup>102</sup> Acts 1:5.

Christ for the remission of sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.” (Acts 2:38). And even where there is some fluidity in sequencing, every one of the accounts in the early chapters of Acts shows that baptism and the Spirit go together.<sup>103</sup>

The connection between the Servant and the Spirit leads also to the intimate bond between the Messianic proclamation and the Spirit. From the beginning the Spirit is bound in the mind of the church to the messianic office of teaching and revealing the knowledge of God.<sup>104</sup> That which Jesus proclaimed was the gospel of the kingdom and was with the power of the Spirit. His words were known as Spirit and life (Jn 6:63). For the church, the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy could lead to no other conclusion. And in this way the Spirit came from Father to the Son through the gospel to the church.<sup>105</sup> Thus the church would be a people of the Spirit in accordance with Old Testament prophecy.<sup>106</sup> The basic concepts of the Spirit being with the church in the words of Jesus and baptism are in this way demonstrated to belong to the earliest Christian belief in Jesus as the Messiah.

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<sup>103</sup> While Matthew 28 does present the Lord’s command to baptize all nations the original concept of the necessity of Baptism and the Holy Spirit was certainly equally to be found in Jesus’ messianic fulfillment of the Old Testament in his baptism. Lull: “In early Christianity the view that baptism and the initial gift of the Spirit are closely related is ‘general and primitive.’”, *The Spirit*, 59. See Lull p. 59, n. 43 for a long listing of scholarly references. This concept stands upon the bedrock of early Christian consciousness (i.e. the consciousness of the church as having something essential that is distinct from Judaism) and thus has the power to continue in the mind and doctrine of the church for centuries. See Pelikan, *Catholic Tradition*, 163ff. The fluidity that exists in the accounts in Acts is almost always a result of the intermingling of the two fundamental means by which the Spirit comes to the church in accordance with Jesus’ messianic office, i.e., whether by gospel or baptism. The fluidity in the texts is also often related to the entire Gentile question and indicates special circumstances.

<sup>104</sup> For Israel had gone into captivity because they had no knowledge (Is. 5:13) and so God’s Servant, upon whom the Spirit of knowledge and fear of the Lord rests (11:2), was appointed to preach the good news (LXX 61:1: eujaggelivsasqai) and fill the world with the knowledge of God (11:9). cf. Mt. 13:11; Lk. 1:77.

<sup>105</sup> The New Testament shows how closely the Spirit remained connected with the proclamation of Gospel even after the resurrection. Mk 13:11; Acts 1:8; 4:31; 6:10; 7:55; 11:15; 13:9.

<sup>106</sup> Joel 2:28ff. is explicitly used in Acts. But several texts in Isaiah also seem possible sources for this idea especially in light of the fourth gospel’s continuous connection of water and the Spirit as we will see later.

When Paul began his ministry less than 20 years after Pentecost he inherited this tradition and he would build upon it in a way fundamental to what was later described as “becoming god.” In Paul the fullness of the objective description of salvation is equaled by the fullness of the presentation of the subjective.<sup>107</sup> Paul taught the traditional doctrine, already observed in the primitive church of Jerusalem, connecting the Spirit and baptism and recognizing their role in initiation into the church.<sup>108</sup> This is directly related to the return of Christ in that the Spirit is a seal or an earnest of the inheritance of the eschatological kingdom.<sup>109</sup> But Paul’s doctrine of the Spirit went considerably beyond this especially in relation to the present state of the baptized believer. “As many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ.” (Gal 3:27). Paul viewed the one baptized as in some way partaking or sharing in the risen Lord himself and in his salvific work: “Don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death.”(Rom. 6:3f.).

But the indwelling Spirit and therefore participation in the Lord was not restricted to the context of baptism. Paul, in agreement with the church before him, regarded the proclamation of the gospel and the gospel itself as connected to the Spirit (1 Cor. 2:13; 1 Cor. 12:8ff; 2 Cor. 3:6ff.; Gal. 3:2ff.). By faith in the gospel the believer receives the Holy Spirit (Gal. 3:14; Eph. 1:13) who dwells in his heart (Rom. 2:29; Gal. 4:6) and by this Spirit the believer awaits his inheritance (Gal. 5:5; Eph. 1:14). The Spirit is a spirit of sonship and of life (Rom. 8:14f.; Gal.

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<sup>107</sup> By objective I refer to those events outside of persons: Jesus, the death and resurrection, justification, the expected coming of Christ. On the other hand the subjective are those things within persons.

<sup>108</sup> Acts 9:18; 16:15; 16:33; 18:8 et. al. “That is what some of you were. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.” (1 Cor. 6:11). Compare Acts 2:21ff. for the connection between baptism and confession of faith in Jesus by “calling on the name of the Lord” for entrance into the church. cf. Acts 8:16; 19:5. See Carlson p. 256. for a discussion of Baptism as a rite of initiation.

<sup>109</sup> 2 Cor. 1:22; 5:5; Eph. 1:14; 4:30.

4:6; Rom. 8:11; 2 Cor. 3:6). Importantly in 1 Cor. 6:11 Paul states that in baptism the Christians “were washed” and were “sanctified” by the Spirit and links this with justification.<sup>110</sup> Again Paul can describe salvation itself as being “by sanctification of the Spirit and faith in the truth.”<sup>111</sup>

Romans 8 contains an extended discussion of this sanctification by the Holy Spirit. Paul teaches there that the condemnation of sin worked by the Son becomes the fulfillment of the righteousness of the law “in us” through the indwelling Spirit.<sup>112</sup> Therefore the “mind of the Spirit” (frovnhma tou' pnevmato") is “life and peace.” (8:6). Paul again stating the relationship between the Spirit and salvation states that “if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he is not Christ’s.” (8:9). And in conclusion, in a remarkable passage, Paul states that: “if Christ is in you, your body is dead because of sin, yet your spirit is alive because of righteousness.” (8:10).<sup>113</sup> Here Paul has spoken in a new manner as if Christ were present in the Christian which apparently is closely related to the indwelling Spirit of the previous verses. And Paul again attributes life, that is salvation, to this indwelling of Christ because it is to us righteousness of spirit.<sup>114</sup> And this seal of salvation ultimately leads to its goal: “And if the Spirit

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<sup>110</sup> This corresponds with Ephesians 5:26 which states that Christ sanctifies and cleanses the church with the washing of water.

<sup>111</sup> 2 Th. 2:13. “ejn aJgiasmw' / pnevmato" kaiV pivstei ajlhqeiva".” Paul speaks of the idea of sanctification (becoming or being made holy) in two different senses. The first is the aJgiasmov" (sanctification) that has already occurred at baptism with the coming of the Spirit and with faith by which Christ becomes our righteousness (aorist in 1 Cor. 6:11 - hJgiavsqhte; 2 Th. 2:13; Eph. 5 :26; 1 Cor. 1:2). And secondly he speaks of the ongoing sanctifying process that continues day to day (1 Th. 5:23) part of which is the avoidance of the pollution of sin (1 Th. 4:3f. 1 Cor. 6:19). It also flows directly from this that Paul can call the Christians “holy ones” or saints (oiJ a{gioi) and at the same time reprove them for various sins yet found among them.

<sup>112</sup> “ i}na toV dikaivwma tou' novmou plhrwqh' / ejn hJmi'n toi'" mhV kataV savrka peripatou'sin ajllaV kataV pneu'ma.” This is again a sharing in the Messianic work through the Spirit.

<sup>113</sup> “eij deV CristoV" ejn uJmi'n, toV meVn sw'ma nekroVn diaV aJmartivan, toV deV pneu'ma zwhV diaV dikaiosuvnhn.” And this on the other hand is the reciprocal of the statements that “there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.” (Rom. 8:1) cf. Rom 16:7; 1 Cor. 1:2; 2 Cor. 1:21.

<sup>114</sup> This idea of “righteousness” ties the entire concept back to “justification” as Paul did himself in the baptismal text of 1 Cor. 6:11. The joining of the Spirit-filled person to Christ causes him to partake of the righteousness worked by the Messiah who “died for our sins.” cf. Paul’s related statement: “He that is

of him who raised Jesus from the dead is living in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit, who lives in you.” (8:11) Thus Paul can again speak of a union between believers and Christ such that Christ dwells in them through the Spirit and is their righteousness and salvation and that the Spirit will ultimately give life to their bodies at the resurrection.

But the concept of “Christ in you” is not isolated to Romans 8 or even to contexts where the Spirit is being directly discussed. Paul chides the Corinthians: “Do you not know yourselves, that Christ is in you?”<sup>115</sup> This is presented as if it were a fundamental concept of Christian identity which should already be known by the Corinthians and not as something new and unknown. This idea finds a place even in the midst of Paul’s discussions on justification. In his well known presentation of Galatians 2 he states that “I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me.”<sup>116</sup> Paul thus speaks of “Christ in me” but can also often turn this into its reciprocal form and speak of being “in Christ.”<sup>117</sup> Being “in Christ” is for Paul related to being free from condemnation (Rom. 8:1), being sanctified (1 Cor. 1:2), being a new creature (2 Cor. 5:17), belonging to one Christian body (Rom. 12:5, Gal 3:28), and being made alive (1 Cor. 15:22). This is not an unimportant barely-mentioned concept for Paul but rather flows throughout his entire concept of the subjective part of salvation.

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joined unto the Lord is one spirit.”. (1 Cor. 6:17). “oj deV kollwvmeno” tw’/ kurivw/ e}n pneu'mav ejstin.” Compare Harnack in discussing Paul’s theology: “The Christ who has already overcome law, sin and death, lives as Spirit, and through his Spirit lives in believers, who for that very reason know him not after the flesh. He is a creative power of life to those who receive him in faith in his redeeming death upon the cross, that is to say, to those who are justified. The life in the Spirit, which results from union with Christ, will at last reveal itself also in the body.” 1, 93.

<sup>115</sup> 2 Cor. 13:5. “h] oujk ejpiginwvskete e}autouV” o{ti j}hsou” CristoV” ejn u}mi'n;” cf. 2 Cor. 13:3; Gal. 4:19; Col. 1:27.

<sup>116</sup> Gal. 2:20. cf. Eph. 3:17 where Christ dwells in the Christian’s heart by faith. So McGiffert: “Identification with Christ in his death and resurrection - and upon this everything hinged - was brought about according to Paul, by faith”, 22.

<sup>117</sup> Notice the related phrases “in the Spirit”: (Rom. 8:9; Gal. 3:3; Gal. 5:16 & 25) and “Spirit in you” (2 Cor. 1:22)

These ideas, not surprisingly, played a large role in Paul's ecclesiology. Precisely in the line of thought already presented he calls the Christians individually "the temple of the Holy Spirit."<sup>118</sup> And he moves on to call the church corporately "God's building"<sup>119</sup>, and "the temple of God."<sup>120</sup> By the use of such imagery Paul is referring this doctrine of the indwelling Spirit and its results back again to Old Testament foundations.<sup>121</sup> By using these ideas he shows that the church is the dwelling place of God and thus they are his people the new Israel.<sup>122</sup> But even this is not the summit of Paul's presentation of the church. Since for Paul the indwelling Spirit of God brings about a union between Christ and his church it makes the believers "who are many, one body in Christ, and individually members one of another."<sup>123</sup> And even more striking in reciprocal manner, "Even as the body is one and yet has many members, and all the members of the body, though they are many, are one body, so also is Christ."<sup>124</sup>

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<sup>118</sup> 1 Cor. 6:19. "[h] oujk oi[date o{ti toV sw'ma u]mw'n naoV" tou' ejn u]mi'n a]givou pneumatov" ejstin, ou] e[cete ajpoV qeou"" The toV sw'ma u]mw'n is here shown by the context to be referring to the bodies of the individual Christians. Notice the continuing text: "You are not your own. You have been bought with a price." Again Paul points to the relationship between redemption and the indwelling Spirit.

<sup>119</sup> 1 Cor. 3:9;

<sup>120</sup> 1 Cor. 3:16f; 2 Cor. 6:16. cf. 2 Th. 2:4. Also compare Eph. 2:21f. where the church is called "a holy temple in the Lord" and a "habitation of God through the Spirit."

<sup>121</sup> Indeed, the apostle explicitly does so in 2 Cor. 6:16 where he tells the Corinthians: "you are the temple of the living God; as God said, 'I will dwell in them, and walk in them; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people.'" The concept of God dwelling among his people and being their God is common in the Old Testament as is the concept of the temple as God's house and dwelling place. Ex. 29:45f; Dt. 12:11; 1 Ki. 6:13; 8:13ff.; Ps. 27:4; Ez. 36:28. See David Adams "The Present God: A Framework for Biblical Theology." *Concordia Journal*. 22 (1996): 279-294.

<sup>122</sup> Rom. 9:6ff.; Gal. 6:16; Phl. 3:3.

<sup>123</sup> Rom. 12:5. "ou{tw" oi] polloiV e}n sw'mav ejsmen ejn Cristw' /, toV deV kaq j ei|" ajllhvlwn mevlh." cf. Eph. 4:25.

<sup>124</sup> 1 Cor. 12:12: "Kaqavper gaVr toV sw'ma e{n ejstin kaiV mevlh pollaV e[cei, pavnta deV taV mevlh tou' swvmato" pollaV o[nta e{n ejstin sw'ma, ou{tw" kaiV oj Cristov":" As pantheistic as this language can begin to sound taken by itself, it is sound advice to take a moment to remember that Paul's teaching is taking place within the context of the early church's confessional framework of monotheism, with its attendant ontological distinctions between creator and creature, and Jesus as the unique Son of God. So Stewart: "We must guard, however, against conveying the impression such union implies virtual

The entire foregoing discussion has limited itself to discussing Paul's doctrine of the indwelling Spirit of God and how this is related to his statements of participation in the Christ and his messianic work. But equally arresting and as important to later deification thought is the rather independent line of thought concerning participation in Christ through the Eucharist. In 1 Corinthians 11 Paul is obliged to correct the lack of order he perceives in the Corinthians' practice of the "Lord's Supper". He instructs them that their lack of love shown when they come together to eat the Lord's Supper is not in accordance with the hallowed nature of the Supper which derives, says Paul, from the Lord's own institution of the Supper and from its content. Paul thus points to the Supper's words of institution, which he "received from the Lord", and concludes from them that whoever eats or drinks of the cup unworthily is "guilty of the body and blood of the Lord." (11:27).<sup>125</sup> And for this reason, says the apostle, many were sick among the Corinthians having eaten judgment to themselves (11:29). Thus according to Paul's doctrine partaking of the Lord's Supper was an eating of the body of the Lord and a drinking of his blood.<sup>126</sup> The ecclesiological consequences of this meal are discussed in 1 Cor 10:

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absorption of a pantheistic kind. Nothing was further from Paul's thoughts. Here again his doctrine runs along a different line from Philo. ... He never thought of Christ as overriding an man's individuality. Union with Christ, so far from obliterating the believer's personal qualities and characteristics, throws these into greater relief.", *A Man in Christ*, 166.

<sup>125</sup> The text from v. 25 on is: "tou'to poiei'te, ojsavki" ejaVn pivnhte, eij" thVn ejmhVn ajnavmnhsin. ojsavki" gaVr ejaVn ejsqivhte toVn a[rton tou'ton kaiV toV pothvrion pivnhte, toVn qavnaton tou' kurivou kataggevllate, a[cri" ou] e[lqh/. {Wste o}" a]n ejsqivh/ toVn a[rton h] pivnh/ toV pothvrion tou' kurivou ajnaxivw", e[noco" e[stai tou' swvmato" kaiV tou' ai{mato" tou' kurivou."

<sup>126</sup> McGiffert: "(Paul) thought of the believer as buried with Christ in baptism and as feeding upon him in the eucharist.", *A History of Christian Thought*, 22. And it is this idea, closely related to the early church's worship, that caused so many corresponding expressions in the second century. It is this continuity that is important to the present argument. So Pelikan: "It does seem 'express and clear' that no orthodox father of the second or third century of whom we have record either declared the presence of the body and blood of Christ in the Eucharist to be no more than symbolic (although Clement and Origen came close to doing so) or specified a process of substantial change by which the process was effected (although Ignatius and Justin came close to doing so). Within the limits of those excluded extremes was the doctrine of the real presence.", *Catholic Tradition*, 167. cf. Harnack who instead claims that the idea of an identity between the "bread and the body he (the Logos) had assumed" first appears in Justin (*1 apol.* 1.66) and this under the influence of the Greek Mysteries. (*History of Dogma*, 1, 213).

The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not communion of the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not communion of the body of Christ? Because there is one loaf, we, who are many, are one body, for we all partake of the one loaf.<sup>127</sup>

Here the church partakes (metevcomen) of the elements of the Supper and by it have koinwniva with the body and blood of Christ which in turn unites the many members into one body. And yet all of this is bounded by the two great acts of salvation. For by the Supper the Christians “proclaim the Lord’s death” even while eschatological hope of the church is likewise expressed by crying Maranatha “till he comes” when they will eat the Messianic banquet in the kingdom.<sup>128</sup> Christ has come and then ascended and is yet to come but nevertheless is still with his church in the mystery of the Supper. This doctrine of the Supper would play an important role later in Christian doctrine generally and especially in Christian deification.<sup>129</sup>

From the forgoing it is apparent that Paul’s doctrine, articulated in the mid first century, of participation of the believer in Christ and Christ in him was thoroughly anchored to the Gospel and the mysteries of baptism and the Lord’s Supper and therefore to the church.<sup>130</sup> In the

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<sup>127</sup> toV pothvrion th'" eujlogiva" o} eujlogou'men, oujciV koinwniva ejstiVn tou' ai{mato" tou' Cristou'; toVn a[rton o}n klw'men, oujciV koinwniva tou' swvmato" tou' Cristou' ejstin; o{ti ei|" a[rto", e}n sw'ma oi| polloiv ejsmen, oi| gaVr pavnte" ejk tou' e}noV" a[rtoV metevcomen.

<sup>128</sup> 1 Cor. 11:26. The eschatological nature of the Lord’s Supper is indicated in many ways and was understood that way in the earliest church. Here it is indicated by the “until he comes”, that is, in eschatological judgment. This is indicated also by the future tense “will be guilty”, namely, when Christ comes as judge of the living and the dead. Note the references to various types of judgment in the following verses: krivma ... diakrivnwn ... diekrivnomen ... ejkrinovmeqa: ... krinovmenoi ... katakriqw'men ... krivma. cf. Wainright, *Eucharist and Eschatology*, 81f. for a discussion of this eschatological indicator.

<sup>129</sup> Elert: “Understanding the Sacrament as a partaking of the body and blood of Christ is as old as the theological interpretation of the sacrament itself.”, *Eucharist*, 17. And so he references: Irenaeus, *Haer.*, V, 2, 2f. Pseudo-Athanasius, PG, 26, 1012b. Cyril of Jerusalem, *Cat. myst.*, IV, 3; V, 1, 21. Basil, PG, 31, 757; 32, 484. Chrysostom, PG, 49, 345; 59, 261.

<sup>130</sup> The entire question of the sacramental nature of Paul’s mysticism is discussed by Schweitzer, *The Mysticism of Paul*, 31-34 and 227-289. There Schweitzer points out the differences between Paul and the sacraments of the mystery religions and concludes that Paul is decisively different and argues instead that Paul is essentially eschatological in his sacramental view.

Johannine literature written later in the first century we find this doctrine again.<sup>131</sup> Even as the language and expression of John and Paul are so distinctly different yet the parallels in their teaching in this area are equally perceptible.<sup>132</sup> The Johannine literature once again presents the close relationship of Jesus as the Messiah to the Spirit and of the Spirit to the disciples of Jesus. As C.H. Cosgrove has pointed out, in John “it is the Spirit that gives life: the Spirit-Paraclete of the glorified Jesus present in the community *and nowhere else*.”<sup>133</sup> In chapter 3 Jesus states that baptism is a second birth in the Spirit necessary for salvation (3:3ff) and later tells his disciples that he is going to the Father and will send the Holy Spirit who “lives with you and will be in you.” (14:17). This is presented as a fulfillment of prophecy when Jesus states that those who believe in him will have the Spirit flowing out of them like rivers of living water springing up to eternal life, just as the scripture says (Jn 7:38; 4:14).<sup>134</sup> The result is again that “we dwell in him, and he in us, because he has given us of his Spirit.” (1 Jn 4:10).

If anything the Gospel of John is even more striking than Paul in its language which explicitly speaks of union between Christ and the believer and even goes beyond Paul. In John’s Gospel the union between Christ and believer is first based upon Christ’s divine sonship and union with the Father.<sup>135</sup> Several times Jesus stresses that the Father is “in him” and he is “in the

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<sup>131</sup> McGiffert, *A History of Christian Thought*, 30ff.

<sup>132</sup> Schweitzer, who held the now untenable position that the Gospel of John was a production of the mid second century, felt that John’s doctrine was an acute Hellenization of Paul. This is on the basis of a “God-mysticism” found in John that is not found according to him in Paul.

<sup>133</sup> Cosgrove, “The Place Where Jesus is”, 529. He also characterizes the Eucharist saying that in John “eating the flesh of the Son of Man and drinking his blood means following him obediently to the place *in the world* where he is, to behold his glory. That place is the community with whom Jesus and the Father are united through the Spirit-Paraclete.”, 539.

<sup>134</sup> As we have seen, this connection between the church and the Spirit was drawn from the Christological reading of the Old Testament and was a basic pillar of the primitive Christian faith. That here John explicitly reports Jesus’ reference to the Old Testament only confirms that to be the case. cf. Is. 12:3; 58:11; and especially Zech. 14:8.

