

Deification and Creativity: A Prelude

This book seeks to discuss the role of deification in Christian theology and the place human creativity holds within the process of deification. I will argue that deification, a central theme in Christian theology, can help explain and re-contextualize theology, particularly as related to a doctrine of creation (and of God as Creator), a doctrine of evil and sin (or the Fall), the Incarnation, and sacramental theology. I will then argue that human creativity is bound to each of these categories. Using the genres of poetry and fantasy (the use of which I will explain below), I will argue that the human creation of worlds (as in fantasy)¹ and the breaking and restructuring of language (as in poetry) as well as the reading of these works serves as part of the process of deification.² Humanity, as created in the image of God and for the end of deification, can and should enact its creative powers, thereby imitating and participating in God. Laying out my argument, therefore, after this introduction, I will argue that part of what it means for God to be Creator is that God creates in order to deify, deification being, in part, defined as participation in God. What God creates—namely, creation—therefore is so created as to be joined to the divine life. Humanity, the pinnacle of this act of creation, is created in the image

1. This is, of course, not limited to fantasy, but all works of fiction.

2. N.B. I am using fantasy, fairy tales (an early form of fantasy in many ways), and poetry as examples of how the creation and use of objects by humans aids in our deification. For this reason, also, I have selected only works written by Christian authors as they more clearly show these connections. I will write more about the possibility of bad creativity or a creativity that does not lead to deification in the final chapter.

of God and bears the burden of directly and indirectly participating in God, which includes participating in God as Creator in order to lift up the rest of creation into the divine life. Humanity, however, is also fallen and its fall is related to the end for which God has created it, deification. This leaves humanity in a state of not only needing to be deified, but to be saved. Therefore, the Incarnation is at the center of both humanity's deification and salvation (I will explain the nature of the relationship of deification and salvation in Stanzas II and III). Humanity now exists in an age after the Christ event and its participation in God comes through the various sacraments, most especially baptism and the Eucharist. Through a discussion of these sacraments and the liturgy, the highest act of human creativity, I will argue in the final chapter that human creativity, as in the creation of stories and poems, and the consumption of human creativity, as through reading, aids in human deification.

In this introduction, I will first give some background details on the terminology of deification and its relation to human creativity, which will allow me to play with language deification as Theo-poetry and creation itself as a poem.³ After this explication of vocabulary, I will outline a theology of poetry and fantasy, explaining both its general theological importance as well as laying the foundation for the role that poetry and fantasy play in human deification. This section will rely on writings by poet David Constantine,⁴ theologian, poet, and former Archbishop of Canterbury Rowan Williams,⁵ and theologian and poet John Milbank.⁶ At the conclusion of this section, I will return to deification, first situating the concept in the context of the study of deification, situating this book within that context.

Next, it will be necessary to examine the scriptures and patristic

3. My use of poetry and poem, throughout, is more closely related to a more philosophical understanding of poetics, that is, of making or creating than simply words written in verse (whether free or metrical, rhymed or alliterative, etc.). While many comparisons or analogies can be made and will be made in this thesis to poetry as defined as the writing of verse and the creativity of God, these are only analogies and are not comprehensive of what it means either to be a human poet or what it means to call God Poet and creation poem.

4. David Constantine, *Poetry* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).

5. Rowan Williams, *The Edge of Words: God and the Habits of Language* (London: Bloomsbury, 2014).

6. John Milbank, "Fictioning Things: Gift and Narrative," *Religion and Literature* 37.3 (Autumn 2005).

understandings of these scriptures used to support later understandings of deification. This will place deification in its historical and theological contexts. Then, I will examine and critique the classification systems developed by Ivan Popov⁷ and Norman Russell⁸ for understanding how the Church Fathers understood and used deification in their theology. Russell and Popov seek to explain how various theologians were using the language of deification in the patristic period (a dubiously definable period since Western Christianity has a middle ages, roughly from the fifth to fifteenth centuries, and Eastern Christianity does not; its patristic period usually runs to the fifteenth century). Finally, I will end with a brief section that lays out what I believe to be the four key terms of deification: participation, transformation, imitation, and virtue. I begin first by examining the language of deification and poetry/fantasy. The language of poetry, of creation, is written into the language of deification.

Before Gregory of Nazianzus began to favor (or coined)⁹ the term *theosis* (θέωσις)—from the verb *theōō* (θέωω)—a common word in Greek for deification was *theopoiesis* (θεοποίησις), from *theopoieō* (θεοποιέω).¹⁰ Norman Russell writes that “The noun *θεοποίησις* makes its first appearance in Greek writers in the *Orationes contra Arianos* (c. 340), on each of its three occasions in a Christian context.”¹¹ By Christian context, Russell means the deification of human beings by God in

7. Ivan Popov, “The Idea of Deification in the Early Eastern Church,” in *Theosis: Deification in Christian Theology*, vol. 2, ed. Vladimir Kharlamov (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2011), 42–82.

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

9. “Θέωσις, the correlative noun to *θέωω*, was coined by Gregory of Nazianzus. It appears in the Fourth Oration, the First Inveictive against Julian, (Or. 7.1) which was composed shortly after Julian’s death in July 363.” *Ibid.*, 341.

