1998

Analysis and Evaluation of Vladimir Lossky's Doctrine of Theosis

Eugene Zaitsev
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ANALYSIS AND EVALUATION OF VLADIMIR LOSSKY’S DOCTRINE OF THEOSIS

A Dissertation
Presented in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Doctor of Philosophy

by
Eugene Zaitsev
July 1998

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APPROVAL BY THE COMMITTEE:

Miroslav M. Kiš
Faculty Adviser,
Professor of Ethics

Fernando L. Canale
Professor of Theology

J. H. Denis Fortin
Associate Professor of Theology

Peter van Bemmelen
Professor of Theology

Harold O. J. Brown
Professor of Biblical and Systematic Theology
Trinity Evangelical Divinity School

Randall W. Younger
Director, Ph.D., Th.D. Program

Werner K. Vothmeister
Dean, SDA Theological Seminary

Date approved
July 30, 1998
ABSTRACT

AN ANALYSIS AND EVALUATION OF VLADIMIR LOSSKY’S
DOCTRINE OF THEOSIS

by

Eugene Zaitsev

Adviser: Miroslav M. Kiš
ABSTRACT OF GRADUATE STUDENT RESEARCH

Dissertation

Andrews University
Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary

Title: AN ANALYSIS AND EVALUATION OF VLADIMIR LOSKYY'S DOCTRINE OF THEOSIS

Name of the researcher: Eugene Zaitsev

Name and degree of faculty adviser: Miroslav Kiš, Ph.D.

Date completed:

This dissertation analyzes and evaluates the doctrine of theosis as it is presented in the work of Vladimir Lossky, one of the leading contemporary spokesmen for Orthodox theology. Two main questions set up the purpose of the study: Is Lossky's soteriological position biblical, and is Lossky's understanding of theosis in agreement with the tradition he belongs to.

The method of study is historical-analytical. First, the development of the idea of theosis is traced in the Greek Fathers, in the Byzantine tradition (mainly Gregory Palamas), and in Lossky's immediate antecedents in the Russian religious tradition. This historical background identifies two major deviations in the understanding of salvation against which Lossky holds his position: a juridical view of salvation in Western theology on the one hand, and panentheosis of Russian sophiological school, on the
Analysis of Lossky’s teaching of theosis reveals that it is a remarkably unified system, where Christian epistemology, Trinitarian theology, Christology, anthropology, soteriology, and ecclesiology are held together by a common theme, which is attaining union with God. Lossky argues the ontological (real, not metaphorical) character of theosis, although he affirms that in his union with God man is not dissolved into an impersonal reabsorption into the divine nature as it is in Neoplatonism. In affirming the ontological character of theosis, Lossky exploits two crucial distinctions that were made in Orthodox theology: essence/energy and person/nature.

In evaluating the main biblical and theological philosophical presuppositions for Lossky’s view of theosis, the criteria of adequacy and internal consistency are used. The weakness of Lossky’s system with regard to his dealing with the Scripture is seen in the author’s rigorous apophaticism as the only way to the true knowledge of God, in his selective use of the Scripture and interpreting the selected material by means of the philosophical categories, and in excluding the covenantal, sacrificial, and substitutive language of the Bible from his vocabulary. Lossky’s employment of the metaphysical categories, such as essence, energy, and hypostasis, taken from the different historical and philosophical milieus, shows a lack of internal consistency in his system, creating a tension between essence/energy and person/nature distinctions. It seems that in describing a reality of theosis, Lossky fails to integrate two models (essence/energy and person/nature) in a unified system that
would demonstrate a close interrelation of the concepts of 'essence', 'energy', and 'person'.

However, Lossky's doctrine of theosis with its synthesis of Christology and Pneumatology, his wholistic anthropology, his teaching on the personhood and understanding of reality as being in a relation to God, are very relevant in the experience of the contemporary Church in both East and West.
To my father and grandfather who had courage to proclaim the Gospel of Jesus Christ during the most difficult years of Communist regime, and whose devotion to God is an everlasting source of my spiritual life.
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<th>Abbreviation</th>
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<tr>
<td>ATR</td>
<td>Anglican Theological Review</td>
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<tr>
<td>ST</td>
<td>Bogoslovskie Trudy</td>
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<tr>
<td>ECR</td>
<td>Eastern Churches Review</td>
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<td>ER</td>
<td>Ecumenical Review</td>
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<td>GOTR</td>
<td>Greek Orthodox Theological Review</td>
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<td>HTR</td>
<td>Harvard Theological Review</td>
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<tr>
<td>JETS</td>
<td>Journal of Evangelical Theological Society</td>
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<tr>
<td>JTS</td>
<td>Journal of Theological Studies</td>
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<tr>
<td>MEPrus</td>
<td>Messager de l’Exarchat du Patriarque russe en Europe occidentale</td>
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<tr>
<td>FBR</td>
<td>Patristic and Byzantine Review</td>
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<tr>
<td>SJT</td>
<td>Scottish Journal of Theology</td>
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<td>SVTQ</td>
<td>St. Vladimir’s Theological Quarterly</td>
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<td>TS</td>
<td>Theological Studies</td>
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<tr>
<td>TUGal</td>
<td>Texte und Untersuchungen zur Geschichte der altchristlichen Literatur</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WTJ</td>
<td>Wesleyan Theological Journal</td>
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Above all, I offer all praise to God for His continuous guidance in my life and His constant care and support.
CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

This dissertation addresses the subject of theosis as it is presented in the work of Vladimir Lossky, one of the leading contemporary spokesmen for Orthodox theology. In the first chapter I examine the subject and question the soteriological position of Lossky in relation to the Eastern and Western theologies and also to the Bible. First I give a definition of the main terms to be used in this research. After a brief discussion of major differences between Eastern and Western soteriological views, I show a historical background that provides a general context for understanding Lossky’s position on theosis. Then I formulate the problem and the purpose of the study, after which justification of the research follows. I also set some delimitations and describe methodology. A review of the literature on the issue concludes the chapter.

Theosis as a Distinctive Feature of Orthodox Theology

While a number of ways are used to describe salvation in Eastern Christian theology, one image seems to assume a preeminent place. This is the concept of *theosis* or *theopoiesis.* Theosis, actually the words *theopoioo* and *theopoiesis* occur in literature earlier than theosis.
the divinization or deification of humanity as the goal of salvation, is a distinctive feature of Orthodox theology. The very purpose of theosis is the ontological transformation or transfiguration of created beings, a process which has already begun on earth in and through the Incarnation of the Son of God and the work of the Holy Spirit. Theosis can be described as the omnipotent and sanctifying, divine and triadic activity which, because of the indwelling of the Trinity and grace and because of the inborn and natural capacity of the creature for transfiguration, induces a process of assimilation to God the Father of the whole human person, of mankind and of the visible and invisible universe in its totality, through the mediation of the incarnate Logos, Christ the Pantocrator, and in the Holy Spirit.

For Orthodoxy, theosis is "the axis of the Christian doctrine of redemption and a special characteristic of the Orthodox Church and its theology." It is not too much to say that theosis is the central theme, the primary religious ideal, "the ultimate goal toward which all people should strive." Since soteriological

Some theologians prefer to use the Greek word theosis, chiefly because of its highly complex nature. The English equivalents "divinization" or "deification" are open to misinterpretation and misunderstanding.


Panagiotis Bratsiotis, The Greek Orthodox Church (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1968), 38.

Georgios I. Mantzaridis, The Deification of Man: St. Gregory Palamas and the Orthodox Tradition (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1984), 12. See also Chrestou who sees theosis as "the blessed telos for which all things were made." Panagiotes K. Chrestou, Partakers of God (Brookline, MA: Holy Cross Orthodox Press, 1984), 36.
thought has been expressed in the West in totally different
categories, the definition of major terms and some considerations
on Orthodox soteriology in general and its distinction from
Western Christian tradition seem to be appropriate for the purpose
of clear communication.

The Definition of Terms

A certain vocabulary is used in reference to the doctrine of
theosis. I briefly discuss the most relevant terms here.

Thēôσ, Theopoιōσ: These verbs are related to the noun Theos
and have the following meanings:

1. The meaning that comes most naturally to the Western mind
is “to become god” or “to be made god.” This is exactly what
often happened to the mythical heroes of ancient Greece. The term
apotheosis—the making of a person into god—is used in this
situation. It referred to the select few and implied the eventual
cessation of human personality.

2. These two verbs are used by the Fathers when they speak
about the deification of Christ’s human nature.

3. The verbs are also used as applied to Christian believers
who become participants in the life of God. This is the
application which most concerns the present subject.

---

See H. G. Liddell and R. Scott, A Greek-English Lexicon, 9th
ed. with a revised supplement (1996), s.v. “ἀνθρωποιόσ.” See also
E. R. Bevan, “Deification,” Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics,
ed. James Hastings (1914), 4:525-533.

“Θεοποιόσ” and “Θεόσ.”

Ibid.
Theosis, Theopoiesis: These terms form the subject matter of this dissertation. Literally, theosis means "becoming God" and theopoiesis "making divine" or "making into a god." Many Western theologians see these terms as very difficult, almost scandalous. This is due to their origin in Greek philosophy and barely concealed pantheistic overtones.

Ibid., s.v. "Θεονομίσις" and "Θεώσις." L. Thunberg suggests that the word theosis finally replaced theopoiesis as the technical term in writings of Pseudo-Dionysius. The term theosis had been used earlier, though not as the technical term. See Lars Thunberg, Microcosm and Mediator: The Theological Anthropology of Maximus the Confessor (Lund: C. W. K. Gleerup, 1965), 456, n. 1.

E. Osborn notes that this term has offended more modern readers than any other part of early Christian theology. See Eric Osborn, The Beginning of Christian Philosophy (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 111. Even Orthodox scholars recognize this. "The term is rather offensive for the modern ear," says Florovsky. "It cannot be adequately rendered in any modern language... Even in Greek it is rather heavy and pretentious." George Florovsky, Bible, Church, Tradition: An Eastern Orthodox View (Belmont, MA: Norland Publishing Company, 1972), 114. But at the same time he admits that although theosis "may be a hard word, it is the only adequate phrase to express what is meant." Idem, "The Lamb of God," Scottish Journal of Theology (SJT) 4 (1951): 19.

The Greek term theosis was translated into English as deification and divinization. Both of these terms are seen by many scholars, both Western and Eastern, as inadequate and misleading. The same is true for attempts to translate the word theosis into other languages. Taking in consideration the Press, 1979), 27-39.

Although these terms are seen as synonyms, some authors prefer the technical term "divinization" to "deification," since the former carries a less radical sense. See, for example, J. Roidanus, Le Christ et l'homme dans la théologie d'Athanase d'Alexandrie (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1968), 162, n. 5. See also Bilaniuk, "The Mystery of Theosis or Divinization," 338.

Pelikan says that for the Western audience the English equivalents of theosis as "deification" or "divinization" "both have grave handicaps, and so do all the other terms that have been suggested." He thinks that the word theosis should simply be taken over into English. Jaroslav Pelikan, "Orthodox Theology in the West: The Reformation," in The Legacy of St. Vladimir, ed. J. Breck, J. Meyendorff, and E. Silk (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1990), 164. Bilaniuk is categorically against the term "deification of man." Petro T. Bilaniuk, "A Theological Meditation on the Mystery of Transfiguration," Diakonia 3 (1973): 326-327. According to Nicolaos P. Vassiliades, we cannot translate the word theosis with the word divinization or deification because it means something different and deeper. N. P. Vassiliades, "The Mystery of Death," Greek Orthodox Theological Review (GCTR) 29 (1984): 180. George Every says that he knows of no equivalent in any modern European language for the Greek theosis, preferring the word "ingodding." G. Every, "Theosis in Later Byzantine Theology," Eastern Churches Review (ECR) 2 (1969): 243-244. Nikos Nissiotis is careful not to translate theosis with "deification," on the ground that theosis actually leads us toward true and complete humanity. N. Nissiotis, Die Theologie der Ostkirche im ökumenischen Dialog: Kirche und Welt in orthodoxer Sicht (Stuttgart: Evangelisches Verlagswerk, 1968), 50-51.

The word theosis is translated in French as divinisation and in German as Die Vergotterung with a clear meaning of "becoming god." In Russian, scholars distinguish between the two terms obozhenie which means drawing near or uniting with God, and obozhestvlenie with a meaning of "recognizing someone as having a divine power or as being divine." But even the former term has a meaning "endowing with a divine essence." Slovar' russkogo iazyka XI-XVII v.v. Vypusk 12 (Moskva: Nauka, 1987), s.v. "Obozhenie" and "Obozhici."
inadequacy and ambiguity of all equivalents of theosis in English as well as in other modern languages, I prefer the use of the Greek term in this dissertation.

Apophasis or apophatic theology: Apophatic theology (from Greek apophasis, "denial" or "negation") teaches that human categories are not capable of conceptualizing God. It follows the so-called apophatic way of theological inquiry into the knowledge of God that proceeds by negations or saying what God is not. Apophatic theology traces its roots to the mysticism of Origen and Greek philosophy, and reaches its classical development in the works of Pseudo-Dionysius, the unknown philosopher-monk of the sixth century. Later it was refined in the monastic tradition of the Eastern Orthodox Church, where it is still prominent today. Apophasis is both a way to the knowledge of God and a way of union with him.

Kataphasis or cataphatic theology: Cataphatic theology, (from Greek kataphasis, "affirmation") in contrast to apophatic, uses positive statements from human experience to describe God and his attributes. This distinction between apophasis and kataphasis is important in dealing with the issue of theosis.

Major Differences Between Eastern and Western Soteriological Positions

It must be stated at once that in the Orthodox Church the problem of salvation has remained as it was in the early church: not defined, not detailed. This doctrine, as J. Pelikan truly notes, did not receive the status of dogma in the ancient church like the doctrine of Christ or the Trinity. Rather, this doctrine was seen as "preeminently a liturgical doctrine, belonging more appropriately to the 'rule of prayer' articulated in the ritual than to the 'rule of faith' articulated in dogmatic theology."

Although pluralism of expressions and trends in the area of soteriology was fully accepted, it can be claimed with good reason...


Jaroslav Pelikan, The Christian Tradition: A History of the Development of Doctrine, vol. 1, The Emergence of the Catholic Tradition (100-600) (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1971), 339. T. Ware agrees with Pelikan in affirming that the Orthodox Church has never formally endorsed any particular theory of atonement. The Greek Fathers, following the New Testament, employed a rich variety of images to describe what the Savior has done for us. Ware mentions at least five models: teacher, sacrifice, ransom, victory, and participation. But he comments that the notion of salvation as participation is the most fundamental model for Orthodoxy. Timothy Ware, "The Understanding of Salvation in the Orthodox Tradition," in For Us and Our Salvation, ed. Rienk Lanoo (Utrecht-Leiden: Iteruniversitair Instituut voor Missiologie en Oecumenica, 1994), 121-122.
that theosis and its cognate terms (i.e., participation in the
divine life and fellowship with God) prevailed in soteriological
thinking of the Eastern Church.

The Orthodox Church has always understood salvation as a
process. “According to the soteriological perspective of the
Orthodox Church,” K. Ware says, “salvation—when viewed from the
standpoint of the human subject that receives it—is not a single
event in that person’s past but an ongoing process.” Here is, as
A. Coniaris expresses, the Orthodox understanding of salvation:

In Orthodox theology salvation is not static but dynamic; it
is not a completed state, a state of having arrived, a state
of having made it, but a constant moving toward theosis,
toward becoming like Christ, toward receiving the fullness of
God’s life. And it can never be achieved fully in this life.

Orthodox theologians talk about two aspects of salvation—
negative and positive. The negative dimension of salvation is
that of liberation from “the state of unauthentic life, that state
of decay into which created nature has fallen.” When approached
from this negative point of view, salvation is called redemption
and justification. The positive dimension is that of
sanctification and theosis. The Orthodox Church has always
emphasized more the positive aspect of salvation. Salvation has
meant not only justification or forgiveness of sins; it means
first of all the renewing and restoration of God’s image in man,

War, “The Understanding,” 108.

Anthony M. Coniaris, Introducing the Orthodox Church, Its
Faith and Life (Minneapolis, MN: Light and Life Publishing Co.,
1982), 48.

Maximos Aghiorgoussis, “The Theology and Experience of
the lifting up of fallen humanity through Christ into the very
life of God. This is why the central question of Orthodox
soteriology is not "salvation from what?" but "salvation for
what?" This determines the major distinction between the Eastern
and Western soteriological positions.

The West has always been more inclined to be juridical and
forensic in its approach to salvation. According to Meyendorff,
the tendency of Latin thought, as it appears already in
Tertullian, was "to see Christ above all as a mediator between God
and mankind." This understanding of redemption was based on the
idea of reconciliation rather than on the Eastern idea of theosis.

Years ago, Zankov expressed the Orthodox position on this issue:

Ibid., 414. See also his essay "Orthodox Soteriology," in
Salvation in Christ, ed. John Meyendorff and Robert Tobias
(Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1992), 56; John Meyendorff, Byzantine
Theology: Historical Trends and Doctrinal Themes (New York:
Fordham University Press, 1974), 146. The Swedish Lutheran
theologian Lars Thunberg also concludes that soteriology "in its
widest and proper sense, is never concerned only for that aspect
of salvation that consists in man's liberation from his
sinfulness. It is the doctrine (and the mystery) of man's
perfection in deification and, through man, the doctrine of the
fulfilment of the destiny of the whole cosmos." Lars Thunberg, Man
and the Cosmos: The Vision of Saint Maximus the Confessor

See Vitaly Borovoy, "What Is Salvation? An Orthodox
Statement" International Review of Mission 61 (1972): 41 (italics
mine).

John Meyendorff, Christ in Eastern Christian Thought

For example, Ernst Benz sees the Western soteriological
position as characterized by the legal relationship between God
and humankind. E. Benz, The Eastern Orthodox Church: Its Thought
and Life (Garden City, NY: Anchor Books, 1963), 43-47. On this see
also Panagiotis Nellas, "Redemption or Deification? Nicholas
Kavasilas and Anselm's Question 'Why Did God Become Man?''
Almost without exception, Orthodox theologians emphatically repudiate the juridical and formal theory of salvation. It is too simple to present the sublime and mystical work of salvation in the form of a legal process or a duel. They consider it better to admit that rationally it is still a mystery how the Savior’s death conquered death and sin, than to identify the process of salvation with a process in court.

Christos Yannaras goes even further when he calls the scheme “guilt-redemption-justification” as a typical symptom of every “natural religion,” which brought “literally incalculable” troubles for the Christian Church.

The Orthodox Church teaches that salvation is ontological and not merely forensic. The contemporary Orthodox theologian S. Harakas argues that

the traditional Protestant interpretation of the Pauline doctrine of justification tended to overshadow the Pauline doctrine of sanctification so that the impression given was that the Christian was ‘pronounced’ saved by God in Jesus Christ, but that no objective real change occurred. Through its doctrine of image and likeness, and theosis, Eastern Christianity affirms, rather, that the Christian life, in fact, implies, results in, and requires an ontological change in human life.

It is clear now why Orthodox theology did not produce any significant elaboration of the Pauline doctrine of justification expressed in Romans and Galatians. Instead of the Lutheran stress

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'Stefan Zankov, The Eastern Orthodox Church (Milwaukee, WI: Morehouse Publishing Company, 1930), 55.


'The Eastern Fathers were not oblivious to the terminology of justification. Even a quick glance at G. W. H. Lampe (A Patristic Greek Lexicon, s.v. dikaiosynē and dikaiōō) reveals a number of patristic texts that speak of justification. But it would not
In Pauline justification/ righteousness expressions, Orthodox theology emphasizes the Johannine imagery of union with God. The Orthodox hope of salvation is more than hope of a divine sentence of "not guilty"; it is a participation in the being of God, a sharing in the life of the Triune God. In such a perspective, no division can exist between justification and sanctification, for salvation and the Christian life are viewed together as the continuing process of transformation. Justification and sanctification are seen by the Orthodox Church as one divine action, one continuous process.

Even a quick glance at two Christian traditions shows that the Western understanding of the human problem was primarily juridical, emphasizing the guilt of sin and our inability to atone for ourselves. Accordingly, the focal truths about Christ became

reveal the predominant teaching of the Eastern Fathers on soteriology, notes W. Rusch. This is because of a different emphasis that was developing in the East as opposed to the West. William G. Rusch, "How the Eastern Fathers Understood What the Western Church Meant by Justification," in Justification by Faith: Lutherans and Catholics in Dialogue VII, ed. H. George Anderson, T. Austin Murphy, and Joseph A. Burgess (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1985), 132.

The Eastern view of atonement was often called the "mystical" or "physical" theory of the Atonement in contrast to the "real" theory taught in the West, that is, that Christ by his death atoned our sins. We should admit that the elements of both theories are found in the writings of both John and Paul. But because of a difference of emphasis, John is considered as the inspiration of the Fathers of the East, Paul as that of those in the West.

those that center around the Atonement. The death of Christ has generally been viewed as the central point of His mission. By contrast, Eastern Orthodoxy placed the emphasis more on the fact of the Incarnation per se. This corresponds to their thought that the essential human need is to develop the likeness of God in our lives and that we cannot do this without the gracious assistance of God.

Different explanations of these distinctions in soteriological approaches have been suggested by both sides. But K. Ware points out that we are saved through the total work of Christ, not just by one particular event in his life. "The cross is central, but it can only be understood in the light of what goes before--of Christ's taking up into himself of our entire human nature at his birth--and likewise in the light of what comes afterwards, the resurrection, ascension and second coming." Ware, "The Understanding," 121. He continues: "The vicarious element in Christ's saving work is accepted but not heavily emphasized, and in particular we do not feel at home in the language of 'imputation.'" Ibid., 122. See also Agathiorghousis, "The Theology and Experience of Salvation," 40. This is why, Bratsiotis says, "instead of speculating on the redemptive significance of the death of Christ, the Orthodox Church prefers to emphasize the Resurrection." The Greek Orthodox Church, 40.

The Orthodox theologian Breck points out that there are at least two reasons why Orthodoxy makes little use of such theories as "justification," "sanctification," and "vicarious atonement." First, such concepts seem to reflect the Roman Catholic-Protestant dispute over the way the guilt of original sin is removed: either by meritorious works, or by the free gift of God's grace. The second reason is that "none of the traditionally Western theories of justification, atonement, etc. really necessitates personal divine involvement in the death that accomplishes our redemption." In other words, Western theories of redemption do not require that Jesus Christ be ontologically identified with God. See John Breck, "Divine Initiative: Salvation in the Divine-Human Dialogue," in Salvation in Christ, 115-116. Zander gave the following summary:

1. The East was not influenced by Augustine; its anthropology is different from that of the West;
2. The East was not influenced by Anselm; its soteriology is different from that of the West;
3. The East was not influenced by Thomas; its methodology is different from that of the West.