<sup>135</sup> Paul’s doctrine does not attempt this explicitly in its discussion of being “in Christ.” But the substance is there especially in Paul’s emphasis on the Spirit (of Christ the Son of God) within the believers

Father.” (10:38; 14:9ff.; 17:21ff.). And thus “I and the Father are One.” (10:30; 17:11; 17:21). The Father has life in himself and has given the Son to have life in himself (5:26). Therefore those who believe in the Son have eternal life (3:16; 3:36; 6:40; 1 Jn. 5:11ff. et. al.). For “because I live, ye shall live also. In that day you will know that I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you.” (John 14:20). Jesus is the vine and his disciples are the branches which “abide in the vine.” (15:1ff.). And finally all of this reaches crescendo in Jesus’ high priestly prayer that his disciples and the Father should know one another in union through himself:

I do not pray for these alone, but also for those who will believe in Me through their word; 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: I in them, and you in me; that they may be made perfect in one.”<sup>136</sup>

By this rather lengthy treatment of Paul and John I hope to have established that in the first century there was a strong tradition of the believer’s union with Christ especially through the indwelling Spirit. Further, this tradition of mystical union consists of two basic clusters of ideas. First, the concepts of the Messiah, the Spirit, baptism, rebirth/recreation, new life, adoption/sonship, indwelling Spirit, earnest of the inheritance, and new life for the body at the resurrection all belong consistently together. Secondly, the Incarnation (the Son become flesh), Christ’s bodily death “for us”, his resurrection, the Eucharist as participation in Christ’s body and blood, indwelling Christ, the resurrection of the believers, and the Messianic Banquet form another group of related ideas. These two lines of thought intersect precisely in the concrete

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as the sons of God. Thus for Paul our status as adopted sons is dependent upon the Spirit in us. For without the Spirit of Christ one is not of Christ. But with the Spirit of the Son of God we receive sonship.

<sup>136</sup> 17:20ff. If anything John’s language goes beyond Paul here in speaking of a being “in God” and “being perfect in one. (i{na w\sin teteleiwmevnoi eij” e{n) cf. 1 John 4:15: “whosoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, God dwells in him, and he in God.” Though Paul does not use this phrase and keeps to “in Christ” he has called the church the “temple of God.” As for whether Paul’s union with Christ and John’s union with God are two different things, Stewart states: “Union with Christ, as Paul conceives it, is union with God. He knows nothing of a mysticism which stops short of faith’s final goal. Behind every expression of his intense intimacy with Jesus stands the great ultimate fact of god Himself. ... Hence

person of Christ as the Spirit bearing Messiah, his own resurrection, in the sacramental/liturgical life of the church, and in his return at the general resurrection and the establishment of the kingdom. These traditions drew upon the messianic understandings of many Old Testament prophecies and formed fundamental elements of the Christian faith that could then be drawn upon to inform the phraseology of “becoming gods.”

### **Theology of the image of God**

The concepts presented above, immortality, immortal knowledge, and indwelling Christ, formed three basic soteriologies used to give meaning to salvation as “becoming a god.” In parallel with this was the emerging theology of image whereby the wider theological landscape was organized. This theology gave answer to the basic question of why salvation is necessary. It accomplished this by relating together the fundamental monotheistic confession which regarded the Lord God as One God and the perfect Creator of all things to the reality of an imperfect world in need of salvation.<sup>137</sup>

The first part of this model of the theology of the image is the recognition that mankind was created in the image of God. The idea that humans by nature in some sense reflect the image and likeness of God comes originally from the creation text of Genesis 1:26f. (also Genesis 5:3) where it is recorded that “God created man in His own image; in the image of God He created him.”<sup>138</sup> Curiously, however, outside of a brief mention of “men, who have been made in God's

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the more any man comes to be “in Christ,” the more is he “in God.” There are not two experiences, but one.”, 170.

<sup>137</sup> It could in fact be argued that the theological systems of Marcion and the various Gnostic groups were aimed at this question also (which in reality is the basic question of why there is evil in the world). But their various theological systems were rejected as heretical largely because they could not be reconciled with the fundamental trust the church had in the Old Testament interpreted with the Christological hermeneutic.

<sup>138</sup> <yhla <lxB wmlxB <dah-ta <yhla arbyw. The Septuagint reads: kat j eijkovna Qeou' ejpovhsen aujtovn. Yet outside of these two texts the Old Testament is nearly silent on this topic and makes no major use of the idea. Thus Lossky, “The theology of the Image”, “Let us concede this much to

likeness” in James 3:9 and Paul’s use of this idea in regard to head covering in 1 Corinthians 11:7 the creation of man in the “image of God” finds no major role in the New Testament itself. However, Genesis 1:26f. importantly did find early use in the church along side of Psalm 82:6 as a proof text of Christ’s divinity and thus was active in the life of the church.<sup>139</sup>

But the theology of the image was more than just the idea that man had been created in the image and likeness of God. The creation was merely the starting point. The model of the theology of the image continues by claiming that Adam’s disobedience introduced corruption, that is, sin and death, into the creation specifically causing human nature in some way to lose or corrupt the image or likeness of God. Man became a mortal.

Finally, Christian salvation in this model is then understood to be in some way a restoration of the original image and likeness of God in man. This soteriology appears to derive from the Pauline texts that teach that Christ is the image of the Father and salvation is a conforming to the image of Christ. Paul called Christ “the image of [the invisible] God” (2 Cor. 4:4; cf. Col. 1:15.) in whom “all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form.” (Col. 2:9). And the ultimate destiny of the Christian is to be “conformed to the image of his Son” (Rom. 8:29) which occurs at the return of Christ (1 Cor. 15:49) but is even now occurring as we “are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord.” (2 Cor. 3:18). And so the new man which every Christian has put on “is renewed in knowledge after the image of him that created him.” (Col. 3:10). As soon as Genesis 1:26’s “Let us make” was used to prove Christ was God it became clear to the fathers that “in the image of God” referred to Christ Himself (cf. 1

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the opponents of the theology of the image: in the purely Hebraic text of the Bible, interpreted in the historic context in which the books of the Old Testament were composed, there is nothing (or almost nothing) which would permit us to base either a theognosis or a religious anthropology on the notion of the image of God.”, “theology of the image”, 129.

<sup>139</sup> That this text served as another traditional Christ-is-God proof text can be gathered from Barnabas 5 and 6; Justin *dial.* 62; Tertullian *Marc.* 5.8 (ANF 3, 445). This could only occur after Christ had been confessed as the pre-existent Son who was the agent of creation as we see already in the earliest New Testament books.

Cor. 15:45-49). This Christian theology of the image as such appears then to have originated from the conjunction of the Christological proof text of Genesis with ideas of Christ as the Image of the Father. This became all the more plausible in light of Paul's frequent use of the First Adam / Second Adam typology. The Pauline corpus contained all the elements except the Christological use of Genesis 1:26 and the final assembly of the entire theory.

However it originated, the theology of the image as a conceptual model apparently gained its universal appeal among the fathers from its correlation to Greek natural theology. Simply stated, this model gave a way to express generally held Greek sentiments through scriptural language. Thus the theology of the image in its earliest stages, along with much of the second century soteriology, became closely aligned with the whole of natural theology and the platonic ideals of ascent through knowledge. The image of God in man was generally explained as found only in the rational soul which had a free will and was naturally immortal. The general idea that the creation in the image of God referred to creation in the image of Christ who was God was accommodated by explaining that Christ is the Logos or reason of the Father and thus the rational soul in man is in his image. And this idea of the image was never lost among the fathers. On the other hand the concept of the image of God was pliable enough to be given a very different meaning. For example Irenaeus uniquely finds the image of God in the human body and explains that man was created in the image of God incarnate, that is Christ's body. What in fact remains constant is the broad outline gathered from Genesis 1:26 that man was created in God's image, the conviction that this refers in some way to Christ as the Image of the Father, and finally that salvation is a restoration in the image of Christ.

If the concept of "image of God" was ambiguous and could be found in man's body or soul by various fathers, the details of the wider theology of image were even more in question. One example is the question of whether "image" and "likeness" refer to the same thing or to two different things. This was answered in various ways. Did mankind retain the image and lose

merely the likeness and what would this mean? Further, the use of the terminology from Genesis in order to represent the ideas taken from natural theology presented a number of rough edges which could not be fully overcome. For example, Genesis represents the original creation and mankind in God's image as "good" or "perfect." But according to Greek thought good could only come about through the application of man's freedom to choose the good and reject the evil. This led to difficulty in dealing with the question of whether Adam and Eve were immortal or mortal as created. Death could never be accepted as natural or good by Christians or Greeks so certainly they could not have been mortal. And yet to claim they were merely created immortal without reference to the actual application of free will was also unacceptable.<sup>140</sup>

As the previous examples demonstrate, the theology of the image was elastic enough to survive an almost unnerving variation of applications. Nevertheless, this general framework was destined to remain a fundamental conceptual model in the fathers' soteriology and the details of Greek natural theology which gave it its original strength were never really lost. So Harnack states that

according to the ideas of the Fathers, the doctrines of the condition and destiny of man belonged to Natural Theology. This appears from the fact that, starting from their Cosomology, they all strove to ascertain, from the original state of man, the nature of Christian redemption, in other words, the state of perfection. ... The following propositions contain everything that can be stated as embodying a common conviction and common presupposition of all further conceptions ... *Man made in the image of God is a free self-determining being. He was endowed with reason by God, that he might decide for the good, and enjoy immortality. He has fallen short of this destiny by having voluntarily yielded and continuing to yield himself - under temptation, but not under compulsion - to sin, yet without having lost the possibility and power of a virtuous life, or the capacity for immortality. The possibility was strengthened and immortality restored and offered by the Christian revelation which came to the aid of the darkened reason with complete knowledge of God. Accordingly, knowledge decides between good and evil. Strictly taken, the will is morally nothing.*<sup>141</sup>

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<sup>140</sup> See the previous quote from Theophilus, *Autol.* 2.27 (ANF 2, 105).

<sup>141</sup> Harnack *History of Dogma*, 3, 255f.

By Irenaeus' day this model was commonplace in the East and West and among the Greek theologians it was one of the few universally accepted aspects of the description of salvation.<sup>142</sup> Therefore it is to be expected that any early idea of salvation as "becoming god" would necessarily have to come into contact with and be fit into this framework of the theology of the image. To observe this, as far as our sources will allow, we now turn to the early second century and attempt to catch a glimpse of these parallel traditions of expressing the content of salvation which all interacted to produce a doctrine of deification.

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<sup>142</sup> *1 Clem.* 33; *Diogn.* 10: "If you also desire [to possess] this faith, you likewise shall receive first of all the knowledge of the Father.[1] For God has loved mankind, on whose account He made the world, to whom He rendered subject all the things that are in it,[2] to whom He gave reason and understanding, to whom alone He imparted the privilege of looking upwards to Himself, whom He formed after His own image."; *Barnabas* 6; *Tatian orat.* 7 (ANF 2, 67); 12 (ANF 2, 70); 15 (ANF 2, 71f.); *Theophilus Autol.* 2.4 "man is His formation and His image" (ANF 2, 90); 2.18 (ANF 2, 101); 2.27 (ANF 2, 105); *Tertullian Marc.* 2.4; 5.8 (ANF 3, 445).

## **EARLY SECOND CENTURY: PARALLEL TRADITIONS**

The authors of the several Christian documents still extant from the early second century are often referred to as the Apostolic Fathers. They are generally interesting not because of their quantity or quality but precisely on account of their antiquity. They do not give witness to any completed doctrine of deification in the first half of the second century. But all the ideas already examined which are incorporated later are floating about in their writings like so many letters in a pot of alphabet soup. By observing several of the authors the gradual development of these ideas and their early tendency to relate to one another can be observed at least in part.

### **Ignatius and Union with Christ**

Ignatius was Bishop of Antioch and in c. 108 AD<sup>143</sup> was forcibly taken in chains by Roman authorities to Rome to face martyrdom. On his final journey he passed through a number of cities and was met by representatives of various churches and also wrote seven epistles which are still extant under his name. In many ways these epistles are quite unique among the early second century material and they as nowhere else witness in the early second period to the continuing use and viability of the doctrine of a mystical union between the believer and Christ.

That which characterizes the letters of Ignatius is his personal remarks and observations in regard to his impending martyrdom and his admonition to his fellow Christians to remain unified with their bishops in light of two threatening heresies, docetism and an apparent Judaizing

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<sup>143</sup> According to Eusebius “the second after Peter to succeed to the bishopric of Antioch”, 3.36.

Christianity.<sup>144</sup> Against the one Ignatius emphasizes the reality of the Lord's earthly life, that he "was really born, and ate and drank, was really persecuted by Pontius Pilate, was really crucified and died ... really rose from the dead."<sup>145</sup> Against the other he warns against "Sabbathizing" and "living according to Judaism."<sup>146</sup> Against both Ignatius emphasizes a traditional bipolar kataV savrka / kataV pneu'ma Christology that already shows no fear of addressing Christ as "God".<sup>147</sup> Jesus Christ is the "one only physician, of flesh and of spirit, generate and ingenerate, God in man, true Life in death, Son of Mary and Son of God, first passible and then impassible."<sup>148</sup> "For our God, Jesus the Christ, was conceived in the womb by Mary according to a dispensation, of the seed of David but also of the Holy Ghost."<sup>149</sup> He who was eternal became "a bearer of flesh" (sarkofovro") and was "truly nailed in the flesh for us under Pontius Pilate and Herod the tetrarch" (ajlhqw'" kaqhlwmevno" ejn sarkiv). It was in Christ, "who existed with the Father before the worlds and appeared at the end of time," that the divine and the human have become

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<sup>144</sup> An argument has also been made that Ignatius writes against only one heresy but see Donahue's article "Jewish Christianity in the Letters of Ignatius of Antioch". Swartley argues via mathematical statistical means that the chief concern of Ignatius is the relationship between the unity of the church in Syria and his own calling as bishop and martyr, "Imatatio Christi", 90-103.

<sup>145</sup> *Tral.* 9. As quoted in Pelikan, *Catholic Tradition*, 174. Notice how Jaroslav Pelikan continues: "Yet the very existence of docetism is also a testimony to the tenacity of the conviction that Christ had to be God, even at the cost of his humanity."

<sup>146</sup> *Mag.* 8.1-9.1. cf. Donahue, "Jewish Christianity", 88.

<sup>147</sup> "according to the flesh / according to the spirit". Known already in Paul's letter to the Romans 1:3-4. "It is highly significant that Ignatius does not limit his use of the terms *qeov*" and *oJ qeov*" (as applied to Christ) to references to the passion, or to discussions of the divinity of Christ in connection with the oft-quoted Psalms. From the thirteen occasions on which the term definitely refers to Christ, we may assume that under all conditions he thought of Christ as God." Richardson, *The Christianity of Ignatius*, 40.

<sup>148</sup> *Eph.* 7.2.

<sup>149</sup> *Eph.* 18.2. cf. *Smyr.* 1.

One in order that the One Father who is hidden in silence should by his Word be revealed to the world.<sup>150</sup> This Christology of divine incarnation informs everything else that Ignatius teaches.<sup>151</sup>

Since Christ has become God in flesh and “Life in death” he is the source of life for those who believe in him because he has “died for us”.<sup>152</sup> The Cross therefore is “salvation and life eternal.” (*Eph.* 18.1). Life is also in Christ because of his resurrection by which “death is abolished.” Thus the cross, Christ’s death, his resurrection, and faith, through which the believer partakes in these, are the *ajrcei'a*, the ultimate foundations (*Phld.* 8.2).<sup>153</sup> On the other hand not just the passion and resurrection but the incarnation as a whole brings life. The entire salvation drama from Mary's conception to Christ’s passion is the *oijkonomiva qeou'*<sup>154</sup> which led to the result that

every spell was dissolved, the ignorance of wickedness vanished away, the ancient kingdom was pulled down, when God appeared in the likeness of man unto newness of everlasting life; and that which had been perfected in the counsels of God began to take effect. Thence all things were perturbed, because the abolishing of death was taken in hand. (*Eph.* 19.3).

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<sup>150</sup> *Mag.* 6.1; 7.2; 8.2. He is the “Eternal, the Invisible, who became visible for our sake, the Impalpable, the Impassible, who suffered for our sake, who endured in all ways for our sake.” *Poly.* 3.2.

<sup>151</sup> “Behind the rich variety of phrases in which Ignatius affirms the centrality of the Lord there are two basic interests. One is the conviction that in the life of Christ a real and true incarnation took place: he was in fullness and actuality God entered onto human life on the scene of history. And in the second place Ignatius is concerned to develop the consequences of this event which was so crucial for the world. The incarnation was revolutionary both in itself and in the effects that flowed from it.” Corwin, *St. Ignatius*, 91.

<sup>152</sup> “toV ajdiavkriton hjmw'n zh'n” “our inseparable life” (*Eph.* 3.2). Also the “diaV pantoV” hjmw'n zh'n” “our never-failing Life” (*Mag.* 1.2). “jlhsou'n Cristovn, toVn di j hjma” ajpoqanovnta” *Tral.* 2.1; *Rom.* 6.1; Ignatius can also vary the formula saying that Christ was “nailed up for us” *Smyr.* 1.1. This formula is found already in Pre-Pauline church (1 Cor. 15:3) and is found throughout the first century especially in Paul (Rom 5:8; 2 Cor. 5:21; Eph. 5:2; Titus 2:4; 1 Pet. 2:21). It was over the explanation of what this meant that the church would stumble. As Corwin points out, Ignatius’ repetitive use of such phrases indicates that he thought of the crucifixion as a sacrifice but this remains entirely undeveloped and unlike Paul no idea of reconciliation with God through Christ’s death is ever presented (172). She also suggests this idea comes from the liturgy of the church but has not penetrated his actual thought. Ignatius as characteristic of the later East does not emphasize the sinfulness of man like Paul. Further, already in Ignatius as later there is a great emphasis on the “Incarnation” more generally and less specifically on the Passion. Thus “love and life were given because Christ was God; and since that was so, the passion did not hold the unique place that it did for Paul.”, *St. Ignatius*, 173.

<sup>153</sup> Winslow, “The Idea of Redemption”, 120-124.

<sup>154</sup> “divine administration” *Eph.* 18.2; 20.1. cf. in the NT Eph. 1:10. Corwin, *St. Ignatius*, 154; 163. This is frequently translated as “economy” in English theological work.

Since Christ is the source of life for those who believe in him the Christian now hopes for “resurrection unto him.” (*Tral. Pref.*). “These are the last times”, says Ignatius (*Eph. 11.1*).

Corwin while recognizing some eschatological language in Ignatius states that he does not have in mind a final judgment but rather simply an internal judgment of darkness in the inner man if God’s gift of grace is despised.<sup>155</sup> It is true that Ignatius uses little explicit language in regard to Christ’s return and the judgment. But this reader finds it terribly unlikely that he would not have believed and taught this article given his time, his thorough and not superficial use of Paul and John, his obviously being held in high regard by the church, and further the general Christian expectation that Christ would return as judge of the living and the dead (*Acts 10:42; 2 Tim. 4:1; 1 Pet. 4:5; Diogn. 7.6; Polyc. 2.1; Barn. 4.12*). In fact Swartley, while granting the lack of explicit statements, has collected a number of indicators that in aggregate strongly suggest Ignatius has an eschatological point of view.<sup>156</sup> Therefore it is the opinion of this writer that when Ignatius mentions his hope to “rise again” after being torn apart and consumed by the beasts in Rome (*ajnasthvsomai ejn aujtw/’, Rom. 4.3; Cf. Smyr. 7.1*) Ignatius has in mind the expected

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<sup>155</sup> Corwin, *St. Ignatius*, 173f. Her otherwise impressive study falls down here. But it should be pointed out that she is following somewhat of a consensus of scholars. See Bower, “The Meaning of EPITUGCANW”, 13. It seems that this originally followed from the fact that it was “generally recognized that Ignatius’ vocabulary and thought-world have marked affinities with the gnostic movement.” Chadwick, “The Silence of Bishops”, 171. W.L. Knox states that “Ignatius’ Greek is largely made up of ... reminiscences of the N.T.; the rest comes from pagan religion and astrology.” (*The Acts of the Apostles* (1948), 48, quoted in Chadwick, 171). This opinion was formed of Ignatius by scholars who accepted the idea of a late evolutionary Christology and/or an inherited Redeemer soteriology from pagan myth as presented by the Religionsgeschichtliche Schule (e.g. Schlier’s *Religionsgeschichtliche Untersuchungen zu den Ignatiusbriefen*. See Corwin’s discussion, 175-188). Further evidence for gnostic influence is Ignatius’ language such as “silence”, a general lack of reference to God the Father, and a lack of concern with creation as indicative of God’s acting in history etc. However, granting some affinity in language, Corwin concludes “Ignatius cannot adequately be interpreted as gnostic.” *St. Ignatius*, 14. (See p. 175). Yet she still accepts that Ignatius does not have an eschatological point of view. Swartley points to this same opinion in Theodor Preiss in “La mystique de l’imitation du Christ et de l’unité chez Ignace d’Antioche” *Revue d’histoire et de philosophie religieuses* 17 (1938): 197-241, but he disagrees with him and Corwin. “The Imitatio Christi”, 81; 88-90. Since denying an eschatological view point in Ignatius is largely an argument from silence (and that only by ignoring some indications of the opposite) one has to wonder if scholarship hasn’t become carried away with itself at this point.

eschatological coming of Christ when wrath will come and those who despise God's gift of grace will perish but believers will rise to life.<sup>157</sup> "All things have an end, and these two - life and death - are set before us together, and each man shall go *to his own place*."<sup>158</sup> Salvation kat j ejxochvn is for him escape from death and corruption and the gift of immortality.<sup>159</sup> "The prize is incorruption and life eternal", he tells Polycarp (*Poly*. 2.3.). But Ignatius is intensely focused upon Christ as God in flesh and his historical resurrection as the guarantee of this.<sup>160</sup> As Christ was raised from the dead so in "like fashion his Father will raise us who believe on him in Christ Jesus, apart from whom we do not have true life."<sup>161</sup>

But if at the judgment the Father will raise believers and grant them eternal life this happens only to those who already have immortality through participation in Christ who is life.<sup>162</sup> And this is accomplished in the Church because the economy (oijkonomiva) of salvation which

<sup>156</sup> Swartley, "The Imitatio Christi", 88f.