10. Russell notes that Clement of Alexandria is the first “ecclesiastical writer to speak of the *θεοποιούμενοι*,” and is thus the first to use the word to refer to Christian deification though he is not the first to use *θεοποίησις* since this noun form does not appear until the fourth century. Furthermore, Clement uses the verbal form *θεοποιέω* to speak both of the deification of inanimate objects in paganism, and the deification of human beings in Christianity. This is in order to avoid confusion over pagan deifications of human beings with Christian deification. Nevertheless, it is important to note that this construction of the words God and to make is among the earliest forms of what I am calling deification. *Ibid.*, 122nn10–15 and 141, and 338. Cf. Clement of Alexandria *Prot.* and *Strom.*

11. Russell, *Doctrine of Deification*, 168. Cf. CA 1.39, 2.70, 3.53.

Christ and through the Holy Spirit, as opposed to *apotheosis* in paganism or describing Christ's deification of his own humanity. When broken down, this word comes from the Greek words for "God" and "to make." *Poieō*, however, is also the source, ultimately, though through Latin, for our English words "poet," "poem," "poetry," and their other forms.¹² Vladimir Lossky notes that there is a sense in which the God of the Nicene Creed is as much Poet of heaven and earth as he is creator. Lossky writes:

Thus the positive meaning of divine gratuitousness appears to us. This is, to speak by analogy (but this analogy constitutes the very meaning of creation), the gratuitousness of the poet. "Poet of the heavens and of the earth," one could call God, translating the Greek text of the Credo. Thus can we penetrate the mystery of the created being. To create is not to reflect oneself in a mirror, even that of prime matter, it is not vainly to divide oneself in order to take everything unto oneself. It is a calling forth of *newness*. One might almost say: a risk of newness. When God raises outside of Himself, a new subject, a free subject, that is the peak of His creative act. Divine freedom is accomplished through creating this supreme risk: another freedom.¹³

For Lossky, the act of creation is itself gratuitous in an analogous way to the gratuity of poetry. By this, Lossky is suggesting that creation itself lacks mere utility, insofar as God is concerned, and is created out of some kind of gratuitous sense. Lossky does not define this gratuity, but one could imagine it being the gratuity of love, of gift, of wonder and desire. Relating poetry to God's act of creation, *ex nihilo*, Lossky provides insight into both creation and human creativity. Both are "a calling forth of newness." This relation also causes us not simply to think of God in terms of a human poet, but of human poets, and all human creators, in terms of God the Creator. It is not, therefore, a long way from here to a relationship between the poet's imitation of God the Poet and the poet's participation in God the Poet. Of course,

12. It is because of theopoesis, that I prefer and will use primarily the Latin-based word deification for that process by which humans become gods. Deification, like theopoesis, comes from the Latin words for God, *deus*, and to make, *facere*. Thus, it serves as a direct translation of the earlier word.

13. Vladimir Lossky, *Orthodox Theology: An Introduction*, trans. Ian and Ihita Kesarcodi-Watson (Crestwood, NY: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1978), 53–54.

this passage from Lossky is not nearly enough to make this claim. He makes no real arguments, merely statements and relationships from which one can infer arguments. However, this book seeks to argue that there is an imitative and participatory relationship between God and poets (and writers of fantasy/fairytales) and that the nature of this relationship is deificatory. In this way, we can take the word *θεοποίησις*, and from it, make the words “Theo-Poet,” “theo-poem,” and of course, we could transliterate and use *theopoesis*, or the more English Theo-poetry, for deification.¹⁴ Discussing deification and creation in the terms of poetry helps us understand the relationship of human creativity through works of poetry and literature (particularly the genre of fantasy/fairytales) not only to deification, but to all discussions of theology. This brings up two key questions: What are poetry and fantasy? What role do poetry and fantasy play in theological discussion? Before I can answer these questions, it is important to review the literature on deification, which is the primary focus of this book, situating my understanding of the relationship between human creativity and deification in the scholarship thus far.

Literature Review

The research into deification from both the East and the West has been growing. Norman Russell’s *Doctrine of Deification in the Greek Patristic Tradition*¹⁵ is a seminal text in understanding the language and development of deification from its pagan origins to its Christian usages and differences. Russell, building on the work of Jules Gross, *The Divinization of the Christian According to the Greek Fathers*,¹⁶ and others, seeks to give a genealogical overview of the language of deification.

14. Behind the desire, though not running so deeply, is Hans Urs von Balthasar’s theo-drama. By noting the etymological connection between *theopoesis* and poetry, we can begin to see that there may be a deep-seated connection between deification and human creativity on the language level as well as when we further examine human creativity in connection with deification. This usage of theo-poetical language, however, should be confused with the use of theopoetry in much of process theology today, see especially, Roland Faber and Jeremy Fackenthal, eds., *Theopoetic Folds: Philosophizing Multifariousness* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2013).

15. Russell, *Doctrine of Deification*.

16. Jules Gross, *The Divinization of the Christian according to the Greek Fathers*, trans. Paul A. Onica (Anaheim, CA: A & C Press, 2002).