L. A. Zander, Vision and Action (London: Gollancz, 1952), 59. While this is helpful, it does not explain what the Orthodox themselves believe. Contemporary
we should agree with Pelikan that "the difference between the Greek and the Latin communions was a question more of emphasis than of opposition." Clendenin subscribes to this opinion and says that "the real issue is a difference of emphasis. There is no need to see them [theosis and justification] as mutually exclusive categories."

After this brief survey of major distinctions between the Eastern and Western soteriological traditions, we may proceed to the background of the problem.

Protestant theologian Alister E. McGrath identifies three factors which account for these distinctions: (1) The different understanding of the operation of the Holy Spirit; (2) The marriage of Eastern Christian thought with Neo-Platonism; (3) The Eastern church has never developed an interest in Roman law which is so characteristic of the early theologians of the Latin West.


Background of the Problem

It would be wrong to accept the common assumption that the Orthodox tradition, as regards the issue of theosis, is homogeneous. It is not likely that there is a close continuity between the ideas of the Greek Fathers in the second, fourth, or sixth centuries, the major figure of Byzantine theology in the fourteenth-century Gregory Palamas, and modern Orthodox theologians. Many influences both internal and external should be taken into consideration. It is a historical fact that, because of the encounter of Greek Orthodox theology with the West, the dogmatic formulations of some Greek theologians were separated from the experience and spirituality of the Church of the past. This process was accompanied by an uncritical acceptance of the spirit and methodology of Western theology, what Yannaras calls “the most serious betrayal of the character of Orthodox theology.”

Official Greek Orthodox theology and church life today are still dominated by the theological perspective of C. Androutsos and his successor P. Trembelas. The works of both scholars represent

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typical examples of Western criteria imposed on Orthodox soteriology with the Western juridical understanding of the relations between God and man.

The same complexity and diversity may be seen in the development of soteriological thought in Russia and the theology of the Russian diaspora after the Revolution. The period which followed the fall of Constantinople, Georges Florovsky called a “Western captivity of the Orthodox mind.” “It was inevitable,” writes Meyendorff, “that a Latinizing, scholastic, basically ‘Anselmian’ view of redemption and salvation would be reproduced in such documents as the Orthodox Confession of Peter Mogila (1640).” Protestant scholastic methodology survived even as a theological revival was taking place in Orthodox textbooks of systematic theology starting with Makary Bulgakov. At the same time, we see a revival of monastic spirituality in Orthodoxy,


George Florovsky, Puti russkogo bogoslovia (Paris: [n.p.], 1937), 515. Florovsky aptly and sarcastically notes: “The West theologizes, but the East remains silent; worst of all, without thinking and belatedly, it repeats Western backlogs.” Ibid.

John Meyendorff, Rome, Constantinople, Moscow (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1996), 151. This document was meant to be a reaction against the Calvinistic Confession of Cyril Lukaris, patriarch of Constantinople (1629), but in substance and in form it is a document of the Latin Counter-Reformation.

starting particularly with the publication of the Slavonic translation of the great patristic texts in the Philokalia. The tradition of Byzantine hesychasm and spirituality represented by this trend placed a major emphasis on the notion of theosis, refusing any juridical understanding of redemption. Meyendorff notes that the "philocalic" revival contributed greatly to modern developments in Orthodox theology.

The other trend which significantly influenced the Orthodox understanding of salvation was the Russian lay theologians movement of the fifties and sixties in the nineteenth century—Slavophiles. The Slavophiles were characterized by sharp criticism of rationalism and legalism and by their faithfulness to the notion of "communion" inherited from the early patristic tradition. But at the same time, their theological thought was "independent of the ecclesiastical academic establishment" and tried to work out a distinctively Russian Orthodoxy.

Such theologians as Sergius Stragorodsky and Anthony Khrapovitsky dominated Russian polemics against a rationalistic (juridical) approach to salvation. In his reaction against

- Ibid.

This tendency to elaborate the distinctiveness of Russian Orthodoxy can be seen in a whole line of thinkers from A. Khomiakov down to N. Berdiaev and S. Bulgakov.

'In his dissertation published in 1895, he criticizes both Catholic and Protestant approaches to salvation as based mainly on juridical categories. Sergius Stragorodsky, Pravoslavnoe uchenie o spasenii [The Orthodox Doctrine of Salvation], 2d ed. (Kazan': Tipographia Imperatorskogo Universiteta, 1898).
scholasticism, Khrapovitsky went to some extremes of moralism and psychologism: redemption, he thought, really took place in Gethsemane, when Jesus manifested his ultimate "compassionate love" in his prayer for sinful humanity before the passion. The moralizing trend found its most consistent expression in the works of M. M. Tareev, professor of moral theology at Moscow Theological Academy, who based his system on an antidogmatic approach "even more extreme than Harnack's."

Side by side with the "moralists," the other antirationalistic trend known as sophiology tried to answer the challenge of philosophical secularism and atheism. Initiated primarily by V. Soloviev, it conceived of salvation not in


M. M. Tareev, Osnovy khrisntiansvtva: Sistema religioznoi mysli, 4 vols. (Sergiev Posad: Tipografiia Sv.-Tr. Sergievov Lavry, 1908-1910); idem, Filosofia zhizni (Sergiev Posad: Tipografiia Sv.-Tr. Sergievov Lavry, 1916). According to "moralists," dogmas, though they play some role in the Church, are not so important in Christianity; the real basis of Christianity is individual spiritual experience.

See P. Vailliere, "The Liberal Tradition in Russian Orthodox Theology," in The Legacy of St. Vladimir, ed. J. Breck, J. Meyendorff, and E. Silk (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1990), 96. The author says that this discovery of the connection between dogmatics and ethics was a very significant development in Russian Orthodoxy. The ethical school thus occupied the classic liberal middle ground between the extremes of radical (antidogmatic) criticism and conservative dogmatism. In connection with this it is appropriate to mention the spread of the critical approach to the Bible and patristic sources in nineteenth-century Europe which led to a critique of theological dogmas and established churches. The historical-critical method brought the Russian Orthodox Church face to face with the demands of the contemporary world. In Orthodox dogmatic theology, the impact of historical criticism began to be felt in the last quarter of the nineteenth century with the work of S. Malevanskii and A. Katanskii. But the effect was rather limited. Florovsky, Puti russkogo bogosloviia, 379-382.
historical but in cosmic terms, linking an ontologically divine nature of creation to the concept of Sophia, which reveals both the essence of God and the foundation of created beings.

All these tendencies and trends are manifestations of a searching, an attempt to express the Christian message of salvation in the context of modern needs and problems. At the same time, there is a tendency among contemporary Orthodox theologians to a more rigorous appeal to patristic thought with its traditional emphasis on the concept of communion with God or theosis, which in Greek patristic thought was used to define the purpose of man's creation and also authentic human destiny. Among these representatives of "neo-patristic theology," which is dominant today in most Orthodox countries as well as in the West, is Vladimir Lossky.

A Brief Biographical Sketch

Vladimir Lossky was born in 1903 at Göttingen (German Empire), where his father, a known Russian philosopher, was

'...Meyendorff sees the similarity of this thought in its fundamental approaches to the thought of P. Tillich and Teilhard de Chardin. He argues that this system could not escape the danger of pantheism, although its main followers (S. Bulgakov and particularly P. Florensky) attempted to place sophiology in the context of the patristic tradition. Meyendorff, "New Life in Christ," 485.

'A. Vedernikov says that there are two different approaches to the estimation of theological heritage in contemporary Orthodox thought. The first, which is predominant, insists on a faithful following of the Patristic tradition. According to the second view, return to the Fathers means running away from the contemporary situation or the slavish imitation to the ancient tradition and refusal of theological development. A. B. Vedernikov, "Vladimir Losski i ego bogoslovie," Bogoslovskie trudy (BT) 8 (1972): 227-228.
Currently staying with his family. From 1920 to 1922 Lossky studied at the University of St. Petersburg where he was influenced by the historian of ideas, L. Karsavin. Karsavin encouraged him to study the Fathers of the Church, though the young Lossky's interests extended to Western medieval history. In 1923, the Soviet government expelled Lossky's family from Russia and they settled in Prague, until in 1924 they moved again, this time to Paris.

Vladimir Lossky was enrolled at the Sorbonne where he studied medieval history with concentration on the Dominican mystical theologian of the fourteenth century, Meister Eckhart. This led him back to Pseudo-Dionysius and his important theological works, *The Mystical Theology* and *The Divine Names*. It was Pseudo-Dionysius who was the subject of Lossky’s first scholarly article. More importantly, Pseudo-Dionysius and his emphasis on apophatic (negative) theology would become, as we shall see, not simply one of Lossky’s chief theological themes but also, in a sense, the foundation of his theology as a whole.


This fundamental study was completed just before Lossky’s death, in 1958, and was published posthumously, with a preface by Étienne Gilson. V. Lossky, *Théologie négative et connaissance de Dieu chez Maître Eckhart* (Paris: J. Vrin, 1960).

In Paris, Lossky joined the newly founded Confraternity of St. Photius, whose aims were to encourage among Orthodox in the West a lively sense of the distinctive Orthodox confessional identity, and yet at the same time to inspire in them a missionary spirit, testifying to the universal relevance of Orthodoxy. In 1931, however, Lossky became estranged from the greater part of the Russian Orthodox community in France by refusing to withdraw from canonical allegiance to the Moscow patriarchate. The tension created by this decision was aggravated during the years 1935-36 when Lossky was involved in the sophiological controversy, or debate about the wisdom of God, aroused by the writings of Sergei Bulgakov. In his book Spor o Sofii (The Dispute About Wisdom), published in 1936, Lossky regarded Bulgakov's thought as an illicit attempt to marry Christianity with pantheism. Rowan Williams, the principal living authority on Lossky's work, describes the book as following:

*Spor of Sofii* crystallises very sharply what it was that distinguished Lossky from the older generation of Russian religious thinkers; it reveals the strength of his commitment to the visible, concrete ecclesiastical institution and his suspicion of any hints of Gnostic mystagogy.

During the Second World War, Lossky played a courageous part in the French resistance, by now fully identifying himself with

'It was at this time that the majority of Russian emigrants broke off ties with Moscow, on the grounds that the patriarchate had become the tool of the Soviet government.


his adopted motherland. In 1943 he published The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church. This book claimed to be “an Orthodox challenge to the understanding of God-man relations which prevailed in Western Christianity.” After the war, Lossky lectured at the newly founded Institut Saint-Denis, a center for French-speaking Orthodox believers. In 1947, he began to play a major part in the Ecumenical movement as a member of the Fellowship of St. Alban and St. Sergius, a body formed to foster mutual understanding between Orthodox and Anglicans. In 1952, Lossky wrote an important essay on the nature of tradition, published as a lengthy introduction to a book by the iconographer Leonid Ouspensky on the meaning of icons.

Lossky died in 1958, little known outside the Russian Orthodox world of Paris. Since his death Lossky’s reputation has


According to O. Clement, at the time of his death Lossky was planning a comparative study of Palamism and the Rhineland mystics. This would have shown how the fundamental intuitions of Western mystical theology were Orthodox--yet frustrated by the issue of filioque. Through awareness of the reality of uncreated
grown steadily. Vladimir Lossky is widely recognized now as perhaps “the most creative theological mind among the younger generation of Russian Orthodox émigré writers who made such an impact on Western European religious thought in the years before and after the Second World War.”

Statement of the Problem

Given the pre-eminent position of Vladimir Lossky among Orthodox theologians and his emphasis on theosis, an understanding of his writings on the topic is important. The main questions to be asked concern soteriology. As mentioned above, the doctrine of grace, participated by them, the Western mystics saw the vision of God as an existential communion, but were unable to find this insight in either theology or ecclesiology. Hence, in Lossky’s eyes, their path led inevitably, via the Theologia Deutsch, to Martin Luther. See Oliver Clement, “Vladimir Lossky, un theologien de la personne et du Saint-Esprit: Memorial Vladimir Lossky,” MEPrus 10-31 (1959): 204-205. See also Basil Krivosheine, “Pamiati Vladimira Losskoogo,” BT 26 (1985): 156.

Two important theological works that have significance for this study have been published posthumously. They are: V. Lossky, Vision de Dieu (Paris: Editions Delachaux et Niestle, 1962), a series of lectures presented as a patristic introduction to the theology of Gregory Palamas, and V. Lossky, À l’Image et à la Ressemblance de Dieu (Paris: Aubier-Montaigne, 1967), a collection of essays by the late Vladimir Lossky, that present his view of various aspects of the relation between God and man.


For Lossky, theosis is “the very essence of Christianity,” for it involves the “ineffable descent of God to the ultimate limit of our fallen human condition, even unto death—a descent of God which opens to men a path of ascent, the unlimited vistas of the union of created beings with the Divinity.” V. Lossky, In the Image and Likeness of God, ed. John H. Erickson and Thomas E. Bird (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1974), 97.
Theosis had been criticized by Western theologians as unbiblical. At the same time, V. Lossky is considered to be the main promoter of this idea in the West. The problem arises: What approach does Lossky use to present this ancient doctrine to the world whose major problem in contemporary life, according to Hans Küng, is not deification but "the humanization of man?" Does he follow the Greek Fathers in their use of Scripture as regards the biblical roots of theosis, or, from a position of contemporary exegetical achievements, does he admit that the original authors of the Bible had different assumptions and purposes in mind? Does he attempt to reaffirm the patristic tradition of theosis as the only true understanding of salvation, or does he try to balance both Eastern and Western soteriological positions? Such questions and others that will naturally flow express the concerns of this study: Is Lossky consistently biblical or is he a faithful, traditional Orthodox theologian? Whereupon, we could also ask: Is theosis a genuinely biblical doctrine, a doctrine which could be formulated without Orthodox theological glasses?

The Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this research was to understand the soteriological position of Vladimir Lossky, one of the most prominent theologians of the contemporary Orthodox Church, who, in a sense, opened Orthodox theology to the West and promoted dialogue between Eastern and Western theological traditions.

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attempt has been made to analyze and evaluate his presuppositions in elaborating the doctrine of theosis.

**Justification of the Research**

This research is justifiable, appropriate, and timely for three major reasons.

First, Western theologians have given only scant attention to the central importance of theosis in the Orthodox Church. There has been no monograph published in English on the subject, despite its prominence in the doctrinal systems of almost all the Greek Fathers from Irenaeus to John of Damascus. The distinctive Orthodox soteriology as it is expressed in the terms theosis or theopoiesis seems strange if not blatantly heretical to the Western ear, and scholars have tended to dismiss it as a euphemism for immortality and fleshly incorruptibility in the resurrection. This is why the study of theosis in itself is important.

Second, although V. Lossky is recognized as "one of the outstanding proponents of the Eastern Orthodox position in our time," his writings and their impact on modern theology have hardly been investigated. To my knowledge, no studies on Lossky's interpretation of the doctrine of theosis have been done.

And lastly, Eastern and Western branches of Christianity are dealing with two radically different systems of soteriology, rooted in two different traditions and accounting for two ways of conceiving the communion of man with God as the goal of human

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See above, p. 4, n. 2.

destiny. Taking this into consideration, the analysis of theosis as presented by Lossky could facilitate a more creative dialogue between Eastern and Western branches of Christian Church.

**Delimitations**

Two major delimitations have kept this work within reasonable bounds. First, the focus of study is on Vladimir Lossky, as one of the major contemporary speakers of the Orthodox Church. Second, only the idea of theosis, as presented in the published works of Lossky, is examined. Other important concepts are elucidated only if they contribute to the main subject.

All discussion on theosis is contained mainly within the boundaries of Eastern tradition.

**Method**

The method of study is historical-analytical. First, I analyze the idea of theosis as it developed throughout the history of the Christian Church. This is a necessary step before dealing with a concrete contemporary author: it helps one to see whether the author dealt with is traditional or is he more creative in his approach. Second, I expose and analyze different aspects of Lossky's view on theosis, and, finally, offer a critical evaluation of the philosophical and theological presuppositions in Lossky's understanding of theosis.

Pelikan says that of the many concepts that are regarded in Western thought as mutually exclusive, "none is more vital--and none, in my judgement, is more sorely needed in Western thought, whether theological or secular--than the concept of theosis/obozhenie." Pelikan, "Orthodox Theology in the West: The Reformation," 164.
Two main criteria are used to evaluate Lossky’s doctrine of theosis. The first is the criterion of adequacy. On its basis I analyze the historical-hermeneutical aspect of the problem and show how far Lossky’s teaching on theosis conforms to the Scripture and the ecclesiological tradition he belongs to. The second criterion is the criterion of internal coherence. On its basis I analyze the systematic-analytical aspect of the problem by examining the concepts, propositions and arguments Lossky uses in defending his position in theosis.

The dissertation is composed of five chapters. Chapter 1 introduces the problem and gives a brief historical background for it. Chapter 2 deals with the doctrine of theosis in its historical perspective in both Eastern and Western traditions with emphasis on the Eastern wing of Christianity. Major figures of the Christian Church (including Lossky’s immediate antecedents in Russian religious thought) who contributed to the doctrine of theosis are discussed. I do not attempt to be exhaustive in this chapter. However, the discussion of the various approaches to the doctrine of theosis, philosophical presuppositions, and a different content of theosis proposed throughout the history of Christian theology will prepare the way for reconstructing Lossky’s theology of theosis.

Chapter 3 comprises the heart of the study and analyses theosis as it is presented in the writings of Lossky. This chapter focuses on the different aspects of theosis: epistemological, “theological,” “economical,” ecclesiological and
moral. The chapter defines the content and means of theosis as understood by Lossky.

Chapter 4 evaluates the philosophical and theological presuppositions in Lossky's understanding of theosis on the basis of two criteria: adequacy and internal consistency. Finally, chapter 5 draws a conclusion and gives some suggestions for further studies.

Review of Literature

Two major blocks of literature demand attention. The first deals with the analysis of theosis as a general concept in contemporary literature. This gives us a good background for discussing this doctrine with regard to Lossky. The second examines Lossky's works and theology.

Literature on Theosis

In spite of the great significance of the doctrine of theosis for the Orthodox Church, this theme has not been studied thoroughly, either exegetically or systematically. Theosis has simply been taken for granted in Orthodoxy as the proper way of expressing the ultimate destiny of man. Modern Orthodox theologians build their understanding of theosis on patristic heritage, where "it [theosis] is like a continuous golden thread running throughout the centuries of Orthodoxy's ancient theological tapestry." Therefore, the investigation of the Fathers' views on theosis is a distinctive feature in contemporary

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Daniel B. Clendenin, Eastern Orthodox Christianity: A Western Perspective (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1994), 120.
studies of the issue. Some Orthodox authors have attempted to summarize the patristic doctrine of theosis.

The study of theosis has been approached in different ways. Some contemporary researchers have dealt with the relationship


between theosis and liturgical life. F. Coolidge has attempted to understand the process of deification from a philosophical point of view. An ethical approach to the doctrine of theosis can be seen in the work of Stanley Harakas.

During the last few decades the attention of non-Orthodox theologians has been drawn to the doctrine of theosis in Western tradition. Some theologians find the topic important for both Catholic and Protestant traditions.


The doctrine of theosis has been generally dismissed by Western Christianity as a prime example of what Harnack called "the acute Hellenization of Christianity." Jules Gross has attempted to investigate the Jewish-biblical roots of the concept of theosis, thus bringing it into a more balanced perspective. There have even been champions of deification among Western Evangelicals who presented papers on this issue at the National Conferences of the Evangelical Theological Society. See James B. Jordan, "Some Encouragements Toward an Evangelical Doctrine of the Deification of Man," TMs [photocopy], 1987, Theological Research Exchange Network, Portland, OR; Craig A. Blaising, "Deification: An Athanasian View of Spirituality," TMs, 1988, Theological Research Exchange Network, Portland, OR; and Robert V. Pakestraw, "Becoming Like God: An Evangelical Doctrine of Theosis," TMs, 1994, Theological Research Exchange Network, Portland, OR. For a contemporary discussion on the issue of theosis between Lutheranism and Orthodoxy, see Meyendorff and Tobias, and also Ross Aden, "Justification and Sanctification: A Conversation Between Lutheranism and Orthodoxy," St. Vladimir Theological Quarterly (SVTQ) 33 (1994): 37-139.


J. Gross, La divinisation du chrétien d’après les pères grecs (Paris: [N.p.], 1938). This is still the best modern exposition of the patristic development of the doctrine of deification, made by the Catholic scholar. The author attempts to see deification as the reflection of gospel data on a Greek problem: the universal desire to be as the gods. A similar approach is taken to a whole range of Christian doctrines, including deification, by Jean S. J. Daniélou, Gospel Message and Hellenistic Culture, trans. John Austin Baker (Philadelphia, CA: Westminster Press, 1973).
scholars, such as L. S. Thornton and E. L. Mascall, who tried to vindicate their distinctive theology of divinization.

Review of the Major Writings of Lossky

Vladimir Lossky was not a prolific writer, but he is one of those interpreters of Orthodox theology whose significance is not valued because of the quantity of published works. A search for a complete bibliography of Lossky's writings was not difficult, because it was already prepared. A review of Lossky's major works to be treated in this study follows.

1. The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church.' The title of this book might be deceiving, so it is important to understand what the writer means by it. The term "mystical theology" denotes no more than a spirituality which expresses a doctrinal attitude. All of Orthodox theology is "mystical" but not in the sense of

Thornton, The Common Life in the Body of Christ. The mystical aspect of the Church as Christ's Body, as a divine-human organism, is primary for the author. He builds his doctrine of deification in the ecclesiastical-sacramental basis, emphasizing the idea of commonality of life in Christ.


See Thomas Bird's bibliography in Lossky, In the Image and Likeness of God, 229-232. In this study I also consulted the list of Lossky's writings made by R. D. Williams in his dissertation.

V. Lossky, The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church. This book was first published in 1944 in French under the title Essai sur la Théologie Mystique de l'Église d'Orient (Paris: Aubier, 1944). It was translated by a small group of members of the Fellowship of St. Alban and St. Sergius with the purpose of promoting better understanding between Eastern and Western Christian traditions.
Western mysticism. It is mystical in that it goes beyond the range of purely intellectual apprehension. It is the contention of the author throughout this book that spirituality must have a dogmatic basis, and that, in turn, dogma be made living and interpreted by the depths of Christian experience. This view of theology determines the author's treatment of God and man, and the relationship between them. Lossky's interpretation of the nature of God and human nature is particularly important for his understanding of theosis.