<sup>157</sup> In *Eph*. 11.1 Ignatius says "Let us fear the patience of God so that judgment does not come to us. Either let us fear the coming wrath or let us love the present grace; one of the two." (fobhqw'men thVn makroqumivan tou' Qeou', i{na mhV hJmi'n eij" kri'ma gevnhtai. h] gaVr thVn mevllousan ojrghVn fobhqw'men h] thVn ejnestw'san cavrin ajgaphvswmen, e]n tw'n duvo." Compare the mevllousan ojrghVn fobhqw'men with the fugei'n ajpoV th'" mellouvsh" ojrgh'" (to flee the coming wrath) of Matthew 3:7 (cf. Lk 3:7), which is from Ignatius' favorite Gospel and is clearly an eschatological text. (This text unfortunately has not been recognized as a scriptural parallel by Lightfoot or the editors of the *Ante-Nicene Fathers* perhaps misleading later scholars). See also *Tral*. 9.2 where Ignatius says the Father will raise those who believe. It is hard to imagine Ignatius to be understood in any other way than the common Christian concept of the eschatological judgment and resurrection.

<sup>158</sup> *Mag*. 5.1. "eij" toVn i[dion tovpon" Compare Acts 1:25: "Judas by transgression fell, that he might go to his own place." (poreuqh'nai eij" toVn tovpon toVn i[dion.) Ignatius also clearly states that Jesus Christ appeared "at the end" of the ages indicating his acceptance of the general Christian view. (*Mag*. 6.1).

<sup>159</sup> *Eph*. 19.3; Richardson, *The Christianity of Ignatius*, 23.

<sup>160</sup> "our life has sprung up again through him (Jesus) ... How will we live without him?" *Mag*. 9.1f.;

<sup>161</sup> *Tral*. 9.2. "kataV toV oJmoivwma o{" kaiV hJma'" touV" pisteuvonta" aujtw/' ou{tw" ejgerei' oj pathVr aujtou' ejn Cristw/' jlhsou', ou} cwriV" toV ajlhqinoVn zh'n oujk e[comen."

<sup>162</sup> See *Mag*. 6.2 where the church's external unity with the bishop is "type and evidence" of the already present immortality. ("eij" tuvpon kaiV didachVn ajfqarsiva")

was carried out in Christ now continues in the church.<sup>163</sup> The word and the sacraments administered there by bishop and presbyters bear the gift of life because they bring participation into Christ and his work. It can not be a coincidence that immortality is explicitly mentioned as the content of the church's Gospel and sacraments. Baptism gains its content from participation in Christ who also underwent baptism. Those who enter the church are purified by baptism because Christ “was baptized that by experiencing it he might purify water.”<sup>164</sup> That purification worked by Christ is now communicated by baptism to those who enter the church. For “the Lord did suffer the ointment to be poured upon His head, that He might breathe immortality into His Church.”<sup>165</sup> The Eucharist on the other hand gives a direct participation in the life giving flesh of Christ. Ignatius follows Paul and confesses “the Eucharist to be the flesh of our Saviour Jesus Christ, (the flesh) which suffered for our sins and which the Father, of His goodness, raised up again.”<sup>166</sup> Being a participation in the risen flesh of Christ, the Eucharist is “the medicine of immortality, and the antidote to death unto living in Jesus Christ through everything”<sup>167</sup> Kenneth Wesche has pointed out how the realistic language of physical union with Christ which finds a place here in Ignatius’ description of the Eucharist fully permeates the letters of Ignatius and concludes that:

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<sup>163</sup> “There is no gainsaying the fact that he [Ignatius] saw it [the church] as the scene and the mediator of salvation. Within the church, instituted and empowered by God, those being redeemed were given grace, so that in the end they could ‘attain to God.’” Corwin, *St. Ignatius*, 204.

<sup>164</sup> *Eph.* 18.2. See *Smyr.* 1.1 where Ignatius quotes Matt. 3:15 to the effect that Christ was baptized to “fulfill all righteousness.”

<sup>165</sup> This would appear to be a baptismal text referring to a chrism of oil accompanying baptism although this would be by far the earliest reference to such a practice.

<sup>166</sup> *Smyr.* 6.2. “thVn eujcaristivan savrka ei\nai tou' swth'ro" hJmw'n jlhsou' Cristou', thVn uJpeVr tw'n ajmartiw'n hJmw'n paqou'san, h}n th/' crhstovthti oJ pathVr h[geiren.” Richardson grants that Ignatius’ comments indicate a similar relationship between Christ and the elements as is indicated in Paul but that “never does he advance a theory concerning it; on the sacrifice of the Mass or on a magical change in the elements he is entirely silent.”, *The Christianity of Ignatius*, 56.

<sup>167</sup> *Eph.* 20.1. “o{ ejstin favrmakon ajqanasiva", ajntivdoto" tou' mhV ajpoqanei'n ajllaV zh'n ejn jlhsou' Cristw/' diaV pantov”

God's love is hypostatized in the flesh and blood of his deified humanity and given to the faithful in the holy eucharist of the church. It mingles with their perishable human blood; it becomes the nourishment that makes up their nerves, their tissues, their bones, their flesh; it mingles with the breath they breathe until they are infused throughout the whole of their being with the flesh and blood, that is to say, with the love of God.<sup>168</sup>

For Ignatius the Gospel too provides a means of participation in Christ's work. The church of the second century was often concerned to show that Christ had fulfilled the prophecies of the Old Testament especially in conflict against the Jews. And although Ignatius honors the "beloved prophets" who proclaimed "unto the Gospel", the Gospel for him excels them by far. It "has a singular preeminence in the advent of the Saviour, even our Lord Jesus Christ, and His passion and resurrection. For the beloved prophets in their preaching pointed to Him; but the Gospel is the completion of immortality."<sup>169</sup> While this might seem at first to merely indicate the historical content of Gospel preaching this does not seem to do full justice to Ignatius' thought for he "flees to the gospel as to the flesh of Jesus Christ".<sup>170</sup> Though Ignatius offers no systematic theory of

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<sup>168</sup> Wesche, "St. Ignatius of Antioch", 104. His thesis is that all of Ignatius' language of union and the realistic language of bearing about Christ, being in God etc., which we will examine shortly, as well as the idea of union and immortality through the Gospel and baptism and in fact the entire sum of ecclesiology and soteriology all derive for Ignatius from the concrete liturgical practice in the Eucharist. While the argument does have a certain consistency to it, it seems to place the eucharist, as important as it is, out of proportion with everything else. Here I leave the question unanswered whether the language first comes from the eucharist or elsewhere originally but merely point out that for Ignatius immortality and participation in Christ and his work comes through Gospel, baptism, and the eucharist within the church since it is through these things that union with Christ is gained.

<sup>169</sup> *Phld* 9.2. This comes at the end of an interesting line of thought. Ignatius apparently opposed certain people who were saying "if I find it not in the charters (*ajrceivoi*), I believe it not in the Gospel." (8.2) Ignatius responded "but for me, my charter is Jesus Christ, the inviolable charter is His cross and His death and His resurrection, and faith through Him." See "Ignatius and the Archives", *Harvard Theological Review* 71: 97-106.

<sup>170</sup> *Phld*. 5.1. "prosfugwVn tw/' eujaggelivw/ wJ" sarkiV jhsou" Although Wesche seems to go too far and make the Gospel entirely dependent on the eucharistic liturgy still his point is well taken that the "Gospel" is seen within the context of the church and the worship of Christ: "The church's gospel does not merely *proclaim* that death has been conquered and that there is now new life in Christ, but actually brings the believer into the *accomplishment* of that salvation through the sacramental entrance of baptism, chrismation, and eucharist into the very passion and resurrection of Christ.", "St. Ignatius of Antioch", 100. On just the opposite side, Harnack quotes this very passage and similar ones to conclude that such mystical language was just common in Ignatius as a sort of metaphor and that therefore when he speaks of the Lord's Supper he does not indicate a true realism either. *History of Dogma*, 1, 212 n.1. While the possibility of this must at first be admitted it will soon be seen that this does not ultimately explain the

explanation, for him Christ is present in the church through gospel, baptism and eucharist such that he brings immortality to those who believe in him by participation in his deified life-giving flesh.

Having examined the objective part of salvation in Ignatius we can now turn to the subjective side of salvation. This side of Ignatius' thought is dominated by several key terms and proves somewhat difficult to organize into a systematic presentation. But the proper starting point is where we have left off. For Ignatius the Christian's goal is life by a three tiered union: with God, with the life giving passion or flesh and blood of Christ, and with the bishop and the church.<sup>171</sup> And in the end when this is complete (teleivo") one will have "attained to God" (ejpituganei'n).<sup>172</sup>

I sing the praises of the churches; and I pray that there may be in them union of the flesh and of the spirit which are Jesus Christ's, our never-failing life - an union of faith and of love which is preferred before all things, and -what is more than all - an union with Jesus and with the Father; in whom if we endure patiently ... we will attain to God.

We have already observed how union occurs with Christ and the Father within the church. This leaves us then with the union of faith and love. For Ignatius faith and love sum up the whole of the believer's life "for the beginning is faith while the end is love." (*Eph.* 14.1). By faith the believer takes part in Christ and his saving work. You believe in him "who died for us, in order that, by believing in His death, you may escape from death", he tells the church in Tralles (2.1). The Father will raise those who believe (*Tral.* 9.2). On the other hand men are to "love nothing but God alone." (*Eph.* 9.2). But many times Ignatius uses the two terms together as if inseparable. Corwin notes that "however much one may try to understand the different

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realistic mystical language concerning the believers themselves as being "full of God" and "Christ-bearers" etc.

<sup>171</sup> "e{nwsı" and e{novth" appear nineteen times in the seven epistles of Ignatius: a fact that is all the more significant when we realize that neither word is found elsewhere in the literature of the Apostolic Fathers, and only e{novth" is found in the New Testament, and there only three times." Bower "The Meaning of EPITUGCANW", 4. For the three fold description see Bower, 5-7.

connotations of ‘faith’ and ‘love’ in Ignatius’ letters it is clear that the two conceptions are more alike than different.”<sup>173</sup> Thus faith and love together belong to union with Christ so that Ignatius can tell the Trallians to “recover yourselves in faith, which is flesh of the Lord, and in love, which is blood of Jesus Christ.” (*Tral.* 8.1). And thus set within the larger context Ignatius can say:

forasmuch as you are stones of a temple, which were prepared beforehand for a building of God the Father, being hoisted up to the heights through the engine of Jesus Christ, which is the Cross, and using for a rope the Holy Spirit; while your faith is your windlass, and love is the way that leadeth up to God. (*Eph.* 9.1)

Together then faith and love bring the Christian to union with God. This connection is so intense in Ignatius’ mind that it brings him to a striking expression that is as close to the later Christian deification doctrine as he would come.

None of these things is hidden from you, if you are perfect in your faith and love toward Jesus Christ, for these are the beginning and end of life - faith is the beginning and love is the end - *and the two being found in unity are God*, while all things else follow in their train unto true nobility.<sup>174</sup>

How can Ignatius’ expression be understood that faith and love being in union “qeov” ejstin”? Corwin on the one hand admits of the difficulty but tries to interpret it as saying “it is the declaration that faith and love for Jesus Christ, in perfect fullness, bring one into the very presence of God; there God is.” On the other hand she says: “That this is a figure we may not question, but that it speaks Ignatius’ most profound conviction is equally certain.”<sup>175</sup> It is in fact only within the context of Ignatius’ equally striking language of the indwelling Christ that this statement can be understood. And it is not a coincidence that this statement falls within the letter to the Ephesians where Ignatius spoke in the most extraordinary manner on this topic.

<sup>172</sup> *Mag.* 1.2.

<sup>173</sup> Corwin, *St. Ignatius*, 242.

<sup>174</sup> *Eph.* 14.1. Lightfoot. “taV deV duvo ejn ejnovthti genovmena Qeov” ejstin” That the editors of the ANF series printed this as “these two, being inseparably connected together, are of God, while all other things which are requisite for a holy life follow after them” reveals a blatant Western and Protestant bias.

We can at first take note that Ignatius without hesitation has taken over Pauline language of mystical union between Christ and believer. While the “in Christ” language, as in Paul, serves several purposes in Ignatius, he is especially concerned that those to whom he writes be “found unblameable in Him.” (*Tral.* 13.3). He begs the Magnesians to “be salted in Him, that none among you spoil ...” (10.1). “A whole life characterized by ‘abiding in’ (*Eph.* 10.3) or ‘living in’ him will mean that at death they will be ‘found in him’ (*Eph.* 11.1; *Tral.* 2.2) and will ‘live forever in Jesus Christ.’ (*Eph.* 20.2).”<sup>176</sup> As in Paul this also appears in inverted form. “You have Jesus Christ in yourselves”, Ignatius tells the Magnesians (*Mag.* 12.1) indicating that as one might be “in Christ” so also a man might “have him within himself” (*Rom.* 6.3).<sup>177</sup> And as has already been seen, Ignatius follows Paul in referring to the church as a temple or building of God (*Eph.* 9.1). Further, he speaks of the “one body of his church” (*Smyr.* 1.2) and the Christians as “members of his (the Father’s) son.” (*Eph.* 4.2). That this concept flows for Ignatius from the idea of union with Christ follows from his statement that “it cannot be that a head should be found without members, seeing that God promiseth union, and this union is himself.” (*Tral.* 11.2). This last text strongly indicates the intention of Ignatius and leaves little doubt that he is speaking of more than just a metaphor or figure of speech. And this is confirmed upon further examination.

Ignatius also makes use of Johannine-like terminology in that alongside of “love in Christ” he can speak of the Ephesians’ “much beloved name in God.” But this usage is not altogether without ambiguity because first as here it is often used of something besides the Christians

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<sup>175</sup> Corwin, *St. Ignatius*, 244 & 262.

<sup>176</sup> Corwin, *St. Ignatius*, 257.

<sup>177</sup> “ti" aujtoVn ejn e]autw/' e[cei”

themselves and secondly because Ignatius so freely substitutes “God” for “Christ”.<sup>178</sup>

Nevertheless, when this terminology is inverted the reciprocal formations form striking examples of Ignatius’ full meaning of union with God or Christ. This union means that the Christians are “full of God.”<sup>179</sup> And thus it follows that they are “God-bearers and temple-bearers, Christ-bearers” because we know that the Lord “dwelleth in us, to the end that we may be his temples and he himself may be in us as our God.”<sup>180</sup>

While these brief texts do not answer all the existing questions, the aggregate strength of what has been presented should bear the weight of several conclusions. For Ignatius the concept of union with the Father through Christ and with Christ through the church leads him to the conclusion that Christ is actually in the believer and the believer is a bearer of Christ. The believer participates in a mystical union with the life-giving flesh and blood of Christ such that he “partakes of God”.<sup>181</sup> This participation is so real that an exchange occurs between Christ and the believer. The believer lives in Christ and Christ in the believer; Christ’s death becomes resurrection for the Christian<sup>182</sup>; Christ is life and so the Christian has life in him.<sup>183</sup> In this way the Christian though still living according the flesh (*kataV savrka*) is no longer fleshly (*sarkikoV*) but instead is entirely spiritual in Jesus Christ. “They that are of the flesh can not do spiritual things just as faith can not do the things of unbelief and unbelief the things of faith. But

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<sup>178</sup> Significantly Ignatius does not speak of being “in the Father” or the “Father in you.” It would appear that when Ignatius speaks of “in God” or “God in you” he is speaking most often of Christ.

<sup>179</sup> *Mag.* 14.1. “EijdwV" o{ti Qeov" gevmete”

<sup>180</sup> *Eph.* 9.2. “qeofovroi kaiV naofovroi, cristofovroi” *Eph.* 15.3. “pavnta ou\n poiw'men, wJ" aujtou' ejn hJmi'n katoikou'nto", i{na w\men aujtou' naoiV kaiV aujtoV" h\ / ejn hJmi'n Qeov".”

<sup>181</sup> *Eph.* 4.2. “It is therefore profitable for you to be in blameless unity, that ye may also be partakers of God always.” “i{na kaiV qeov" pavntote metevchte.” Here “unity” refers to the unity of the church but how this relates to union with God has been pointed out earlier.

<sup>182</sup> *Smyr.* 5.2. “Christ's passion, which is our resurrection”

<sup>183</sup> *Eph.* 11.1. “let us be found in Christ Jesus unto the true life.”

the things that you do according to the flesh, these are spiritual things. For you do everything in Jesus Christ.”<sup>184</sup>

When Ignatius says that faith and love being in unity “qeov" ejstivn”, his precise meaning is unclear. It is uncertain whether he intends to say that faith and love in unity is Christ as God or the believer becomes god through Christ in him. Faith and love can not themselves be Christ. It seems probable then, that while Ignatius most likely did not make the distinction introduced in this question, nevertheless, his statement can not but infer the second answer. But the church was only now coming to regularly refer to Christ as God; it certainly was not prepared as of yet to say that “God became man in order that man might become god.” In fact Ignatius lacks even the full framework of the later doctrine of deification in that he does not relate this to the theology of the image and does not explain the final resurrection in terms of becoming god. And equally significant is his great lack of comment on the Holy Spirit’s role in salvation. Yet, that having been said, it is here in Ignatius that the Pauline and Johannine doctrine of the indwelling Christ has been exposed to the atmosphere in which Christ is regularly called “God”. And this, in turn, was a critical step along the way to a more developed doctrine of deification. Ignatius has molded the core substance of what will be grouped later into a coherent doctrine of “becoming god” by others.

In spite of the magnitude of evidence, however, some scholars deny that a doctrine of mystical union is to be found in Ignatius. Richardson states that “Ignatius does not think of eternal life as deification.”<sup>185</sup> He argues that

The chief difficulties with the latter view, i.e. that man becomes deified, can be briefly summarized: the absence in Ignatius of such terms as *ajpoqeovw*, the stress he lays upon the moral outcome of the Christian life, and the absence of any doctrine of perfectionism. If the believer is literally deified in his nature, why does he yet sin? Or again, if deification and an

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<sup>184</sup> *Eph.* 8.2. “a} deV kaiV kataV savrka pravssete, tau'ta pneumatikav ejstin: ejn jlhsou' gaVr Cristw' / pavnta pravssete.”

<sup>185</sup> Richardson, *The Christianity of Ignatius*, 32.

essential change of his nature is the real goal of the believer, why is there such need to stress the moral issue of the Christian life of faith?<sup>186</sup>

In making his argument in this way Richardson has set up a false dichotomy. He feels that either Ignatius is concerned with moral improvement of a person's character which can be called in a metaphoric way "Christ in you", or Ignatius is discussing deification in such a way that man is in his nature changed into Christ or God, that he undergoes a change of essence. It can at once be granted that Ignatius does not use *ajpoqeoovw* terminology. The cause for this has already been discussed. The second part of his argument may also be granted: Ignatius does not teach a deification in which the essence of a person is changed into God in such a way that he becomes a member of the Godhead. Or to use the later Nicene terminology, it is true that for Ignatius the believer does not become *oJmoousivo*" with the Father or the Son. He does not change into the essence of God Himself. But Richardson's argument does not speak to the type of union that Ignatius takes from Paul and John in which the believer lives in Christ and Christ in him yet without loss of identity or essence. This is a union as we have seen in which the believer is renewed and reborn and being delivered from sin and death serves as a basis for a new moral life in imitation of the Lord. For "no one professing faith sins" (*Eph.* 14.1) and "faith can not do the works of unfaithfulness." (*Eph.* 8.2). Thus Corwin after considering Richardson's argument decides against him stating that:

If mystical union with God himself is possible as the final healing of the divisions that mar life, then Ignatius' emphasis on unity and his reiteration of the "one cup," the "one Jesus Christ" becomes much more comprehensible. It is the capstone of the arch. ... The uniting of the divisions of life, the transcending of the separateness, the giving of life, is the work of the one God in the world. It is because this is his dearest conviction that Ignatius describes himself as a man "completely given over to union." For union is the nature of God himself.<sup>187</sup>

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<sup>186</sup> Richardson, *The Christianity of Ignatius*, 58.

<sup>187</sup> Corwin, *St. Ignatius*, 267f.

If we have identified in Ignatius the continuing use of first century doctrines to form a soteriology based on the indwelling Christ / indwelling Spirit we must look elsewhere for the other parallel traditions. In Ignatius' letters there is no indication of any explicit use of the theology of the image. Salvation for Ignatius does not in any way arise from human nature; it is entirely supernatural.

### **Barnabas: theology of the image and indwelling Christ**

One of the earliest explicit uses of the theology of the image is found in the Epistle of Barnabas. The exact dating of this epistle is unknown but it is generally agreed to be quite early in the second century with some scholars placing it even in the first. Its author's intent is to prove that Christ was the fulfillment of the Old Testament prophecies and that the Jews did not understand their own scriptures. Thus this epistle in some ways falls into the same genre as Justin's *Dialogue*. And here, as in Justin, in the midst of a Christological apologetic to the Jews we have evidence that Genesis 1:26 served as a traditional proof text for the divinity of Christ.<sup>188</sup> In responding to the old problem of how the Christ could have suffered Barnabas states:

If the Lord endured to suffer for our souls, though he was Lord of the whole world, unto whom God said from the foundation of the world, *Let us make man after our image and likeness*, how then did he endure to suffer at the hand of men? Understand. The prophets, receiving grace from him, prophesied concerning him. But he himself endured that he might destroy death and show forth the resurrection of the dead, for that he must be manifested in the flesh.<sup>189</sup>

Barnabas is interested in showing that Jesus Christ was indeed the pre-existent Lord and agent of creation with God the Father. This verse apparently served this use very early in the church. But Barnabas also affords us evidence that this text also was already closely tied to a theology of the image of God. The epistle argues:

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<sup>188</sup> *dial.* 62.