Russell's work is nearly exhaustive, at least as regards the Greek East, noting not only usages of deificatory language as regards deification/theosis as we tend to understand those terms today, but also their other usages. *Theōsis: Deification in Christian Theology*,¹⁷ the first volume edited by Stephen Finlan and Vladimir Kharlamov, the second edited by Kharlamov alone,¹⁸ both provide excellent collections of essays on various topics and figures related to deification. In this vein as well is *Partakers of Divine Nature: The History and Development of Deification in the Christian Traditions* eds. Michael J. Christensen and Jeffery A. Wittung.¹⁹ *Partaking in the Divine Nature: Deification and Communion*²⁰ by Paul M. Collins provides an excellent and somewhat genealogical look at deification up to the present in East and West. Similar to this is Anthony Baker's *Diagonal Advance: Perfection in Christian Theology*.²¹ While the emphasis in Baker's book is more specifically terminology related to perfection in the Christian tradition, he notes that deification is inherent to an understanding of Christian perfection. Daniel Keating's *Deification and Grace*,²² while written for a more popular audience, is an example of the rising preeminence of this concept among Western theologians. On the explicitly Eastern side is Panayiotis Nellas' *Deification in Christ: Orthodox Perspectives on the Nature of the Human Person*,²³ which gives christological and anthropological emphases to deification. He focuses on the way(s) in which the Christian's union with Christ (Christification), who is God, is the source of their deification. He also notes the anthropological concerns of deification.

There are also several books that connect deification back to the Bible. An excellent example of this among Pauline scholarship is Ben

17. Stephen Finlan and Vladimir Kharlamov, eds., *Theōsis: Deification in Christian Theology* (London: James Clarke, 2006).

18. Vladimir Kharlamov, ed., *Theosis: Deification in Christian Theology*, vol. 2 (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2011).

19. Michael J. Christensen, and Jeffery A. Wittung, eds., *Partakers of the Divine Nature: The History and Development of Deification in the Christian Tradition* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007).

20. Paul M. Collins, *Partaking in Divine Nature: Deification and Communion* (London: Continuum, 2010).

21. Anthony D. Baker, *Diagonal Advance: Perfection in Christian Theology* (London: SCM, 2011).

22. Daniel Keating, *Deification and Grace* (Naples: Sapientia Press, 2007).

23. Panayiotis Nellas, *Deification in Christ: Orthodox Perspectives on the Nature of the Human Person* (Crestwood, NY: St Vladimir's Press, 1978).

Blackwell's *Christosis: Pauline Soteriology in Light of Deification in Irenaeus and Cyril of Alexandria*.²⁴ Also in Pauline scholarship, there is M. David Litwa's *We are Being Transformed: Deification in Paul's Soteriology*.²⁵ Written almost contemporaneously with Blackwell's book, this makes an attempt to look at Paul objectively, through the eyes of a religious historian. This book falls flat as it attempts to ignore later readings of Paul and Paul's own majority interaction with the canonical Old Testament scriptures and focuses solely on attempting to place Paul within his first-century Greco-Roman context. Litwa emphasizes pagan religion and divergent trends in Judaism in attempting to find evidence of deification in Paul with little or no reference to later developments in deification. Carl Mosser's article "The Earliest Patristic Interpretations of Psalm 82, Jewish Antecedents, and the Origins of Christian Deification,"²⁶ also provides an excellent genealogical and biblical look at deification in Psalm 82. Also, while intended for a non-specialist, non-academic audience, Stephen Thomas' *Deification in the Eastern Orthodox Tradition*²⁷ shows the various ways one can find the ideas and notions deification in the Bible, from an Orthodox perspective, going all the way back to the book of Genesis.

Deification in Scripture and Tradition

In this section, I seek first to come to an understanding of just what precisely cannot be and can be called deification in a Christian sense. Looking at scripture, the writings of the Fathers and recent theologians, particularly those who have written on deification, I will examine the various understandings of Christian deification, coming to a sort of a synthesis in order to understand its relation to the rest of this book. My understanding of deification will be refined and made clearer as it is seen interacting with the rest of the topics discussed in

24. Ben Blackwell, *Christosis: Pauline Soteriology in Light of Deification in Irenaeus and Cyril of Alexandria* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2011).

25. David M. Litwa, *We Are Being Transformed: Deification in Paul's Soteriology* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2012).

26. Carl Mosser, "The Earliest Patristic Interpretations of Psalm 82, Jewish Antecedents, and the Origins of Christian Deification," *Journal of Theological Studies* 56.1 (April 2005): 30–74.

27. Stephen Thomas, *Deification in the Eastern Orthodox Tradition* (Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias Press, 2008).

this book. In an attempt to help further understand deification, I will look at the ways in which both Ivan Popov and Norman Russell have classified the various usages of deificatory language employed by the Church fathers. From there, I will provide my own synthesis of the four main aspects of deification.

I have clearly left out a rather large swathe of history between the thirteenth and late nineteenth/early twentieth centuries. This is primarily because these centuries are unnecessary to the narrative I am trying to construct. That there are many important theologians in this period cannot be denied; nor, as I will note briefly below, did they completely ignore the question of deification. Rather, this book being situated somewhat in the Western Ressourcement tradition and that aspect of the Radical Orthodoxy sensibility, I desire to return to the sources foundational to Christianity in general and Western Christianity in specific—namely, those of the patristic and medieval periods. This being said, it is now necessary to turn the discussion to an understanding of deification.