2. The Vision of God was based on a series of lectures at the Sorbonne in 1945-46 and is of a more historical nature. It presents the patristic roots of "Palamism," or, to be more precise, the patristic origins of the terminology of Palamas. His major concern is the vision of God, which is for him the knowledge of divine things and actually the definition of theology as a whole. Yet this book attempts to do more than elucidate Eastern Orthodox belief in regard to the vision of God. There is a tendency in Lossky to integrate the theology of grace into a soteriological, Christological, ecclesiological, and sacramental context, which betrays his hope to interest Western theologians in Eastern religious thought by carrying on a dialogue with the West.

3. *In the Image and Likeness of God* represents a collection of Lossky's articles on the following themes: the importance of apophatic or negative theology, the vision of divine light, and the doctrine of the procession of the Holy Spirit from the Father. A particularly important point made here by Lossky concerns the relationship between the Orthodox doctrine of the Trinity and the Orthodox understanding of man. Important for this present study is Lossky's treatment of redemption. He shows that scriptural images which explain the salvation of man in Christ are not to be understood in isolation from each other. Atonement, for example, is an image which must be contemplated in the context of the scriptural and patristic notion of communion and theosis. Otherwise, a one-sided understanding could distort the meaning of Christ's saving work. Even as a collection of essays written under different circumstances and at different times, this volume is a very consistent doctrinal statement of the Orthodox understanding of man's destiny as communion with the Triune God.

4. *Orthodox Theology: An Introduction*, originally intended as a course in dogmatic theology, investigates the fundamental questions every theologian asks: Can we know God? What is the

"Lossky, *In the Image and Likeness of God*. This book is an English translation of a collection of essays that he had published, mostly in French, in various European journals. He had personally selected the essays to be published in book form before he died. The book in French was published in 1967 under the title *A l’Image et a la Ressemblance de Dieu*.

relationship of creation to the Creator? How did man fall and how is he saved? Here again, as in all his writings, Lossky shows that doctrinal issues are not just abstract propositions for theological debate but affect the whole of Christian life.

Next, a review of literature deals directly with the analysis of Lossky's theology. A serious study on Lossky, undertaken soon after the death of the theologian, was done by O. Clément. During the following thirty years, a few attempts to investigate Lossky's theology were made. One of the most serious is a dissertation by R. D. Williams, "The Theology of Vladimir Nikolaevich Lossky: An Exposition and Critique." The author deals with Lossky's theology in general. He portrays Lossky as a major spokesman of the "neo-patristic" movement, who reacted to the impasse of Russian religious metaphysics and to the tensions between voluntarism and determinism, personalism and organic collectivism. By his reaction, which sometimes took the form of a total rejection of


the categories accepted in "classical" Russian philosophy, Lossky tried to resolve these tensions in a more satisfactory way.

Williams argues that Lossky, confronted by the problems of Russian metaphysics, appeals to the Greek patristic tradition for a theological language. Initially, Lossky's tendency is to claim that the patristic tradition provides an alternative set of answers to these problems. The keynote of Lossky's theology for Williams is

the vision of man as defined by his capacity to 'image' God's self-renunciation as shown in His Trinitarian life, His creation of the world, His life on earth, and His work in each particularly human soul, to respond to this self-renunciation in the ekstasis of contemplation, and the kolovoza of life in the Church.

Some current research on Lossky appears to be helpful in this study. Thomas Weclawsky discusses the apophatic approach to theology in Lossky and Martin Heidegger. Josekutty Puthiaparampil investigates the theological notion of the human person in terms of image and likeness, giving the theological meaning of the creation of man in the image and likeness of God. Puthiaparampil shows that according to Lossky, image and likeness are realized in man by the divine economy.


The most recent study on Lossky has been done by the German scholar Josef Freitag. Freitag deals mainly with a pneumatology of Lossky, which he views as a challenge to Western theology. No studies have been found regarding Lossky's understanding of theosis.

Before discussing the doctrine of theosis in Lossky, a brief survey of this doctrine in historical perspective is necessary. This is the major content of chapter 3.

CHAPTER II

THE DOCTRINE OF THEOSIS IN HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

This chapter explores the historical background necessary for understanding the problem of theosis in Vladimir Lossky’s writings. First, I trace briefly the development of this doctrine in the Fathers, then concentrate on the Byzantine tradition, mainly Gregory Palamas, and, finally, describe the main soteriological trends in Russian religious thought. The chapter is concluded with a concise summary of the idea of theosis in Western theology.

Patristic Heritage

The Patristic view of salvation as theosis has received scant attention from the modern historians of Christian theology in the West. Moreover, as K. E. Norman rightly points out, in all modern

The best modern exposition of the Patristic development of the doctrine of theosis is still Gross, La divinisation du chrétien d’après les pères grecs. He attempts to see theosis as the reflection of Gospel data on a Greek problem: the universal desire to be as gods. For a helpful historical survey of the concept of theosis in both East and West, see Édouard Places et al., “Divinisation,” Dictionnaire de Spiritualité, ed. M. Viller et al. (Paris: Beauchesne, 1957), 3:1370-1459. For a good bibliography on Patristic doctrine of deification, see Lot-Borodine, 279-286. The most important studies on the subject in Greek are: Theodorou, The Theosis of Man in the Teaching of the Greek Fathers of the Church to John of Damascus; Bratsiotes, The Doctrine of the Greek Fathers of the Church on the Theosis of Man.

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studies on theosis the actual content of deification within the writings of the Fathers themselves "has been conspicuously lacking." While the fact of the doctrine itself is undeniable, the exact meaning of it is not clarified. Norman concludes that "the concept of Christian deification is much more profound and rich in content than has generally been supposed." In this part of the study I try to trace briefly the major "deification" themes as they occur in the Fathers up to John of Damascus.

Theosis in Ante-Nicene Fathers

The beginnings of the Patristic doctrine of theosis are already discernible in the writings of the Apostolic Fathers. The Apostolic Fathers usually are non-speculative, and they tend to speak of salvation in terms of attaining immortality and incorruption. Immortality and eternal life for Ignatius (c. 35--c. 107), for example, are positive assertions of the integrity of human life.

The same tendency is clearly seen in Justin Martyr (c. 100--c. 165) who used the term "immortalize" as equivalent to "raise


Norman, S.

Ibid.

D. Winslow points out that "by virtue of the ἐνωμία of the divine with the human, effected in the Incarnation, the essential mark of eternal life is the ultimate ἐνωμία of the human with the divine." Donald F. Winslow, "The Idea of Redemption in the Epistles of St. Ignatius of Antioch," SOTR 11 (1965): 122.
to divine status." It should be mentioned that in Justin, theosis is implied rather than formally expressed. Those who choose what is pleasing to God, he said, are "deemed worthy of incorruption and of fellowship with God" and "of reigning in company with him," and, on the basis of Ps 32:6, "of becoming 'gods' and of having power to become sons of the Highest." Both Justin and Tatian (c. 160) stressed the dependence of the human soul on God in opposition to the Greek idea of its natural immortality.

Theophilus of Antioch, later 2nd cent. was the first to use the vocabulary of theosis but restricted its meaning to that of immortality, incorruption, and the heavenly life. In his apologetic treatise To Autolycus, he expresses the eschatological hope of the Christians as becoming gods. But at the same time Theophilus emphasizes the capacity of man to progress and to the perfection of godhood even in this life. It remained for Irenaeus, however, to develop a comprehensive doctrine of theosis.

Osborn, 114. The author asserts that in each of the other writers of that period, the primary significance of deification points to immortality. See also Gross, 142-143. What makes a man divine is his power through Christ to live forever.

Justin Martyr The First Apology 10.

Justin Martyr Dialogue with Trypho, a Jew 124.

Ibid., 4-6: see also Tatian Oratio ad Graecos 13.

Theophilus of Antioch To Autolycus 2.26, 27. For Lossky's analysis of Theophilus's view on vision of God, see Lossky, The Vision of God, 27-29.

Theophilus says: "And God transferred him [man] 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." To Autolycus 2.24.
Irenaeus

The teachings of Irenaeus (c. 130–c. 200), the bishop of Lyons, are particularly important for understanding the background of Lossky's view of theosis. Although Irenaeus never actually used the words theopoiesis or theosis, his soteriological achievements set the tone for the Patristic doctrine of theosis for centuries to come. He centered his teaching on the Incarnation as the means of raising man to the level of divinity. Irenaeus postulated a "double metathesis" whereby God became man that man might become God. He developed his soteriological position in terms of the well-known theory of recapitulation by the Savior, who reversed Adam's fall through his entire life and passions.

Irenaeus starts with an optimistic anthropology. Man was created in the image and likeness of God. Yet, human beings were not created perfect, but as children they were to grow to


Irenaeus Against Heresies 3.19.1.

Against the Gnostics, Irenaeus argued that it was the complete person, not just the pneuma, who carried the image and likeness of God (ibid., 5.6.1). Although he did not consistently distinguish between eikon and homoiosis, he tended to refer the former to the body, and the latter to the mind and Spirit (ibid., 5.1.3; 5.16.2). Ladner points out that this distinction, which was employed by most earlier Christian writers, is Platonic, not biblical. Gerhard B. Ladner, The Idea of Reform: Its Impact on Christian Thought and Action in the Age of the Fathers (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1959), 90.
Godlikeness. This growth was not conceived as an inner development but the result of God’s continued creativity.

According to Irenaeus, Adam was made at the beginning in the image of God but was just a man. He would attain likeness to God only in the process of unlimited progression towards godliness and would consummate it at the age to come when the final manifestation of that for which humanity has been progressively prepared will be revealed and man will become a god. Thus, man’s divinitation was seen as the fulfillment rather than the negation of his humanity, as manhood is the fulfillment rather than the negation of childhood.

Sin caused man to lose the ability to grow in the likeness to God, but it did not thwart the divine plan for man. The fall helped man to recognize the true source of his blessings, especially in the appearance of Christ, who fulfills the destiny of man. Christ, the second Adam, has re-established the possibility for man to grow into the likeness to God by taking human nature and deifying it in the process of Incarnation. But

Irenaeus Against Heresies 4.38.4; 5.32.1.

In this sense salvation can be seen as maturation. To be unsaved is to be undeveloped. As S. Duffy says, “Irenaeus has given us a process-soteriology initiated by grace and fulfilled in recapitulation, participation, and reenactment.” Stephen J. Duffy, The Dynamics of Grace: Perspectives in Theological Anthropology (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1993), 49.

Irenaeus Against Heresies 3.20.1; 4.39.2; 5.3.1.

By affirming that Christ deified human nature in its entirety, including the flesh, Irenaeus challenged docetism of Gnostics and refuted their pneumatic soteriology.
this does not mean that man is deified automatically. Irenaeus emphasizes that man is required to attain moral perfection in this life through imitation of Christ. This includes faith, charity, baptism, and participation in the "divinity-bearing Eucharist" which "produces incorruption." More than any other writer of the second century, Irenaeus emphasizes the work of the Holy Spirit in our salvation; however, the relationship between the Spirit of God and man's individual spirit is not clear in Irenaeus.

Salvation, to Irenaeus, does not mean that the spirit of man will be released from its material bondage, but rather that the whole man, with body and soul, will be freed from the devil's dominion, returned to his original purity, and become like God. Having always in view the errors of the Gnostics, Irenaeus was determined to stress that salvation was a salvation of humanity

Ibid., 3.19.1. We should not conclude that Irenaeus here conceives of human nature as a kind of substance existing in its own right, apart from human beings, which was automatically transformed and as a result of this we are all automatically saved. Cairns comments: "While admitting that the language of St. Irenaeus does sometimes seem to suggest a mechanical notion of salvation by inoculation with imperishable substance, when we look into his thought more deeply we see that in fact he avoids this pitfall." David Cairns, The Image of God in Man (London: SCM Press, 1953), 104.

Irenaeus Against Heresies 5.7.2.

Ibid., 4.18.5; 5.2.2-3.

Ibid., 3.17; 5.1; 5.6.1; 5.7.1. Cf. also 2.19.6; 4.20.4.

For discussion on this point see Gross, 153-155.
not from humanity, a salvation of the world not from the world, a
salvation of the body not from the body.

With regard to man becoming like God, Irenaeus, like
Athanasius later, was speaking not of identity of being but of the
glory of eternal life in Christ. He thinks of the deified
Christians as adopted or "filiated" into the relationship of sons
and heirs, sharing the glory of eternal God, but clearly
subordinated to the Father.

The full knowledge and vision of God are the epitome of
Irenaeus's soteriology. Actually he distinguishes three degrees
of vision: the prophetic vision through the Holy Spirit, the
vision of adoption through the Son, and the vision of the Father
in the Kingdom of heaven. The Spirit prepares man in the Son of
God, the Son brings him to the Father, and the Father confers on
him the incorruptibility of eternal life. For Irenaeus, as with
Theophilus of Antioch, Lossky says, the vision of God is connected
with incorruptibility. But here "it becomes the source of eternal

On Irenaeus's insistence on the resurrection of the body, of
man's actual physical flesh, see Against Heresies 1.10.1; 1.22.1;
1.33.5; 3.16.6; 3.18.1; 5.9.1-4. Also see M. F. Wiles, The
Christian Fathers New York: Oxford University Press, 1982, 91-
93.

'Irenaeus Against Heresies 3.19.

Ibid., 2.11.1; 3.19.1; 4.41.2-3. Hughes admits that
deification is, in fact, associated by Irenaeus with the process
of the believer's sanctification. P. E. Hughes, The True Image:
The Origin and Destiny of Man in Christ (Grand Rapids, MI:
Eerdmans, 1989), 283.

'Irenaeus Against Heresies 4.20.5.

'Ibid., 4.20.3. See discussion on these ideas by Lossky in
The Vision of God, 32-36.
life and even the source of all existence, since vision means participation." This eschatological vision of Irenaeus did not allow him to develop the theme of mystical contemplation which, as is shown later, is present in the Fathers of the Alexandrian school.

After this brief discussion of theosis in Irenaeus we may conclude that his conception of salvation as the gift of immortality, as adoption into divine sonship, and as transformation into God’s image through the vision of Christ incarnate are all quite legitimate aspects of the gift of salvation, for which ample scriptural authority can be found.

**Clement of Alexandria**

Clement (c. 150–c. 215) was the first to use the word theopoieo to designate the deifying action of the incarnate Logos in Christians. Creation of man in the image and likeness of God is important to him. He conceives of God as basically Nous, and thus locates our image of the divine in the mind and reason, not

> Lossky, The Vision of God, 37.


in the body. However, like Irenaeus, his view of man, even though a creature, was positive. In his proper nature, man was created for immortality, although, not being consubstantial with God, he was not yet perfect and had to acquire virtue by the exercise of his free will. Like Irenaeus, Clement works with the concept of likeness, which leaves behind the mere image of creation. The gaining of perfection and assimilation to God is the fulfilment of the homoioiosis intended for man in Gen 1:26-27. In his doctrine of theopoiesis, Clement prefers what may be termed the Ps 32:6 tradition of “becoming gods” to the 2 Pet 1:4 tradition of “partaking in the divine nature.”

Clement spoke of this likeness to God in connection with divine gnosis. In this sense, his goal of gradual ascent leaves little room for the eschatology of the New Testament. Salvation is primarily a matter of paideia and of gnosis. Clement extols the contemplation of God, “a comprehension of the incomprehensible,” as the ultimate goal of perfected Christians. Commenting on this, Lossky notes: “The contemplation of God is presented . . . as the highest bliss.” Clement’s ideal Gnostic, a son of God by adoption, is, Clement declared, a god even in this

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Clement of Alexandria Stromata 6.12; 2.19. Properly speaking, it is the Logos, the Image of God, which is Nous. Our nous is in the image of the Logos (Stromata 5.14).

See Gross, 161-162. Against Gnostic dualism, Clement emphasized the harmony of all being with the Creator (Stromata 4.15); but elsewhere he stresses the ontological difference between Creator and man as creature (Stromata 2.16).

Butterworth, 160.

Lossky, The Vision of God, 44.
The supremacy of contemplation or theoria over practical activity, as well as the moral qualities which are expressed in such activity, is given clear priority in Clement’s view. He even declares that, upon the hypothetical supposition that salvation and the knowledge of God could be separated, the true Gnostic, if called upon to choose between them, would choose the knowledge of God.

Another important concept for Clement’s view of theopoiesis is apathèia or complete detachment and purification from sensible objects. The process of theopoiesis is the laying aside of the passions. He held that “man, when deified,” is in “a passionless state.” This idea stands closer to Stoicism than to the teaching of the New Testament. Unification (in a sense of both purification and reduction to One) of the soul is another term he uses to describe this process. The unification is reached not through control or sublimation of the desires and inclinations but rather through their eradication.

Clement of Alexandria Stromata 4.8.

Ibid., 4.22. Lossky comments: “Indeed we cannot help noticing the split between the living God of the Bible and the God of Platonic contemplation, a split which disrupts the very integrity of eternal bliss.” Lossky, The Vision of God, 45.

Clement of Alexandria Stromata 4.23.

‘We should agree that Clement is wrong in regarding apathy as a part of Christian perfection. The definition of the impassible man in Stromata 6.71 is a picture of a really inhuman being. The theory of man that is forced to a docetic interpretation of our Lord’s humanity is clearly drawing its inspiration from non-biblical sources. Cairns is categorical here: “It is clear that Clement has not only adopted Gnostic terms, but has been infected with Gnostic thought.” Cairns, 106.
Although Clement is considered to be one of the most "hellenized" of all the Christian Fathers, his view of deification retains basic differences from that of paganism. He never loses sight of the metaphysical distance between God and man, and differentiates between our sonship by adoption and that of the Logos by nature.

Origen

Origen (c. 185-c. 254) was more reticent than Clement in his use of deification terminology, but like Clement he speaks of salvation as the attainment of the state of divinity. Origen is known for his attempt to relate the created order to God. This cosmological concern becomes evident in his doctrines of the preexistence of souls and the eternal generation of the subordinate Logos or deuteroc theos, the mediator between God and the cosmos. There is a real kinship between the Logos and the soul because both are eternal. Origen uses Ps 82:6 to support the clearly Platonic notion of the elevation of the soul into divine...

J. Bernard is even more positive in his assessment of Clement. He points out that in the context of the biblical background of Clement, who tried to communicate to the society of his day by using Platonic terminology to ensure its missionary impact, we cannot speak either of any syncretistic tendencies or of the illegitimate hellenization of the Christian message, precisely because the new interpretation of the concept of eksomoiosis (assimilation, becoming like) no longer coincides with the original intention of Plato but is expressive of an authentic Christian content. See Bernard, 30. I do not share this optimistic position.

Origen On Prayer 27.13.
likeness. Our souls, by nature spiritual and reasonable, are the
ymbols of the pure Nous that is God. According to Origen, only the
oul is in the image of God, not the body. All material substance
is corruptible. Only immaterial substance is eternal.

Origen sought a synthesis between the scriptural account of
creation and the metaphysical presuppositions of Platonism. As a
solution, he accepted the notion of eternal creation. God never
became a Creator. He is Creator eternally. His goodness always
needed an object, and this object was an eternally existing world
of created intellects, which were equal and identical. The
existence of our own visible universe, in which beings are mutable
and unequal, came about as a result of the fall. God created the
present world, linking the soul with a body as a punishment.
Man's ultimate destiny, therefore, is escaping from psycho-
material existence by the way of dematerialization and returning
to the union with God. Deification for Origen transcends human
nature, which is by definition corruptible; it consists of
"raising man above the level of human nature, and causing him to
pass into a better and more divine condition, and preserving him

Origen Commentary on the Gospel of John 29.27.28. Duffy
comments, "Showing clearly his Christian Platonism, the
Alexandrian genius sees the soul's ascent as a process of becoming
what it really is, innately divine." Duffy, 56.

Origen Against Celsus 7.66; idem, On First Principles
2.10.7.

Origen On First Principles 1.2.10; 2.9.6.

Actually, Origen is not clear on the extent to which flesh
is involved in deification. But general scholarly opinion is that
he speaks in Platonic tones of the body as a hindrance to
attaining a likeness and union with God (On First Principles
3.6.1). See also Lossky, The Vision of God, 58.
in it.” Origen ends his discourse on the consummation of this world by stating that:

all matter must be transformed into a single body of the utmost purity. . . . And God shall be all in all, so that the whole of bodily nature may be resolved into that substance which is superior to all others, namely, into the divine nature.

The concept of gnosis is crucial for Origen, as it was for Clement before him. “To know God” is a favorite expression of Origen. The intellectual contemplation of God by the mind is actually the essence of deification for Origen. This contemplation is itself a purification, and it goes hand in hand with the active practice of virtue to work deification.

The Incarnation, says Origen, demonstrated that, since Christ, “the union of the divine with the human nature has its beginning, in order that the human, by communion with the divine, Origen Against Celsus 5.23.

Origen On First Principles 3.6.9. Harnack notes that although this apokatastasis or universalism of Origen’s system was later rejected by the Christian Church, the attachment to this most important point in Origenism and Neoplatonism was very profound. Harnack, 3:139. In connection to this we should note that the line of demarcation, for Origen, passes between the spiritual domain related to God and the created psycho-material world, rather than between the Holy and Righteous God of Heaven and man as a sinner.

Origen Commentary on John 32.17. See also Lossky, The Vision of God, 48.

Origen Commentary on John 32.27. It is clear that this transformation through contemplation is similar to the teaching of Plotinus. Norman notes that “it was this contemplative predilection which made Origen so influential for generations of later mystics, including Gregory of Nyssa and Pseudo-Dionysius, whose concept of deification shows its Origenistic ancestry.” Norman, 73. See also Lossky, The Vision of God, 57.
might rise to be divine." It seems that an incarnational philosophy of salvation is unrelated to the cross, but it would be a mistake to conclude that Christ’s death on the cross held little significance for Origen, even though he does not seem to have fully grasped its profound significance as a vicarious sacrifice.

In spite of the fact that Origen’s teaching was condemned at Constantinople II, it remained, according to Meyendorff,

at the center of the theological thought of post-Chalcedonian Eastern Christianity, and its influence on spirituality and theological terminology did not end with the condemnation of the Origenistic system in 553.

The allegorical spirit of the Alexandrian school, with its emphasis on a spiritual life devoted to the contemplation of God, contributed considerably to the decline of the eschatological vision that characterizes the first two centuries of the Christian era. This ideal of the contemplative life borrows forms that are all too reminiscent of hellenistic wisdom. Lossky admits:

We must recognize . . . that the hellenistic world enters the Church with Clement and Origen, bringing with it elements alien to the Christian tradition--elements of religious speculation and intellectualistic spirituality belonging to a world altogether different from that of the Gospel.'

Origen Against Celsus 3.38.

According to Harnack, “he [Origen] propounded views as to the value of salvation, and as to the significance of Christ’s death on the Cross, with a variety and detail rivalled by no theologian before him” (2:367). Actually, Origen was the first Christian theologian to teach clearly that the death of Christ is a ransom paid to the devil in exchange for the souls of men.