<sup>189</sup> *Barn.* 5.5-6.

Forasmuch then as He renewed us in the remission of sins, he made us to be a new type, so that we should have the soul of children, as if he were re-creating us. For the scripture says concerning us, how He says to the Son: *Let us make man after our image and after our likeness, and let them rule over the beasts of the earth and the fowls of the heaven and the fishes of the sea.* And the Lord said when He saw the fair creation of us men: *Increase and multiply and fill the earth.* These words refer to the Son. Again I will show you how the Lord speaks concerning us. He made a second creation at the last; and the Lord said: *Behold I make the last things as the first.* In reference to this then the Prophet preached: *Enter into a land flowing with milk and honey, and be lords over it.* Behold then we have been created anew, as He says again in another prophet: *Behold, says the Lord, I will take out from these, that is to say, from those whom the Spirit of the Lord foresaw, their stony hearts, and will put into them hearts of flesh;* for he himself was to be manifested in the flesh and to dwell in us. For a holy temple unto the Lord, my brethren, is the abode of our heart.<sup>190</sup>

This important text gives us a glimpse at how a relationship was being formed between the original creation as being in the “image of God”, the fall from that image, and salvation as a type of recreation in that image and how this was being related to the idea of Christ dwelling in the hearts of his people. But what was the motivation for this? It would seem that Barnabas gives us a glimpse of that process that connected the important Christological proof text of Genesis 1:26 with Christological and soteriological ideas of “image” already present in the Pauline corpus. Apparently this process was underway in the first half of the second century.

### **Diognetus: theology of the image and Imitation**

The moralistic influence of natural theology also played a role in the success of the concept of imitation among the fathers. In the New Testament the idea of imitation pointed in two directions. On the one hand, Christians were to imitate the Apostles and the saints (1 Cor. 4:16; 1 Thess. 2:14; Heb. 6:12) and on the other to imitate “the Lord” (1 Thess. 1:6) and “God” (Eph. 5:1). To imitate meant to “live a life of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.” (Eph. 5:1). In Clement, the Martyrdom of Polycarp, and in Ignatius we find the ideas of imitating the saints in their good works and especially in

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<sup>190</sup> *Barn.* 6.11-14. (ANF I, 140f.)

martyrdom.<sup>191</sup> But in Ignatius we also find a strong element promoting the imitation of Christ. There it “means shaping one’s historical life, especially in love’s willingness to suffer and in love’s quest for unity, by the paradigm set forth in Jesus Christ.”<sup>192</sup> To imitate is closely related to becoming complete (teveio”) and is thoroughly ethical in nature and yet is related to the mystical element in that the Christians are “in flesh and spirit united in all of [Jesus Christ’s] commandments.”<sup>193</sup> It would appear that imitation for Ignatius can be characterized as the ethical results of the mystical union which has already been noted to be full of ethical consequences. The concept of imitation then could be easily related to the idea of being like God and thus could relate to the idea of “becoming god”. In the Epistle to Diognetus in the first half of the second century this in fact can be explicitly observed.

This faith if thou also desirest, apprehend first full knowledge of the Father. For God loved men for whose sake He made the world, to whom He subjected all things that are in the earth, to whom He gave reason and mind, whom alone He permitted to look up to heaven, whom He created after His own image, to whom he sent his only begotten Son, and to whom He promised the kingdom which is in heaven, and will give it to those that have loved him. And when thou has attained to this full knowledge, with what joy do you think you will be filled or how much will you love him that so loved you before? And if you love Him, you will be an imitator of His kindness. And do not wonder that a man may become an imitator of God. He can, if he is willing. For it is not by ruling over his neighbours, or by seeking to hold the supremacy over those that are weaker, or by being rich, and showing violence towards those that are inferior, that happiness is found; nor can any one by these things become an imitator of God. But these things do not at all constitute His majesty. On the contrary he who takes upon himself the burden of his neighbour; he who, in whatsoever respect he may be superior, is ready to benefit another who is deficient; *he who, whatsoever things he has received from God, by distributing these to the needy, becomes a god to those who receive [his benefits]: he is an imitator of God.*<sup>194</sup>

This is in fact the first Christian text that explicitly refers to a Christian “becoming god.”

Here already this is related to the theology of the image but it demonstrates a purely ethical

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<sup>191</sup> *I Clem.* 17; *M. Polyc.* 19; *Ignatius Smyr.* 12.

<sup>192</sup> Swartley, “The Imitatio Christi”, 101.

<sup>193</sup> *Rom. Ins.* See Corwin, *St. Ignatius*, 229f.

<sup>194</sup> *Diognetus* 10 (ANF 1, 29). “tau'ta toi' ejpideomevnoi" corhgw'n qeoV" givnetai tw'n lambanovntwn, ou|to" mimhthv" ejsti qeou'.”

understanding of deification deriving from knowledge of the Father. How different this is from Ignatius' union with the life giving flesh and blood of Christ and his faith and love which being in unity "is god." How different this is from Barnabas' doctrine of the indwelling Christ. But again this clearly demonstrates the great variety of doctrines and traditions found in the early period. It would seem that already at the date of origin of this epistle, even already in Ignatius' day, the idea of the believer somehow "becoming god" was known and influencing Christian thought. I have already shown that this seems to have come from the very early use of Psalm 82 as a Christological text. But at this time the explanation of "becoming gods" was not yet fixed and found various explanations just as did the idea of "image."

### **Theology of the image and Psalm 82**

The explicit mingling of Psalm 82 with the framework of the theology of the image can first be observed in Justin's *Dialogue with Trypho*. In chapter 55, Justin records Trypho the Jew's request that Christ be proven to be God. In chapter 124 Justin concludes his arguments toward this end. In this final chapter Justin addresses the Jewish concern that Christians are even called sons of God by bringing forth once again Psalm 82. Thus the Psalm appears at the end of a Christological argument but not for a purely Christological use. Showing that Christ is to be addressed as God he introduces the text and admonishes the Jews saying, "Listen, sirs, how the Holy Ghost speaks of this people, saying that they are all sons of the Highest and how this very Christ will be present in their assembly." He then quotes the entire Psalm:

<sup>1</sup> God standeth in the congregation of the mighty; he judgeth among the gods.

<sup>2</sup> How long will you judge unjustly, and accept the persons of the wicked?

<sup>3</sup> Judge for the orphan and the poor and do justice to the humble and needy.

<sup>4</sup> Deliver the needy, and save the poor out of the hand of the wicked.

<sup>5</sup> They know not, neither have they understood; they walk on in darkness: all the foundations of the earth shall be shaken.

<sup>6</sup> I said, You *are* gods; and are all children of the most High.

<sup>7</sup> But you die like men, and fall like one of the princes.

<sup>8</sup> Arise, O God, judge the earth: for you shalt inherit all nations.

The traditional Christological application drawn from verse 6 has been observed already in the fathers both East and West<sup>195</sup> and indeed Justin considers the title “God” of verses 1 and 8 to apply to Christ. But here Justin is mainly interested in an anthropological argument and gives an exposition of verses 6 and 7 as manifesting

the disobedience of men, - I mean of Adam and Eve, - and the fall of one of the princes, i.e., of him who was called the serpent, who fell with a great overthrow, because he deceived Eve. But as my discourse is not intended to touch on this point, but to prove to you that the Holy Ghost 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 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.*<sup>196</sup>

Justin has brought out of Ps. 82:6-7 the three ideas: that mankind was first created “like God”, that they later “worked out death for themselves”, and finally that they are yet worthy by nature of becoming gods and sons of the Highest. Although no explicit mention of the image of God is made here the general framework of the theology of the image is unmistakable and is completed by a salvation expressed as “becoming god”. Again, this snapshot from the mid second century shows that Psalm 82 provided a terminology to express the concept of salvation as the restoration of mankind even while this terminology itself is yet being defined in terms of several different models.

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<sup>195</sup> This is however the earliest extant instance of such use of this verse outside of the Gospel of John. One further note, once Jesus came to be addressed as “God” the messianic application of verse 8 is also clear. But it is interesting that this Psalm never entered into the traditional role of proof texts for the messiahship of Jesus and so verse 8 is not referenced in the first century at all. Compare this to Psalm 2:8 where in an otherwise parallel verse God says to his “Son” and his “Anointed One”: “Ask of me, and I shall give thee the heathen for thine inheritance.” Psalm 2 is quoted extensively in the New Testament and in the fathers immediately thereafter. Psalm 2:8 is explicitly quoted in *I Clem.* 36 and *Iren. haer.* 4.11.3. Once again this draws attention to the fact that it was later in the first century when the church attempted to prove Christ should be called God from the scriptures well after the initial phase of proving that Jesus was the Christ and the Son of God worthy of worship and prayer which we see in the earliest years of the church but which was complete by Paul’s day.

<sup>196</sup> *dial.* 124. (ANF 1, 261f.). That this text is also serving as a Christological argument is indicated by his closing of the chapter with the comment that “Now I have proved at length that Christ is called God.”

## Summary

We can now summarize the results of the investigation into the period before Irenaeus. It has been shown that the actual use of technical deification terminology does not come into regular use in this period. But the idea of Christians as becoming “gods” is well known in the second half of the second century as demonstrated from Justin, Theophilus and Tertullian. This terminology can be traced to earlier in the second century as the two examples from Ignatius and Diognetus show. It has also been demonstrated that this language was likely taken from the traditional use of the phrase “I said, ‘You are gods’” found in Psalm 82:6. The use of this text likely dates back to the late first century as an Old Testament Christological proof text for the divinity of Christ since the argument taken from this Psalm is found in Greek and Latin fathers from the mid second century onwards and is seen in an earlier form already in the tenth chapter of the Gospel of John.

However, even though the language of Christian salvation as “becoming god” can be found this early, various meanings are given to this terminology. The various meanings which can be found attached to the idea of “becoming god” are simply the various second century expressions of the content of Christian salvation. In other words, the terminology was given meaning from independently existing soteriological models. First, it was explained as “immortality” as in Theophilus. Secondly, the idea of salvation through knowledge and virtue by choosing of the good prompted the Epistle to Diognetus to give a moral explanation of the terminology such that a Christian “becomes god” to those to whom love is shown by “imitation of the kindness of God.” Thirdly, the idea was related to the Pauline and Johannine idea of union between the indwelling Holy Spirit or indwelling Christ and the believer. The believer in this way participates already now in the life giving person and work of Christ, who is God, which gives rebirth and brings new life to the believer who thus begins the process of becoming a god. This strain of thought was seen Ignatius and Barnabas. Further, the theology of the image has been observed

arising with the interaction of the Christological proof text of Genesis 1:26 with the Pauline ideas of Christ as the image of the Father. This theology of the image provided a framework within which the restoration of mankind was expressed with the idea of “becoming god” taken from Psalm 82.

The clues given by the use of Genesis 1:26 and Psalm 82 as Christological proof texts and the evidence already examined would indicate that the phraseology of believers becoming gods arose in the early second century. The terminology was thus introduced but was in need of explanation. The teachers of the church then made use of existing soteriology to explain what “becoming god” meant since it was immediately obvious that in fact believers did not in essence become the Lord. The unreflective acceptance of such a potentially troublesome language even alongside the church’s monotheistic confession could only occur under the influence of the Old Testament and the Christological hermeneutic. The terminology was not introduced on account of the influence of hellenistic religions or philosophy but rather because of the influence of the church’s Christological argument primarily with the Jews. The idea of the believer becoming a god was so related to the church’s Christology from the beginning that in fact it could arise and did arise only as the church confessed Christ specifically as “God” and gave proof for this in teaching by reference to Psalm 82.

## IRENÆUS: BECOMING A GOD BY ADOPTION AND PARTICIPATION

Irenaeus was Bishop of Lyons in France in the last quarter of the second century. He wrote his famous *Against Heresies* during the episcopate of Eleutherus in Rome somewhere between 182 and 188 AD<sup>197</sup> His *Proof of the Apostolic Preaching* is from the same general period.<sup>198</sup> Irenaeus in many ways demonstrates a general conservative nature and most often presents ideas and arguments that were traditional in his time.<sup>199</sup> By his day the concept of salvation as “becoming god” was apparently well known and yet he hesitates to use it freely. And further he avoids *θεοποίησις* and all the purely technical deification language. What place then does deification have in Irenaeus? To find the answer to this question requires an overview of Irenaeus’ soteriology.

Irenaeus’ description of salvation follows the theology of the image but builds this model around the incarnation of the Son of God and the work of the Holy Spirit. He makes use of the many various traditions present in the church in the earlier age and puts them into a coherent if not always consistent system. The ideas already observed in the earlier authors are all presented along with an attempt to seriously incorporate the Pauline emphasis on salvation as deliverance from sin. Here for the first time the New Testament as scripture makes a serious impact on the theology of the fathers. In one of Irenaeus’ common figures he claims that man was created at

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<sup>197</sup> “Introductory Note” ANF 1, 312.

<sup>198</sup> References from the *Proof of the Apostolic Preaching* come from the *Ancient Christian Writers* series, vol. 16, tr. Joseph P. Smith. Quotes from *Against Heresies* generally come from the *Ante-Nicene Fathers* series vol. 1. References to the original are from the J.P Migne *Patrologia Graeca* text.

<sup>199</sup> cf. Pelikan, *Catholic Tradition*, 144.

the beginning “by the hands of God, that is, by the Son and the Holy Spirit.”<sup>200</sup> Thus mankind is the Lord’s “own handiwork ... who had been created after His image and likeness”.<sup>201</sup> Irenaeus uniquely did not follow those before him who defined the “image of God” in terms of the soul’s rational and reasonable nature.<sup>202</sup> For Irenaeus, who expressed his theology in the context of battle with the Valentinians and the other gnostics for whom the flesh was inherently defective, the image and likeness of God was found especially in the flesh. Generally he does not distinguish between the “image” and “likeness” of God, but where he does, the “image of God” refers most simply to the nature of having flesh, and “likeness” refers more broadly to the assimilation of the whole man, body, mind, and soul, to God in salvation through immortality.<sup>203</sup> Where the two are not distinguished they seem as a pair to bear these ideas together.

The question immediately arises as to how the image of God could be understood to be in the human body. Irenaeus answers by proposing that “when God fashioned the earth creature from the mud he did so after the pattern of the body of Christ (*Dem.* 22; *haer.* 5.16.2). Mankind is made in the image of God in the flesh because the body has been shaped after the pattern of the body of the incarnate God.”<sup>204</sup> But merely bearing flesh was not the full meaning of the image

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<sup>200</sup> *haer.* 5.6.1 (ANF 1, 531). This idea of the “hands of God” represents the agency of the Son and the Holy Spirit at creation in many texts. So also the *Dem.* 11: “But man he fashioned with His own hands, taking of the purest and finest of earth, in measured wise mingling with the earth His own power.” See Frend, 246. cf. *haer.* 5.28.4 for a slight variation.

<sup>201</sup> *haer.* 3.23.1 (ANF 1, 455).

<sup>202</sup> This is contrary to Minns who claims that where “image” and “likeness” are distinguished Irenaeus follows the “earlier tradition.” The proof texts given (*Dem.* 11; *haer.* 4.4.3; 37.4; 38.4) do not show an explicit distinction made by Irenaeus between “image” and “likeness” in Genesis 1:26 but rather show a use of the tradition gathered from natural theology which stated that man’s “free will” and “reason” made him “like to God.” (*haer.* 4.4.3). In the apologists this was the explanation given for Genesis 1:26. But Irenaeus makes use of the earlier tradition while never placing it into proximity with Genesis 1:26. cf. Minns, 59f.

<sup>203</sup> *haer.* 5.16.2

<sup>204</sup> Minns, 60. Thus *haer.* 5.16.2: “For in times long past, it was *said* that man was created after the image of God, but it was not [actually shown]; for the Word was as yet invisible, after whose image man was created.” ANF 1, 544.

and likeness of God. And it is the Fall which brings Irenaeus to distinguish “image” and “likeness.” For man continued in the flesh but nevertheless through misuse of his free will “did easily lose the similitude” (*haer* 5.16.2). The result of the disobedience of Adam was subjection to sin, death and the devil. Death “took possession of man” (*haer* 3.23.7) and man became “a vessel in his (Satan’s) possession, whom he held under his power” (*haer* 3.23.1) Only in the recapitulation of the second Adam was the transgression of the first Adam undone and salvation brought about.

Irenaeus’ concept of recapitulation served as a link between the first created man and Christ in his typological system of the first and second Adam.<sup>205</sup> This system serves as the basic explanation of the need for the incarnation and the work of Christ. Jesus Christ is the divine Logos who has descended to earth and took on flesh. For what the man Adam did had to be undone by the work of the new man and yet it could not be undone by a man alone.

As it was not possible that the man who had once for all been conquered, and who had been destroyed through disobedience, could reform himself, and obtain the prize of victory; and as it was also impossible that he could attain to salvation who had fallen under the power of sin,—the Son effected both these things, being the Word of God, descending from the Father, becoming incarnate, stooping low, even to death, and consummating the arranged plan (economy) of our salvation.<sup>206</sup>

So the Son, as God in flesh, by his obedience was able to undo the disobedience of Adam and in undoing this disobedience, the second Adam destroyed sin, death, and the devil. By having fellowship with man in the flesh he made it possible for man and God to be reunited into

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<sup>205</sup> Schultz, 162. He continues: “It is God’s plan that Adam be once in his pristine glory, become sinful and once again be restored to his original exalted state in the second Adam.” See Eph. 1:10: “For he has made known to us in all wisdom and insight the mystery of his will, according to his purpose which he set forth in Christ as a plan (*oikonomia*) for the fullness of time, to recapitulate (RSV ‘unite’) all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth.” Minns states: “Christ recapitulated Adam because he was fashioned from the very same earth that Adam was fashioned from, and he recapitulated the manner of Adam’s generation, for, like Adam, he had no human father. He recapitulated Adam in another sense by retracing Adam’s temptation and defeat in disobedience and reversing that defeat in the victory of his own obedience. In this sense, his recapitulation of Adam is Adam’s renewal, his restoration to the glory God intended for him from the beginning.”, 93.

fellowship.<sup>207</sup> “For, in what way could we be partaken of the adoption of sons, unless we had received from Him through the Son that fellowship which refers to Himself, unless His Word, having been made flesh, had entered into communion with us? Wherefore also He passed through every stage of life, restoring to all communion with God.” (*haer* 3.18.7) Therefore, according to Irenaeus, it was God’s economy of salvation that the Son by becoming flesh, recapitulating the sin of Adam, and being obedient unto death should enable man to be reformed (*replasmari*, recreated) and to obtain salvation and the adoption of sons through reunited fellowship with the Father.<sup>208</sup>

The recreated fellowship with the Father, recreation of man in the image of God, and the adoption of sons are key concepts in Irenaeus’ description of salvation. As with all the early Christian authors, this economy of salvation is ultimately consummated in the eschatological kingdom. There man will see God face to face and thus be perfected in immortality and in the image and likeness of God.<sup>209</sup> But since the Father is by nature invisible only in the future will

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<sup>206</sup> *haer* 3.18.2. dispensationem salutis, oijkonomiavn. cf. this to the same terminology used by Ignatius.

<sup>207</sup> “As our Lord is alone truly Master, so the Son of God is truly good and patient, the Word of God the Father having been made the Son of man. For He fought and conquered; for He was man contending of the fathers, and through obedience doing away with disobedience completely: for He bound the strong man, and set free the weak, and endowed His own handiwork with salvation, by destroying sin. ... He caused man (human nature) to cleave to and to become one with God. For unless man had overcome the enemy of man, the enemy would not have been legitimately vanquished. And again: unless it had been God who had freely given salvation, we could never have possessed it securely. And unless man had been joined to God, he could never have become a partaker of incorruptibility. For it was incumbent upon the Mediator between God and men, by His relationship to both, to bring both to friendship and concord, and present man to God, while He revealed God to man.” *haer* 3.18.6f.

<sup>208</sup> The idea of the divine economy or plan runs strong in Irenaeus. This is related to God’s divine foreknowledge. “All things were foreknown by the Father and will be effected by the Son, in the proper and at the appropriate time.” (*haer* 3.16.7). Yet he is equally eager to deny any divine compulsion of the individual in the process of salvation.

<sup>209</sup> “God thus determining all things beforehand for the bringing of man to perfection, for his edification, and for the revelation of His dispensations, that goodness may both be made apparent, and righteousness perfected, and that the Church may be fashioned after the image of His Son, and that man may finally be brought to maturity at some future time, becoming ripe through such privileges to see and comprehend God.” *haer* 4.37.7. Also 4.20.5f.; 4.38.3

we see him face to face. For now no one can see God and live (Ex. 33:20). Even so he has already been revealed and made visible through the sending of the Son who is the Father's own Word.<sup>210</sup> The Word made flesh has reconciled the world to the Father and recapitulated all things in order that people might begin even now to be perfected in the image and likeness of God.<sup>211</sup> For people become acceptable to the Father by being conformed to the image of the Son.<sup>212</sup> But being conformed to the image of the Son occurs only by the work of the indwelling Holy Spirit. It is the Holy Spirit that changes people from being merely flesh that can not inherit the kingdom of God into a spiritual people.<sup>213</sup> And it is the Holy Spirit that is the earnest of the final inheritance and cries "Abba, Father" in the hearts of those who believe, testifying that even now

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<sup>210</sup> From Ex. 33:20 Irenaeus concludes that "two facts are thus signified: that it is impossible for man to see God and that, through the wisdom of God, man shall see Him in the last times, in the depth of a rock, that is, in His coming as a man." *haer* 4.20.9ff. cf. *haer* 3.20.2. This revealing takes place through the teaching of Christ. But this revelation also goes much beyond merely Christ's teaching because Christ himself is the Father's own Word who reveals the Father "to Angels, Archangels, Powers, Virtues and all to whom He wills that God should be revealed." *haer* 2.30.9. cf. *haer* 4.6.3ff. It is quite interesting that although Irenaeus makes so much use of the theology of the "image" in regard to man he especially avoids the New Testament language of calling Christ the "image" of God although he seems to assume the fact. For example, he makes use of 2 Cor. 4:4 several times but never its phrase that Christ is the "image of God." cf. Col. 1:15; Heb. 1:3.