While deification is often considered a primarily Eastern Christian theological notion (Andrew Louth sees the doctrine of deification as having fallen out of Western theology some time during the twelfth century),²⁸ research is being carried out to show how various authors outside of the Greek patristic tradition (from Augustine to Aquinas, from Aquinas to Luther, Wesley, and beyond) held to ideas such as sanctification, justification, redemption, and salvation that are linguistically similar to, and perhaps theologically related to, the Eastern Christian notion of deification.²⁹

28. Andrew Louth, "The Place of Theosis in Orthodox Theology," in *Partakers of the Divine Nature: The History and Development of Deification in the Christian Traditions*, eds. Michael J. Christensen and Jeffery A. Wittung (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008), 33.

29. For texts on deification in the Bible cf. Stephen Finlan, "Can we speak of Theosis in Paul?" in *Partakers of the Divine Nature: The History and Development of Deification in the Christian Tradition*, eds. Michael J. Christensen and Jeffery A. Wittung (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007), 68–80; James Starr, "Does 2 Peter 1:4 Speak of Deification?," in *Partakers of the Divine Nature: The History and Development of Deification in the Christian Tradition*, eds. Michael J. Christensen and Jeffery A. Wittung (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007), 81–92. Ben Blackwell, *Christosis*; M. David Litwa, *We Are Being Transformed*; Carl Mosser, "The Earliest Patristic Interpretations of Psalm 82, Jewish Antecedents, and the Origins of Christian Deification."

For more general texts on deification, cf. Gross, *The Divinization of the Christian*; Russell, *Doctrine of Deification in the Greek Patristic Tradition*; Veli-Meli Kärkäinen, *One with God: Salvation as Deification*

Understanding the origins of this doctrine³⁰ is not simple. The scholarship is varied concerning the origins of deification. Some suggest that notions of Christian deification began with the apostle Paul (or even Christ, particularly as portrayed in the Gospel of John).³¹ Others will say that while Paul, Clement, and Ignatius all have hints of it, Irenaeus is the first to begin developing deification as a doctrine.³² In many ways, the notion, or as I call it here, doctrine, of deification is much like the doctrine of the Trinity. In scripture, it is not made absolutely explicit, but as the earliest theologians expounded the meaning of scripture, the notion of God as three-in-one came to the fore. So too with deification: while no Father or Medieval theologian writes a treatise on it, it is so assumed in almost all Christian writing in East and West for so many centuries and is so inextricably tied to the doctrines of Salvation and Redemption, that it is not, in my opinion, inappropriate to refer to it as a doctrine.

To define deification is no simple task.³³ Most of the theologians who

and Justification (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2004); Finlan and Kharlamov, eds. *Theōsis: Deification in Christian Theology*; Christensen and Wittung, eds., *Partakers of the Divine Nature*; Keating, *Deification and Grace*; Collins, *Partaking in Divine Nature*; Baker, *Diagonal Advance*; Kharlamov, ed., *Theosis: Deification in Christian Theology*; Nicholas Bamford, *Deified Person: A Study of Deification in Relation to Person and Christian Becoming* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 2012); Adam Cooper, *Naturally Human, Supernaturally God: Deification in Pre-Conciliar Catholicism* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2014).

For texts on deification in specific theologians, cf. A. N. Williams, *The Ground of Union: Deification in Aquinas and Palamas* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999); Adam Cooper, *The Body in St Maximus the Confessor: Holy Flesh, Wholly Deified* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005); Nancy J. Hudson, *Becoming God: The Doctrine of Theosis in Nicholas of Cusa* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America, 2007); David Vincent Meconi, *The One Christ: St. Augustine's Theology of Deification* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America, 2013); Daria Spezzano, *The Glory of God's Grace: Deification according to St. Thomas Aquinas* (Naples: Sapientia Press, 2015).

30. Even the use of the term doctrine is a bit tenuous. While no council has officially proclaimed it to be so, it is so central to Eastern Orthodox (Chalcedonian and non-Chalcedonian) theology and, as will be evidenced in this thesis, inimical to traditional "Western" theology, that I will, throughout, refer to it as a doctrine.
31. In essence, this is the position of the Eastern Orthodox Church, who, while noting the development of the language of deification, suggest that the idea and themes of deification are Scriptural. This is particularly evident in the way the Church Fathers use passages such as John 10:35 (citing Ps 82), 2 Pet 1:4, and others.
32. I am indebted to the work of Norman Russell both for the structure of the history of the doctrine of deification and for his definitions of how this term is used by the various fathers of the Greek Church. For a fuller understanding of the history of deification, at least in the Greek-speaking church, see Russell, *Doctrine of Deification*.
33. "The language of deification is daring. It says that human beings will literally become God. 'To become God' — this sounds unfamiliar to the ears of what one often calls 'western' Christianity especially when it is presented in the shape of a Christian doctrine of salvation." Torstein Theodor

have employed deificatory language have refrained from giving a set answer. At its most basic, deification means human beings becoming God. Despite the difficulties for Western audiences in understanding deification, Western churches, especially Roman Catholic, but also many of the Reformed tradition churches, have been latching on to this notion with rapidity for the past sixty to seventy years. Two major aspects concerning deification ought to be mentioned: First, at the center of deification and an understanding of the ways in which deificatory language is useful and allowable is the Incarnation. The Incarnation that gives the final understanding of what deification is; for, as Athanasius wrote, God became man that we might become gods.³⁴ Second, deification, at its heart, means humans, all creation, becoming truly what they were created to be. This aspect of creation becoming what it is intended to be will be examined more below and in chapter 1.³⁵