Meyendorff, Byzantine Theology, 26.

‘Lossky, The Vision of God, 56-57. Lossky is even more categorical when, describing the relationship between Christianity and paganism, he concludes: “Instead of Christianizing hellenistic spirituality, Clement and Origen almost succeeded in spiritualizing Christianity.” Ibid., 58.
In conclusion, it can be stated that, with Origen, theosis became established as a fully developed category of Christian theology. But the full clarification of the term had to anticipate the resolution of the conflict over the deity of Christ. One thing is clear: In spite of all differences between Irenaeus, Clement, and Origen, the Christian Church did not regard salvation as simply a restoration of what had been lost in the first Adam, the original creation. Salvation had to be an incorporation into what had been vouchsafed in Christ, the second Adam, a new creation.

Athenasius

It was Athenasius (c. 256-373) who became the classical spokesman for the doctrine of theosis. For him, this doctrine forms the heart of Christianity. Theosis is the focus of both his anthropology and soteriology, which he summed up in the famous


As Pelikan notes, “the Church could not specify what it meant to promise that man would become divine until it had specified what it meant to confess that Christ had always been divine.” Pelikan, The Christian Tradition, 1:155.


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catchphrase: “He [God] became man in order that we might be made God.” In no other Church Father’s writings is the concept of theosis so crucial to an understanding of the overall doctrinal system. It was not without reason that L. Bouyer calls Athanasius “the doctor of our deification.”

By the fourth century the interrelationship between Christian doctrine and classical culture had become quite complex, and as Norman notes, “there is no clear-cut line of ancestry connecting theopoesis in the writings of the Bishop of Alexandria to Homer or Plato on the one hand, or to Moses and Jesus on the other.” A true disciple of Origen, Athanasius used Greek categories and concepts but filled them with a content taken from revelation. However, this syncretic approach caused him significant problem.

Although Athanasius held Origen in high esteem, his understanding of theosis evolved from contemplation as a means to reunion with God to the divinization as a gift of grace through the Incarnation of Jesus Christ. Contrary to Origen, contemplation is no longer a means of divinization. The soul does not become divine by what it contemplates. Never does he speak of divinizing contemplation. This position is partially the result of his doctrine of creation from nothing, which discloses the ontological gulf between God and the creature. Therefore, Athanasius broke with the Platonic teaching that the soul is con-

Athenasius On the Incarnation 54; idem, Against the Arians 1.39.


Norman, 8.
natural with God. Theosis for him is the result of the 
Incarnation now. But before discussing this very important issue, 
Athanasius's concept of creation must be presented.

Athanasius endorses the anti-Gnostic tradition of creation ex 
nihilo, and by doing this he affirms the value and goodness of the 
cosmos. There is no dichotomy between creation as "wholly other" 
than God and that it is good. As a corollary of the doctrine of 
creation ex nihilo, man cannot be divine by essence, he is also 
"wholly other." For the first time in the history of Christian 
thought, in the heat of the Arian debate, the distinction between 
generation and creation was made and consistently elaborated. It 
was a great step beyond Origen. The Divine Generation is an 
effect of Divine nature. Creation, on the contrary, is an act of 
decision and will. By nature, God generates the Son; by will, He 
creates the world. This creative action does not involve God's 
nature, therefore it excludes ontological continuity between God

Duffy, 58.

Duffy discusses the evolution of Athanasius's understanding 
of theosis from contemplation as the way to divinization (in 
Against the Pagans) to huiopsiosis or deification as adoption by 
grace into a filial relationship (in On the Incarnation). Ibid.

Athanasius's thought implies a radical rejection of Origen's 
vision of God as the eternal Creator, and of his view of the 
original state of created beings as participants in God's very 
essence. See John Meyendorff, "Creation in the History of Orthodox 
in Athanasius's doctrine of creation in comparison with the Neo-
Platonic model. See George Florovsky, "The Concept of Creation in 
Saint Athanasius," in Studia Patristica, vol. 6, part 4, Texte und 
Untersuchungen zur Geschichte der altchristlichen Literatur 
(TUGAL) 81, ed. F. L. Cross (Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 1962), 36- 
57, but the author fails to see the problem this radical sense of 
creation implies for Athanasian soteriology.
and creation. By making this distinction, Athanasius defended (against the Neoplatonic tradition of Origen) the absolute transcendence of the divine nature and (against Arius) the consubstantiality of the Son of God with the Father.

This distance between God and creation is even more emphasized in the Athanasian view of God. For him, God is self-sufficient and complete in Himself, He is immaterial as well as incorporeal, invisible, and untouchable, and has power over all the universe, being transcendent to it. Athanasius appeals to a principle of Greek philosophy that that which is single and complete is superior to those things which are diverse. We clearly see that in Athanasius the personal, non-speculative theology of the Bible was left behind by cultured Christians, especially at Alexandria. He was greatly influenced in his understanding of God by Plato, Albinus, Plotinus, and Proclus. He transfers his understanding of God to Christ the Savior. The strong anti-Arian feelings epitomize the soteriological necessity

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Meyendorff, Rome, Constantinople, Moscow, 158. This antithesis [generation/creation or nature/will] is one of the main distinctive marks of Eastern theology. It was systematically elaborated once more in late Byzantine theology by Gregory Palamas, who contended that unless a clear distinction had been made between the essence and energy in God, one could not distinguish also between generation and creation.

Athenaius Against the Heathen 29; idem, Defence of the Nicene Council 10.

Athenaius Against the Heathen 28.

For example, he interprets the Septuagint's version of Exod 3:14 according to sound Platonic/Philonic principles (Councils of Ariminum and Seleucia 35: Defence of the Nicene Council 22). See more about this in Norman, 173-179.
of the Savior's absolute divinity for him. He even goes so far as
to stress the transcendence of the Logos. The danger of this
insistence on the absolute essential deity of the Son is a docetic
tendency, which always seems to haunt Athanasius's Christology.
The irony of Athanasius's doctrine is that the more he emphasized
the absolute divinity of the Savior, the more difficult it became
to explain his concept of salvation in terms of an essentially
foreign creature participating in that divinity. That paradox in
Athanasius’s soteriology is discussed later; now the importance of
the Incarnation is presented.

For Athanasius, theosis can only be based upon the historical
fact of the Incarnation. For him, Christ is not only fully God
but He is also fully man. And Christ became human by nature for
the purpose of theosis of man. Athanasius insists and repeatedly
emphasizes that our theosis was the very purpose of the
Incarnation. He asks emphatically: "And how can there be
reification apart from the Word and before him?" If Christ was
not fully God and fully man, theosis cannot be reached. According

'Athanasius Against the Heathen 47. It is the very heart of
Athanasius's main argument against the Arians that Jesus, before
deifying us by grace, must be God by nature. For Athanasius,
theosis was the very reason of Nicaea, because, to deify, Christ
Himself must be fully divine, or in the Nicene phrase, "very God." It
is this concept of salvation which requires that the Son be
fully divine.

'His similarity to Appolinarius is one manifestation of this.
For example, Athanasius never clearly refers to the human soul of
Christ; see Norman, 195.

'Athanasius On the Incarnation 54; idem, Epistle to Adelphius
4.

'Athanasius Against the Arians 1.39.
to Athanasius, Arianism was the first instance of a dangerous theory that finds man "stuck" in his nature and frustrated in his efforts to be like God. The Athanasian stress on the unity of the two natures in Christ heightens the reality of theosis for man. If man was to become divine, then God really had to be united with humanity into one being, a union that would raise human nature to the level of God. Thus, soteriology and Christology are interdependent for Athanasius. Athanasius fought Arianism primarily to defend the possibility and the reality of that communion with God in Christ: for him it was the very basis of the gospel.

The Incarnation itself as the means to the achievement of the destiny designed for mankind was perceived as the deification of our humanity. Athanasius says: "He deified what he put on." Had Christ been a creature and not true God, his union with our humanity would never have accomplished its theosis.


Gross, 284. By the same soteriological reason, Athanasius defended the divinity of the Holy Spirit. If salvation as theosis was the gift of the Holy Spirit, then he was God. And it is precisely because the Spirit is divine by nature that men are "made divine" (theopoiei). See Athanasius Epistle to Serapion 1.24. He even formulated the axiom: "By the participation of the Spirit we are knit into the Godhead" (Against the Arians 3.24).

See Meyendorff, Christ in Eastern Christian Thought, 125.

'ATHANASIUS AGAINST THE ARIANS 1.42.

Ibid., 2.70. This view on the assumption of human nature by the Logos creates difficulties. Is Christ's human nature a particular humanity or humanity as such? If the former, how can the assumption by the Logos of a particular humanity avail for the sins of humanity as a whole? If the latter, can any convincing significance be attached to a humanity which lacks particularity?
Now we are approaching what is called the Athanasian paradox. The paradox of his soteriology is that, despite his creatureliness and essential alienation from God, which seems to make communion with Him impossible, man nevertheless is called to a supernatural destiny. There is a clear tension between Athanasius’s theology, which, against the Arians, places both God the Father and the Son on a different and ultimately unattainable ontological plane, and his soteriology, which promised a participation in that Deity transcending virtually all the limitations of the human, creaturely status. The Athanasian dilemma may be formulated with a question: How could he reconcile his condemnation of a hubris, which aspires “to ascend to heaven, to be like the Most High” (Isa 14:14), with his own oft-repeated promise of deification to the faithful, which was so fundamental to his doctrinal system?

Norman concludes that, from the standpoint of Athanasius’s ontology, theopoiesis is a contradiction in terms. Only the Son is God by nature, and if He deifies his followers by virtue of that Godhood, they cannot be essentially divine; they remain beings created “out of nothing” and thus always subject, at least in principle, to change and corruption. It is in this context

Turner says: “We are here confronted with the dilemma which was to embarrass the Greek tradition of Christology for centuries, and which perhaps has not been successfully overcome even yet.” Turner, 90.

‘Norman is right when he says that “Athanasius condemned the Arians for the idolatry of calling their creaturely Christ a divine being, yet his doctrine of divinization held out just such a prospect for every faithful Christian.” Norman, v.

Ibid., 190.
that Athanasius stressed the idea of theosis as adoption into sonship.

The Arian claim that believers were fully equal to Christ as sons of God led Athanasius to stress the adoptive nature of their sonship, as opposed to the natural or essential sonship of the Savior. He draws a sharp line of demarcation between Christ's sonship and ours. He tries to never lose sight of the difference between the Logos and the redeemed man. Gross summarized the importance of this concept:

More clearly than the earlier Fathers, S. Athanasius identifies divinization and divine filiation. He employs the terms *theopoiein* and *huiopoiein* as synonyms, which express the assimilation and the intimate union of the Christian in him. Assimilation, not deification, the Bishop of Alexandria specifies, because deified man is the son of God by adoption, by grace alone; he could never become a son by nature as the incarnate Logos.

The lack of clarity in the Athanasian concept of *zheosis* gives some scholars the right to equate it with the so-called "physical theory of redemption." But theosis for Athanasius is more than immortality. Theosis is given a more profound basis as

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See Athanasius Against the Arians 3.24.

Ibid., 1.9; 2.72.

Gross, 215.

'A great authority of the last century, A. Robertson described the categories under which Athanasius states the soteriological problem (life and death, corruption and immortality) as physical categories, without doing full justice to the ideas of guilt and reconciliation. See A. Robertson, Select Writings of Athanasius (London: D. Nutt, 1891), 1. But Gorringe opposes this approach, affirming that it "fails to do justice, not only to Athanasius, but to the patristic tradition from Irenaeus onwards." T. J. Gorringe, "'Not Assumed Is Not Healed': The Homoousion and Liberation Theology," SJT 38 (1985): 482-483.
the radical transformation of human nature, which the name implies; subsequently it becomes more difficult to reconcile it with Athanasius's ontology. Anglican scholar P. Hughes considers that Athanasius, with regard to theosis, "was not thinking in terms of an ontological change, but of the reintegration of the divine image of man's creation through the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit." Hughes simply interprets theosis in Athanasius in terms of the Western tradition of sanctification, emphasizing that his language is soteriological, not ontological. This position is too simplified, however, because it takes Athanasian soteriology out of the context of the Arian debate.

Thus, we clearly can see that because of his ontology Athanasius never attained a harmonious synthesis of the relationship of God to the world, and especially to man. As Lot-Borodine points out, the Nicene definition of the Son as homoousius with the Father would logically preclude the Logos as a mediator between God and man. Actually, Athanasius based his attack on the Arians on the principle that "there is nothing between God and creature which can be called divine." Yet in his


Ibid., 282.

Some defend the Alexandrian use of ontological rather than ethical terms as necessary for apologetic aims. But, as Norman points out, the doctrine of theosis makes the Patristic use of Greek ontology self-defeating as an apologetic tool. Norman, 178, n. 3.

Lot-Borodine, 25.

Athenasius Against the Arians 2.14; 3.8; 3.16.
own soteriology he teaches theopoiesis by grace, which, in effect at least, seems to put him in the same camp with the Arians he so vigorously condemns for placing man on the same level with God. The only substantial soteriological dispute between Athanasius and Arians was over the question of how man could become God. Is it by adoptive grace or by ascent through moral progress? In this sense, Arian conflict anticipated the primary issue of Pelagianism.

Despite the problem discussed here, the language of theosis and theopoiesis became the standard in soteriological formulations of the Eastern Church. Consequently, the logical incompatibility of Orthodox ontology with theosis led to its eventual rejection by mainstream Western Christianity, although it did survive, somewhat transformed, in the mystical tradition of the West.

Theosis in Post-Nicene Fathers

Because of its importance in the Christological debates of the following years, the doctrine of theopoiesis did not die with Athanasius in 373. As is shown below, theosis was a presupposition, rather than a startling innovation or dangerous speculation for the following generations of Eastern theologians. Like Athanasius, they used it as an argument for the divinity of the Son and the Holy Spirit without apology, and they were not concerned with defining or defending the doctrine in itself.

The Cappadocians

Most of the characteristic features of Athanasius were carried on by the Cappadocian Fathers: Basil of Caesarea, his
friend Gregory of Nazianzus, and his younger brother Gregory of Nyssa.

Basil (c. 330-379)

Basil did not dwell on the concept of theosis, but espoused a resemblance to God from creation as the basis of salvation through restoration. In his discourse On the Spirit, he explained that the Spirit’s work in man is to extinguish the passions of the flesh, which “have alienated it from its close relationship to God.” This purification is a “return to natural beauty,” a “cleansing [of] the Royal Image and restoring its ancient form.” He argued that rejecting the deity of the Holy Spirit meant casting away the meaning of salvation itself. What is most important for us in Basil’s treatment of theosis is drawing a distinction between God’s essence and His powers. He does this to prevent a Plotinian kinship between creature and creator. He states carefully that the essence of God is absolutely inaccessible to a human being. God is known only in his energies or actions. Basil says:

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Basil of Caesarea On the Spirit 9.23. Enumerating the gifts of the Spirit, Basil affirmed that from this “comes . . . the being made like God— and highest of all, the being made God.”

Ibid.


This gives A. Meredith the right to affirm that the deification Plotinus and Basil set before us as the ultimate ideal needs to be understood in very different ways. Anthony Meredith, The Cappadocians (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1995), 35.

'Basil of Caesarea Against Eunomius 1.14.
The energies are numerous and the essence of God simple and what we know when we say God, is in fact His energies. We do not presume to approach His essence. His energies come down to us, but His essence remains beyond our reach.

Affirming this, Basil anticipated the elaboration of this idea by Gregory Palamas in the later Byzantine period. It was Gregory of Nazianzus and Gregory of Nyssa, however, who contributed significantly to the doctrine of theosis.

Gregory of Nazianzus (329-389)

No Christian theologian prior to Gregory employed the term theosis or the idea contained in the term with as much consistency and frequency as Gregory of Nazianzus did. "There is no part of Gregory’s writings," says J. Winslow, "whether contemplative, pastoral or ascetical, in which this constant concern for theosis is not a major motif, a motif by which we today are the more able faithfully to interpret his thought."

Given the importance obviously assigned to the idea of theosis in Gregory, it is surprising that he never sought to support it on scriptural grounds. But this was not an

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'Basil of Caesarea Letters 234.1. See also idem, Against Eunomius I.c.

'Byzantine theologians often quoted Basil in formulating the distinction between the inaccessible ousia and its natural processions or energiae. See Lossky, The Vision of God, 65.

For the best presentation on the topic, see Winslow, The Dynamics of Salvation: A Study in Gregory of Nazianzus.

'Ibid., 178.

'Winslow comments: "Like homoousion, theosis found its way into the Christian vocabulary from extra-biblical sources." Ibid., 181.
embarrassment to Gregory since the validity of a specific doctrinal term was based on its faithfulness to biblical ideas, not to biblical words. Theosis was a term by which Gregory sought to indicate a dynamic relation between God and mankind, a relationship that is dependent upon God's creative and sustaining initiative, resulting in our progressive growth towards a fulfilled creatureliness.

Gregory adopted the Irenaean view that salvation places us on a higher level than the one we had attained before the fall. It is for this reason that Gregory could speak of salvation as recreation, as being a more exalted and godlike creation than the first. Gregory saw theosis as a process grounded on God’s purpose to creation. When he spoke of the growth towards mankind's created goal, he conceived of it as having a double direction: "backward" movement to the previously unfallen state as well as a "forward" movement towards the originally intended state of fulfillment. Gregory did not think of earthly Paradise as a state of perfection or fulfillment. It is clear that he refers to the ultimate goal of history in unmistakably Origenist terms, as the union of all rational creatures with God.

Winslow says that Gregory spoke of the relation of intimacy between us and God in two complementary ways. "When he sought to describe God’s role in the relationship, he spoke 'anthropomorphically.' In the same way, when he attempted to describe what happens to us within the dimensions of this relationship, i.e., theosis, he could well afford to speak 'theomorphically.'" Ibid., 199.

"Gregory of Nazianzus Orations 40.7.

Ibid., 38.4.

"Gregory of Nazianzus Orations 30.6.
Gregory follows Athanasius in his focus on the Incarnation as the keystone of salvation. He sees theosis as analogous to the “deification” of Christ’s human nature, but not identical. The union effected within the one Person of Christ, as we have seen, was effected by the presence of the divine nature; the divine nature “deifies,” and the human is “deified.” Thus, for Gregory, the “deification” of Christ’s human nature became the pattern upon which our analogous “deification” is based. Within the economy of salvation, however, theosis is not limited to the Incarnation event. We have already seen that Gregory considered theosis as a process having its initial roots in the purposes of creation.

Gregory does not restrict theosis to physical immortality since the image of God resides, according to him, in the higher spiritual faculty of man.

Gregory sees salvation in terms of synergeia or cooperation between divine grace and human freedom. Developing this notion of co-operation, he states that our incorporation into Christ depends both on God and on ourselves. In other words, he combines grace-by-incarnation soteriology with a moral-ascetical ascent ideal

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Gregory of Nazianzus Orations 38.13; idem, Letters 101.

Gregory of Nazianzus Orations 38.13.

This is especially clear in Gregory’s refutation of Apollinarius (Orations 28.17), where he requires the entire human nature to be deified.

Ibid., Orations 37.13.
through the development of virtues, which culminates in bridging the gap between God and man.

Gregory of Nazianzus is one of the early representative exponents of the mystical theology, developing the doctrines of katharsis, contemplation, and kenosis. Theosis for him "is conferred by true philosophy, and by rising superior to the dualism of matter, through the unity which is perceived in the Trinity." Nevertheless, this process is not merely mystical and passive. Gregory believes salvation is a dynamic process of daily divinization transforming human relations on the pattern of Trinitarian interpersonal relations and leading to personal kenosis, that is self-emptying and unselfish service to fellowmen.

Gregory was quite aware of the pagan parallels to theosis: more than this, he quite consistently repudiated the various expressions of deification as found in his non-Christian heritage.

``Gregory of Nazianzus Two Invectives on Julian 121.

Gregory of Nazianzus Orations 21.2. Lossky points out that Gregory of Nazianzus, more than other Cappadocians, stressed the idea of contemplation on the Trinity. But it is quite difficult to clarify the doctrine of Gregory on the manner of this contemplation. Sometimes he denies the possibility of knowing the divine essence; sometimes he uses expressions which could lead us to think that the very nature of God can be known in the contemplation of the Trinity, in being 'united' with or 'merged' entirely in the entire Trinity. See Lossky, The Vision of God, 69. Lossky suggests that the contemplation of the Trinity replaced the vision of the ousia for Gregory. Ibid., 70.

Gregory of Nazianzus Orations 16.19-20; 40.31, 45.

Winslow points out at least four occurrences of deification in pre- and non-Christian literature, which he criticized as not being consonant with his own idea of theosis: idolatry, Greek mystery religions, imperial apotheosis, and polytheism or pantheism (The Dynamics, 183-186).```
Nowhere in Gregory's writings do we find any expression of either plurality of gods or an identification of the created world with the Creator. He does not threaten the unique status of the Godhead numerically (polytheism) or substantially (pantheism).

Theosis, as Gregory once said, cannot be taken "literally": one cannot literally become God since that would be as absurd as if we were to state that God is a creature. In this sense, the term theosis becomes fluid and ambiguous. Winslow suggests that theosis, both as a word and as a concept, is, like most theological languages, a metaphor, which was used by Gregory on several levels of thought and in various arenas of concern: spatial, visual, epistemological, ethical, corporate, and social. Theosis is therefore a "shorthand" metaphor describing the creative and salvific economy as well as the relation between God and creation.

Gregory of Nyssa c. 330-c. 395:

It is with Gregory of Nyssa that we come to the most profound and philosophical of the Cappadocians. Gregory of Nyssa was

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Gregory writes: "I shall admit that God is a creature, if I become God, in the strict sense of the term" (Citations 42.17).

Winslow, The Dynamics, 193-197.

It seems that Winslow oversimplifies the problem by taking theosis just metaphorically. Theosis for the Greek Fathers is a reality that is experienced in the life of a Christian believer.

"Gregory of Nyssa's main contention was that Greek philosophy or secular knowledge was sterile in itself, so he attempted to bridge the existing gap which separates Greek philosophy and Christian faith. G. Bebis notes, "There is no doubt that the problem of the relation between philosophy and theology is an acute one in most of the works of Gregory of Nyssa." George S. Bebis, The Mind of the Fathers (Brookline, MA: Holy Cross Orthodox
perhaps the most optimistic of all the Fathers in his anthropology, with theosis as the main operative soteriological principle of it. His great system of God's plan of salvation is in many ways a revival of Origen. Gregory subscribes to the creation ex nihilo view, but for him this implies more the participation in divine being than the ontological separation from God. Man was originally created to participate in Divinity. Like a good Platonist, Gregory described man as the copy of the ideal or archetypal man in which exists naturally, and not as of grace, the fullness of humanity. But in spite of the full possession of the divine similitude, Gregory leaves open the possibility of a metaphysical distinction between God and man. God is by

Press, 1994), 68.