<sup>211</sup> "Now this being is the Creator (Demiurgus), who is, in respect of His love, the Father; but in respect of His power, He is Lord; and in respect of His wisdom, our Maker and Fashioner; by transgressing whose commandment we became His enemies. And therefore in the last times the Lord has restored us into friendship through His incarnation, having become "the Mediator between God and men;" Also propitiating indeed for us the Father against whom we had sinned, and canceling (consolatus) our disobedience by His own obedience." *haer* 5.17.1. Also *haer* 4.38.3; 5.14.3; 5.6.1.

<sup>212</sup> "And then, again, this Word was manifested when the Word of God was made man, assimilating Himself to man, and man to Himself, so that by means of his resemblance to the Son, man might become precious to the Father." *haer* 5.16.2. Since Adam was first created in the image of God, that is, in the image of God's Son, the recreation of man in the image of the Son is a type of restoration of the original state of man. cf. *haer* 4.33.4. This conforming to the image of the Son clearly has ethical implications and yet it is not merely ethical. One does not become like the Son merely through ethical behaviour or good works. There must first come the Spirit who brings life and recreation and union with God and makes us spiritual.

<sup>213</sup> Christ was "joining and uniting the Spirit of God the Father with what God had fashioned, so that man became accruing to the image and likeness of God." *Dem.* 97. See Irenaeus' entire discussion on the exegesis of 1 Cor. 15:50 where Paul says that "flesh and blood can not inherit the kingdom of God." The gnostics apparently made much of this passage against the resurrection of the flesh and Irenaeus attempts to repudiate their interpretation. *haer* 5.9.1 ff. Also *haer* 5.6.1.

God's people have received the adoption of sons.<sup>214</sup> And thus by the Holy Spirit the person once dead is vivified and made to join in union and fellowship with the Son and the Father. And union with God is life and salvation.<sup>215</sup> Therefore apart from the Holy Spirit there can be no Church and no eternal salvation.<sup>216</sup> But within the Church "those who are bearers of the Spirit of God are led to the Word, that is, to the Son; but the Son takes them and presents them to the Father; and the Father confers incorruptibility."<sup>217</sup>

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<sup>214</sup> "This earnest, therefore, thus dwelling in us, renders us spiritual even now, and the mortal is swallowed up by immortality. "For ye," he declares, "are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit, if so be that the Spirit of God dwell in you." This, however does not take place by a casting away of the flesh, but by the impartation of the Spirit. For those to whom he was writing were not without flesh, but they were those who had received the Spirit of God, "by which we cry, Abba, Father." If therefore, at the present time, having the earnest, we do cry, "Abba, Father," what shall it be when, on rising again, we behold Him face to face; when all the members shall burst out into a continuous hymn of triumph, glorifying Him who raised them from the dead, and gave the gift of eternal life? For if the earnest, gathering man into itself, does even now cause him to cry, 'Abba, Father,' what shall the complete grace of the Spirit effect, which shall be given to men by God? It will render us like unto Him, and accomplish the will of the Father; for it shall make man after the image and likeness of God." *haer* 5.8.1. (ANF 1, 533). The connection between the Spirit and the adoption as sons is very close in Irenaeus as in the Christian tradition before him. "Thus does he attribute the Spirit as peculiar to God which in the last times He pours forth upon the human race by the adoption of sons" *haer* 5.12.2.

<sup>215</sup> "*accipiens Filium Dei, ut et homo fieret particeps Dei*" *haer* 4.28.2; "the Word of the Father and the Spirit of God, having become united with the ancient substance of Adam's formation, rendered man living and perfect, receptive of the perfect Father, in order that as in the natural [Adam] we all were dead so in the spiritual we may all be made alive." *haer* 5.1.3; cf. 4.40.1; 5.1.1; 5.13.4; 5.14.3; 5.27.2. "... calling man back again into communion with God, that by communion with Him we may have part in incorruptibility." *Dem.* 40. On the other hand, "separation from God is death, and separation from light is darkness; and separation from God consists in the loss of all the benefits which He has in store." *haer* 5.27.2.

<sup>216</sup> Already it is taught that only in the church does the Holy Spirit work and this through the gifts given by God: "'For in the Church,' it is said, 'God hath set apostles, prophets, teachers,' and all the other means through which the Spirit works (*et universam reliquam operationem Spiritus*); of which all those are not partakers who do not join themselves to the Church, but defraud themselves of life through their perverse opinions and infamous behaviour. For where the Church is, there is the Spirit of God; and where the Spirit of God is, there is the Church, and every kind of grace; but the Spirit is truth. Those, therefore, who do not partake of Him, are neither nourished into life from the mother's breasts, nor do they enjoy that most limpid fountain which issues from the body of Christ" *haer* 3.24.1.

<sup>217</sup> *Dem.* 7. This Trinitarian formula type expression of salvation is quite popular with Irenaeus. See *Dem.* 5; "For the Father bears the creation and His own Word simultaneously, and the Word borne by the Father grants the Spirit to all as the Father wills. To some He gives after the manner of creation what is made; but to others [he gives] after the manner of adoption, that is, what is from God, namely generation. And thus one God the Father is declared, who is above all, and through all, and in all. The Father is indeed above all, and He is the head of Christ; but the Word is through all things and is Himself the Head of the Church; while the Spirit is in us all and He is the living water." *haer* 5.18.2 (ANF 1, 546). In this way

This occurs only in the church because it is there that the gifts of God are found through which the Spirit works. It is only in the Church that one finds the one “vivifying faith, which has been preserved in the Church from the apostles until now, and handed down in truth.”<sup>218</sup> Only there is one instructed for baptism in order to be restored in the image of God.

When [do we bear] the image of the heavenly? Doubtless when he says, “Ye have been washed,” believing in the name of the Lord, and receiving His Spirit. Now we have washed away, not the substance of our body, nor the image of our [primary] formation, but the former vain conversation. In these members, therefore, in which we were going to destruction by working the works of corruption, in these very members are we made alive by working the works of the Spirit.”<sup>219</sup>

Only in the Church is one fed by the Eucharist “which the Church receiving from the apostles, offers to God throughout all the world.”<sup>220</sup> There one receives the “bread over which thanks have been given” and which is therefore “the flesh of Christ.”<sup>221</sup> For “our bodies, when they receive the Eucharist, are no longer corruptible, having the hope of the resurrection to eternity.”<sup>222</sup>

For Irenaeus, it is the adoption as sons and the Spirit of adoption that forms the basis upon which the believer can be claimed to “become god.” But whereas the theology of the image and the adoption as sons plays a significant role throughout Irenaeus’ anti-gnostic and catechetical work the actual technical terminology of *ajpoqeoovw* does not occur in his corpus and the more biblical “become gods” occurs in *Against Heresies* only a few times. And it occurs, moreover,

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Irenaeus’ doctrine of salvation and the theology of the image are themselves used within the overarching context of the doctrine of the Triune Godhead which came from the Rule of Faith. *Dem. 3; haer 1.10.1*. Thus as in Paul all things consummate in the monarchy of Father, Son and Holy Spirit: Those who are saved “ascend through the Spirit to the Son, and through the Son to the Father, and in due time the Son will yield up His work to the Father.” *haer 5.36.2* (ANF 1, 567).

<sup>218</sup> *haer 3.3.3* (ANF 1, 416).

<sup>219</sup> *haer 5.11.2*

<sup>220</sup> *haer 4.17.5*

<sup>221</sup> *haer 4.18.4f.*

<sup>222</sup> *haer. 4.18.5*. Thus we have in less explicit terms the same doctrine as in Ignatius in regard to the ministry of the church and salvation which is found only there.

only in the context of the exegesis of Psalm 82.<sup>223</sup> Psalm 82:6 says, “I have said, ‘You are gods’; and all of you are children of the most High.” As we have seen, the idea of the adoption and becoming sons of God was well known in the church as early as the Pauline and Johannine writings (John 1:12; Gal. 4:5; Eph. 1:5) and the Holy Spirit was closely associated with this concept. In Romans 8, which we examined previously, Paul wrote that “(you) have received the Spirit of adoption whereby we cry, Abba, Father. The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God.” (Rom. 8:15). This indwelling “Spirit of adoption” (pneu'ma uiJoquesiva") refers to the Spirit as the earnest of the promised inheritance and of the eschatological adoption. For having “the firstfruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting for the adoption.” (8:23). Thus believers are already in one sense the “children of God” (ejsmEVn tevkna qeou') but in another they await the final consummation of the adoption. All of these ideas were easily tied into Psalm 82’s “Qeov ejste kaiV uiJoiV uJyivstou pavnte”.

The first occurrence of the idea of “becoming god” in Irenaeus occurs in *haer* 3.6.1 in the middle of a Christological proof that “neither would the Lord, nor the Holy Spirit, nor the apostles, have ever named as God, definitely and absolutely, him who was not God, unless he were truly God.” Showing that Christ is called God along with the Father and is therefore truly God, Irenaeus argues that

the Spirit designates both [of them] by the name of God - both Him who is anointed as Son, and Him who does anoint, that is, the Father. And again: “God stood in the congregation of the gods, He judges among the gods.” He [here] refers to the Father and the Son, and those who have received the adoption; but these are the Church. For she is the synagogue of God, which God - that is, the Son Himself - has gathered by Himself. ... But of what gods [does he speak]? [Of those] to whom He says, ‘I have said, You are gods, and all sons of the most High.’ To those, no doubt, who have received the grace of the “adoption, by which we cry, Abba Father.”

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<sup>223</sup> Another instance is found in *haer* 4.Pref.4. There Irenaeus says: “(I) have shown that there is none other called God by the scriptures except the Father of all, and the Son, and those who possess the adoption.” But this is clearly a reference back to his previous exegesis of Psalm 82.

This passage demonstrates again that the primary use of Psalm 82 was originally Christological and that the use of the text required a subsequent explanation of who the “gods” of the text were. And this gave rise to a doctrine of salvation as deification. Here the explanation is given that the “gods” are those who receive the Spirit and the adoption as explained in Romans 8. But immediately Irenaeus continues on with his Christological argument and leaves this point undeveloped.

The second occurrence of Psalm 82 occurs in *haer* 3.19.1.<sup>224</sup> Here the emphasis is on the meaning of the beginning of verse 7, “But you shall die like men”, which Irenaeus interprets in light of verse 6.

He speaks undoubtedly these words to those who have not received the gift of adoption, but who despise the incarnation of the pure generation of the Word of God, defraud human nature of promotion into God, and prove themselves ungrateful to the Word of God, who became flesh for them. For it was for this end that the Word of God was made man and He who was the Son of God became the Son of man, that man, having been taken into the Word, and receiving the adoption, might become the son of God. For by no other means could we have attained to incorruptibility and immortality, unless we had been united to incorruptibility and immortality. But how could we be joined to incorruptibility and immortality, unless, first, incorruptibility and immortality had become that which we also are, so that the corruptible might be swallowed up by the incorruptibility, and the mortal by immortality, that we might receive the adoption of sons?

Irenaeus again launches from this into a Christological argument proving that Christ was true God born of Mary of true flesh. So again Psalm 82 finds its place within the bounds of a Christological argument. But here Irenaeus gives a more extended explanation of how the incarnation makes possible the adoption of sons by immortality absorbing mortality and incorruption corruption. He also speaks of receiving the “gift of adoption” (*proV" touV" mhV dexamevnou" dwreaVn th" uiJoqesiva*), *qui non percipiunt munus adoptionis*). But here instead of “becoming god” Irenaeus opts to express the result of the adoption as “becoming the son of God” which follows from the later part of Psalm 82:6. The despising of the incarnation

moreover has the result that such people “defraud human nature of the ascent unto God (th' eij' QeoVn ajnovdou, *ab ea ascensione quae est ad Dominum*)” made possible by Christ. This ascent relates again to the Holy Spirit who is the “ladder of ascent to God.”<sup>225</sup> For it is by the Spirit that one “ascends to that which is perfect.”<sup>226</sup> Thus salvation is the ascent by which we become perfect through the Spirit and the Son in our likeness to God. And to become perfect in likeness to God is to “become god.”

This understanding of Irenaeus’ presentation is in fact confirmed by the third occurrence of Psalm 82 in Irenaeus which must also be considered in detail. Toward the end of Book 4 of *Against Heresies* Irenaeus presents his argument that mankind has been given a free will and is not coerced by God in the matter of salvation. This argument is made in the interest of maintaining mankind’s responsibility over against God’s judgment of sin. Here for the first time we find Psalm 82 in a purely anthropological and soteriological context apart from any Christological argument. In chapter 38 Irenaeus takes up the question of why mankind wasn’t just created perfect in the beginning rather than leaving him to his own weak nature. Irenaeus can only answer that for God “all things are possible” and he could have done so but that in fact he did not. Only God is uncreated; everything created is in fact inferior to him. “Inasmuch as they are not uncreated, for this very reason do they come short of the perfect.” (4.38.1). Since mankind was not uncreated and therefore not perfect, a process leading to perfection was required. God thus determined

all things beforehand for the bringing of man perfection, for his edification and for the revelation of His dispensations, that goodness may both be made apparent, and righteousness perfected, and that the Church may be fashioned after the image of His Son, and that man

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<sup>224</sup> ANF 1, 448. Note that the index to this volume of the *Ante-Nicene Fathers* incorrectly omits this reference.

<sup>225</sup> *haer* 3.24.1 “*scala ascensionis ad Deum*” [ANF 1, 458]

<sup>226</sup> *haer* 4.39.2 “*ascendes ad perfectum*” [ANF 1, 523]

may finally be brought to maturity at some future time, becoming ripe through such privileges to see and comprehend God. (4.37.7)

The Lord came not in his natural glory but in a humble state in which mankind could behold him. “He did this when He appeared as a man, that we, being nourished, as it were, from the breast of His flesh, and having, by such a course of milk-nourishment, become accustomed to eat and drink the Word of God, may be able also to contain in ourselves the Bread of immortality, which is the Spirit of the Father” (4.38.1). By the economy of salvation, which includes the work of the Son and of the Spirit, mankind is brought toward perfection. Man can not become uncreated as only God is. But he can through ascension and eternal progress approach likeness to God. In this chapter Irenaeus puts all of these ideas together in one important text. Despite its length it deserves to be quoted:

For from the very fact of these things having been created, [it follows] that they are not uncreated; but by their continuing in being throughout a long course of ages, they shall receive a faculty of the Uncreated, through the gratuitous bestowal of eternal existence upon them by God. And thus in all things God has the pre-eminence, who alone is uncreated, the first of all things, and the primary cause of the existence of all, while all other things remain under God’s subjection. But being in subjection to God is continuance in immortality, and immortality is the glory of the uncreated One. By this arrangement, therefore, and these harmonies, and a sequence of this nature, man, a created and organized being, is rendered after the image and likeness of the uncreated God, - the Father planning everything well and giving His commands, the Son carrying these into execution and performing the work of creating, and the Spirit nourishing and increasing [what is made], but man making progress day by day and ascending towards the perfect, that is, approximating to the uncreated One. For the Uncreated is perfect, that is God. Now it was necessary that man should in the first instance be created; and having been created, should receive growth; and having received growth, should be strengthened; and having been strengthened, should abound; and having abounded, should recover [from the disease of sin]; and having recovered, should be glorified; and being glorified, should see his Lord. For God is He who is yet to be seen, and beholding of God is productive of immortality, but immortality renders one nigh unto God.<sup>227</sup>

Irenaeus considers this a sufficient explanation of the process nature of salvation.

Immediately following he rebukes those who think that God should have created man perfect in the beginning and “ascribe to God the infirmity of their nature.” Before “they become men they

wish to be even now like God their Creator.” (*haer* 4.38.4). “We cast blame upon Him, because we have not been made gods from the beginning, but at first merely men, then at length gods.” But what does it mean that we at length become gods? Irenaeus here introduces Psalm 82:6-7 and says that “You will die like men” indicates that God knew the weakness of man’s created nature. But

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. ... How, then, will he be a god, who has not as yet been made a man? Or how can he be perfect who was but lately created? How, again, can he be immortal, who in his mortal nature did not obey his Maker? For it must be that you, at the outset, should hold the rank of a man, and then afterwards partake of the glory of God.<sup>228</sup>

### Summary

In summary then, “to become god” for Irenaeus is to be remade in the image and likeness of God, a likeness that men lost through the weakness of human nature but is to regain in even greater measure. This is to “ascend to that which is perfect” (4.39.2) because “the Uncreated is perfect, that is God.”<sup>229</sup> This is only possible because the Word became flesh and through his work of redemption and revelation of the Father began the work of creation, that is, recreation of mankind. He then grants the Holy Spirit who vivifies man and acts as an earnest of the inheritance and the eschatological resurrection and adoption of sons. The Holy Spirit brings

<sup>227</sup> *haer* 4.38.3. Almost the entirety of Irenaeus’ soteriology is summed up in this one text. Notice even the implication that even in eternity man will continue to progress towards perfect likeness to God.

<sup>228</sup> *haer* 4.38.4 - 4.39.2. This text is found in ANF 1, 522. The *Ante-Nicene Fathers* translation has the pivotal phrase of this quote as “How, then, shall he be a God, ...” with a capitalization of the divine title. This occurs in other deification texts as well. It has been noted by other scholars working on deification in the early fathers and denounced as incorrect. This author must concur in this judgment. Neither Irenaeus, nor the other early fathers, were trying to say that the believer becomes by nature Yahweh or Jesus. Again, the Christian does not become *homoousios* with God the Father or God the Son. Indeed, he does not become “God.” Instead, he becomes “god” or perhaps we would prefer “divine.” But that substitution really does not gain us anything in clarity, for to become “divine” is the same as becoming “god.” This practice by the ANF editors is again an indication of the lack of familiarity in the West of the concept of deification in the East and what was meant by it.

<sup>229</sup> *haer.* 4.38.3. *tevlēio* " gaVr oj ajgevnnohto": ou|to" dev ejsti Qeov".

fellowship and union with God. He begins our process of perfection in the likeness of the Son. For becoming like the Son we become acceptable to the Father and like God the Father himself. While deification terminology does not appear at any point in Irenaeus and although to “become god” occurs in only a few places in conjunction with the use of Psalm 82, yet it is clear that deification defined as to become “perfect in the image and likeness of God” and to become “sons of God” by joining in union with Christ is the ultimate goal of his soteriology. This is to “become god.” It is therefore a concise and brilliant passage summarizing all of his Christological and soteriological teaching when Irenaeus in his famous text says that the Lord Jesus Christ “became what we are, that He might bring us to be even what He is Himself.”<sup>230</sup>

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<sup>230</sup> *haer.* 5.Pref.

## CLEMENT OF ALEXANDRIA: DEIFICATION BY KNOWLEDGE

Titus Flavius Clemens was born in the middle of the second century and was originally a pagan philosopher.<sup>231</sup> Upon his conversion he was instructed by Pantaenus the leader of the Catechetical School in Alexandria. He later succeeded Pantaenus as head of the catechetical school and served there until 202 AD when persecution in Alexandria drove him away. He lived until about 220 AD. His three well-known works make up the trilogy of the *Protrepticus*, the *Paedagogus*, and the *Stromata*.<sup>232</sup> The first is meant to convince the pagan that their traditional gods are worthless and false having been made by men. The second work is meant to instruct the simple Christian in holy living. And finally the last work is meant to give intellectual instruction to the mature Christian to bring him to be more perfect in his contemplation of God. For Clement divided Christians into two categories: the *Prokoptoi*, who “were the baptized, the faithful servants of God who were engaged in the ascent of becoming complete persons in the image and likeness of the Logos”, and the *Sophoi*, who “were the Christian gnostics, those who were in the image and likeness of the Logos as much as was humanly possible.”<sup>233</sup> As a result, in these works we have Clement’s conscious effort to use the language and categories of Platonism and natural theology in general to present his understanding of the gospel to the nations and to the church.

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<sup>231</sup> These introductory remarks are drawn from the introduction to Clement’s writings found in ANF 1, 166-168.

<sup>232</sup> *The Exhortation to the Heathen, The Instructor, and The Miscellanies*. Although they were not necessarily written one after another and thus may not technically be a trilogy. Grant, *Greek Apologists*, 175.