I want now to examine some of the key passages of scripture used to found notions of deification. There are four key passages I want to briefly entertain: Exod 7:1, Ps 82:6, John 10:34–36, and 2 Peter 1:4. This is not even remotely an exhaustive list and many of the ways in which these passages will be used to evidence deification will be further discussed in the course of this book, but it will be helpful to examine them, briefly, now.

In Exod 7:1, God tells Moses that he has made him “like God to Pharaoh.” This will be used by theologians such as Athanasius and John Cassian to suggest that for Christ to be firstborn in all things, he cannot have God as title given to him after the Incarnation; otherwise, men such as Moses would have been entitled God before him, making him

Tollefsen, “Theosis According to Gregory,” in *Gregory of Nazianzus: Images and Reflections*, ed. Jostein Børtnes and Tomas Hägg (Copenhagen: Museum Tusculanum Press, 2006), 258.

34. DI 54. All citations from Athanasius, “*De Incarnatione Verbi Dei*,” in *Select Writings and Letters of Athanasius, Bishop of Alexandria*, vol. 4 in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers 2*, ed. Archibald Robertson (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2004), 31–67.

35. As a point of clarification, I do not mean here to flatten deification as to simply mean the transformation of all things in the return of Christ. Rather, the deification of humanity, which is only possible because of our being created in the image and likeness of God, is what allows for the transformation of creation, through its participation in us and our priestly role towards it. I will go into this further in chapters 2 and 3.

no longer the first.³⁶ Psalm 82, which may bear quotation in full, is also used, often in conjunction with Exodus 7, as a reference to humanity's calling.³⁷ The Psalmist writes:

God has taken his place in the divine council;/in the midst of the gods he holds judgment:/“How long will you judge unjustly and show partiality to the wicked?/Give justice to the weak and the fatherless; maintain the right of the afflicted and the destitute./Rescue the weak and the needy; deliver them from the hand of the wicked.”/They have neither knowledge nor understanding,/they walk about in darkness;/all the foundations of the earth are shaken./I said, “You are gods, sons of the Most High, all of you;/nevertheless, like men you shall die, and fall like any prince.”/Arise, O God, judge the earth; for you shall inherit all the nations!³⁸

This Psalm is used by many of the Church Fathers as either a reference to Adam and Eve, noting their intended end of deification, and yet, their Fall.³⁹ Again, this is used in conjunction with the preeminence of Christ, that is, how can others be called gods and sons of the most high if there is not one who is both Son and God in his nature. In John 10:34–36, Christ himself seems to use the Psalm in this way, “Jesus answered them, ‘Is it not written in your Law, “I said, you are gods?”’ If he called them gods to whom the word of God came—and Scripture cannot be broken—do you say of him whom the Father consecrated and sent into the world, “You are blaspheming,” because I said, “I am the Son of God?”’” Here, Christ all but says, if those to whom the Word has come can be called gods, why not the Word himself?

Finally, 2 Pet 1:3–4 is perhaps the preeminent text for deification:

His divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of him who called us to his own glory and excellence, by which he has granted to us his precious and very great promises, so that through them you may become partakers of the divine

36. See chapter 3 on nature and adoption in Christ for just how Cassian and Athanasius use this text in conjunction with Psalm 82 in *De Incarnatione* and *contra Arianos* respectively.

37. As noted in n. 13, Cassian and Athanasius use it in conjunction with Exodus 7.

38. Unless otherwise noted, all citations from scripture come from the English Standard Version.

39. Cf. Carl Mosser, “The Earliest Patristic Interpretations of Psalm 82, Jewish Antecedents, and the Origins of Christian Deification,” especially pp. 37–38 and his discussion of Justin Martyr’s interpretation of this passage.

nature [θείας κοινωνοὶ φύσεως], having escaped from the corruption that is in the world because of sinful desire.

The author of this epistle seems to indicate that the promises of God include Christians becoming sharers in God's nature. This is not further explained by the author of 2 Peter.⁴⁰

These passages, among others, have been used throughout the history of the church as evidence that humanity's destiny is to be deified. Clement of Alexandria (c. 150–c. 215) was one of the first to use the terminology suggesting that Christians are deified according to the example of the God-man Jesus.⁴¹ From Clement, the terminology was developed and used by other such figures as Irenaeus of Lyons (c. 130–c. 202)⁴² as well as Origen (c. 184–c. 254).⁴³ After Origen, the language and terminology for deification began to develop even more rapidly, with some ebbing by the sixth century, and then, a resurgence in the seventh century with Maximus the Confessor. From Maximus, deification would be further defined and refined in the East.⁴⁴ However, in the West, the terminology would begin to fall out of regular use. Yet, careful readings of many Western theologians from the seventh century onward shows evidence for the continuation of the ideas and themes of deification. Since the time of Myrrha Lot-Borodine (1882–1957), Hans Urs von Balthasar (1905–1988), Henri de Lubac (1896–1991), and others, the West has had a resurgence of interest in deification. Due to a general lack of conversation concerning deification in Western Christianity, it is important to set a definition. In this way, a definition will already be in place as the various chapters and arguments of this book unfold. In order to set a definition, it is first important to examine two key methods of classifying deification. By understanding how previous historians/theologians, specifically