See Turner, 90-91.

Völker, 276-277.

'Turner points out that "this notion of primal man has more in common with the Philonic conception of archetypal man than with the Adam of the Genesis story." Turner, 91.
definition uncreated, while the archetypal man remains essentially a created being."

Gregory of Nyssa asserts that the image of God is not in any part of human nature but "extends equally to all the race." The image consists in those attributes which we perceive in the archetype (purity, apatheia, immortality, etc.). The focus of the image to God is exclusively the soul, (nous). What is the function or purpose of the divine image for Gregory? "This can be understood," says Scuiry, "only in light of humanity’s ultimate end—participation in Divinity, which begins at baptism and is fulfilled in the life to come." The Fall, which Gregory views as a mythic event or as having occurred simultaneously with creation, is not seen as a catastrophic loss of the capacity of man for divinity. The changeability of human nature (birth, growth,

"Gregory of Nyssa On the Soul and the Resurrection.
Consistent with this is Gregory’s idea of two different orders of creation. The first is in the mind of God, the second is realized in the course of history. The former has existed in the mind of God from all eternity; the latter occurs for us in time. Gregory does not speak about two conflicting accounts of creation, but two different orders: one is from eternity, the other is in time. See Jean S. J. Daniélou, From Glory to Glory, trans. Herbert Musurielo (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1961), 12-14.

Gregory of Nyssa The Great Catechism 16,17.

Gregory of Nyssa On the Making of Man 11.3: 5.1.

"Gregory, like Origen, was strongly influenced by Platonic dualism. Like Athanasius, however, he does not distinguish between image and likeness. Ladner, 90.

continuance, and even death) does not alter the basic identity of a person and its relation to the divine.

While such an optimistic anthropology might seem to obviate the need for the Incarnation, Gregory uses it in quite the opposite manner. It is because of his high estimation of human nature that he could acknowledge the possibility that God Himself could enter into it without being sullied. He speaks of the Incarnation as the union of God and humanity, which deifies the latter. Because of this, sacraments are very important to him. Baptism and the Eucharist are the appointed means whereby the Logos continues His redemptive work among men. In his sacramental theology, Gregory of Nyssa considers sacraments as essential for theopoiesis.

Attaining immortality and incorruptibility does not constitute theosis in itself. Gregory envisions an eternal

\begin{quote}
Gregory of Nyssa The Great Catechism 14.
\end{quote}

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Ibid., 15.
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Ibid., 25. In reading Gregory, one gets the impression that our salvation is “generic.” If we recall, Gregory believes in a kind of “generic creation” in which all of humanity is created at once in God’s foreknowledge. In the Incarnation, there is a sense in which Christ is not merely “a man” but “man” (in general). Christ takes on the whole of humanity. But we must be careful on this point. Scuiry says: “If Christ’s hypostatic union with ‘humanity’ identifies him with the whole race, there is a danger of drawing the wrong conclusion that man is hypostasized into the Godhead and that in the Trinity there are not three hypostases, but multitudes and that man become God.” Scuiry, 39.
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The new divinized nature is begun in germ by baptism and is nourished by the Eucharist. Gregory looks at the Eucharist especially as the medicine of immortality. In his well-known passage in The Great Catechism, he affirms that the reception of Christ’s body and blood divinizes the recipient. See The Great Catechism 37. Here Platonic realism is evident.
\end{quote}
expansion and progression of the individual soul. Such a capacity for eternal progression is not found in Athanasius, but does recall Irenaeus. The basis of this principle is the ontological difference between man and God. Man's creaturely nature is defined as "becoming" as opposed to God's, which is "Being," so that human nature always remains capable of change, in contrast to its divine archetype.

Norman sees two important results of Gregory of Nyssa's optimistic anthropology. The first is that Gregory is allowed more latitude in emphasizing ethical striving and the development of virtue, although perhaps at the expense of divine grace. Second, Gregory's exclusion of unchangeability from theosis largely overcomes the paradox of Athanasius's soteriology. Whereas for Athanasius perfection is static, a state of being in which the ontological distance from God can never be lessened, for Gregory the essential difference between human nature and God is the very means of approach and assimilation: changeability allows limitless growth and progression. Theosis means that while we never reach God's infinite level of being, we never cease to develop godliness or to enjoy Him to our full capacity, which is itself always expanding. This limitless vista means that Gregory cannot fully define the content of theosis.

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Irenaeus Against Heresies 4.2.2.

Gregory of Nyssa The Great Catechism 21.

Gregory of Nyssa On Virginity 1, 2, 4, 6, 21; idem, The Great Catechism 35.
The same optimism permeates Gregory's view of history. He asserted that humankind was progressively developing towards the full growth of manhood like the seed is developing toward a mature plant. In his On the Soul and the Resurrection, Gregory follows Origen's lead in the assertion that ultimately all will be saved and evil eradicated. The assertion that salvation will be universally accomplished is based on Gregory's belief that the entire human race is the divine image in the creation.

**Antiochenes**

We have seen that the Athanasian stress on the unity of the two natures in Christ heightens the reality of theosis for man. The Antiochenes, however, were not so enthusiastic on the issue of theosis. The issue of theosis stands as a necessary background to the clash between Alexandrian and Antiochian Christologies in the fifth century. The clash occurred because Antiochenes insisted on the necessity of clearly distinguishing between the divine and human natures in Christ even after their union. Confusion of the natures would not only involve the Godhead in the suffering on the cross, but make redemption irrelevant to man, since such a Savior

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For a view of sacred history as one process of growth, Gregory used the word *akolutia*, which he took from the language of Greek philosophy, especially from Aristotle, who uses it in connection with the laws governing physical change and motion. Gregory applied it to the gradual unfolding of God's plan through all its phases. The ultimate goal of this plan is an assimilation to God. *Akolutia* actually is a process of theosis. Jean S. J. Daniélou, *The Lord of History: Reflections on the Inner Meaning of History* (London: Longmans, 1958), 251-252.
would be another entity than man. Therefore, because of its association with Alexandrian Incarnation Christology, theosis was played down by the Antiochenes. In fact, all of the Antiochenes, with the exception of Theodoret of Cyrus, shunned explicit theopoiesis language in their adoptive sonship Christology. Actually, the two-nature Christology of the Antiochenes led to their rejection of the traditional understanding of salvation as theosis.

The leading figure of the Antiochene Christology, Theodore of Mopsuestia, developed in many passages a scheme of two “states” or

The primary spokesman for this two-nature Christology was Theodore of Mopsuestia (c. 350-428). He emphasized the full humanity of Jesus, understanding this humanity not merely as distinct from the divinity, but as “autonomous” and personalized. See for example, Catechetical Homilies 12.9. He differs in some important respects with most of the Greek Fathers. He is concerned in all of his writings to underline the transcendence of God and to preserve a clear, irreducible distinction between God and His creation. It leads him to seek other conceptual models for the union of the Word with the man Jesus than that of a hypostatic union. There is a strong sense of the tension between the divine and human in him. “Theodore is utterly opposed to any mixing of the divine and the human, to any erasure of the gulf between Creator and created. That gulf can be bridged only by grace, and grace does not change nature.” J. E. M. Dewart, The Theology of Grace of Theodore of Mopsuestia (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1971), 147, n. 50.

For example, John Chrysostom (c. 347-407), at least in his later works, described salvation as assimilation to God by the active practice of virtues, especially Christ-like love or charity. But this is as far as he would go: he repudiated the practice of calling this assimilation a “divinization,” as non-scriptural. This is why Lossky characterizes Chrysostom as “a moralist rather than a theologian.” The Vision of God, 77. For a more extensive analysis, see Gross, 253-255.

Actually Theodoret does not speak of salvation in terms of divinization or of the creature’s participation in God’s nature, except when he is quoting earlier authors. See G. Koch, Strukturen und Geschichte des Heils in der Theologie des Theodoret von Kyros. Eine dogmengeschichtliche Untersuchung (Frankfurt: [n.p.], 1974), 242.
"aeons" in which humanity exists: the present state, a state of slavery to sin and death, and the state of moral and physical freedom and integrity, or immortality. He is emphatic, however, that immortality or incorruptibility does not constitute theopoiesis. Redeemed man is conformed to the likeness of the resurrected humanity of Christ, but he can never be like God, or participate in the divine nature.

The Church rejected the Antiochene Christology, since it "threatened to devalue salvation by pulling back from deification." But at the same time, the Antiochene disaffection with the long-held doctrine of theopoiesis signals a recognition of the inconsistencies which it entailed in the Christian doctrine in salvation.

Pseudo-Dionysius

In the sixth century--the years of the Monophysite controversy--the doctrine of theopoiesis, which had long been the background for doctrinal controversies in the Eastern Church,


Regarding the vision of God, Lossky concludes that the Antiochene school actually "completely rejects the vision of God properly so called, i.e. rejects any immediate communion with God and all possibility of the deification of created beings in the true sense of the word." The Vision of God, 90.

Norman, 237.
culminated in the mystical theology of Pseudo-Dionysius. Pseudo-Dionysius was a firm advocate of theosis, which he defined in mystical terms. It is in him that the mystical tradition of Origen—and with him of the Platonists—and the Eastern view of salvation as theosis come together. He defines theosis this way:

Theosis is assimilation to and union with God to the extent this is permitted. It is the common end of all hierarchy that a continual love of God and of divine things, carried out in a holy way in God and in unity, and, previously, the total and irreversible flight from what opposes it, the gnosis of what is as being, the vision and the science of the holy truth, participation in God in uniform perfection and in the One Himself so far as this is permitted.

It is clear from this definition that Pseudo-Dionysian philosophy is Neo-Platonism as propounded by Plotinus and taught in Pseudo-Dionysius's time by Proclus. It was Pseudo-Dionysius's purpose to place Neo-Platonism at the service of the Christian faith. As a result, the biblical conception of a historic

Although Gregory of Nyssa, following certain themes in Philo, Origen, and Neo-Platonism, revealed a mystical bent in his thinking (especially in his On the Life of Moses), it was Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite who became the inspiration for generations of later Christian mystics in both East and West.

In fact, in Dionysius, theosis replaces theopoiësis as a technical term for our assimilation to God, no doubt under the influence of Proclus and late Neoplatonism.

Pseudo-Dionysius On the Ecclesiastical Hierarchy 1.4.

'According to this system, the One in a process of universal progressive emanation produces the Intellect, which produces the World-Soul, from which all things proceed, including pure matter and even pure evil. In this scheme that which proceeds from the One will return mystically to the One. "The soul, then, by its natural kinship with the One can return to the source and be 'oned' with it." J. M. Rist, Plotinus: The Road to Reality (Cambridge: University Press, 1967), 230.

Redemption was replaced with the idea of mystical ascent to God through purgation, illumination, and union (perfection), the stages that were spelled out by Proclus, and transmitted to the Church by Dionysius. The whole Christian life came to be seen as a mystical ascent or return of the soul to union with God.

Pseudo-Dionysius is a champion of negative theology, and therefore it is impossible for him to talk about the transcendent God in positive statements. Affirmative or kataphatic theology cannot reach to the essence of God, which is totally indescribable in its reality. At the same time, there is the via negativa, which is the theme of apophatic or mystical theology and which leads in turn to the via mystica. By following this path one may come to the absolute knowledge of God. The soul passes beyond sense experience and the operations of the intellect. The soul plunges into "the darkness of unknowing," where the intellect experiences divine reality in a direct way, but without understanding this reality.


It is important to note that that which propels the soul to mystical heights is not love (as it is with Augustine and especially with Wesleyan tradition), but an act of the intellect that is purged from all thought, imagination, and experience so that the soul may be prepared to receive the divine impulse of God’s being.

Pseudo-Dionysius On the Divine Names 7.3; 13.3.

‘Pseudo-Dionysius Mystical Theology 1. Burgess adds: “To know God is not to know what is indeed known. This is a transcendent level of truth achieved through the mystical life, in a way of consciousness that belongs to God.” Burgess, 36. See also Lossky, The Vision of God, 102-103.
Pseudo-Dionysius also developed sacramental theology along the lines of "his mystical version of the doctrine of deification." Baptism, Eucharist, and Anointing are corresponding rites for purification, illumination, and union, but it is the Eucharist to which Dionysius devotes primary attention as the sacrament of theosis.

Pseudo-Dionysius differs from most of his predecessors in exploring the problem of the Trinity in connection with theosis. He appears to be most uncomfortable when he talks about the unique nature and offices of the Three Persons of the Godhead. Burgess is right when he says that "his [Pseudo-Dionysius] Christology is anemic and his pneumatology virtually nonexistent." As Berthold states,

the specifically Christian revelation of God as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit does not seem to mark Dionysius’ theological scheme to any great extent. Trinity seems to be merely the Christian name of the superessential monad.

Because of this, Dionysius’s writings were to be reinterpreted by his spiritual descendants so as to make provision for distinctions


Pseudo-Dionysius On the Ecclesiastical Hierarchy 3.7.

It is clear that Pseudo-Dionysius prefers unity to Trinity as an ultimate concept, although he attributes a Trinitarian nature to the Godhead as a natural expression of its supernatural fecundity. On the Divine Names 2.

Burgess, 37.

between the Three Persons of the immanent God who deals in human affairs, especially in the redemptive process.

Pseudo-Dionysius impacted both Eastern and Western Christian thought. Through his influence on such mystics as Erigena, Bernard of Clairvaux, the Victorines, and especially Meister Eckhart, the language of theosis survived in Western Christianity. In the East his influence is perhaps the greatest in the thought of Maximus the Confessor, John of Damascus, Symeon the New Theologian, and especially Gregory Palamas. Pseudo-Dionysius’s concept of the spiritual ascent through purification, illumination, and perfection into divine darkness, where God reveals Himself in ineffable light, became “standard theology for virtually all Eastern and Western mystics through the Middle Ages.” He provided the framework for mystical theology for both the Christian East and West.

Maximus the Confessor

Maximus the Confessor (c. 580–662) is a great proponent and synthesizer of earlier Christian traditions of the seventh century. It was Maximus who combined Pseudo-Dionysius’s apophatic vocabulary and the notion of a superessential monad with Gregory

Lossky notes that Dionysius’s influence on the West was only partial, for “the dynamic doctrine which determines the course of Byzantine thought has never been understood or adopted in the West.” The Vision of God, 104.

Norman, 248.


Burgess, 38.

Lossky, The Vision of God, 105.
of Nazianzus's awareness that the whole scope of salvation is trinitarian. In short, Maximus "turns apophatic theology around, from the speculative nihilism that was its potential outcome back to a concentration on the person of Jesus Christ."

Maximus understood salvation, defined as theopoiesis, as the chief theme of the Christian faith and the biblical revelation. "For St. Maximus," Lossky says, "deification, the supreme end of the human will, determines all the rest." Maximus goes as far as to say that theosis itself is natural to man since it was God's intention from the beginning. This doctrine is essentially dynamic and it supposes a double movement: a divine movement toward man consisting of making God partakeable of by creation, and a human movement toward God, willed from the beginning by the

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On theosis in Maximus the Confessor, see Stephen J. Juli, "The Doctrine of Theosis in the Theology of Saint Maximus the Confessor" LST dissertation, Catholic University of America, 1990.

Lossky, The Vision of God, 108. Thunberg points out that it is possible "to present his doctrine of deification as a summary of his whole theological anthropology." Thunberg, Microcosm and Mediator, 457.

Meyendorff notes that the conception of natural deification brings out the question of Maximus's dependence on Origenism and Evagrius. If union with God is natural for man, is he not by nature a divine spirit that merely returns to its primitive state and in which God is immanent? Meyendorff answers that "the intellectualistic and monistic conception of Origen's world ... is replaced by the biblical dualism of Creator-creatures." See his Christ in Eastern Christian Thought, 133.
Creator and restored in Christ. Because of that, Incarnation is crucial.

Incarnation is a major presupposition for theosis. Moreover, Incarnation was foreseen and foreordained irrespective of man's tragic misuse of his own freedom. According to Maximus, Adam was meant to be the first incarnation, the first union of God and man. Adam was made in the image of God, explains Maximus, in order that through the Spirit he might be born in God by his own free will, that "the same man" might thus be "on the one hand a creature of God by nature, and on the other hand a son of God and a god through the Spirit by grace." The union was recreated in the Incarnation of the Logos because the first Adam failed to attain it. The hypostatic union of the two natures in Christ in turn becomes the paradigmatic model for human deification.

Maximus's main personal contribution, according to Thunberg, lies in the way in which he combined the doctrines of Incarnation and theosis by linking them with the concept of perichoresis. Maximus is the first Christian writer who has given to the term

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Ibid., 141.
Maximus the Confessor The Ascetic Life I. See also Thunberg, 457.
Maximus the Confessor Questions ad Thalassium 60.
'Maximus the Confessor Book of Ambiguities 41.
Maximus the Confessor Epistles 2.
'Thunberg, 457.
perichóresis a central position within Orthodox Christology. This process of interpenetration, although maintaining the gulf and the fixity of the natures, "communicates the modes of existence as human virtues and divine attributes." This gave Maximus the right to affirm that "all that God is, except for an identity in ousia, one becomes when one is deified by grace."

Theosis is at one and the same time a gift of divine grace and an act of human free will. Maximus speaks about theosis as

Ibid., 26-27. The concept was originally developed by Stoic philosophers to describe a mixture in terms of a thorough and mutual penetration of all the parts of one nature into all the parts of another. See Harry A. Wolfson, The Philosophy of the Church Fathers. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1956, 418f. It was Origen who began to talk about the co-penetration of corporeal, spiritual and divine qualities. See Lossky, The Vision of God, 50. This term was frequently used in relation to theosis and the reciprocal relationship between human and Divine within the process of theosis. The term perichóresis was first used in a Christological context, probably by Gregory of Nazianzus, to stress the mutual interdependence of the two natures of Christ. See his Epistles, 101.

Wolfson, 453. This author emphasizes that Maximus did not hesitate to talk of a penetration "through" the other nature, and also that the process expressed through the concept of perichóresis is not regarded as one-sided but mutual. But Wolfson restricts the importance of this concept by underlining the fact that the actual reference is simply to the Incarnation (424). Lossky indicates that the impression of one-sidedness of perichóresis in the texts of Maximus is linked with the fact that the process of perichóresis is self-evidently regarded as starting from the side of God--and thus from the divine nature--because perichóresis is part of the economy of salvation (Incarnation). But when the Incarnation is a fact it implies then that the human nature is really made capable of penetrating into the divine. Lossky, Mystical Theology, 145-146. For a more detailed discussion on the concept of perichóresis in Maximus, see Thunberg, 21-37.

Maximus Book of Ambiguities 41.
available only through grace as a supernatural gift, but he also emphasizes the concept of free will.

The doctrine of theosis in Maximus’s theology is strongly characterized by a social dimension. Primarily it means imitation of Christ in charity, unselfish love, and service to the needy and oppressed.

John of Damascus

John of Damascus (c. 675-c. 749) is considered to be the last Christian writer of the Greek patristic age. The doctrine of theosis plays an important role in his theology, and this concept colors his treatment of many other issues. He, as many of his predecessors, was indebted to a culture deeply immersed in the traditional, Greek philosophical school of thought. Actually, he does not hide his positive attitude toward the various

Maximus Questiones ad Thalassium 15. Rusch notes that “as with Dionysius, in Maximus there is some ambiguity about the relative roles of grace and human free will in the process [of deification].” Rusch, 140. Maximus goes even as far as to say that our salvation depends on our will. One cannot conceive of a system of thought more different from Western Augustinianism; and yet Maximus is in no way a Pelagian. “His doctrine of salvation,” says Meyendorff, “is based on the idea of participation and of communion that excludes neither grace nor freedom but supposes their union and collaboration.” Christ in Eastern Christian Thought, 150.


philosophical schools, broadly using the metaphysical language in his dealing with the issue of theosis.

The first step in John's doctrine of theosis is the assertion that all things are deified to a certain extent simply because of having been created by God. Creation for him is nothing less than God's sharing His existence with other beings or things and allowing these things to have existence by means of their participation in Him. John talks about varying degrees of participation in God with rational beings participating most of all. Thus, the reason for man's creation is that he may participate in God, and this is the first step toward theosis.

According to John of Damascus, in the beginning, man was created with a dynamic nature, destined to progress to divine communion. Adam was "in a state of deification, by participation in the divine enlightenment." The concept of the "image and likeness to God" is important for John's understanding of theosis. He says that "image" refers to reason and free will, "likeness"

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John of Damascus The Orthodox Faith 1.7.28.

Ibid., 4.13.7; 2.2.1.

Ibid., 1.14.24; 4.13.11. Thus in John's theology, God pervades all things and all things participate in Him in order to exist. But this is not mere pantheism. John is very careful to point out that God is not contaminated by that in which He participates, and also that things participate in Him without ceasing to be what they are. Ibid., 1.14.28.

Himmerich notes that "the ontological foundation for deification is given by God in man's creation." Himmerich, 87.

John of Damascus The Orthodox Faith 2.12. John thus ignores, as does the whole of the Greek patristic tradition, the notion of a static "pure nature." Meyendorff, Christ in Eastern Christian Thought, 161.
refers to similarity to God "in virtue as is possible." Beings with reason and will participate even more in God, and thus by their creation in the image and likeness of God they enjoy a greater level of theosis. The Fall interrupted the process of theosis, but it did not utterly destroy the image of God in man. Man's nature, including its most important faculty of free will, was weakened. But with God's help (Incarnation), man may again receive that for which he was created--union with God.

Incarnation is crucial for theosis according to John of Damascus. Actually the central purpose for the Incarnation was theosis of man. The human nature that the Logos assumed was deified. It was not changed or eliminated; it remained human nature with human properties, but it was enriched with the divine properties. Thus, Christ, in whom human nature was joined to divine nature, and in whom this human nature was deified by the union, is also the exemplar for other human beings. Since the human nature of Christ was "saved, renewed, and strengthened," so the nature of other human beings can be saved, renewed and

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\[\text{John of Damascus} \textit{The Orthodox Faith} 2.12.1c.\]

John uses a terminology introduced by Maximus to designate the freedom of will. He speaks about gnomic and natural wills in man. For a discussion on this, see Meyendorff, \textit{Christ in Eastern Christian Thought}, 162-163.

For very good reason John has been called the doctor of the Incarnation. See P. Voulet, ed., \textit{Homélies sur la nativité et la dormation} (Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 1961), 11. Actually, one half of \textit{The Orthodox Faith} is concerned with the doctrine of the Incarnation.

\[\text{John of Damascus} \textit{The Orthodox Faith} 4.13.19.\]
strengthened—in a word, deified. Christ is “an ontological mediator” for us, since the very being of both God and man is found in Him.