If in Irenaeus we have seen a conservative churchman attempting to keep to the church's tradition in language as well as in substance, Clement on the other hand is quite different. At a basic level Clement is concerned with the traditional faith of the church. He is certain that the teaching of the church and the exposition of the scriptures must be in accordance with the received rule of faith.<sup>234</sup> And thus he builds upon this foundation. Therefore he shows many parallels in thought and agreement with Irenaeus. Nevertheless, when one reads Clement it doesn't take long to see that his real interest or perhaps his own personal thinking lies so within the realm of the philosophical that it greatly flavors his presentation of Christian doctrine. While he values the scriptures far above the philosophers, yet the distinction is not absolute, as the philosophers too taught truth in part by divine inspiration of the heavenly Logos.<sup>235</sup> Clement thus draws many of his concepts and expressions from Jewish-Alexandrine philosophy of his day and even from Gnosticism.<sup>236</sup>

Clement's soteriology is dominated by the idea of forming the Christian Gnostic. The Gnostic is "first of all the man who knows certain truths; secondly, one who has attained spiritual perfection; and thirdly, a teacher who leads others to the gnosis."<sup>237</sup> Knowledge, which occupies a central position here, comes primarily through divine revelation whether in the scriptures or elsewhere. This knowledge is a revelation concerning God and the whole world and enables a man to become pure in heart and thus ascend to God and contemplate him face to face. On the most basic level is the knowledge of the catechetical instruction which is taught to all who come

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<sup>233</sup> Pratt, "Clement of Alexandria", 166. He refers to Walter H. Wagner's "Another Look at the Literary Problem in Clement of Alexandria's major Writings" *Church History* 37 (1968): 257-260.

<sup>234</sup> Clement refers to the "ecclesiastical rule" (*str.* 6.15) [ANF 2, 509] and the "rule of the Church" (*str.* 6.18 [ANF 2, 519]; 7.7 [ANF 2, 534]) and the "rule of truth" (7.16) [ANF 2, 551] among other designations.

<sup>235</sup> Lilla, *Clement of Alexandria*, 16.

<sup>236</sup> Lilla, *Clement of Alexandria*, 227.

to the church to be baptized. This knowledge is enough for the salvation for the simple. But there is also the knowledge of the mysteries communicated to the Apostles and handed on by them but only to some not to all.<sup>238</sup> It is this knowledge that leads to a beginning of perfection and contemplation of God already in this life. And upon death when the soul of the Gnostic is released from the body “after becoming a god, it can enjoy, in a complete and perpetual rest, the contemplation of the highest divinity ‘face to face.’”<sup>239</sup> Thus once again in Clement we have a description of salvation as a process of perfection culminating in the believer “becoming god”. However, Clement lacks the familiarity with the Old Testament and the Pauline emphasis found in Irenaeus. Instead he substitutes philosophical ideas and phraseology to complete his model of salvation. Further, he was not at all afraid to make use of deification terminology alongside the more traditional language of “becoming god” based on Psalm 82.

Though the idea of knowledge as a motif is dominant in Clement’s soteriology and has captured the fancy of scholars yet in fact like Irenaeus it is a doctrine of the image and likeness of God that provides the widest framework and setting for Clement’s concept of salvation. Clement’s usage of the terms “image” and “likeness” varies greatly due to the eclectic nature of his theology. But a general overview can be given. Clement’s starting point, as with those before him, is that man has been created in the image of God. This is explained, as in the case of Irenaeus, as meaning that man has been created in the image of the Son. But contrary to Irenaeus, Clement refers this to the Logos or divine Word as the rational mind of God.<sup>240</sup> Thus being in the

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<sup>237</sup> Daniélou, *Gospel Mesage*, 448.

<sup>238</sup> Daniélou, *Gospel Mesage*, 454.

<sup>239</sup> Lilla, *Clement of Alexandria*, 142.

<sup>240</sup> Therefore man is also said "to have been made in [God's] image and likeness." For the image of God is the divine and royal Word, the impassible man; and the image of the image is the human mind." *str.* 5, 14 (ANF 2, 466).

image of God refers to man's rational nature and thus pertains only to his soul.<sup>241</sup> Whereas the likeness to God, as distinguished from the image of God, is for Clement generally that which man gains by living a life of virtue in obedience to the divine will.<sup>242</sup> This likeness has been lost or tarnished through sin and salvation is the process of restoration of the image and likeness to God.<sup>243</sup> And this restoration will only be complete when the flesh has been put off and the soul enjoys the eternal beholding of God face to face. And this begins already in this life.

Sin for Clement is divided into two types. The first is conscious sins of decision and will. This type of sin is to be put away by all the baptized. But the second type of sin is that of sins of passion when the rational part of man loses control and sin is committed. It is the goal of the true Gnostic to avoid the first completely and to put away the second as far as possible and thus to imitate Christ. In this way the Gnostic gains *ajpavqeia* (apathy, passionlessness) and is more and more filled with the Spirit of God. For "the gnostic soul, adorned with perfect virtue, is the earthly image of the divine power; its development being the joint result of nature, of training, of reason, all together. This soul of beauty becomes a temple of the Holy Spirit when it acquires a disposition in the whole of life corresponding to the Gospel."<sup>244</sup> Following this line of thought Clement's description of salvation becomes closely tied to obedience to the commands of God

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<sup>241</sup>For the Word of God is intellectual, according as the image of mind is seen in man alone. Thus also the good man is godlike in form and semblance as respects his soul. And, on the other hand, God is like man. For the distinctive form of each one is the mind by which we are characterized." *str.* 6, 9 (ANF 2, 497). In rejecting anthropomorphic understandings of God, Clement emphatically claims that "the likeness is not, as some imagine, that of the human form; for this consideration is impious." *str.* 6, 14 (ANF 2, 506).

<sup>242</sup> Daniélou notes that "in Clement's writings the words *eijkwvn* and *oJmoivwsi*" may denote very different things at different times.", *Gospel Message*, 408. But where they are distinguished this is their sense.

<sup>243</sup> So Clement characterizes Jesus as exhorting men: "I desire to restore you according to the original model, that you may become like Me." *prot.* 12 (ANF 2, 205) "*ojrqwvsasqai uJma" proV" toV ajrcevtupon bouvlomai, i{na moi kaiV o{moioi gevnhsqe*" (PG 5, 241) But the fall as an historical event effecting the present and Adam as an historical man and therefore the Adam typology so prevalent in Irenaeus find little use in Clement.

<sup>244</sup> *str.* 7, 11 (ANF 2, 541)

given by the Logos who is the instructor and physician of the soul.<sup>245</sup> By such obedience one becomes, as far as possible, assimilated to the Logos.<sup>246</sup> And thus one gains the *oJmoivwsi* "qew/' (likeness to God).<sup>247</sup> "To him the flesh is dead; but he himself lives alone, having consecrated the sepulcher into a holy temple to the Lord, having turned towards God the old sinful soul. Such an one is no longer continent, but has reached a state of passionlessness, waiting to put on the divine image."<sup>248</sup>

The first difficulty to address is how to relate Clement's philosophic ideals to the Christological lines of thought already examined. Though Clement's language is deeply rooted in the thought world of Platonism yet in places he retains the traditional emphasis that salvation is closely related to the Spirit who must first come and make a person spiritual.<sup>249</sup> It is here in his

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<sup>245</sup> "Our Instructor, the Word, therefore cures the unnatural passions of the soul by means of exhortations. For with the highest propriety the help of bodily diseases is called the healing art--an art acquired by human skill. But the paternal Word is the only Paeonian physician of human infirmities, and the holy charmer of the sick soul." *paed.* 2 (ANF 2, 210)

<sup>246</sup> "Our Instructor is like His Father God, whose son He is, sinless, blameless, and with a soul devoid of passion; God in the form of man, stainless, the minister of His Father's will, the Word who is God, who is in the Father, who is at the Father's right hand, and with the form of God is God. He is to us a spotless image; to Him we are to try with all our might to assimilate our souls. He is wholly free from human passions; wherefore also He alone is judge, because He alone is sinless. As far, however, as we can, let us try to sin as little as possible. For nothing is so urgent in the first place as deliverance from passions and disorders, and then the checking of our liability to fall into sins that have become habitual. It is best, therefore, not to sin at all in any way, which we assert to be the prerogative of God alone; next to keep clear of voluntary transgressions, which is characteristic of the wise man; thirdly, not to fall into many involuntary offenses, which is peculiar to those who have been excellently trained." *paed.* 2 (ANF 2, 209f). "Believers are to 'be made like (*ejxomoiou'sqai*) to the Lord as much as they can'" (*str.* 3.5) Daniélou, *Gospel Message*, 409.

<sup>247</sup> Clement can also speak of gaining the "image" of God: "For being pure and separated from all wickedness the mind begins to be receptive of the power of God, the divine image (*eijkwvn*) being set up in it." (*str.* 3.5; quoted in Daniélou, 408). Lilla has shown how closely Clement has followed the Stoicism and Platonism found in Philo of Alexandria in this entire system of salvation of *ajpvavqeia* and *oJmoivwsi* "qew/'. Clement has, it appears, for the most part just added a Christological content to this philosophic system. (Lilla, 103ff.).

<sup>248</sup> *str.* 4, 22 (ANF 2, 434)

<sup>249</sup> Clement thus disapproves of ideas put forth by the Gnostic heretics that man is 'spiritual' by nature. Instead Clement claims that man is "not a being by nature divine who has fallen from perfection, but one who, though purely human at his setting forth, is capable of being perfected." Daniélou, *Gospel Message*, 412.

consideration of the indwelling Spirit that Clement balances some of his one-dimensional emphasis on the mind or intellectual aspect of man as the image of God.<sup>250</sup> For example, in *Stromata* 6.16 Clement makes use of a Stoic idea that man can be divided into ten constituent parts.<sup>251</sup> The tenth part of man is “the Holy Spirit, which comes to him through faith.” The discussion of the Spirit brings Clement to consider the whole man body and soul. But even so, it is an abstract and philosophical treatment of the issue. The basis for it, however, is the earlier tradition of the indwelling Spirit and the ongoing liturgical life of the church which he had to take into account if he was to remain faithful to the rule of truth. Thus it is in the *Paedagogus* where he instructs the simple Christian in the mysteries that he says “being baptized, we are illuminated; illuminated, we become sons; being made sons, we are made perfect; being made perfect we are immortal.”<sup>252</sup> Here Clement approaches the expressions of salvation based on the incarnation and the church’s liturgical life. Once again baptism and the adoption of sons are found together which are matters relating to the Holy Spirit. But this more traditional stratum of ideas comes to the surface only too rarely in Clement because he considers the indwelling Spirit as part of the foundation of faith common to the simple Christian as well as the mature Gnostic. Thus the Holy

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<sup>250</sup> He thus maintains that this earthly abode “is dignified with the Holy Spirit through the sanctification of soul and body perfected with the perfection of the Saviour.” *str.* 4.26. Here Clement opposes the Gnostics saying that “those, then, who run down created existence and vilify the body are wrong.” (ANF 2, 439.)

<sup>251</sup> This is discussed in Daniélou, *Gospel Message*, 410ff. This ten part division is the Stoic equivalent of “body, soul and spirit.”

<sup>252</sup> *paed.* 6.2. This passage is especially important to the discussion of deification in Clement so we will have to return to it. Butterworth believes that this text represents stages of deification beginning in this life and being completed in eternity. “The Deification of Man”, 160. But Lattey corrected this opinion and shows that this text refers to the one event of Baptism. “The Deification of Man”, 259f. Casey takes note that by claiming perfection for all the baptized Clement has caused himself trouble for his concept of the Christian Gnostic. “The difficulty is a real one, and from Clement’s premises strictly insuperable, since he could not deny the superiority of the gnostic over the average Christian, and had to admit that what distinguished him was a difference in the structure of his faith for which God was ultimately responsible. Clement’s only course was to evade the difficulty, and he does this with such skill that his system betrays hardly a sign of the danger to which it had been exposed. His method is time-honored in theology; he uses the same words in different senses.” “Clement of Alexandria”, 71.

Spirit is often a mere assumption for his more detailed discussions of Gnostic knowledge, obedience, and perfection to which he gives most of his attention.

The Eucharist too finds similar treatment in Clement who presents it in such a way as to support the general Gnostic themes important to him. He also tends to downplay the flesh and spiritualize the effects of the mystery by ascribing the salvific nature of the Eucharist to the Holy Spirit working on the soul. Or without specifying what exactly is meant, Clement portrays the Logos as “feeding the Church” in the Eucharist.<sup>253</sup> Yet even in Clement the earlier doctrine finds some expression and in spite of Clement’s general neglect of the flesh in salvation he teaches at least once that the entire man body and soul is fed in the Eucharist.

And the blood of the Lord is twofold. For there is the blood of His flesh, by which we are redeemed from corruption; and the spiritual, that by which we are anointed. And to drink the blood of Jesus, is to become partaker of the Lord's immortality; the Spirit being the energetic principle of the Word, as blood is of flesh. Accordingly, as wine is blended with water,[9] so is the Spirit with man. And the one, the mixture of wine and water, nourishes to faith; while the other, the Spirit, conducts to immortality. And the mixture of both--of the water and of the Word--is called Eucharist, renowned and glorious grace; and they who by faith partake of it are sanctified both in body and soul. For the divine mixture, man, the Father's will has mystically compounded by the Spirit and the Word. For, in truth, the spirit is joined to the soul, which is inspired by it; and the flesh, by reason of which the Word became flesh, to the Word.<sup>254</sup>

Thus in Clement there is a reflection of the tradition of union and participation with Christ found in the earlier authors. He does have an awareness of the indwelling Spirit and the indwelling Christ and does not deny them; yet these topics receive little emphasis. On top of them he has built a new layer of ideas relating to the salvation of the mature Gnostic. Clement himself explicitly speaks of a distinction between the foundation in Jesus Christ and the Gnostic “superstructure”:

(Paul) recognizes the spiritual man and the Gnostic as the disciple of the Holy Spirit dispensed by God, which is the mind of Christ. “But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit, for they are foolishness to him.” Now the apostle, in contradistinction to

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<sup>253</sup> Pratt, “Clement of Alexandria: Eucharist as Gnosis”, 174ff.

<sup>254</sup> *paed.* 2, 2 (242)

gnostic perfection, calls the common faith the foundation, and sometimes milk, writing on this wise: “Brethren, I could not speak to you as to spiritual, but as to carnal, to babes in Christ. I have fed you with milk, not with meat: for ye were not able. Neither yet are ye now able. For ye are yet carnal: for whereas there is among you envy and strife, are ye not carnal, and walk as men” Which things are the choice of those men who are sinners. But those who abstain from these things give their thoughts to divine things, and partake of gnostic food. “According to the grace,” it is said, “given to me as a wise master builder, I have laid the foundation. And another buildeth on it gold and silver, precious stones.” Such is the gnostic superstructure on the foundation of faith in Christ Jesus.<sup>255</sup>

It is against this background of soteriology then that we must examine Clement’s use of Psalm 82 and deification. For here too we will be able to find the Christological line of thought already seen in earlier authors but there is an unmistakable effort to give deification a meaning in accordance with Clement’s doctrine of the Christian Gnostic. This use of Psalm 82 reveals that even at this date the phraseology of the Psalm is accepted as a part of tradition but its meaning is not precisely fixed. Surprisingly, for as much as Clement talks about becoming gods and about deification he makes use of Psalm 82 only a total of four times. Only one of these reflects the Christological line of thought and this occurs not surprisingly in the context of a discussion of the enlightenment gained in baptism and follows immediately upon a discussion of Christ’s own baptism. Christ

is perfected by the washing--of baptism--alone, and is sanctified by the descent of the Spirit? Such is the case. The same also takes place in our case, whose exemplar Christ became. Being baptized, we are illuminated; illuminated, we become sons; being made sons, we are made perfect; being made perfect, we are made immortal. “I,” says He, “have said that ye are gods, and all sons of the Highest.” This work is variously called grace, and illumination, and perfection, and washing: washing, by which we cleanse away our sins; grace, by which the penalties accruing to transgressions are remitted; and illumination, by which that holy light of salvation is beheld, that is, by which we see God clearly.<sup>256</sup>

Here the meaning of “You are gods” is explained primarily by reference to baptism and its effects including the working of the Holy Spirit. There is curiously no reference to the theology of the image at all. Further, according to this text deification belongs to all the baptized already in

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<sup>255</sup> ANF 2, 450

<sup>256</sup> *paed.* 5. (ANF 2, 214).

this life. But Clement's lack of consistency in explaining this text can be seen already in his second use of Psalm 82 found at the end of the *Protrepticus*:

It is time, then, for us to say that the pious Christian alone is rich and wise, and of noble birth, and thus call and believe him to be God's image, and also His likeness, having become righteous and holy and wise by Jesus Christ, and so far already like God. Accordingly this grace is indicated by the prophet, when he says, "I said that ye are gods, and all sons of the Highest." For us, yea us, He has adopted, and wishes to be called the Father of us alone, not of the unbelieving.<sup>257</sup>

The first item of note is that this text occurs in a context that has nothing to do with a Christological argument; it is purely a statement of soteriology. In some ways this text represents an understanding of a kind already seen in Irenaeus as the ideas of adoption and the image of God play an important role. But as in the previous passage, Clement demonstrates his independence in that the Christian is already considered to be "God's image" and deification has already taken place.

The third explicit use of this Psalm appears in Clement's *Stromata*. Here Clement would be expected, if anywhere, to bring Psalm 82:6 explicitly into relation with his theory of the Christian Gnostic. And indeed this is the case.

We have exhibited before our eyes every day abundant sources of martyrs that are burnt, impaled, beheaded. All these the fear inspired by the law,--leading as a pedagogue to Christ, trained so as to manifest their piety by their blood. "God stood in the congregation of the gods; He judgeth in the midst of the gods." Who are they? Those that are superior to Pleasure, who rise above the passions, who know what they do--the Gnostics, who are greater than the world. "I said, Ye are Gods; and all sons of the Highest." To whom speaks the Lord? To those who reject as far as possible all that is of man. And the apostle says, "For ye are not any longer in the flesh, but in the Spirit." And again he says, "Though in the flesh, we do not war after the flesh." "For flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, neither doth corruption inherit incorruption." "Lo, ye shall die like men," the Spirit has said, confuting us.<sup>258</sup>

This text represents classic Clement of Alexandria and is quite remarkable when compared to the previous two examples. The previous two passages were indeed thoroughly permeated

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<sup>257</sup> *prot.* 12, 123.

<sup>258</sup> *str.* 2.20 (ANF 2, 374).

with Hellenistic language such as illumination, perfection and immortality. But these represent a traditional language that the Greek churches had used for a century or longer. On the other hand, in this passage Clement's own doctrine of the Christian Gnostic as one who gains *ajpavqeia* is used instead to provide content to the Psalm's striking phrase of divinity. Gone is the creation in the image of God, the Fall, and the other ideas we have seen used many times. No longer are all the baptized, who are adopted as sons, regarded as gods. Now it is the Gnostic who has attained the philosophic ideal by putting away the passions of the flesh in a more perfect manner who has attained to being a god. And this refers not to eschatology but to the Christian philosopher now in his earthly contemplation of God. This rather remarkable inconsistency in explanation of this text doesn't seem to have concerned Clement. How far he was willing to continue in this direction is seen in his final use of this Old Testament text:

And that is preferable which is advantageous to what is superior; but what is superior to everything is mind. So, then, what is really good is seen to be most pleasant, and of itself produces the fruit which is desired--tranquillity of soul. "And he who hears Me," it is said, "shall rest in peace, confident, and shall be calm without fear of any evil." "Rely with all thy heart and thy mind on God."

On this wise it is possible for the Gnostic already to have become God. "I said, Ye are gods, and sons of the highest." And Empedocles says that the souls of the wise become gods, writing as follows:--

"At last prophets, minstrels, and physicians,  
And the foremost among mortal men, approach;  
Whence spring gods supreme in honours."<sup>259</sup>

Here again the philosopher's passionless state is that which makes the Gnostic god. Again all the traditional elements are missing in favor of Clement's own unique doctrine. But he even goes further in that alongside the Psalm he makes use of the pagan author Empedocles in order to show that men can indeed "become gods." In this way Clement puts into practice his claim that in places the pagan authors too have been inspired by the cosmic Logos. This shows very clearly

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<sup>259</sup> *str.* 4.23 (ANF 2, 437). Again the ANF series shows confusion in deciding how to present deification and chooses to simply follow normal English precedent by capitalizing "God" and not "gods."

how far Clement's philosophic system took him from the Christological use of this text in that he knew that the philosopher could not have had any of the church's Christological confession in mind when writing that man might become gods. But he was willing to adduce the words nevertheless. "Becoming god" in Clement's passage now relates little to Christ as God incarnate or to the adoption of sons but is instead reduced almost entirely to the Platonic ideal of the soul overcoming the prison of the body by becoming passionless "like God." In this way Christian deification becomes almost identical in content with the Platonic expressions of "likeness to god." It is no surprise then that, unlike Irenaeus, Clement feels no compunction against freely using the idea of "becoming god" apart from the context of Psalm 82 or against using the technical terminology of deification to describe Christian salvation.

This technical terminology of deification occurs already in the *Protrepticus*. In fact, this work is full of deification terminology. But most of it is a rebuke against the pagan nations and their deifying of various objects for worship. The number of synonyms used by Clement in this work is impressive and allows Clement to make some effort to distinguish between the unacceptable pagan deification and Christian salvation as deification. Regarding the pagans, Clement says that Cynyras attempted to deify (qeiavzein) a "strumpet of his own country."<sup>260</sup> And others too "deify men" (ajnrwvpou" ajpoqeou'n).<sup>261</sup> In one particular text, which forms a rhetorical unit making use of *variatio*, Clement speaks of those who deified the stars (ejkqeiavzein) and forms of calamity (qeopoiei'n), also of philosophers who make idols (ajnadwlopoievw) of affections in the breast, also of objects such as Dike and Clotho deified (ejkqeovw) by men. Clement regards all of this as the "manufacturing of gods" (peripointikoV"

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But the intention that normally accompanies this convention makes nonsense of Clement's text. Nevertheless, it has been reproduced as in the original.

<sup>260</sup> *prot.* 2 (ANF 2, 175).