40. See Starr, "Does 2 Peter 1:4 Speak of Deification?" for a more in-depth study of this passage.

41. Russell, *Doctrine of Deification*, 121–40. Cf. Clement, *Protrepticus*; *Stromateis*; *Paedagogus*. See also, Jules Gross, *The Divinization*, 130–41. Vladimir Kharlamov, "Clement of Alexandria on Trinitarian and Metaphysical Relationality in the Context of Deification," in *Theosis: Deification in Christian Theology*, vol. 2, ed. Vladimir Kharlamov, 83–99 (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2011).

42. Russell, *Doctrine of Deification*, 105–10.

43. *Ibid.*, 140–61.

44. *Ibid.*, 262–95.

Norman Russell and Ivan Popov, have classified various understandings of deification, we can then move forward with a general definition.

Classifying Deification

In an attempt to better understand the various ways the Church Fathers employed the language of deification, two authors, Ivan Popov and Norman Russell, have designed methods to classify the usage of deificatory language. While their approaches are similar, it will be helpful to differentiate and compare how these two authors understood the various usages of deification. While Russell's Doctrine of Deification gives both pagan and other kinds of Christian usages, I will be focusing on the Christian usages that Russell defines as metaphorical. I begin with Popov's classifications.

Popov's Idealist Deification

Ivan Popov was writing at the turn of the twentieth century in Russia.⁴⁵ His works were not well-known outside of Russia until now.⁴⁶ This essay, "The Idea of Deification in the Early Eastern Church," marks the beginning of modern patristic deification study.⁴⁷

The first of Popov's delineations, he calls idealistic. For Popov, idealistic deification is linked back to Neo-Platonism.⁴⁸ According to Popov, "For theologians of the idealistic orientation, the point where human nature physically touches Divinity is the mind, which, deified by participation in God, communicates deification also to the body over which the mind has mastery."⁴⁹ While using language like physical and touching—which may not have been appropriate to those whom he sees as having envisioned this kind of deification—it is apparent that

45. Vladimir Kharlamov, "Introduction," in *Theosis: Deification in Christian Theology*, vol. 2, ed. Vladimir Kharlamov (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2011), 15.

46. There is no evidence of his being known outside of Russia in those who came immediately after him.

47. Vladimir Kharlamov, "Introduction," 16.

48. Ivan Popov, "The Idea of Deification in the Early Eastern Church," in *Theosis: Deification in Christian Theology*, vol. 2, ed. Vladimir Kharlamov (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2011), 58.

49. *Ibid.*, 62.

in Popov's understanding, these writers saw deification as beginning in the soul. This is related to the *imago dei*. If the human soul (that is reason, ability to rule, create, and so on) is in the image of God, then it stands to reason that the soul is where deification would begin. The main writers Popov sees as exhibiting idealistic deification are: Clement of Alexandria, Origen, the Cappadocians, Dionysius, and Maximus the Confessor.⁵⁰

For the idealists, deification begins with a moral or ethical union with God. This, however, is not purely, or even primarily, an imitation, but a participatory union. It is, as Popov writes, "a likening to his [God's] properties."⁵¹ Moral union is also not the end of this kind of deification, but moves into an intellectual union. This is based in a unity of "the subject of knowledge and truth, which is the object of knowledge."⁵² This then culminates in a union between the intellectual and moral unions in love: "The divine likeness of the morally transformed personality; the ecstasy of mind and the ecstasy of love is what unites the human being with God."⁵³ Ultimately, the idealist deification is still centered on what seems to be a participatory union with God. This union begins in the moral and intellectual aspects of the soul and culminates in their linkage in love and humans taking on the divine likeness.

Popov's Realist Deification

While the idealists understood deification from a Neo-Platonic understanding, particularly that of Dionysius and Proclus,⁵⁴ the realists come from a Stoic understanding. As Popov writes, "For the realistic orientation, participation in divine life was a consequence of the permeation of the soul and the body by the divine powers of the Holy Spirit, which permeation was conceived according to the Stoic's schema of the mixing of bodies."⁵⁵ According to this understanding,

50. Ibid., 44–45.

51. Ibid., 63–64.

52. Ibid.

53. Ibid.

54. Ibid., 58.

since the soul and body mix inextricably, in life anyway, when the Spirit deifies us, it is a deification which automatically works in soul and body together. These authors—made up primarily of Irenaeus, Athanasius, and Cyril of Alexandria—⁵⁶understood deification to be something that takes hold of the entire human person.