John used the concept of perichōrēsis to indicate the relationship between the divine and human in Jesus Christ. This permeation or mutual indwelling of two natures is not, however, the action of the flesh, but the Divinity, for it is impossible that the flesh should permeate the Divinity. Rather the divine nature, once permeating the flesh, gives to it the same ineffable power of permeation; and this is indeed what John calls union. This same concept John uses to explain the presence of the Body and Blood of Christ in the bread and wine of the Eucharist, which, along with Baptism, he considers the means to accomplish theosis.

There is a third major aspect of theosis for John after creation and Incarnation, and this has to do with the life of virtue. All those who are being deified are called to exemplify deification in a life of virtue. It is important to realize, 

Ibid., 3.18.15.

Himmerich, 122.

It should be indicated that although human nature was united to God and was deified, it does not mean that all human persons were automatically deified too. John enters into a quite complicated scholastic discussion on universals and particulars in this matter. See ibid., 129-132. John also emphasized that for each individual human person to be deified, he must freely choose to be deified by means of his personal faith.

"John of Damascus The Orthodox Faith 3.19.

Ibid., 4.13.121-134. For a discussion on sacraments in John of Damascus and their role in theosis, see Himmerich, 143-162.
however, that for John the virtues are the result of deification and not the cause of it.

The development of the idea of theosis as an immediate experience of God, as union with Him and "participation" in Him, characterizes the later Byzantine theology with Simeon the New Theologian as one of its major exponents.

**Symeon the New Theologian**

Symeon the New Theologian (949-1022) is a major representative of the "experiential" tradition in Byzantium, following in the line of Evagrius and Macarius of Egypt, and anticipating Gregory Palamas. Meyendorff calls him "the prophet of Christian experience," which implies the possibility here on earth for each Christian to be consciously in communion with the divine life. "The reality of deification, which is neither a subjective state nor a purely intellectual experience, but the very content of the Christian faith, such is Symeon's own message." Basil Krivosheine expresses the idea of theosis in the thought of Symeon as following:

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See Himmelrich, 163-164.

Ware rightly notes that the doctrinal controversies from the fourth to the eighth century concentrated more especially on the first half of the Athanasian phrase, "God became man . . . ." Byzantine religious thought in the 11-14th centuries worked out the full implications of the second half, "that we might become God." See Timothy Ware, "Christian Theology in the East 600-1453," in A History of Christian Doctrine, ed. Hubert Culliffe-Jones (Edinburg: T. & T. Clark, 1978), 186.

Meyendorff, Christ in Eastern Christian Thought, 194.

Ibid., 195.
Divinization is the state of man's total transformation, effected by the Holy Spirit, when man observes the commandments of God, acquires the evangelical virtues and shares in the sufferings of Christ. The Holy Spirit then gives man a divine intelligence and incorruptibility. Man does not receive a new soul, but the Holy Spirit unites essentially with the whole man, body and soul. He makes of him a son of God, a god by adoption, though man does not cease being a man, a simple creature, even when he clearly sees the Father. He may be called man and god at the same time.1

Symeon deals with three major features of later Byzantine spirituality. First, he strongly insists upon the divine mystery and, as a result, the apophatic approach to God. He emphasizes that God cannot be known in Himself but He is to be known instead "from his effects." Second, we find in him a balancing sense of the nearness as well as the otherness of God: He is both transcendent and immanent; He can be known here and now, through direct personal experience. Symeon writes: "He who is God by nature converses with those whom he has made gods by grace, as a friend converses with his friends, face to face." And third, he repeatedly uses the symbolism of light. Mystical union with God takes the form of vision of divine radiance with the model of Christ transfigured upon the Mount of Tabor. It is possible for

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2 Symeon Orations 12.

But although Symeon, like most Eastern Christian writers after Pseudo-Dionysius and Maximus the Confessor, continuously speaks of the unknowability of the transcendent God, he prefers the language as well as the reality of immanence to that of transcendence, advocating direct, conscious experience of God. See Burgess, 64.

3 Symeon Orations 30.
"the pure in heart" to see God and to see him truly. Symecn, however, did not formulate a systematic treatment of the relation between transcendence of God and the identity of Him with the light. The task of articulating a new theology of the spiritual life, including the doctrine of God as light, was undertaken by Gregory Palamas more than three centuries after Symecn.

Gregory Palamas

The Greek Patristic tradition of theosis finds its fulfillment in the theology of Gregory Palamas (c. 1296-1359), the Byantine monk-theologian who later became Archbishop of Thessalonica and whose name is inseparably linked with the controversial doctrine of God and of the God-man relationship known as "Palamism." It is frequently suggested that Palamism was an attempt at theological justification of the hesychast practices of Mt. Athos. But Contos affirms that

Symecn, The Catechetical Discourses 4.12. He goes as far as to affirm that a man who does not see God in this life will not see Him in the life to come either.


However, among Western scholars, as we shall later see, the problem of whether Palamism finds itself in real continuity with the Patristic tradition remains a debated point.

The hesychast method was an acceptable means of enabling the believer to experience theosis. The "Jesus Prayer" is not only a means, but also an end in itself; that is, it is an energy in itself. See Allen, 79. S. Bulgakov speaks about the "universal value" of this prayer, because the Name of Jesus Christ has in itself the power of the presence of God and the power to deify the
the bulk of the Palamite corpus does not in fact relate to the conflict over methods and principles involved in hesychasm; it ranges over a much broader field of theological questions, and lays bare some of the most crucial differences of Latin and Greek thought.

The initial and most decisive motivation that pushed Palamas to the formulation of his theology was his concern to affirm the possibility and, indeed, the reality of communion with God Himself. Thus, Christianity for him is not merely a philosophical theory or a moral code, but it involves a direct sharing in divine life and glory, a transforming union with God. Gregory is a theologian of personal experience first of all.


Contos, The Concept of Theosis, 77.

Meyendorff points out that “the main concern of Palamas is to affirm that this goal [theosis] is not reserved to isolated ‘mystics’ but is, in fact, identical with the Christian faith itself and therefore offered to all the members of the Church, in virtue of their baptism.” John Meyendorff, The Byzantine Legacy in the Orthodox Church (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1982), 176.

Meyendorff qualifies the theology of Palamas with regard to the quality of our relations with God as “an existential theology.” John Meyendorff, A Study of Gregory Palamas (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1964), 202-207. It means that this theology is “personalistic” theology: persons take priority over existence, and existence takes priority over essence. The
Theosis for him is a gratuitous state wherein the created subject objectively transcends its ontological level as it is adopted by God and given the status of the uncreated realm. He writes, "Those who attain it become thereby uncreated, unoriginated and indescribable, although in their own nature they derive from nothingness." A way had to be found, Palamas maintained, to preserve the reality of salvation as deification without implying the absurd and blasphemous idea that those who were deified became "God by nature." The problem was solved by making a distinction between the totally unknowable essence of the Divinity and the divine actions or energeiai. "The deifying gift of the Spirit is not the superessential ousia of God, but the deifying activity energeiai of the superessential ousia of God." By adopting terms from Aristotelian philosophy, together with characteristic formulas of the Platonic and Neo-Platonic tradition, Gregory entered into a dialogue with the representatives of humanistic thought and of the secularized Christianity of his time.

Gregory's major opponent, a Greek Italian philosopher and theologian, Barlaam the Calabrian, rejected the claims of the same idea is seen in G. Barrois, "Palamism Revisited," SVTQ 19 (1975): 222.

'Gregory Palamas Triads 3.1.37.

'Ibid., 3.3.8. See also Pelikan, The Christian Tradition, 2:268.

'Gregory Palamas Triads 3.1.34.

'The term energeiai, while possessing a philosophical flavor, is in fact also scriptural. It is found several times in Paul's Epistles (Eph 1:19, 3:7; Phil 3:21; Col 1:29, 2:12).
hesychasts to direct knowledge and vision of God. He reduced knowledge of God to the level of a dialectic or irrational "illumination of the mind" in the case of extraordinary mystical experiences. In neither case was there a real communion with divine existence. He also denied a real distinction between divine essence and energies, Patamas emphatically stood for, since it gave a basis for the reality of theosis. During the early stages of the controversy, Akindynos, who had long been a friend of Patamas, and in some fashion, his pupil, tried to play the mediator's role, but soon he came to believe that Patamas had fallen into serious error. Akindinos charged Patamas more particularly with innovation: in his view the essence-energies distinction was not found in earlier tradition. His attitude necessarily led him to deny the reality of theosis as well. Because of the significance of this issue for this study, we need


Naturally the antipalamites acknowledged a difference between the essence and its created effects, but not as uncreated divine operations distinct, though inseparable, from the first cause. Barlaam considered that Patamas, in differentiating between the essence and the uncreated energies of God, was introducing a division into the Godhead, thereby impairing the divine simplicity. So, for Barlaam, the distinction is merely logical conjecture, necessary for the support of theosis but ultimately without any ontological significance. Otherwise it leads to "ditheism." On this controversy see Meyendorff, A Study of Gregory Patamas, 42-62.

Actually Akindynos in his Refutation of the Letter of Patamas accused Patamas of Monophysitism, for, according to him, any "participation by energy" was necessarily a confusion of the natures. See Meyendorff, Christ in Eastern Christian Thought, 205.
to look more thoroughly at Palamas’s teaching on the essence-energies distinction.

The main intention of Palamas in making such a distinction was to safeguard the reality of theosis on one hand and the reality of the transcendence of God on the other. He recognized the seeming inconsistency between a belief in the absolute transcendence of God and hesychasm, which affirmed confidently that God indeed could be known, experienced, and in which a person could participate. Thus, the essence-energies distinction functions as “the technical articulation” of this paradox.

Palamas stated his solution to the paradox as follows: God cannot be known, communicated with, or participated in as He is in His essence; but He can be known, communicated with, and participated in as He is in His energies. The distinction is made

A. N. Williams rightly notes that both Western and, to a lesser extent, Orthodox scholars of Gregory’s work tend to treat this distinction as a doctrinal end in itself, “as if his theological goal were the re-formation of the classical doctrine of God.” He points out that the essence-energies distinction is certainly important to Palamas, but not for its own sake. Williams, “Light from Byzantium,” 484. Lossky, defending Palamas, says that this distinction is “an inevitable theological postulate if we wish to maintain the real and not just the metaphorical character of deification, without a suppression of created being with the divine essence.” The Vision of God, 135.


Palamas affirms that the divine essence transcends all affirmation and negation to that extent that the term “essence of God” is itself misleading. To emphasize the inaccessibility of God’s nature in the process of theosis, Palamas needed more from the “essence” term that did his predecessors. So, he chose to signify the radical transcendence of the inaccessible aspect of God by qualifying “essence” as “superessential” or just replacing it with “superessence.” Triads 3.2.7. In doing so he was trying to skirt the danger that God’s inaccessibility would be lost in God’s immediate accessibility through theosis.
unavoidable in the context of the doctrine of theosis, which implies a participation of created man in the uncreated life of God, whose essence remains transcendent and totally unparticipable. Gregory said also that if one does not accept this distinction then it would be impossible to discern clearly between the "generation" of the Son and "creation" of the world.

This distinction does not imply or effect division or separation in God. It does not result in any composition, any synthesis in God; neither does it introduce any complexity. Gregory uses paradoxical language: "God suffers no multiplicity through these distinctions, nor any composition, for He is indivisibly divided and separately conjoined." Gregory insists that the distinction between essence and energies is a real one. "This is clearly not an intellectual distinction, hence an abstraction; it is ontological [sic]." Now we have come to the


Gregory Palamas Contra Akindynus 5.11.1-2; 5.21.1-2. According to Palamas, generation is always according to essence, but creation is according to energy or the will. For him this distinction is real, and not just a logical device. See Timothy Ware, "God Hidden and Revealed: The Apophatic Way and the Essence-Energies Distinction," ECR 7 (1975): 133.

Gregory Palamas Capita 91. In another place he says: "He [God] is all essence and all energy; but this does not deny the distinction between the two." Contra Akindynus 4.15.1.

'Contos, The Concept of Theosis, 91; idem, "Essence-Energies Structure of Saint Gregory Palamas with a Brief Examination of Its Patristic Foundation," GOTR 12 (1967): 286-287. The West criticized this distinction, as we will later see, emphasizing that it may have some validity on the level of epistemology, but should not be projected onto that of metaphysics. See, for example, R. Williams's dissertation on Lossky.

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point where we need to clarify what Gregory meant by divine energies.

The doctrine of the energies is central both to Gregory's Christology and soteriology. He is known as "the doctor of the uncreated energies." The clarification of this doctrine was his contribution to the theological development of the Eastern tradition of Christianity. The divine uncreated energies are the means by which the Three Persons of the Trinity created the world and the way in which they ordinarily communicate with it. They are "the eternal, immutable, continuous mode of God's id extra existence, changing only in degree and in the circumstances of its manifestation." While energy is not the essence, it does not exist per se, and, thus, may be termed an accident. However, when theologians employ the term, they do so only by way of establishing that the energy is not the essence of God. The energies, according to Palamas, are never considered as divine emanations, or as a diminished God. They are divine life, as given by God to His creatures. It is through these energies that God enters into a direct and immediate relationship with humankind. However remote from us in His essence, yet in His

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Gregory Palamas Contra Akindynus 6.21.1-2. Contos points out that "this is an example of the elaborate, meticulous, somewhat Aristotelian mode of argument" Palamas employs in support of the essence-energies premise. Contos, "Essence," 288.

Palamas Capita 127. Actually the energies cannot be accidents, because they are eternal and unchangeable, but inasmuch as they do not exist of themselves, per se, they are called by Palamas quasi-accidents.

Ibid., 135. And again, as Contos notes, there are here visible signs of the struggle to be free of Aristotelian categories. Contos, "Essence," 293.
energies God has revealed Himself to us. These energies are not something that exists apart from God, not a gift which God confers upon humans; they are God Himself in His action and revelation to the world. God exists complete and entire in each of His divine energies. Ware explains this as follows:

They [energies] are God himself, God in action, God in self-revelation, God as he enters into unmediated communion with his creatures. Furthermore, the energies are not a part or division of God, but they are severally and individually the whole God, God in his entirety. . . . The whole God is present . . . entire and undivided in each and all of the divine energies.

This is why, for Palamas, the union by the means of energy is a union with God Himself.

Another very important aspect of Gregory’s theology of theosis concerns the place of the divine persons relative to both essence and energies. The Aristotelian nature-energy dyad is not seen as fully adequate for Palamas. Actually, Palamas expresses

Aghiorougoussis affirms that the energies of God are the equivalent of the attributes of God in Scholasticism. The difference is that these attributes-energies have nothing static in themselves: they are not abstractions that we make concerning the qualities of God. They are “active manifestations” of the divine reality, as it can be manifested to man and known by him. Maximos Agiorgoussis, “Christian Existentialism of the Greek Fathers: Persons, Essence, and Energies of God,” JOTR 23 (1978): 29.

Gregory Palamas Triads 3.2.7.

Ware, “God Hidden and Revealed,” 135. See also idem, “The Understanding,” 124. It is difficult to reconcile this understanding of energies with what Maximus the Confessor wrote that we have “one and the same energy with God, but not one essence.” Book of Ambiguities 7.

For this, see D. Wendebourg, Geist oder Energie? Zur Frage de innergottlichen Verankerung des christlichen Lebens in der byzantinischen Theologie (Munich: Münchener Universitäts Schriften, 1980).
the being of God by the triad essence-hypostasis-energy.

Repeatedly in the writings of Gregory Palamas we find the expressions that divine energies are "hypostatic" or "enhypostatic." Each energy is a personal self-communication of God to a human person, but the energy is not itself hypostasis: the energy is not itself a divine person. The energies are distinct from the divine hypostases, but they are "enhypostatic" personal. The energies are enhypostatic also because the recipient of the divine self-communication and action is a person. M. E. Hussey comments that the energy, although real, does not have its own independent existence. It cannot manifest itself; nor can it be manifested by the divine essence; it can only be manifested by a person. He concludes:

The concept of enhypostasized, or personalized, energy enabled Gregory to affirm that the uncreated and eternal activity which flows from the divine essence is possessed, used and manifested by the divine persons and can be communicated to our persons so that we have a personal communion with God without mixture of divine and human natures.


Gregory Palamas Triads 1.3.7.

Ibid., 3.1.18.

Ibid., 3.1.9. Palamas uses the term enhypostatos, which was coined by Leontius of Byzantium in the Christological disputes of the sixth century. He established the distinction between enhypostasis (personal union) and anhypostasis (impersonal union). Human nature was enhypostasized by the Logos because it was possessed, used, and manifested by the Logos.

M. Edmund Hussey, "The Persons-Energy Structure in the Theology of St. Gregory Palamas," SVTQ 18 (1974): 27. It seems that Gregory has set up the divine persons as a kind of intermediary level between essence and energies. This is the primary weakness of Palamite theology: the creature cannot have
The term energy has a somewhat abstract and elusive flavor: What does it really mean? Fortunately, Palamas also uses words with a more specific connotation. First of all, in relation to us humans, it can be termed divine grace. Grace is not just a gift of God but God Himself in action. "Fundamentally the terms 'grace' and 'divine energies'," comments Ware, "both denote one and the same reality: God in action, transmitting his power and life directly to human persons." For Palamas—and this must be seen as the key to his redemptive theology—grace is not a means for an extrinsic justification of man. Man is involved in the supernatural life of God through that grace. It is uncreated, and it really has deifying character, for without this, man's theosis would not be effected really but only metaphorically. Deifying grace is not mere function or effect of God produced in the soul, but God Himself communicating Himself and uniting Himself in ineffable union with man. If grace is anything but an uncreated energy, it cannot unite man to a divine source. Thus, the identification of energeia with charis is of particular importance, and shows that the Orthodox teaching on the divine immediate contact with a divine person, only with a person as expressed through an energy. By locating the divine persons in the inaccessible, imparticpable divine essence, Gregory in effect has removed the Trinity from our salvation. D. Wendebourg, "From the Cappadocian Fathers to Gregory Palamas: The Defeat of Trinitarian Theology," in Studia Patristica, ed. Elizabeth A. Livingstone, vol. 17, part 1 (Oxford, England: Pergamon Press, 1982), 194-197. Gregory Palamas Contra Akindynus 7.4.1. Ware notes that the Palamite doctrine of energies is in fact an Eastern theology of grace. See Timothy Ware, "The Hesychasts: Gregory of Sinai, Gregory Palamas, Nicolas Cabasilas," in The Study of Spirituality, ed. C. Jones (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), 251.

Ware, "Salvation and Theosis," 177.
energies embodies a theology of grace. In equating grace with the uncreated energy of God, Gregory Palamas and the fourteenth-century Councils seem to exclude the notion of "created grace."

Palamas also talks about divine energy as light. The experience of divine light, which the Hesychasts beheld in prayer, Palamas called a "theology of fact." He saw the phenomenon of light as a factual and nonsymbolic revelation from God. God's energies take the form of light; this was a theological fact for Palamas. Contos summarizes the Palamite concept of God as light:

"The whole light thought is molded into an elaborate theology of theosis, which considers light-grace under four main headings: light as the nature of God, light as the manifestation of God, light as the knowledge of God, light as the deifying gift to man."

Since every energy of God is God Himself entirely, argued Palamas, and since the light is one of the uncreated energies of God, it is permissible to speak of God as light. Therefore, to deny the existence of an illuminating energy is to deny the

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Meyendorff, A Study of Gregory Palamas, 176-177.

He continues the tradition of the so-called "school of light," to which Origen, Evagrius, Macarius, Symeon the New Theologian, and some other Greek writers belong. Gregory of Nyssa and Dionysius speak about the "divine darkness" (darkness of incomprehensibility, darkness of unknowing), but this divine darkness is a "radiant" or "dazzling" darkness, due not to the absence but to the superabundance of light. See Ware, "Christian Theology in the East," 217.


"Contos, The Concept of Theosis, 62-63.
existence of God. This light is the natural glory of God, to speak of it therefore as a created light or symbolic, as Barlaam did, is to debase God to the level of creature. The vision of light is the vision of God Himself—however, in His energies and not in His essence. What the saints see is the same uncreated light that shone from Christ at the transfiguration on the Mount Tabor, and that will shine from Him equally at His second coming.

Palamas does not elaborate an explicit doctrine of the Church. This is because Orthodox thought rarely considers the Church apart from Christ and the Holy Spirit; thus, in his amplified theosis Christology as well as in his doctrine of uncreated grace, Palamas is in fact developing the crucial elements of a traditional ecclesiology.

After the vindication of Gregory Palamas’s views by the condemnation of Barlaam and Akindynos at the Synods of 1347 and

Palamas Contra Akindynos 1.7.5.

Ibid., 1.7.6.

Contos comments: “The whole soteriology is in reality a profound ecclesiology; neither a doctrine of soteria nor a doctrine of ecclesia has any meaning for him without the doctrine of theosis.” Contos, The Concept of Theosis, 137. It was Nicholas Cabasilas who placed a strong emphasis on the Church and the sacraments as the means of theosis. He continues a long and rich Byzantine tradition in his understanding of God as light and its teaching that the saints may attain theosis, in which they become one with the divine light. On main characteristics of Cabasilas’s spirituality, see B. Bobrinsky, “Nicholas Cabasilas and Hesychast Spirituality,” Sobornost’ 7 (1968): 483-510. What is unique with Cabasilas is his insistence that the only way to attain theosis is through the mysteries or sacraments of the church. In this he clearly moves away from Symeon the New Theologian’s teaching that there is a special experience of the Spirit of God outside the established sacramental system. Burgess, 77.
1351, Palamism was virtually forgotten for several centuries in the Orthodox Church. The reason for this may be found (as was already pointed out in the Introduction) in the domination of the Orthodox theological schools by Western, or Western-inspired, textbooks. A revival of Palamism had already begun to take place in the early 1900s among Greek, Russian, and Romanian Orthodox scholars who assumed that Palamism was an authentic expression of the Orthodox tradition. In part, the rediscovery of Palamas was triggered by the attack on Palamism mounted by the Catholic Byzantists Martin Jugie and S. Guichardan who fiercely criticized the essence-energy distinction, primarily in the name of the notion of simplicity of God as defined in Latin scholastic thought. They claimed that Palamism represented a distortion of the Greek Patristic tradition, and involved a false idea of God’s transcendence.

Ware summarizes the essential points affirmed by the council in 1351. Ware, “God Hidden and Revealed,” 120.


In the 1950-60s, several works written by Orthodox theologians appeared in French and English, which made Palamism more accessible in the West. The most significant contribution to Palamite studies was made by Meyendorff who viewed Palamism as “essential” for the reconstruction of the Church’s anthropology and soteriology.