<sup>261</sup> *prot.* 10 (ANF 2, 199).

qew'n).<sup>262</sup> Thus he says the Greeks have made images of human form by which they have “constructed piety (ejpimorfavzein eujsevbeian) and slandered the truth.”<sup>263</sup> While Clement here uses quite a number of synonyms, a review of his terminology in general shows he clearly prefers to use qeivavzein or ejkqeivavzein to indicate the pagan deification he so strongly rejected.

But at the same time and even within the same work there is a sort of play between the pagans’ false deification of objects to be their gods and Christ’s true deification of Christians that they may be gods. And to accomplish this, Clement with no discomfort makes use of deification terminology like qeopoievw, which is literally “to make (a) god.” But when he does use such terminology he does not keep to the traditional concepts connected with Psalm 82. Instead Clement’s more intellectual description of salvation holds sway. Butterworth has in fact shown that Clement’s use of deification terminology falls within the general themes of his soteriology. For Clement deification is related on the one hand to salvific knowledge and on the other to passionlessness and virtue.<sup>264</sup> The divine scriptures “form the short road to salvation” “for truly holy are those letters that sanctify and deify (qeopoiou'nta).”<sup>265</sup> And Christ has “bestowed on us the truly great, divine and inalienable inheritance of the Father, deifying man by heavenly teaching, putting his laws into our minds, and writing them on our hearts.”<sup>266</sup> So Clement states that the fifth commandment “clearly announces God as Father and Lord. Wherefore also it calls those who know Him sons and gods.”<sup>267</sup> In this way one becomes like Christ and is deified.

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<sup>262</sup> *prot.* 2 (ANF 2, 178).

<sup>263</sup> *prot.* 4 (ANF 2, 184)

<sup>264</sup> Butterworth, “The Deification of Man”, 158ff. Butterworth does not really point out that for Clement passionlessness (ajpavqeia) is in fact a result of the knowledge brought and imparted by Christ.

<sup>265</sup> *prot.* 8 (ANF 2, 194) and *prot.* 9 (ANF 2, 196).

<sup>266</sup> *prot.* 11 (ANF 2, 203f.). “oujranivw/ didaskaliva/ qeopoiw'n toVn a[nqrwpon”

<sup>267</sup> *str.* 6.17 (ANF 2, 514). “And this takes place, whenever one hangs on the Lord by faith, by knowledge, by love, and ascends along with Him to where the God and guard of our faith and love is.

Most often man is said to become deified already here on earth but at other times this life is spoken of as a preparation for the god-like life to come.<sup>268</sup> Christians “practice here on earth the heavenly way of life by which we are deified.”<sup>269</sup> And just “as, if one devote himself to Ischomachus, he will make him a farmer; 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 flesh.”<sup>270</sup>

### Summary

In summary then, Clement of Alexandria makes free use of the concept of deification as no teacher before him in the church. His use of the concept agrees with his overall disposition and approach to teaching the faith. Clement often uses words with different meanings and explains texts such as Psalm 82 in different ways. This makes a systemization of his thought dangerous. However, some generalizations can be made. First, Clement thoroughly rejects pagan forms of deification which conflict with monotheism. He generally designates this with the words *ejkqeiavzein*, *qeiavzein*, *ejkqeiei'n*, *qeopoiei'n*, and *ajpoqei'n* with preference for the first two. Secondly, Clement describes Christian salvation as deification for which he usually uses *gevnhtai qeov*" or *qeopoiei'n*. Deification for Clement, except in those few instances of a more traditional usage of Psalm 82, means likeness to God (*oJmoivwsi*" *qew/'*). He thus approaches Platonic doctrine Christianized only by reference to Christ as the ideal example. Man has a rational soul made in the image of the Logos who is the image and mind of God. Christ who is

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Whence at last ... it is that knowledge is committed to those fit and selected for it. It leads us to the endless and perfect end, teaching us beforehand the future life that we shall lead, according to God, and with gods; ... and they are called by the appellation of gods, being destined to sit on thrones with the other gods that have been first put in their places by the Saviour.” *str.* 7, 10 (ANF 2, 539)

<sup>268</sup> Rines does not appear to catch the right balance when he summarizes Clement’s doctrine as being that “deification is a process that begins on earth. However, it is never attained in this life.” “The Concept of Deification”, *The Concept of Deification*, 33.

<sup>269</sup> Butterworth, “The Deification of Man”, 158.

the eternal Logos of God has come and instructed us with divine exhortations in order that by this knowledge the Christian Gnostic might put away the passions of the flesh and strive for perfection and *ajpavqeia*.<sup>271</sup> This is similar to the soul of Christ who is God and the Father Himself both of whom are without passion. This likeness to God is deification. By it the Gnostic ascends and will ultimately contemplate God eternally face to face and thus live the life of a god. Although a sort of union does occur between the Gnostic and the Christ, this idea does not take a place in the foreground. The mystical ideas of the indwelling Spirit and indwelling Christ while present are very much attenuated compared to earlier authors. And where they do occur it appears to this author to represent echoes of traditional language and the living liturgical life of the church rather than an essential part of Clement's own thought.

Thus Clement's use of deification varies from the earlier use of the idea. This has not in general been recognized by scholars because the earlier history of the idea of "becoming god" associated with Psalm 82 has been largely ignored and Clement himself has been regarded as essentially the first ecclesiastical author to make use of the concept of deification. This is true in the sense that he is the first to regularly use actual technical deification terminology in his teaching. But in actuality he appears to represent a considerable shift away from a traditional model of "becoming god" associated with Psalm 82 that was familiar to earlier authors and was focused on the incarnation and Christ as God. He instead represents the tradition that filled the theology of the image with content gathered from Platonism and the natural theology of Greek thought and finally added the idea of "becoming god." But this in fact only shows with more certainty that the language of Psalm 82 was accepted and known in the church at an earlier date but that different authors provided different meanings for the idea of "becoming god" and the technical language of "deification". In the case of Clement his soteriology had many aspects that

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<sup>270</sup> *str.* 7.16 (ANF 2, 553). cf. *paed.* 1, 12 (ANF 2, 234)

were different than earlier authors and thus his concept of deification was different as well. It is all the more certain then that becoming god was an established traditional idea by Clement's day even if the meaning was not explicitly determined. Clement generally informed the phraseology with his own soteriology but he also knew and on occasion expressed the ideas based on mystical union between Christ and believer. But perhaps it was possible to express both at once as in Clement's flashy conceit stating that "the Word of God became man, that you may learn from man how man may become god."<sup>272</sup>

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<sup>271</sup> Although it is admitted that only God Himself never sins.

<sup>272</sup> *prot.* 1 (ANF 2, 174). This phrase is quite similar to the passage observed earlier in the fifth book of Irenaeus' work except that it is made even bolder by the explicit "become god" rather than "become what He is." It is also very unique among all the expressions of deification found in Clement because it so closely associates the incarnation and deification. Clearly it has traditional roots, perhaps the very phrase of Irenaeus referred to. However, Clement would undoubtedly have explained this in terms of Christ the Instructor who came to impart life giving knowledge. Notice in fact that Irenaeus' phrase too occurs in the context of Christ as our Teacher. The similarities are striking. But the authors obviously differ greatly in their general use of the idea of deification.

## **ATHANASIUS: GOD BECAME MAN THAT WE MIGHT BECOME GOD**

Athanasius was a member of the long line of Alexandrians who wielded so much influence in the early church. But more so than Clement, Athanasius possessed a traditional frame of mind that connects him with the language and thinking of those before him. But he proved such a pivotal figure in the Arian controversy in the fourth century that he also wielded enormous influence on those that followed him. His unhesitating use of the idea and language of deification gave it an unquestioned place in the East; his integration of it into a consistent soteriology centered on the incarnation of the Son who is *ὁμοούσιος* with the Father kept the concept within the bounds of orthodox theology.<sup>273</sup>

With Athanasius it is not possible to proceed as with earlier authors and first consider his concept of soteriology and then afterwards observe how this has been used to explain the phraseology of Psalm 82. For in Athanasius deification has been completely integrated into his doctrine of salvation which is ultimately for Athanasius deification. He explains the meaning of this by means of the primitive elements already seen. In fact, in form and content Athanasius follows Irenaeus very closely especially in his focus upon the incarnation and upon Christ as

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<sup>273</sup> Although certainly the idea and language of deification was known outside of Athanasius, yet it seems more than a coincidence that in fact it is precisely the Cappadocians and the later Alexandrians who follow Athanasius so closely who make the most use of this concept. And further, it is precisely following the Arian controversy when in the West, where Athanasius too had influence, that Psalm 82 and deification make a sudden brief appearance in the language and teaching of several Latin authors. In addition, Norman points out that in fact it is soteriology and redemption in particular that is in fact the most important concern for Athanasius' theology, not the divinity of the Son per se. "His near-fanatical concern with the Son's full deity was, at bottom, a concern over man's redemption.", *Deification*, 92ff.

redeemer from death and corruption.<sup>274</sup> And he presents this likewise within a system of the theology of the image in which salvation is the restoration of the image of God.

The theology of the image begins for Athanasius as with his predecessors with mankind's creation in the image of God. His ideas on this topic are presented in the most detail within his pair of works *Contra Gentes* and *De Incarnatione*.<sup>275</sup> Athanasius here begins by arguing that "evil has not existed from the beginning" because God created mankind originally "in his own image through his own Word."<sup>276</sup> This in fact for Athanasius is not simply natural theology. Athanasius points out that by nature only God is uncreated (ajgevnhton) whereas everything else, including mankind is made or created "from nothing" (taV ejx oujk o[ntwn gegenh'sqai). He then follows Irenaeus in concluding that this establishes a fundamental ontological gulf between God and mankind. This in fact means that because of the weakness of created nature mankind "was not capable by itself of knowing the Creator or of taking any thought of God."<sup>277</sup>

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<sup>274</sup> Harnack states that "the importance of Athanasius and the Cappadocians consisted in the strenuous emphasis laid by them on the impressive connection existing between the incarnation and the restoration of the human race to the divine life, and in their consequent escaped to some extent from the rationalistic scheme of doctrine (of natural theology); ... The above combination had been made in the Church long before this (see Irenaeus), but in the theology of Origen it had been subordinated to, and obscured by, complicated presuppositions." *History of Dogma*, 3, 290.

<sup>275</sup> *Against the Heathen and Concerning the Incarnation*. *Contra Gentes* follows closely in the footsteps of Clement's *Exhortation to the Heathen*. References to this work and quotes come from the critical edition by Robert W. Thomson, Oxford, 1971. References to *De Incarnatione* and quotes likewise come from the critical edition by Robert W. Thomson, Oxford, 1971.

<sup>276</sup> *gent.* 2.1.

<sup>277</sup> *inc.* 11.1ff. "oujc ijkanhV ei[h ejx e]auth'" gnw'nai toVn dhmiourgovn, oujd j o{lw" e[nnoian lapei'n qeou'." Also "man is by nature mortal in that he was created from nothing." *inc.* 4.26. This fundamental metaphysical distinction was to play a critical role in the Arian controversy as Arius claimed that Christ was made "from nothing" and was thus part of the creation whereas Athanasius continuously denied this was the case. e.g. "For from this one question the whole case on both sides may be determined, what is fitting to say,--He was, or He was not; always, or before His birth; eternal, or from this and from then; true, or by adoption, and from participation and in idea; to call Him one of things originated, or to unite Him to the Father; to consider Him unlike the Father in essence, or like and proper to Him; a creature, or Him through whom the creatures were originated; that He is the Father's Word, or that there is another word beside Him, and that by this other He was originated, and by another wisdom; and that He is only named Wisdom and Word, and is become a partaker of this wisdom, and second to it?" *Ar.* 1.9

But God had “pity on the human race” (ejlehvsa" pavlin toV gevno" toV ajnqrwvpinon)<sup>278</sup> and as a gift or an act of grace God

bestowed on them of his own image, our Lord Jesus Christ, and he made them according to his own image and likeness, in order that, understanding through such grace the image (i{na diaV th"" toiauvth" cavrito" thVn eijkovna noou'nte"), I mean the Word of the Father, they might be able through him to gain some notion about the Father, and recognizing the Maker, might live a happy and truly blessed life.<sup>279</sup>

According to Athanasius then, the grace of being in the image of God (hJ kat j eijkovna cavri") was in fact sufficient for newly formed mankind to know the Father.<sup>280</sup> Athanasius explains this by means of Platonic doctrine. He claims that while mankind yet had a pure soul they were capable by creation in the image to contemplate and know the Word. Such a person is superior to all bodily passions and clings to the divine. “For when the mind has no intercourse with the body, and has nothing of the later’s desires mingled with it from outside but is entirely superior to them, being self-sufficient as it was created in the beginning, then it transcends the senses and all human things and it rises high above the world, and beholding the Word sees in him also the Father of the Word.”<sup>281</sup>

The main characteristics of the image of God were rationality and free will.<sup>282</sup> Accordingly God “secured the grace they had been given by imposing a law and a set place” (hjsfalivsato novmw/ kaiV tovpw/ thVn doqei'san aujtoi").<sup>283</sup> And thus opportunity was given to mankind such that if they kept the command and the gift given them they would be able to enjoy paradise

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<sup>278</sup> *inc.* 11.8. cf. *inc.* 3.17ff.

<sup>279</sup> *inc.* 11.15ff. cf. *gent.* 2.5ff. where Athanasius says the benefit of being made in the image of God was that mankind might lead “an idyllic and truly blessed and immortal life.”

<sup>280</sup> *inc.* 12.1f.

<sup>281</sup> The requirement of a “pure soul” and “passionlessness” for “contemplation” and ascending through knowledge unto beholding in heaven are all Platonic ideas here given a Christian interpretation.

<sup>282</sup> *gent.* 31ff. *inc.* 3.21ff. Again Athanasius followed the precedent of the earlier fathers in interpreting the image with ideas prevalent in natural theology.

without pain or care and finally inherit immortality. But if they transgressed the commandment they would “would no longer live in paradise, but in (the) future dying outside it would remain in death and corruption.”<sup>284</sup> And so when Adam and Eve transgressed the law they received the sentence which God had threatened and “death overcame them and reigned over them.”<sup>285</sup>

Thus mankind misused the gift of the image of God and turned away from the contemplation of God to the contemplation of themselves, turning to all sorts of bodily desires, to murder, drunkenness, gluttony and all sorts of evils.<sup>286</sup> The results of turning away from the contemplation of the divine was that the mind became perverted and “forgetting that it was made in the image” it forgot the invisible God altogether and deified parts of the visible creation.<sup>287</sup> Men worshipped the sun and the moon, idols made with their own hands or like the Romans even deified their own mortal rulers with decrees. Thus “in the place of the truly existent God, they have deified unrealities (taV mhV o[nta ejqeopoiivhsan).”<sup>288</sup> And so men, created to be rational and contemplate God, moved from one evil to another increasing in wickedness and the law of death which God established because of the transgression held sway.<sup>289</sup>

<sup>283</sup> *inc.* 3.25f.

<sup>284</sup> *inc.* 3.32f.

<sup>285</sup> *inc.* 4.16f.

<sup>286</sup> *gent.* 4 and 5.

<sup>287</sup> *gent.* 8. *Contra Gentes* from this point on until chapter 30 largely points out and condemns the false deification of the pagans of various things of creation.

<sup>288</sup> *gent.* 47.18. Within the confines of *Contra Gentes*, where Athanasius keeps closely to the arguments of natural theology, he suggests that a possible solution to this problem is that as souls have abandoned God they could now turn back to God by casting off all the desire they have put on and in this way the purified the soul could once again take up the contemplation of the Word. But immediately he suggests that this self instruction of the soul would not suffice because of “external influences which disturb (the soul’s) mind.” (*gent.* 34.28). Yet lost souls could in fact gain some knowledge of God from the order and harmony of creation. For everyday the Father reveals his Word “through the subsistence and life of the universe.” (*gent.* 47.8ff.). Even beyond this he sent the law and the prophets that they might know him. “Nevertheless men, being overcome by their present desires and the illusion and deceits of demons, did not look towards the truth, but sated themselves with many vices and sins.” (*inc.* 12.26ff.).

<sup>289</sup> *inc.* 6.

This rather detailed and systematic conception of the creation and the fall led Athanasius to conceive of salvation as consisting of the restoration of man in the image of God such that he might again know his Creator. But Athanasius viewed the fall as consisting of two parts.<sup>290</sup> The first is the guilt incurred by disobeying the divine command. This aspect of the fall lies within the realm of will rather than nature, that is, God was angry at the disobedience and atonement was required.<sup>291</sup> But removal of guilt was not enough for Athanasius.<sup>292</sup> For the removal of guilt did not repair the damage done to nature by corruption and death. For the second part of the fall was the curse of God set upon man that “you will surely die.” Therefore the corresponding second part of salvation for Athanasius was the restoration of human nature to the image of God, deliverance from corruption, and the gift of immortality. And only the Word of God could bring about this salvation “for since he is the Word of the Father and above everyone, consequently he alone was both able to recreate the universe and be worthy to suffer for all and to be an advocate on behalf of all before the Father.”<sup>293</sup>

For this reason the incorporeal and incorruptible and immaterial word of God came to our realm.<sup>294</sup> For the salvation of mankind the Word descended and took on flesh. “He was God, and

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<sup>290</sup> Norman states that “this double aspect of redemption (in Athanasius) has often been overlooked.”, *Deification*, 95.

<sup>291</sup> Harnack points this out saying “atonement can only be thought of where the division between God and man is regarded as an opposition of the will.” *History of Dogma*, 3, 165. But he does not seem to take note of the place that the atonement plays in Athanasius along side the requirement for the restoration of nature.

<sup>292</sup> “Repentance gives no exemption from the consequences of nature, but merely looses sins. If, therefore, there had been only sin and not its consequence of corruption, repentance would have been very well. But if, since transgression had overtaken them, men were now prisoners to natural corruption, and they had been deprived of the grace of being in the image, what else should have happened?” *inc.* 7.12ff. Actually this argument appears to be partially rhetorical and not fully compatible with Athanasius’ final intent. For he actually argues that Christ had to die for all to remove the curse of the law which resided on all. Nevertheless that was not enough. Death itself had to be removed and life brought in its place.

<sup>293</sup> *inc.* 7.20ff.

<sup>294</sup> *inc.* 8.1ff.

then became man, and that to deify us”<sup>295</sup> The restoration of the image of God in mankind consisted of a number of necessary parts. The first was the incarnation itself whereby human nature was taken up into the Logos and deified.<sup>296</sup> This first part made all subsequent parts effective. The second was Christ’s death and resurrection. By his being flesh Christ could die; yet since it was the Word’s body all mankind died with it and thus the punishment for sins and the debt of death were paid for all.<sup>297</sup> And through the resurrection of Christ death was destroyed for all and all could thus rise.<sup>298</sup>

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<sup>295</sup> *Ar.* 1.39; ANF 27,329.

<sup>296</sup> “For therefore did He assume the body originate and human, that having renewed it as its Framer, He might deify it in Himself, and thus might introduce us all into the kingdom of heaven after His likeness.” *Ar.* 2.70. Thus “the crucial fact of the Incarnation, for Athanasius, is that the Logos united to Himself the flesh of mankind, thereby raising it up to his level, that of godhood.” Norman, *Deification*, 98. Norman then points out that apparently Athanasius understood the deification of the Word’s flesh as in some way taking on a kind of universal character. Thus in the death and resurrection of Christ human nature itself participated in death and resurrection merely by virtue of being joined to the Logos. He suggests this might occur in part by following Pauline thought but especially by incorporating the idea of Platonic Ideals into the doctrine of the incarnation. Thus Christ is joined to the archetype of “human nature” and the results of the incarnation take on a universal scope. See Norman’s entire discussion of this on 98ff. But whatever the logical implications of this idea are Athanasius was no universalist as seen below.

<sup>297</sup> “Since then the Word, being the Image of the Father and immortal, took the form of the servant, and as man underwent for us death in His flesh, that thereby He might offer Himself for us through death to the Father; therefore also, as man, He is said because of us and for us to be highly exalted, that as by His death we all died in Christ.” *Ar.* 1.41. “For it was not some man that gave Himself up for us; since every man is under sentence of death, according to what was said to all in Adam, 'earth thou art and unto earth thou shall return.' Nor yet was it any other of the creatures, since every creature is liable to change. But the Word Himself offered His own Body on our behalf that our faith and hope might not be in man, but that we might have our faith in God the Word Himself.” *ep. Max.*, 3 (ANF 27,579). “Again, if the Son were a creature, man had remained mortal as before, not being joined to God; for a creature had not joined creatures to God, as seeking itself one to join it; nor would a portion of the creation have been the creation’s salvation, as needing salvation itself. To provide against this also, He sends His own Son, and He becomes Son of Man, by taking created flesh; that, since all were under sentence of death, He, being other than them all, might Himself for all offer to death His own body; and that henceforth, as if all land died through Him, the word of that sentence might be accomplished (for 'all died' in Christ), and all through Him might thereupon become free from sin and from the curse which came upon it, and might truly abide for ever, risen from the dead and clothed in immortality and incorruption.” *Ar.* 1.69.

<sup>298</sup> “Whence also is He said to be 'First-born from the dead,' not that He died before us, for we had died first; but because having undergone death for us and abolished it, He was the first to rise, as man, for our sakes raising His own Body. Henceforth He having risen, we too from Him and because of Him rise in due course from the dead.” *Ar.* 1.61.

Although the incarnation, death, and resurrection of Christ were necessary and even primary, they were insufficient in and of themselves as historical events to actualize salvation for all people. For Athanasius the realization of deification occurs only on an individual basis through participation in the Logos and his life-giving deifying flesh.<sup>299</sup> Christ is God not by participation but by nature; we on the other hand are deified not by nature but by participation.<sup>300</sup> “We are deified not by partaking of the body of some man, but by receiving the body of the Word Himself.”<sup>301</sup> By participation in Christ the believer receives the benefits gained by Christ and his work and is recreated in the image of God.