Ultimately, however, it seems that Popov's divisions come to the same conclusion. For the idealists, the soul is the beginning place of deification, but from the soul, it is mediated to the rest of the body. The realists, however, see it happening in some ways simultaneously through body and soul. Having examined Popov's classifications, it is necessary to turn to those of Norman Russell.

Russell's Ethical Deification

Russell's Doctrine of Deification has become one of the premier texts on understanding deification in Eastern Patristics, thanks to his nearly exhaustive study of the various terminology used in discussions of deification as well as his building on the work that has preceded him. Russell is, in many ways, building off the work done by Popov, but is seeking to come to an even fuller understanding of deification. Russell divides deification into four different aspects: nominal, analogical, ethical, and realist. The two that are most relevant to this discussion are the ethical and the realist. For Russell, the nominal is merely titular—one is called god as a title—while in the analogical, deification is stretched a bit further, where one is like a god or like God in some way that is real but lesser and confined to a particular circumstance. An example Russell gives of the analogical is that of Moses being told by God that God would make him a god to Pharaoh (Exod 7).⁵⁷ These usages, though not necessarily the passages to which Russell might attribute them, are outside the purview of this book.

Ethical deification means to become like God, mainly through imitation of Christ and the practice of virtue. This view is found

55. Ibid., 62.

56. Popov, "The Idea of Deification in the Early Eastern Church," 44–45.

57. Russell, *Doctrine of Deification*, 1.

predominantly in the Cappadocian school, according to Russell.⁵⁸ In this definition of deification, the emphasis is not on ontological transformation, but instead, focuses on likeness, or imitation of the divine. Here, taking on the attributes of the divine is done via imitation and practicing virtue. In the case of Christian deification, it would mean Christians acting like Christ. This view is often framed in the language of virtue.

The first aspect of the ethical definition, imitation, specifically, the imitation of Jesus, who is both God and man—the emphasis here being on his perfect humanity without divorcing it from his divinity—centers around the idea that Jesus, the first perfect human,⁵⁹ sets a standard which the rest of humanity is to attain. His life is to be imitated by his followers. This likeness in a purely ethical view of deification is not a joining to Christ through imitation, but an external similarity to Christ through imitation. Russell notes that likeness to Christ is the key goal of ethical deification (and this is also the key goal of the active or dynamic goal of realistic deification),⁶⁰ but what separates this imitation from the realistic is that there is no implied transformation. Christians are not different in nature which allows them to imitate Christ, nor does the imitation change them in their nature. Christians simply look and act like Christ (with the help of God the Spirit). There is not even an implicit, or at least necessary, union with or participation in Christ for there to be an ethical deification. Russell does, however, admit that, “analogy, imitation, and participation . . . form a continuum rather than express radically different kinds of relationship.”⁶¹ This would imply that, ultimately, to speak of one is to speak of another, but Russell does not primarily do this when examining the different understandings of deification, as he sees them, in the Greek Church fathers.

Connected to the idea of imitating Christ in ethical deification is the

58. *Ibid.*, 9.

59. Rom 8:29; Col 1:15, 18; Rev 1:5.

60. Russell, *Doctrine of Deification*, 9.

61. *Ibid.*, 2. Therefore, while trying to delineate the various usages of deification, Russell notes that all discussion of deification by Christians ultimately comes to similar conclusions.

practice of virtue. This is often the same as imitating Christ, practicing the virtues he practiced as defined in the Gospels. In some ways, it goes beyond imitating Christ as he is described in the Gospels. Practicing virtue would also include the many lists of Paul (that is, The fruits of the Spirit; faith, hope, and love, and so forth) and other virtues defined both by pagan and Christian authors. Virtue, like imitation, is not solely encamped in the domain of ethical deification. It also is firmly a part of realistic deification.

Russell's Realistic Deification

The realistic understanding of deification is found predominantly in the Alexandrian school, according to Russell.⁶² Realistic deification is conceived as becoming divine through a transformation in nature via participation in the nature of God (that is, Becoming God insofar as it is possible for humans to become God).⁶³ This kind of deification still, however, does not cause the creature crossing the divide that separates it from the Creator.

For deification to be realistic, it must include some kind of transformation. This transformation could be immediate, over a prolonged series of events, or even be forever progressing forward. Whichever may be the case, true ontological transformation must take place in the person being deified for that deification to be classed as realistic. Into what, however, is one transformed? The answer is God, but without erasing the distinction between Creator and created. Therefore, what humans are being transformed into are humans. Not fallen humans or even better humans; instead, it is true humanity as seen in Jesus, which is to say, it is humanity united to divinity without loss of self. This again must be couched in terms of the *imago dei* and the Incarnation. Humans are created in the image of God, which is

62. Ibid., 9. Russell writes, "Justin and Irenaeus may have laid the foundations, but the devising of technical vocabulary, the elaboration of a philosophical framework, the borrowing of motifs from Hellenistic and Enochic Judaism, the enlargement of biblical support through the allegorical exegesis of Scripture, and the development of a correlative christology all took place in Alexandria, shaped by the unique character of Alexandrian Christianity." Ibid., 115.