The interpretation of Palamite theology offered by Meyendorff and other prominent Orthodox scholars was challenged by a group of French Dominicans from the study-center Istina. Contemporary Orthodox theologians were accused of having reinvented Palamism but they were not able to answer the basic arguments of Jugie’s critique. On the Orthodox side, strong feelings were expressed

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regarding the fact that Neo-Palamism is authentic Palamism, not a late derivative or a modified Palamism. It has the same goal: an immediate participation of the Christian in the life of the Triune God, theosis, and the same metaphysical principle: the distinction between the divine essence and energy. This distinction is fundamental in contemporary Orthodox thought "alike to the doctrine of the Trinity, to Christology, and to the theology of man's sanctification and 'divinization' theosis." Ware indicates that the West always misunderstood Gregory's teaching in the energies of God chiefly because it starts primarily from the idea of God as essence, whereas Gregory, in common with earlier Greek Fathers, started primarily from the idea of God as personal.

To sum up the significance of Gregory Palamas in the development of the Orthodox idea of theosis, we may say that the traditional paradox between the absolutely transcendent God and the reality of theosis not only finds in Palamas's teaching on the


Ware, "God Hidden and Revealed," 136. Thomas Anastos argues that Palamas's theory of deification spun through the terms and logic of the essence, energies, and hypostasis scheme previously embodied by Palamas's predecessors. See Thomas Anastos, "Gregory Palamas' Radicalization of the Essence, Energies, and Hypostasis Model of God," GOTR (1993): 335-349. It is quite difficult, however, to reconcile the strong anti-Palamite position of many bishops during Palamas's time with affirmation by contemporary Orthodox theologians that essence-energies distinction was taught before Palamas by many Greek Fathers.

Ware, "Christian Theology in the East," 221.
uncreated divine energies its final and systematic expression but also its theological and philosophical explanation.

Theosis in Russian Religious Thought

While realizing the necessity of the Patristic background for analyzing the doctrine of theosis in Lossky, I assume that Lossky could not be unreceptive to the ideas of his immediate antecedents in the contemporary Russian religious thought. It is therefore desirable to turn to a brief survey of Lossky's immediate background in Russian religious philosophy and theology in attempt to identify some of its basic concerns in order to assess how far Lossky may be said to stand within his ecclesiastical tradition as regarding the issue of theosis. For the sake of the better organization of our study, I will discuss, first, philosophical tradition and then 'ecclesiastical'.

Philosophical Tradition

Lossky was brought up at St. Petersburg in a vigorous intellectual environment. It was the time when an impressive number of the Russian intellectuals turned to the Church in believing that a religious world-view was the only bulwark able to resist the atheism and materialism of the radical intelligentsia with her political and social irresponsibility. The prime concern of these thinkers was the attempt to synthesize or at least to reconcile religion with modern secular culture.

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1Frederick C. Copleston, Philosophy in Russia (Tunbridge Wells, England: Search Press, 1986), 204.

One of those who exerted a tremendous influence on most Russian thinkers of the twentieth century was Vladimir Soloviev (1853-1900). The traditional Orthodox notion of theosis is expressed in Soloviev's writings by the idea of "pan-unity" or reality as one. Pan-unity appears as an ideal, as something to be attained. Soloviev speaks about the progressive transfiguration of the world, of its gradual divinization. The culminating point in this process is the Incarnation of the Son of God. The belief that Jesus Christ embodied divine and human nature, and that He entered the course of human history, and thus "sanctified" it making the spiritualization of humanity a real possibility is central for Soloviev's teaching on Godmanhood. Actually, Godmanhood is


"The gradual realization of the ideal pan-unity is the meaning or goal of the world process." Ibid., 3:144. The key word here is spiritualization (odukhovorenie) of the world. Ibid., 11:304-305. In his discussion of spiritualization Soloviev focuses upon the evolution of the whole created order, and in this he anticipates the ideas of Teilhard de Chardin. Jonathan Sutton, The Religious Philosophy of Vladimir Solovyov (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1988), 73.

Soloviev, 3:165. Soloviev refers to Christianity with its teaching on the Incarnation of the God-man Jesus Christ as the "end point" and "summation" of the cosmic process. Ibid., 4:158.
another expression for the idea of theosis in Soloviev. Mankind is called to become one divine-human organism. But human beings cannot fulfill this vocation unless enlightened and inspired by Sophia, the divine wisdom. It is the task of Sophia to restore unity, to unite human beings in one divine-human organism. In the work of restoring the world to its original unity it is the Church which is to play the key role. Soloviev explicitly equates the Church, this ideal community of believing Christians, with Sophia. Through and in the Church, holds Soloviev, individual Christians can become one body, and the multiplicity of the created order can be brought back to unity, unity which has remained constant and eternal in God.

In summary, the whole cosmic salvific process is presented by Soloviev in quite Plotinian way as being developed in three stages: (1) a stage of complete undifferentiated unity; (2) a stage of multiplicity of the created order which is distinct from

This idea is worked out in Soloviev’s Chtenia o Sodochelovechestve (See Sobranie sochinenii, 3:1-181). For a critique of this idea from the standpoint of traditional Orthodox theology, see V. Benkovsky, “Ideia vseedinstva v filosofii Vladimira Solov’eva,” Pravoslavnaiia mysl’ 10 (1955): 45-59.

The idea of Sophia evolved in Soloviev’s writings from understanding it as “the world soul,” or as nature in its spiritual aspect, to conceiving it as “the true rationale and end of creation,” which is the divine life in the Church. Brown, 50-51; Copleston, 224-225.

Ibid., 260-261.

It is this confusion of the Church with the cosmos that Lossky criticized in Soloviev. Lossky, Mystical Theology, 112.

the Divine Absolute; 3) the striving and voluntary return of the created order through Godmanhood of the Logos and by means of Sophia to unity with God.

Soloviev's speculations on Sophia inspired the whole group of religious thinkers of the s.c. sophiological school: Pavel Florensky (1883-1937), Sergius Bulgakov (1871-1944), and Simeon Frank (1877-1950). Florensky tried to "Christianize" the sophiological teaching of Soloviev but he "seems even further away from any satisfactory resolution." The idea of vseedinstvo is the foundation of his sophiological reflections. This ultimate, inexplicable oneness of all in the Absolute is realized through Sophia. Sophia in its divine aspect is of God's very essence and is His very creative love. It "penetrates the depths of the Trinity" and, as such, is a "fourth person," but a person that is not consubstantial to the Trinity but "admitted within divine life through divine condescension." That means that in its terrestrial

Copleston concludes: "The ancient cosmological idea of plurality as a falling away from unity and of a return to unity in God or the Absolute is thus reaffirmed by Soloviev, though he places the idea in a Christian setting." Copleston, 227.

Slesinsky notes, that the overriding idea linking the views of Florensky, Bulgakov, and Frank is that of "the correlativity that obtains between God and the world, the Creator and his creature." Robert Slesinsky, "The Relationship of God and Man in Russian Religious Philosophy from Florensky to Frank," SVTQ 36 (1992): 223.

Levitsky, 156.

Williams, "The Theology of Lossky," 227.

Florensky develops these ideas in his main theological work, entitled Stolp i utverzhdenie istiny (The pillar and foundation of truth) (Moskva: [n.p.], 1914).

Ibid., 323-324.
aspect, Sophia is the realized love of God in His divine energies and, thus, His manifested, "creatural" wisdom. It seems that there is no necessity for creation in Florensky's sophiology. Lossky twice refers to Florensky in Mystical Theology, and, in some respects, their concerns are similar. The closest parallel between them, however, is in a conviction that reason is totally incompetent to pronounce dogmatic statements. What is lacking in Florensky, and what actually cuts him off from Lossky, is a sense of history, as Florovsky points out. It was Sergius Bulgakov, however, a close friend of Florensky, in debate with whom Lossky's attitude to sophiology in general and his position on theosis were elucidated.

Bulgakov viewed sophiology as the only philosophical approach able to counteract secularization faced by contemporary

Meyendorff points out that this concept is somewhat parallel to the idea of "deification by grace," or "by energy," found in Greek patristics and Byzantine Palamism. But because of the unusual terminology and the absence of a clear affirmation of divine transcendence and creation in time, he associates Florensky's thought with the gnostic tradition. Meyendorff, "Creation in History of Orthodox Theology," 31.

Like Origen centuries earlier, Florensky considers any real existence to be divine and eternal— not only in its origin but in its subsistence. Meyendorff concludes, that in Florensky the significance of a creation in time is greatly reduced, if not totally suppressed. Ibid.

Lossky, Mystical Theology, 65, 106.

Williams considers this fact as an important departure from Soloviev's epistemological optimism. "The Theology of Lossky," 232.

Florovsky, Futi russkogo bogoslovia, 493-494.
Christianity. For Bulgakov, the central problem of sophiological reflection concerned the relation of God and the world or, otherwise put, God and man. According to him, sophiology is nothing but the full, dogmatic articulation of the more foundational idea of “Godmanhood,” which expresses the basic unity of God with his creation. The notion of “Godmanhood” attempts to capture the duality of God-in-the-world and the world-in-God, but without effacing their essential difference. Bulgakov bases his doctrine in the Chalcedonian dogma of the person and nature of Christ. Actually he goes beyond the negations of Chalcedon and develops the dogma cataphatically. Bulgakov’s starting point is the following proposition: for God to become incarnate, there must be some common point between God and man. He says:

The union of the two natures, the divine and the human, must be something more than the mere mechanical conjunction of two


Bulgakov saw his task in conceptualizing unity of God with his creation while, at the same time, avoiding the two traditional extremes of Manichean dualism and pantheistic monism. Sergius Bulgakov, Svet nevechernii (The unfading light) (Moskva: [n.p.], 1917; repr., Westmead, England: Gregg International Publishers, 1971), iv. Recognizing that there is some truth in each view, Bulgakov sees not “a synthesis [as Hegel would say], but a vital unity.” Ibid. See also, Winston F. Crum, “Sergius N. Bulgakov: From Marxism to Sophiology,” SVTQ 27 (1983): 14.

Bulgakov, The Wisdom of God, 128.
alien principles. That would be a metaphysical impossibility.

What is the solution? Bulgakov finds it in two apparently contradictory notions: "divine godmanhood" and "creaturely godmanhood." Divine godmanhood is the primordial manhood in God in the image of which God created man. Conversely, the creaturely godmanhood is the divinity in man. Bulgakov summarizes this as following:

Man as having God's image is god-like, and God as having his image in man is man-like. There exists a positive relationship between God and man which may be defined as godmanhood.

Since Divinity is the prototype of humanity and humanity is the image of Divinity, both man and God have common points. In a sense, both man and God are theandric. To define this godmanhood, to locate it and describe it, both in God and man, Bulgakov uses the concept of Sophia.

Sophia is found in both God and man, and as such, she is an entity which bridges the gulf between the absolute Creator and the created order. Bulgakov makes a logical distinction between the divine Sophia and creaturely sophia. The divine Sophia is divine


'Sergius Bulgakov, *Social Teaching in Modern Russian Orthodox Theology* (Evanston, IL: Seabury Western Theological Seminary, 1934), 13.

nature, a common substance \( \text{	extit{ousia}} \) of the three hypostases. He says:

The tri-hypostatic God possesses, indeed, but one Godhead, Sophia; possesses in such a way that at the same time it belongs to each of the Persons, in accordance with the properties distinguishing each of these persons. 

Thus, the persons of the Holy Trinity are founded on a single principle and ground, which Bulgakov chooses to call the divine Sophia. The creaturely Sophia, according to Bulgakov, is the image of God in the world and especially in man. If divine Sophia can be described as the prototype of the world, creaturely Sophia is actually the world and man, as fashioned after the divine Sophia. Using Aristotelian terminology, creaturely Sophia is entelechy and telos of the emerging world. As such, she is the

Bulgakov does not tolerate any suggestion of the impersonal in the doctrine of God. So, “by glossing the dry and colorless term ousia with the radiant name of Sophia, he thought to infuse a new fervor and vitality into dogma, without loss to orthodoxy.” Barbara Newman, “Sergius Bulgakov and the Theology of Divine Wisdom,” SVTQ 22 (1978): 44.

Bulgakov, The Wisdom of God, 56.

At first, Bulgakov described Sophia as a fourth hypostasis (see Svet nevechernii), but in response to vigorous criticism, he corrected and refined his doctrine by developing the notion of “hypostaseity” (ipostasnost’). Newman, 42. See also Zenkovsky, 901-905; Williams, “The Theology of Lossky,” 41.

Bulgakov follows Platonic concepts used in some patristic writings when he sees the creation of the world as creation on the basis of the divine prototype in the nature of God Himself. Wisdom of God, 99.

Bulgakov finds the bases of his teaching in the Biblical in principio and the patristic ex nihilo. He interprets the beginning or arche (Gen 1:1; John 1:1) in which all things were made, as none other than the divine Sophia. Creation can most simply be described as the divine nature projected onto the void. For a helpful discussion on this, see Crum, 16; Newman, 53-54.
World-Soul, the living plenitude of creation in its all-unity.

The paradox of distinction-in-unity, which lies at the heart of trinitarian and christological dogma, also marks Bulgakov’s doctrine of creation. The world is both created and uncreated, consubstantial with God and independent of him. This is also true with regard to man. “Man is at once created and uncreated, absolute in relativity and relative in absoluteness, . . . a living antinomy, . . . an incarnate contradiction.” The source and cause of man’s absoluteness is the divine image according to which he was created. Image is “the irremovable basis of our being,” and it is the ideal according to which the divine “likeness” is fashioned. The task and goal of one’s life with God is, by grace, to bring the likeness into conformity with the image. As these become the same, a person is “divinized.”

Bulgakov, Svet nevechernii, 223-225. In other words, Sophia is between God and creation, constituting “neither the one nor the other, or even appearing as both at once.” Ibid., 214. “With one side she is involved in being; but, with the other she is transcendent to it, escapes from it.” Ibid. Similarly, she is between eternity and time, although participant in both. Ibid., 115. With respect to space “Sophia is superspatial, but at the same time she is the basis of every kind of spatiality.” Ibid., 116.

Bulgakov, Wisdom of God, 115.

Bulgakov, Svet nevechernii, 278. Bulgakov quite often uses this word “antinomy.” Actually, all Bulgakov’s theology is “antinomical” in its character. Williams, “The Theology of Lossky,” 39-40; Crum, 15; Harakas, “Sergius Bulgakov and His Teaching,” 104.

'Bulgakov, Svet nevechernii, 277.

Ibid., 309.
Since we are unequal to our primary task because of the Fall, “a new act” was “demanded” of God, namely, “a new act of creating the world in a perfect man through the incarnation.” By becoming man, God did not need to discard or revise his original plan. The creation is indeed to be perfected in and through Adam (or humankind), but more gradually, by means of perfecting us in and through Christ, who is our “deepest basis,” our “most intimate essence.” He reminds us of our lost entelechian form. This process is sustained now “only in the Church and through the Church, in which dwells Christ.”

Concluding the brief survey of Bulgakov’s system, we may say that it combines in itself the postulates of panentheism (“God is in the world and the world is in God”) and patristic theosis (“God became man that man might become God”). Bulgakov arrives to “panentheosis,” the bold eschatology which fulfills and in fact, underlies his teaching on creation. This process, which is basically good and positive, may be characterized as realization

The distinctive characteristic of the fallen condition of the world, according to Bulgakov, is its “bad multiplicity” or rank individualism. Svet nevechernii, 233.

Ibid., 336.

Ibid., 339. It must be emphasized that the Fall is not primary cause of the Incarnation in Bulgakov’s system. God did not become man because man fell, but created man that he might assume flesh. Such an idea was taught by some Eastern fathers, mainly Maximus the Confessor and Isaac the Syrian, and is also known in the West through Duns Scotus. For discussion on this see Newman, 62.

Bulgakov, Svet nevechernii, 346. Bulgakov affirms that in the Church “humanity . . . has been regenerated,” in the Church the process of divinization is realized, in the Church the manifestation and operation of Sophia are especially clear. Ibid., 345.
of potentiality, or organic growth, or obozhenie theosis. Since God and the world are consubstantial, since the divine Sophia is the one foundation of the cosmos, this process cannot but lead to universal salvation, which Bulgakov actually teaches.

The philosophical system of Simeon Frank represents "the most profound and consistent development of the idea of pan-unity" although without recourse to the notion of Sophia. His teaching on God and the Absolute, as well as on the relationship between God and man and the world, follows from this affirmation of reality as pan-unity. Frank conceives God as a "metalogical unity" which comprises all reality within itself. However, Frank's refusal to erect an impenetrable barrier between natural and supernatural is in danger of blurring the distinction between created and uncreated. Frank rejects both the idea of creation out of nothing and that of emanation, if these theories are understood literally, and proposes that the world is better...

Newman notes that "panentheosis" of Bulgakov is sufficiently close to the apokatastasis taught by Origen, although the metaphysical setting and the form of expression differ. Newman, 66.

Levitsky, 157; Zenkovsky, 253.

Slesinsky, 233; Williams, "The Theology of Lossky," 245.

'Frank, like Soloviev and all defenders of the metaphysics of pan-unity, converts the concept of Godmannot, which has meaning in Christianity only on the foundation of the Incarnation, into a general metaphysical concept. Zenkovsky, 863.

'S. L. Frank, Predmet znania (St. Petersburg: Tip. P. G. Shredera, 1915), 235-240. Copleston notes that in defending this idea, Frank stood close to the writings of the western religious thinker Nicholas of Cusa. Copleston, 356. See also Slesinsky, 234.

'Copleston, 360.
regarded as the "immanent expression" of divine creativity than as its "result". There is clearly a current in Frank’s thought which could be called pantheistic, though, like Bulgakov, he insists that there is difference between pantheism and panentheism. He even compares his panentheism to Palamism. He criticises all automatist and determinist views of salvation, insisting on the need for personal appropriation of redemption, for synergy.

Personality is the central category in the writings of Nicholas Berdiaev (1874-1948), probably the most widely translated and read of the Russian religious philosophers in exile. Personality, as distinguished from individuality, is a religious category, according to him. That is to say, the human being is a


Nikolai O. Lossky criticises Frank for his pantheistic tendencies in his History of Russian Philosophy. Zenkovsky agrees with this 872, although Slesinsky is less categorical 234-235.


Frank, Reality and Man, 126. He affirms, in Palamite vein, that God’s being "for us", "God-and-the-world", does not exhaust "Deity", the inaccessible inner "fulness and harmony" of God, above and beyond his involvement in creation. Ibid. Being pantheistic or not, his entire philosophic conception is permeated by a sensitivity for the personal. He clearly distinguishes personality from individuality. Ibid., 23-24, 60-62; cf. idem, God With Us, 48. See also Williams, "The Theology of Lossky," 247; Slesinsky, 234.

person only as related to God. Hence, the importance of the doctrine of Godmanhood for Berdiaev. "Both philosophy and theology," he says, "should start neither with God nor with man ... but rather with God-Man." The concept of Godmanhood, in Berdiaev's thinking, should not to be understood as a metaphysical doctrine. It is rather an attempt to describe that which is unfathomable, irrational, and inexpressible—a mystery of which a man can become aware only in the depths of his existence, not by means of reason, but by intuition. It is a myth which can be expressed only in terms of spiritual experience, not rational categories. Berdiaev describes the myth of Godmanhood as the "drama of love and freedom between God and man, the birth of God in man and the birth of man in God." Both biblical narrative and spiritual experience disclose the fact that God longs for man, and that man longs for God. They need each other. Their reciprocal relationship is dramatic, that is, dynamic: there exist between God and man two irresistible movements toward each other, the


'Berdiaev, Freedom and Spirit, 199.

movement of God towards man, and of man towards God. Those movements are characterized by freedom and creativeness. The creative act that God awaits from man, is participation in His own work of creation. That creation has not been completed: its completion has been handed to man. Although vitiated by the Fall, this creative calling for man was restored by Christ, the God-Man. The race of the New Adam is called to prepare the world for its

This truth finds its fullest and most concrete expression in Christ. Berdiaev writes, "The coming of Christ, the God-Man, is a perfect union of these two movements, the realization of unity in duality and of the divine-human mystery." Berdiaev, Freedom and Spirit, 189. Berdiaev interprets the Christological dogma not only in relation to the Person of Christ, but also in reference to every human being. Ibid., 45. This allows him to affirm that "Christology is the only true anthropology." See N. Berdiaev, The Meaning of the Creative Act (London: Victor Gollancz, 1955), 81. Berdiaev asserts that the Council of Chalcedon beclouded the relationship of man to Christ and of Christ to God by presupposing an irreconcilable metaphysical dichotomy between human and divine, or natural and supernatural. He rejects the distinction between natural and supernatural because, in his view, there is not and cannot be anything superior to the human-divine entity (Godmanhood) as experienced within the spiritual depths of a person. Vallon, 197.

As a true "existential" thinker, he puts freedom, rather than "being", at the basis of his philosophy. N. Berdiaev, Dream and Reality: An Essay in Autobiography, trans. K. Lampert (London: n.p., 1950), 46, 100; cf. 102. See also Copleston, 373.

Creativity, according to Berdiaev, is that essential attribute which is common to God and man alike, indeed, it is the very image of God in man: "As the image and likeness of the Creator, man is a creator too and is called to creative cooperation in the work of God." Berdiaev, The Destiny of Man, 69.


Berdiaev strongly opposes the "juridical" theory of redemption as a way for understanding the salvific work of Christ. He writes: "The coming of Christ and Redemption can be spiritually understood only as a continuation of the creation of the world, as the eighth day of this creation, that is to say, as a cosmogonic and anthropogenic process, as a manifestation of divine love in creation, as a new stage in the freedom of man." Freedom and Spirit, 176.
transfiguration, for the advent of the Kingdom of God which can only be a Divine-human kingdom. The end of history "is theosis, deification, attained through man's freedom and creativeness which enrich the divine life itself."

Discussion on the immediate philosophical background of Lossky's theology of theosis would be incomplete without at least mentioning two other names: L. P. Karsavin (1882-1952), Lossky's teacher at St. Petersburg University, and N. O. Lossky (1870-1965), Vladimir Lossky's father. Karsavin paid special attention to philosophy of history, identifying the history of mankind with preparation for the Incarnation and with the development of the Church. His metaphysics of pan-unity continues the sophiological tradition in Russian philosophy. In quite Plotinian fashion, he affirms that "the unity of the world is prior to its multiplicity, and this multiplicity is resolved in unity." All creation is 'theophanic', which means for Karsavin that "all the positive content of the creature is the content of the divine being."

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Berdiaev, The Destiny of Man, 297. Berdiaev was clearly impressed by the Patristic notion of theosis pointing out that only in the "Johannine Church," which is the Orthodox Church, does man's creativity have the possibility of fulfillment. The Meaning of the Creative Act, 299.