For Athanasius participation in Christ and the attendant renewal in the image of God is accomplished primarily through the indwelling Holy Spirit. And the concept of the indwelling Spirit is again attached to baptism. For “when baptism is given, whom the Father baptizes, him the Son baptizes; and whom the Son baptizes, he is consecrated in the Holy Ghost.”<sup>302</sup> And thus the initiate becomes, by adoption, a son of God and Christ’s Father becomes his Father.<sup>303</sup>

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<sup>299</sup> Norman, *Deification*, 110. It is of course a reflection of Athanasius’ still incomplete Christology that he often speaks of the Logos and his body. This is rather uncomfortable language in light of the later Chalcedonian definitions. But this only shows that Athanasius too has to be read in the context of his time and the fact that many of the later questions had not been asked yet in the early fourth century. In fact the confession of Jesus Christ as God the Son *homoousios* with the Father really gave rise to the Christological questions with which the church wrestled in the following centuries.

<sup>300</sup> *Ar.* 1.4; 1.9. “And again, if, as we have said before, the Son is not such by participation, but, while all things originated have by participation the grace of God, He is the Father’s Wisdom and Word of which all things partake, it follows that He, being the deifying and enlightening power of the Father, in which all things are deified and quickened, is not alien in essence from the Father, but coessential. For by partaking of Him, we partake of the Father; because that the Word is the Father’s own. Whence, if He was Himself too from participation, and not from the Father His essential Godhead and Image, He would not deify, being deified Himself.” *synod.* 51 (ANF 27, 477)

<sup>301</sup> *ep. Max.* (ANF 27, 578f.) Written about 371 AD Although the language is different the similarity of this to Ignatius’ arguments is striking.

<sup>302</sup> *Ar* 2.41

<sup>303</sup> “For He has bid us be baptized, not in the name of Unoriginate and Originate, not into the name of Uncreate and Creature, but into the name of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, for with such an initiation we too are made sons verily, and using the name of the Father, we acknowledge from that name the Word in the Father. But if He wills that we should call His own Father our Father, we must not on that account

Therefore ... we, no longer as being men, but as proper to the Word, may have share in eternal life. For no longer according to our former origin in Adam do we die; but henceforward our origin and all infirmity of flesh being transferred to the Word, we rise from the earth, the curse from sin being removed, because of Him who is in us, and who has become a curse for us. And with reason; for as we are all from earth and die in Adam, so being regenerated from above of water and Spirit, in the Christ we are all quickened; the flesh being no longer earthly, but being henceforth made Word, by reason of God's Word who for our sake 'became flesh.'<sup>304</sup>

In accordance with this Athanasius follows the Pauline ecclesiology of being built up in Christ through the indwelling Spirit.<sup>305</sup> And believers are they who "bear Christ within us."<sup>306</sup> "For the Word was made flesh in order to offer up this body for all, and that we partaking of His Spirit, might be deified, a gift which we could not otherwise have gained than by His clothing Himself in our created body, for hence we derive our name of "men of God" and "men in Christ."<sup>307</sup> Thus without the Spirit we are "strange and distant from God" but by participation of the Spirit "we are joined to the Godhead."<sup>308</sup> The emphasis upon the role of the Holy Spirit in deification by Athanasius is striking and Norman is certainly correct when he states that "in a number of important respects, then, the work of the exaltation of man undertaken by the Logos may be said to be made effective by the Holy Spirit."<sup>309</sup>

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measure ourselves with the Son according to nature, for it is because of the Son that the Father is so called by us; for since the Word bore our body and came to be in us, therefore by reason of the Word in us, is God called our Father. For the Spirit of the Word in us names through us His own Father as ours, which is the Apostle's meaning when he says, 'God hath sent forth the Spirit of His Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father.' *decr.* 31

<sup>304</sup> *Ar.* 3.33.

<sup>305</sup> "Therefore according to His manhood He is founded, that we, as precious stones, may admit of building upon Him, and may become a temple of the Holy Ghost who dwelleth in us. And as He is a foundation, and we stones built upon Him, so again He is a Vine and we knit to Him as branches,--not according to the Essence of the Godhead; for this surely is impossible; but according to His manhood, for the branches must be like the vine, since we are like Him according to the flesh." *Ar.* 2.74.

<sup>306</sup> *Ar.* 3.45.

<sup>307</sup> *decr.* 3.14 (ANF 27,159) hJmei'" ejk tou' pnevmato" aujtou' metalabovnte" qeopoihqh'nai dunhqw'men.

<sup>308</sup> *Ar.* 3.24. Quoted in Norman, *Deification*, 127f.

<sup>309</sup> Norman, *Deification*, 130.

Unlike his emphasis on the Holy Spirit, Athanasius' extant writings reveal no equal emphasis on participation in Christ through the eucharist in regard to deification. It is therefore difficult to gauge how Athanasius felt this mystery to belong to the deification of the Christian. However, even if the details of his Eucharistic doctrine are fuzzy and its relationship to deification is not explicitly clear, Athanasius in the main apparently continued in the traditional line of thinking that in the Eucharist the believer does partake of Christ. Norman quotes Athanasius' fifth Festal letter as saying:

For to those who keep the feast in purity, the Passover is heavenly food, but to those who observe it profanely and contemptuously, it is a danger and reproach. for it is written, "whosoever shall eat and drink unworthily is guilty of the death of the Lord." Wherefore, let us not merely proceed to perform the festal rites, but let us be prepared to draw near to the divine Lamb, and to touch heavenly food. ... so that, being altogether pure, we may be able to partake of the Logos.<sup>310</sup>

The above has demonstrated that for Athanasius, as for those before him, participation in the mysteries of the church was an essential part of salvation and therefore deification. But this was not the full extent of Athanasius' doctrine of deification. For Athanasius being recreated in the image of God and being deified could not be without moral and ethical consequences. Being deified by participation in Christ the believer ought become like Christ.<sup>311</sup> Imitation of Christ does not appear as a cause of deification, but, on the other hand, one could not "become god" without the attendant Christian life.<sup>312</sup> Virtue and purity of soul allow the believer, recreated in

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<sup>310</sup> *ep. fest. 5.5*. Norman, *Deification*, 125.

<sup>311</sup> "... not only should we bear His image, but should receive from Him an example of the heavenly way of life; that as he has begun, we should affirm ... For those who are thus disposed, and conform themselves to the Gospel, will be partakers of Christ and imitators of the apostolic examples." *ep. fest. 2.5*. Norman, *Deification*, 112.

<sup>312</sup> "For as, although there be one Son by nature, True and Only-begotten, we too become sons, not as He in nature and truth, but according to the grace of Him that calleth, and though we are men from the earth, are yet called gods, not as the True God or His Word, but as has pleased God who has given us that grace; so also, as God do we become merciful, not by being made equal to God, nor becoming in nature and truth benefactors (for it is not our gift to benefit but belongs to God), but in order that what has accrued to us from God Himself by grace, these things we may impart to others, without making distinctions, but

the image of God, to once again ascend, contemplate, and know God. The influential *Life of Anthony* shows how important moral effort and a striving to live like Christ were to Athanasius. Salvation and deification could not be without divine assistance or cooperating free will.<sup>313</sup>

And finally, the old eschatological element of deification continued in Athanasius as well. For although already in this life the believer begins the recreation in the image of God it is not complete until the resurrection and the restoration of creation.<sup>314</sup> There the blessed will see their Creator face to face in perfect joy in the company of the saints and the angels without the pain, sorrow, and sighing of this life. “For therefore did He assume the body originate and human, that having renewed it as its Framer, He might deify it in Himself, and thus might introduce us all into the kingdom of heaven after His likeness. ... For therefore the union was of this kind, that He might unite what is man by nature to Him who is in the nature of the Godhead, and his salvation and deification might be sure.”<sup>315</sup>

Although deification was so completely embedded in Athanasius’ soteriology the question remains as to the place of Psalm 82 in his doctrine. In regard to deification, Psalm 82 does appear a number of times but in no way is Athanasius’ concept of becoming god derived from it. Athanasius is merely following established tradition in his use of the idea of deification. It is because of this that Psalm 82 takes on the appearance of an after-the-fact proof text for

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largely towards all extending our kind service. For only in this way can we anyhow become imitators, and in no other, when we minister to others what comes from Him.” *Ar.* 3.19.

<sup>313</sup> See Norman, *Deification*, 115ff.

<sup>314</sup> Norman states that deification has three identifiable steps in Athanasius: “(1) the sanctification from sin, including the development of moral virtue and ethical purity; (2) the abolishment of physical death and corruption through the resurrection; and (3) the final, eschatological apotheosis, described as entry into heaven. There the redeemed will enjoy, in the presence of the saints and angels, the *visio Dei*, and being crowned with glory they will inherit their kingdom, to rule and reign with Christ without end.”, *Deification*, 165.

<sup>315</sup> *Ar.* 2.70 (ANF 27, 386).

Athanasius.<sup>316</sup> And undoubtedly it is this appearance that has misled some scholars into thinking that it could have no other role than this in earlier authors contrary to what I have shown previously. But Athanasius can also quote different passages to support the idea of deification by participation in Christ. For example in his *Four Orations Against the Arians* he states:

And thus of the Son Himself, all things partake according to the grace of the Spirit coming from Him; and this shows that the Son Himself partakes of nothing, but what is partaken from the Father, is the Son; for, as partaking of the Son Himself, we are said to partake of God; and this is what Peter said 'that ye may be partakers in a divine nature;' as says too the Apostle, 'Know ye not, that ye are a temple of God?' and, 'We are the temple of a living God.'<sup>317</sup>

The use of 2 Peter 1:4 is the first we have observed in relation to the idea of deification. In many later authors it becomes one of the favorite proof texts for the idea of deification. But in fact it had nothing to do with the historical development of the concept of deification and only after the doctrine was well established could the New Testament be searched for other proof texts and this one immediately presented itself to the Fathers.

What in fact is most interesting in regard to Psalm 82 in Athanasius is its continued Christological use which, as we have seen, was its original primary function in the development of Christian doctrine. Athanasius' argument with Arius was largely about the sense in which the church's early confession of Christ as "God" should be understood. Arius could not deny something as traditional as the confession itself and so he tried to give it a meaning acceptable to his theology of "God one and only".<sup>318</sup> Apparently his attempts were focused on trying to find a way to bring Christ to this side of the creator/creation ontological division by using phrases such "there was a time when he wasn't" and Christ was "made from nothing" even while yet

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<sup>316</sup> See for example *inc.* 4.30ff.

<sup>317</sup> *Ar.* 1.16.

<sup>318</sup> Pelikan, *Catholic Tradition*, 193ff. It is immediately clear then that the Arian controversy was ultimately about the difficulty of reconciling the church's monotheistic confession with the ancient practice of addressing and confessing Christ as "God."

confessing that Christ was the first born of creation and that through him all other things were made. But Athanasius opposed Arian theology precisely because it made the Son a creature and not by nature God. For Athanasius the Son belonged to the divine side of the creator/creature dichotomy.

It is quite interesting that Norman in fact criticizes this conceptual distinction as “philosophical ontology” taken from pagan authors. Norman follows other scholars in finding this logically incompatible with the idea of deification. He interprets Athanasius as struggling with the conflict between this ontological distinction and his soteriology of deification when he writes that “we can not become like God in essence.”<sup>319</sup> Norman notes that this ontological distinction comes especially from the doctrine of creation *ex nihilo* (out of nothing) and that it is much older than Athanasius. Yet he finds the idea that man can not become God by nature the logical failing of Athanasius’ soteriology.<sup>320</sup> So he considers the idea of *qeopoivhsi*” (deification, lit. a making of a god, i.e. being made a god) a “contradiction in terms” if this only refers to a “participation” in divinity and not a change of nature to divinity.<sup>321</sup>

Once again this shows how the difficult and ambiguous phraseology of “becoming god” was first taken up by the church through Psalm 82:6 and later the terminology had to be explained by reference to already existing models of salvation. We have seen that there was never a real logical necessity to use the terminology describing believers as “gods”. Nor can the idea of “becoming god” be ascribed simply to influence from the surrounding hellenistic culture. The terminology was introduced through the use of Psalm 82 as a Christological proof. And the

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<sup>319</sup> Norman, *Deification*, 179f. *ep. Afr. 7. cf. ep. Serap. 2.4.*

<sup>320</sup> Although he notes the importance of this ontological distinction in the Arian controversy he does not seem to fully appreciate that there would have been no Arian controversy or Athanasius as we know him without this fundamental distinction known throughout the Christian tradition See his entire curious discussion on pages 173ff.

<sup>321</sup> Norman, *Deification*, 190.

difficulty mentioned here by Norman was already latent in this original use of Psalm 82 itself. For when the fathers argued that, since the adopted sons were called “gods”, how much more so should the true and only Son be called “God”, they in fact were already demonstrating that the word “qeov” could be used in two different ways. The text was never used to prove nor thought of as proving that Christ is God and his disciples are “Gods” in the same sense.<sup>322</sup> Further, the Christological argument made use of calling believers “gods” as the premise not the conclusion of the Christological argument. Thus the description of believers as “gods” derived from a scriptural given, not from a logical conclusion of some philosophical argument. In this way Psalm 82 first was used as a Christological argument and secondarily gave rise to the idea of salvation as “becoming god” even while performing its Christological function. In Athanasius it in fact returns to the function of proving the divinity of Christ, but now with a fantastic *tour de force* having a new premise, the tradition of salvation as deification.

When Athanasius countered Arius’ claims that Christ was the Son of God by grace or creation and not by nature he could not ignore one of the church’s traditional Christological texts in Psalm 82. He thus returns to it to explain how it is that Christians can in fact be called “gods.” Here he presents his familiar argument that in fact Christ is God by nature while the believers become gods by participation.<sup>323</sup> But in remarkable fashion Psalm 82 is able to serve to prove Christ’s natural divinity precisely by taking deification to be a premise to this text:

For adoption there could not be apart from the real Son, who says, ‘No one knoweth the Father, save the Son, and he to whomsoever the Son will reveal Him.’ And how can there be deifying apart from the Word and before Him? Yet, saith He to their brethren the Jews, ‘If

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<sup>322</sup> This is already stated explicitly by Tertullian in *Marc.* 1.7 as described earlier in the text.

<sup>323</sup>“For, behold, we take divine Scripture, and thence discourse with freedom of the religious Faith, and set it up as a light upon its candlestick, saying:--Very Son of the Father, natural and genuine, proper to His essence, Wisdom Only-begotten, and Very and Only Word of God is He; not a creature or work, but an offspring proper to the Father's essence. Wherefore He is very God, existing one in essence with the very Father; while other beings, to whom He said, 'I said ye are Gods,' had this grace from the Father, only by participation of the Word, through the Spirit. For He is the expression of the Father's Person and Light from Light, and Power, and very Image of the Father's essence.” *Ar.* 1.9 (ANF 27,311)

He called them gods, unto whom the Word of God came.' And if all that are called sons and gods, whether in earth or in heaven, were adopted and deified through the Word, and the Son Himself is the Word, it is plain that through Him are they all, and He Himself before all, or rather He Himself only is very Son, and He alone is very God from the very God, not receiving these prerogatives as a reward for His virtue, nor being another beside them, but being all these by nature and according to essence. For He is Offspring of the Father's essence, so that one cannot doubt that after the resemblance of the unalterable Father, the Word also is unalterable.<sup>324</sup>

Here in fact the doctrine of deification has come full circle after 200 years. The “you are gods”, which originally was used to support addressing the risen Christ as “God”, has given birth to the concept of salvation as “becoming god.” This in turn has taken such content from Christology that it has returned to prove that one can not become god by participation in Christ unless Christ is true God by nature. This remarkable turn of events has been missed by previous scholarship. And it is in fact this context and historical development that makes all the more dramatic Athanasius’ famous dictum from *De Incarnatione* that in the incarnation the creator and leader of the world himself has been made known “for he became man, that we might become god.”<sup>325</sup>

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<sup>324</sup> *Ar.* 1.38f (ANF 27, 329)

<sup>325</sup> *inc.* 54.11f. *aujtoV" gaVr ejnhnqrwvphsen, i{na hJmei'" qeopoihqw'men:*

## CONCLUSION

This thesis began with a survey of various pagan ideas of being like god or being declared and worshipped as a god. It seems appropriate in reviewing the origin of the Christian doctrine of deification as has been presented in the previous pages to review the relationship of Christian deification to those earlier ideas. It has been shown that the early Christian authors forcefully rejected the deification of people and objects of creation as being worship of creatures as opposed to the creator. Hence this general phenomenon played no role in Christian deification except to serve as a sort of contrast in a certain genre of apologetic works aimed at the pagan nations. The old Homeric idea of being “godlike” in terms of bodily attributes likewise had no place in the Christian mindset. Various ideas of Greek natural theology did play a significant role in the doctrine of the early church and threatened to swallow up soteriology with a sort of rationalistic and moralistic doctrine but did not give rise to the idea of “becoming god.” The Platonic ideal of becoming “like god as far as we are able” was able to play a supportive role to the idea of “becoming god”, but Plato’s own language based on the philosophy of the transcendent Ideas never went beyond the “as far as we are able” since development in this direction was hindered by the ontological gulf between the ideas and this world. Finally, the mystery religions in some way were built upon the idea of immortality and deliverance from fate in everyday life by being joined in some way to one of the cultic deities like Isis. But it does not seem that the idea of “becoming god” played a significant role in these cults. Therefore, in the past when scholars have placed the concept of Christian deification under the banner of the Hellenization of Christianity, it has been done so rather out of a general resemblance to various motifs in a number of Graeco-Roman religions rather than to any real ability to trace the actual source. Deification’s rather dramatic contradiction with Hebrew thought seemed to leave this as the only viable alternative.

But in this thesis it has been demonstrated that the idea of Christian salvation as “becoming god” was older than the usage of technical deification terminology found in Clement of Alexandria. The concept of salvation as “becoming god” has been demonstrated to exist early in the second century and to be closely associated to the use of Psalm 82 in both Latin and Greek authors of the second centuries and following. Further, it has been demonstrated that Psalm 82 was quite active in the theological life of the church as a text used in Christological argument, specifically, to show that addressing the risen Christ as “God” was in accordance with scripture. This argument followed upon the logic of Jesus’ reasoning with the Jews in John 10:31-36. There Christ quotes Psalm 82 in order to show that since scripture called those to whom the word of God comes “gods”, it was not blasphemy to call himself the “Son of God.” The fathers modified this argument slightly in order to show that since scripture called believers “gods” it was in fact appropriate, even necessary, to address Christ as “God.”

But this argument taken from Psalm 82 requires as a premise that believers are called “gods” in the Psalm. This terminology would have required some type of explanation. And this explanation, it has been suggested, was supplied by reference to existing doctrines of salvation. The state of soteriology in the mid second century was quite mixed but centered upon three basic themes: eschatological ideas focused on Christ’s second coming, rather rationalistic explanations taken from natural theology, and also ideas of redemption from death closely focused on the incarnation of Christ as the Logos of God become man. At this time these various ideas were in fact all being organized to fit into a model of the theology of the image which considered salvation to be the restoration of the image of God in man which had been lost in some way at the fall. Observation of the various soteriologies and their interaction with the idea of deification has shown that all these main soteriological ideas from the second century were used to supply meaning to the idea of salvation as “becoming god”. This supports the theory that the terminology of “becoming gods” was supplied first and the meaning for the words were given

later from various established descriptions of salvation. As the theology of the image matured, “becoming god” was explained as the restoration of the image of God in mankind. This takes place ultimately in the resurrection and the eternal kingdom where the believer will see God face to face forever, but in this life it begins already at baptism through the indwelling Holy Spirit and continues through the eucharist because through both of these one partakes of the risen Christ and the benefits of his earthly work. This must coincide with a life of imitation of Christ through which the soul increases in purity and can thus more freely contemplate Christ and the Father. From Ignatius’ “faith and love being in unity, is god” to Athanasius’ “he became man that we may become god”, a variety of ideas came together to form a tradition of salvation explaining the Psalm’s “I said, ‘ye are gods.’”

I believe the results of this study are important in several ways. First, I think this is the first real explanation for the historical rise of this important phenomenon among the Greek fathers. Secondly, in the field of theology as in all branches of human knowledge people tend to organize thinking along familiar models of thought. This has in recent years been referred to as thinking in paradigms. The result is often development of questions, answers, terminology and systems that only make sense within the bounds of certain ways of thinking. This is not to deny the existence of objective truth but merely that the expression of truth most often fits the existential needs of the one asking the questions. A person asks a question and wants the answer to that question, not a different one. As it turns out, in the Latin West and the Greek East different cultures tended to focus theological attention on different questions and thus different answers. The common factors were only those items originating so early in the church as to be a common inheritance of East and West. The Christological argument from Psalm 82 is one of these. But already in the second century the differences in East and West can be discerned. In light of this and the wider ecumenical concerns, I think it important that if historical confessions are to mean anything, it is incumbent upon Western theologians to attempt to get outside of their

own comfortable systems and attempt to understand how in fact the East could think in such different terms from the West on many questions. This study concerns merely one small piece of such a seemingly insurmountable mountain. However, in this particular question, it should be of import for the West to recognize a legitimate historical origin for the idea of deification and to see that it is closely related from the beginning to the Christological confession of the church. Third, within the smaller confines of Luther scholarship, the relationship of deification and faith has become a serious question. Professor Kurt Marquart in his 1996 presentation to the Symposium on the Lutheran Confessions at Concordia Seminary in Ft. Wayne, IN demonstrated the importance even for confessional Lutheranism of work done on this subject by Helsinki University Professor Tuomo Mannermaa since the late 1970's. Perhaps in some way this investigation will be of possible use in these considerations as well.

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