63. Ibid., 2.

what uniquely allows us the possibility of being deified. Equally, it is the unique position of Christ as the only one who ever was, is, or will be, both truly God and truly man, that makes it possible for humans to be deified. The Creator-creature distinction and the notion of deification as becoming human must be kept in mind. As Louth describes it, “Deification, then, is not a transcending of what it means to be human, but the fulfilment of what it is to be human.”⁶⁴

The other necessity for the realistic deification is participation, that is, the participation of the person being deified in the deity that is deifying them.⁶⁵ It is this participation, both active and passive, that leads to the transformation of the one being deified. Without these two elements, transformation and participation, the deification could only be ethical, if not analogical or nominal.⁶⁶

Russell admits the overlap of the ethical and the realistic, as noted above. In terms of a continuum, realistic deification includes all the major aspects of ethical deification. Nevertheless, Russell’s distinctions are questionable. For instance, Stephen Finlan and Vladimir Kharlamov note the various usages of the terminology without dividing them into the two camps as Russell does. Instead, they are content to present the language used and show that both participation in the divine life and imitation of the moral attributes of God make up the overall definition of deification.⁶⁷

What both Popov and Russell have done for those of us wanting to understand what the Church Fathers meant by deification is to give us language for the various ways in which the vocabulary and concept of deification has been employed. This allows us to come to texts with some notion of how the author might be employing the language of deification. The problem, however, is that these classifications do not tell the whole story. Authors who are said to write purely in an ethical

64. Andrew Louth, “The Place of Theosis in Orthodox Theology,” in *Partakers of the Divine Nature: The History and Development of Deification in the Christian Traditions*, eds. Michael J. Christensen and Jeffery A. Wittung (Grand Rapids: BakerAcademic, 2008), 39.

65. For my purposes, it is the Christian’s participation in God.

66. Russell, *Doctrine of Deification*, 1–2.

67. Stephen Finlan and Vladimir Kharlamov, “Introduction,” in *Theōsis: Deification in Christian Theology*, eds. Stephen Finlan and Vladimir Kharlamov (Cambridge: James Clark, 2006), 1–15.

fashion may, and often do, have passages much more reminiscent of Russell's realistic.

For example, the Cappadocians, according to Russell, primarily have an ethical view of deification. This is because a realistic understanding would confuse the difference between Christ and Christian.⁶⁸ Yet, when looking at Gregory Nazianzen's Theological Orations, one finds that they are rife with usages of deification which tend more toward a realistic understanding. In Or. 30, Gregory is explaining why the Son took the title man, he says, "He bears the title, 'Man' . . . with the aim of hallowing Man through himself, by becoming a sort of yeast for the whole lump. He has united with himself all that lay under condemnation, in order to release it from condemnation."⁶⁹ The reason, then, that the Son was known as man and became man was to "hallow the lump," as it were, to make humanity like himself, that is, to make all humanity and each individual Christian, like God. This likeness seems to be affected by a change, just as yeast changes the nature of the dough so it can rise and become bread when baked.

My purpose here is to note and thank Popov and Russell for their work, but also, to attempt to treat deification as a unity of realistic, idealistic, and ethical. Rather than attempting to discern into what category various theologians would fit, I shall look at deification as having various emphases, but the same end in mind—likeness to and participation in God. That being said, there is more to Russell's understanding, which now must be explored as it will help with understanding just what it is that makes up deification, that is: When can something be called deification?

The Four Aspects of Deification

Earlier, I mentioned the aspects that make up realistic and ethical deification for Russell: participation and transformation for the former and imitation and virtue for the latter. While I will not be making the distinctions Russell makes concerning ethical or realistic deification,

68. Russell, *Doctrine of Deification*, 233.

69. Or. 30.21.

I do find this fourfold method of understanding the aspects of deification helpful. These aspects of deification will now be examined, each in their turn, so as to understand what it is that makes up deification when it is examined in the subsequent chapters. These different aspects as defined below are interpenetrating—particularly in the pairs of participation/transformation and imitation/virtue. However, it is not uncommon to see references made between the pairs. What follows then is my own understanding of how participation, transformation, imitation, and virtue are essential to a unified definition of deification.

Participation, Grace, and Adoption

The first aspect of deification goes by several names: participation, grace, adoption, union. Each of these four terms—participation, grace, adoption, and union—are nearly synonymous. However, note well that while usually synonymous, each can be, and often is, used in a slightly different manner. Union, in particular, is perhaps inappropriately termed a synonym. It is more a related term to the trilogy of participation, grace, and adoption. Union is qualified by these terms, but more on that below. It would not be true to say that the existence of any of these terms in a text would equal the existence of a notion of deification. They are, however, all terms used often with deificatory significance. Now, this beginning notion in deification is that humans in general and Christians in specific derive all things from God, particularly their very being. From a Christian understanding, the notion of participation finds its source in 2 Pet 1:4.⁷⁰ However, the Platonic tradition was also essential to configuring a notion of participation for Christians. It would seem that there are two ways participation ought to be understood. The first is the notion that by nature of our existence, we, along with all created beings, participate in God.⁷¹ Yet, as noted above, the other terms that are often used

70. “4 by which he has granted to us his precious and very great promises, so that through them you may become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped from the corruption that is in the world because of sinful desire.”

71. “Therefore all beings apart from God are not their own being, but are beings by participation.