Williams, talking about Karsavin's influence on Lossky, points out that "his [Karsavin's] concern with the patterns of religious history in Europe is very clearly reflected in his pupil's work." Williams, "The Theology of Lossky," 250.

L. Karsavin, Noctes Petropolitanae (Peterburg: 15-ia Gos. Tip., 1922), 106. Strictly speaking, Karsavin is talking here about pan-unity, i.e. a unity which embraces both the world and all that is beyond and above it--the Absolute.

N. O. Lossky, History of Russian Philosophy, 313. N. Lossky sees the Karsavin's system as a form of pantheism, and although Karsavin tries to distinguish his system from pantheism by
Karsavin sees each man as a potential cosmos developing towards the realization of pan-unity in ever higher forms of organic unity. Far more significant for this study, however, are Karsavin's historical writings and especially his book on the Fathers, which is of no small importance as promoting the patristic revival in twentieth century Orthodox theology. In this book, Karsavin puts a special emphasis on the idea of personality and its value as one of the fundamentals for Christian theology. In the context of the hypostasis, he considers the filioque clause as containing perversion of the main basis of Christianity. Belittling the Holy Spirit, he says, leads to belittling Christ in His humanity and to the idea that "empirical existence cannot be wholly deified or become absolute; an impassable barrier is fixed between the absolute and the relative."

N. O. Lossky tried to present a unified conception of reality, but he was at pains to avoid the pantheistic tendency which was a feature of the philosophies of Frank and Karsavin. Following Bergson, Lossky begins from a view of the world as an

pointing to his theory of created being, "this attempt to escape from pantheism is utterly unsatisfactory." Ibid., 312.

Karsavin, Noctes Petropolitanae, 73. See Zenkovsky, 949.


Ibid., 154-156.

L. Karsavin, Vostok, Zapad i russkaia ideia (Peterburg: Academia, 1922), 41.
organic whole. His metaphysics is a revision of Leibniz's theory of monads. Lossky does not apply the idea of creation to the world as a whole, but only to its fundamental 'units of being', which he calls 'substantival agents'. The substantival agent, which is either a potential person or an actual person, is the fundamental mode of being.' Lossky's hierarchic conception of reality, a conception which can be associated with the Neoplatonist tradition, does not exclude the idea of development, of change. He admits interaction between agents, and, together with Leibniz, he envisages the possibility of a monad evolving from the stage of being an atom to the status of a person. This process of development he calls 'reincarnation'. N. Lossky writes:

in the process of reincarnation all agents sooner or later overcome their selfishness and are vouchsafed deification through grace. But since the process of development is carried on by means of free creative acts, it frequently is not a direct ascent to the Kingdom of God, but contains temporary falls and deviations.

This is the foundation for his intuitivist theory of perception, which posits a real pre-cognitive contact between the subject and the external world. Nicholas O. Lossky, The Intuitive Basis of Knowledge. London: Macmillan and Co., 1919.

'Zenkovsky, 662-663; Copleston, 363.

For the most subtle exposition of Nicholas Lossky's metaphysics, see his The World as an Organic Whole, trans. N. Duddington (London: Oxford University Press, 1928).

'Lossky calls his system 'hierarchical personalism' or 'panvitalism'. Nicholas O. Lossky, Value and Existence (London: Allen & Unwin, 1935), 95.


'N. Lossky, History of Russian Philosophy, 264.
Such, according to N. Lossky, is the 'normal evolution' of the cosmos. The final end of every personal being in this process, is the absolute fullness of being, which is realized as participation in God. N. Lossky comments:

The first and fundamental condition of realizing that end is the participation of the created personality in the perfect fullness of life of the Lord God Himself. To render this possible, the ontological gulf between God and the world has to be bridged.

This gulf is bridged, according to N. Lossky, by the Logos who, uniting human and divine natures, from all eternity exists both as God and as the Heavenly Man, i.e., as ideally perfect man, such as He is in the Kingdom of God.

Although some aspects of N. Lossky’s thought are grounded in Orthodox tradition, he is not an Orthodox thinker. He was eagerly concerned to establish connections between his system and Orthodoxy, but quite often traditional theological positions were sacrificed in his writings to the needs of his metaphysical construction. This is why his son, V. Lossky, as Williams points out, had little sympathy with his father’s metaphysics.

N. Lossky, Bog i miru i o, 26-27; Zenkovsky, 666.
N. Lossky, History of Russian Philosophy, 259.
Ibid.

'For example, his defense of creation ex nihilo (ibid., 265), insistence on deification as the end of Christian life, attained through participation in Christ’s deified human nature (ibid., 259), conception of evil as rooted in self-love (ibid., 261-263).

As an example of such an attempt, see Nicholas O. Lossky, "Personalist Christian Metaphysics," ATR 39 (1957): 331-344.

Williams, "The Theology of Lossky," 4.
It is quite clear that Lossky's doctrine of theosis has little in common with sophiological idea of pan-unity. Realizing that all the attempts to accommodate the Hegelian-sophiological approach to the problem of salvation within an Orthodox framework have failed, Lossky seeks a deeper integration of his system into historical Christianity and 'ecclesiastical tradition' of more recent times.

'Ecclesiastical' Tradition

If we expect to find the elaborated idea of theosis in Lossky's immediate antecedents in 'ecclesiastical' tradition, we will be disappointed. The very notion is totally absent from the theological vocabulary of the Orthodox theologians preceding Lossky. However, the roots of some of Lossky's ideas can be traced in contemporary Orthodox theology. Among those who might be considered as most significant and interesting precursors of Lossky, are Philaret of Moscow and Antony Khrapovitsky.

Lossky calls Philaret of Moscow (1782-1867) a great Orthodox theologian of the last century. Lossky commends him for defending a mystical, experiential character of Orthodox theology as opposed

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"In 1909, I. Popov wrote that the idea of theosis was totally forgotten in contemporary theology. I. B. Popov, "Ideia oboznenia v drevne-vostochnoi tserkvi," Voprosy filosofii i psychologii 97, no. 2 (1909): 165.


Lossky, Mystical Theology, 111."
to Latin scholasticism of the eighteenth century academies. Lossky quotes him with some frequency, which is a clear evidence that he regarded him as an authority of major significance. The theme of kenosis is fundamental to Philaret's thinking. The humility, self-sacrifice and obedience of the Son of God are constantly presented as the paradigms for Christian living. Moreover, he extends the kenotic theme into the innermost life of the Godhead, seeing the Trinity in terms of radical self-sacrifice. It is precisely this extension and deepening of the idea of kenosis which characterizes Lossky's exposition of relations between God and man and the doctrine of theosis.

Metropolitan Anthony Khrapovitsky (1863-1936) was another spokesman for an essentially experiential theology based on personalism and synergism. The distinction between person and nature is of fundamental significance for him. The primitive ontological unity of human nature is indispensable to his

Ibid., 9. On the issue of Western influence in the Orthodox theology in general and soteriology in particular in eighteenth century see Florovsky, Puti russkogo bogosloviia, chap. 4, passim.

Lossky, Mystical Theology, 3, 75, 85, 92, 105, 107, 111, 131.


Metropolitan Philaret, Slova i rechi, 4 vois. (Moskva: n.p., 1892), 1:153a-160b.

Lossky, Mystical Theology, 144-145.

theology, and he sees this unity as expressed in the general will. As a result of the Fall, this communality of will, thought and action among men is broken, and persons separate themselves from each other in the opposition between 'ego' and 'non-ego.' Thus, man loses the capacity for realizing the likeness to God. According to Anthony, God is three persons in perfect unity, and man's destiny is to reflect this trinitarian life in a community in which there are no barriers between 'ego' and 'non-ego.' The atonement restores the possibility of authentically personal existence and of life in community. Christ establishes the Church as the image of the Trinity on earth, a community in which the freedom of each person finds fulfillment in the rejection of self-love. This becomes possible only because the atonement (Incarnation) has recreated the objective unity of human nature. The Church as the expression of a radically new nature shared fully by a multiplicity of persons, no less real than the divine nature shared by the persons of the Trinity. Human nature is recreated by the union of humanity with divinity, a union which is not the submerging of human personality in God which would be pantheism, but an infusion into human nature of the life and power of the Trinity. The vivifying force by which

Ibid., 22-23.

Ibid., 20-22. See also Florovsky, Puti russkogo bogoslovia, 429.

Khrapovitsky, Polnoe sobraniye sochinenii, 2: 16-19.

'Ibid., 75.
the believer lives is, in Paul’s words, ‘not I but Christ’, as the Scriptural imagery of the Vine and Body suggests.

The only context in which Lossky discusses Anthony is in relation to his soteriology. Lossky is very critical, describing Anthony’s views of salvation as purely psychological theory compared with the theory of moral influence of Abelard. A possible reason for Lossky’s attitude, according to Williams, is that Sergei Stragorodsky, whom Lossky held in very high regard both as a theologian and as a Church leader, had criticized Antony’s soteriology in his own study Православное учение о спасении (The Orthodox Teaching on Salvation). However, as regards the doctrine of the Church as imago Trinitatis, the restoration of human nature in Christ, free development in grace of each particular person, liberated from his ‘ego’, Lossky and Antony are strikingly unanimous.

Sergei Stragorodsky (1867-1944) was the one whose position Lossky defended in the sochniological controversy with Bulgakov. It is his work Православное учение о спасении that influenced Lossky considerably in his soteriological views. Stragorodsky develops ‘the moral-subjective’ soteriology as opposed to the Western juridical concept of salvation. The critique of the forensic idea of salvation is the main content of his work.

Ibid., 69-70.

It seems that Lossky accepted Florovsky’s judgement that Antony treats the Atonement in exclusively moral terms and ignores its ontological dimension. Florovsky, Путi русскoгo богословiя, 435-438.

However, his attempt to ascribe the whole of soteriological juridism to Western theology seems to be unjustified. Most of the Fathers, both in Eastern and Western traditions used the forensic categories in their soteriology. While appealing broadly to the Fathers, Stragorodsky, however, does not employ the idea of theosis in his soteriology.

The last representative of ‘ecclesiastical tradition’ I am going to discuss and whose influence upon Lossky can not be disregarded is George Florovsky (1893-1979). Like Lossky, he pursued the same course in search of a “neo-patristic synthesis” as an ideal for contemporary theology. He pleaded for a “re-Hellenization” of Christian doctrine, insisting that Hellenism as transfigured by the gospel in patristic and Byzantine thought is of more ultimate significance than “Hebraism.” Florovsky’s philosophy is directly opposed to the metaphysics of pan-unity developed by Russian sophiologists. The patristic idea of theosis is the main category in his soteriological position. Like Lossky, Florovsky stresses the importance of essence/energies distinction for theosis. The energetic being of God and the being of God in Godself are the two divine “forms of existence.” The energy is

“Ecclesialized Hellenism” is a “permanent category of Christian existence,” Florovsky argues, and “theology can only be catholic in Hellenism.” Florovsky, Puti russkogo bogosloviia, 509. Any attempt of refusal of a “Greek heritage” is an “ecclesiastical suicide.” Ibid., 512.

In his Puti russkogo bogosloviia, Florovsky criticizes the sophiological schemes of Soloviev (314-317), Florensky (497-498), and Bulgakov (493).

understood as a "procession" from Godself--not like the personal or "hypostatic" processions of the Son and the Spirit, but rather as the procession of grace or graces. These graces are the attributes of God which become the fundamental life-giving principles of all created things. The energy is "that aspect of God which is turned towards creation." The idea of participation in God is the final purpose of creatures. With this participation they "enter into a genuine and perfect communion and union with God; they receive deification." Only in this "communion" with God, Florovsky asserts, does man become "himself." In separation from God and in self-isolation, on the contrary, he falls to a plane lower than himself. Florovsky, however, emphatically notes that any "transubstantiation" of the creature in the process of theosis is excluded. Theosis is only a communion with God, participation in His life and gifts.

Such is the immediate philosophical and theological background against which Lossky developed his theology. His views were shaped in the atmosphere of a search for the unity between God and man which was the main concern of both Sophiologists and

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"Florovsky, Creation and Creaturehood, 67.


"Ibid., 74.

"Ibid., 74-75. Florovsky recognizes the fact that the concept of "divinization" was not established all at once, and was crystallized only when the doctrine of God's "energies" had been explicated. Ibid., 76.
traditional Orthodox theologians. To put Lossky’s doctrine of theosis in a broader theological context I conclude the chapter with a concise summary of this idea in Western Christianity.

**Theosis in Western Tradition**

Theosis is a distinctively but not exclusively Greek doctrine. We find its presence in the West, although no systematic treatment of the problem has been done. Tertullian (c. 160-c. 225) clearly shows the influence of Eastern theological formulations. But it was Hippolytus (c. 170-c. 235) who became the most explicit Western exponent of theosis in the pre-Nicene period. Hastings points out that Hippolytus attributed salvation mainly to the Incarnation, not to the death of Christ.

Thecophilus’s moralistic emphasis is echoed in the thought of

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Tertullian *Against Marcion* 2.27.

According to D. Ritschl, Hippolytus is “in many ways responsible for the development of a doctrine of participation in Christ expressed as deification or mystical union.” Dietrich Ritschl, “Hippolytus’ Conception of Deification: Remarks on the Interpretation of *Refutation X*, 34,” *SJT* 12 (1959): 388. The main point, Ritschl makes, is that Hippolytus does not intend to teach ‘deification’ separated from ‘union with Christ’ (392).

Hippolytus, who advised: "If you are desirous of becoming a god, obey him who created you." But the context of his major work, Refutation, clearly shows that deification is an escatological event. It indicates the enjoyment of the glory, the immortality, and the perfection of harmony with the Creator, which is never attained in this present life.

Among those Fathers of the West who are traditionally linked with the Eastern current of thought is Hilary of Poitiers (c. 315-367). He is reputed to have taught the divinization of the Christian in a manner similar to that of the East.

It is with the dominance of Augustinianism that salvation as theosis recedes from a prominent place in Western theology. There are a number of passages, however, where Augustine also speaks of human fulfillment as deification. He even describes the Incarnation in terms of Athanasian soteriology: "He who was God became man so as to make those who were men gods." But in typical

Hippolytus Refutation of All Heresies 10.29.

Hilary of Poitiers is called the "Athenasius of the West" for elaborating the concept of deification in the West. See the thorough study by Philip T. Wild, The Divinization of Man According to Saint Hilary of Poitiers (Mundelein, IL: Saint Mary of the Lake Seminary, 1950).


Augustine On the Trinity 4.2. The idea is also present in his Sermons. See Sermons 47.12; 107.2; 192.1; 342.5.
Western fashion, Augustine links deification with justification. Justification implies deification because by justifying human beings God makes them His children. If we have been made children of God, we have also been made gods, not through a natural begetting but through the grace of adoption. Augustine makes allowance for the scriptural promises of a divine inheritance for redeemed man, but his preoccupation with grace, justification, and sanctification finds little room for theosis if the Greek Fathers. At best, it is a secondary motif for Augustine, giving precedence to redemption from sin and the bondage of Satan.

Although there are some references to theosis in Augustine, in the perspective of his prolific writings these seem insignificant. It seems that this is more than a statistical

Capanaga, 45; Bonner also concludes that "Augustine was apparently prepared to equate justification and deification, regarding both as the consequence of man's adoption." Gerald Bonner, "Augustine's Conception of Deification," JTS 37 (1986): 184.

Augustine Expositions on the Book of Psalms 49.1; idem, Sermons 121 and 159; idem, City of God 14.42. R. Franks states that with Augustine the Greek idea of theosis lost its "natural" and "physical" dimensions and came to be described in "ethical" and "adoptive" categories. Robert S. Franks, The Work of Christ, 3d ed. (London: Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1962), 100.

Ladner, 195. Patricia Wilson-Kastner argues that a central theme in Augustine's theology is grace as a partaking of the divine life. "Grace as Participation in the Divine Life in the Theology of Augustine of Hippo," Augustinian Studies 7 (1976): 135-152. But Augustine was not prepared to assert that a human being is made a god by grace in this life, but only in the life to come. On the Trinity 14, 17, 23.

Augustine's theology was not compatible with the view that man could become god in any concrete sense. He starts with the idea of God as a sheer Unit and its defining simplicity (i.e., its lack of all inner differentiation). Only when this is in place does he try to say how this abstract One can nevertheless meaningfully be called Father, Son, and Spirit. Thus, as Jenson rightly notes,

Augustine's God has no room in himself for us. . . . If God is as Western theology normally thinks him [sic], then to "become gods" could indeed only mean an alteration of natures. Deification could only mean what the West thinks it must mean, that we become additional instances of the divine nature, gods additional to an original God.

It is apparent that Augustine could not achieve an elaborated teaching on theosis because of the logical incompatibility of the language of theosis with his ontology.

Reference to theosis has been virtually absent from the major Roman Catholic manuals throughout the succeeding centuries.

G. Bonner admits that references to deification in Augustine are rare, but he points out that the case for their importance must be made from their content, and from their relation to Augustine's theology as a whole, rather than from their frequency. Bonner, 369. M. Azkoul criticizes this exaggerated estimation of Augustine's teaching on theosis. He says that "the very possibility of deification is unthinkable without the theological distinction between the divine Essence and Energies." M. Azkoul, The Influence of Augustine of Hippo on the Orthodox Church (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen Press, 1990), 177.


This does not mean that the concept of theosis is totally foreign to the Roman Catholic tradition. Henri Rondet notes that Aquinas was not afraid of the word 'divinization.' See H. Rondet, The Grace of Christ (New York: Newman Press, 1966), 206-208. Some Orthodox scholars see the 'transcendental anthropology' of K. Rahner as coming closer than most Western theology to the classical language of deification. M. O'Keefe suggests that retrieving the concept of theosis as a way of understanding the
However, deification terminology survived on the periphery of Western orthodoxy in the form of mysticism and ecstatic union with God, along the lines of Pseudo-Dionysius.

John Scotus Erigena, c. 810-c. 877, Irish churchman and philosopher, introduced Pseudo-Dionysius to the West by translating his writings into Latin. In his system of thought he clearly shows his dependence on the Greek Christian tradition, especially on Gregory of Nyssa in whom he found what today we call "theocentric anthropology.” God is so closely related to His creatures that He is said more properly to be created in them than to create them. Commenting on Erigena, Meyendorff points out:


Meyendorff, Rome, Constantinople, Moscow, 60. It was also Erigena who first coined the Latin words apofaticus and catafaticus. Periphyseon, 1.66.

Erigena Periphyseon 3.23. But he surely differs from the Greek Fathers for whom the created world was ontologically external to God when he affirms that there is nothing really external to God, because God not only will be “all in all” at the end of time, but always was and is “all in all,” as foundation and essence of all things.
in his system, of the distinction between essence and energy in God inevitably leads him to neoplatonic monism.

An attempt to make such a distinction was made later by the most significant of the German mystics, Meister Eckhart.

Eckhart’s thought is rooted in a Thomistic background, to which he makes some unique contributions. One is his distinction between God and the Godhead. God is a personal being, who has attributes, who is active in history, and who is revealed as a Trinity. The Godhead is the very essence of God, beyond all categories and characteristics. Eckhart’s major concern is a possibility of union with the Godhead. Union with the Godhead is possible because the soul is grounded in the Godhead. His basic premise is clearly Plotinian: Everything emanates or comes from one primal source and seeks to return to it. All creation desires unity, the supreme unity being with the source of all that is. He insists upon the absolute oneness of God and the soul: “Between man and God, however, there is not only no distinction, there is

Meyendorff, Rome, Constantinople, Moscow, 69.


He makes a clear distinction between a union with God, which is one through a medium (a visible person of Christ), and union with the Godhead, which is an unmediated, ontological union, and union of the essence of the soul with the essence of all being, the Godhead. Bishop, 86.

‘His formula is “God’s ground and the soul’s ground are one ground.”’ Meister Eckhart, The Essential Sermons, Commentaries, Treatises and Defense, trans. and intro. Edmund Colledge and Bernard McGinn (London: SPCK, 1981), 183, 192. There is in the soul a “spark,” “castle,” or “ground” that is identical with God. Ibid., 42-44.
no multiplicity either. There is nothing but one.” The Church rejected his teaching in 1329, a few years after the death of Eckhart, for paving the way for pantheism. However, there is a tendency among contemporary historians to reexamine his case and to show that Eckhart had right intentions and an immense zeal for the glory of God and the salvation of the souls. Lossky seems to support the latter position. In the second part of his profound but complicated and extremely detailed study of Eckhart’s theology which treats chiefly Eckhart’s doctrine of man’s return to God in the supernatural union of grace, Lossky stresses that he was neither a monist nor a pantheist. When Eckhart comes to speak of the deifying transformation into the image of God and of sonship in the Son he remains faithful to the spirit of the dogma of Chalcedon and orthodox Trinitarian theology.

Meister Eckhart Sermon 40.

Rudolf Otto sets up a very careful comparison between Eckhart and the Hindu mystic Shankara, and comes to the conclusion that there is no real difference between Vedantic God-human identity and the teachings of Eckhart. See R. Otto, Mysticism East and West (New York: Collier, 1961).

As, for example, Richard Kiekhefer, “Meister Eckhart’s Conception of Union with God,” _HTR_ 71 (1979): 202-225. The author tries to deny anything theologically unusual in Eckhart, except perhaps his hyperbolic rhetoric. The problem with Kiekhefer’s position, however, is that many of Eckhart’s contemporaries, both friends and foes, understood Eckhart more in line with Otto’s assessment, leading eventually to certain official condemnations.

'Lossky, Théologie négative et connaissance de Dieu chez Maître Eckhart.

An even more interesting tendency has been clearly seen among some contemporary scholars in rediscovering theosis in certain Protestant traditions, namely, Anglican, Lutheran, and Wesleyan.

The Anglican scholar A. M. Allchin affirms that the patristic adage 'God became man so that man might become God' is not so foreign to Anglican tradition as is commonly assumed, and . . . this doctrine of theosis is in no way remote from the concerns of late-twentieth-century humanity but rather is of vital importance for any truly human living and thinking today.

Allchin says that the classical Christian doctrines of the Trinity and the Incarnation find their fulfillment and ultimate purpose in the doctrine of theosis. It is because we have neglected this doctrine that so much of traditional Christian teaching has come to seem irrelevant and meaningless. Allchin explores the doctrine of theosis that proves to be present in representative Anglican teachers of the seventeenth to nineteenth centuries. Another

Allchin, Participation in God, ix.

Ibid. Allchin attempts to bring theology and spirituality together into a new synthesis to respond to the current thirst for knowledge and experience of the true and living God.

Anglican scholar, E. C. Miller, argues that there is an essential connection between the Anglican way of theological reflection and Orthodox methodology since much of what is unique to Anglican tradition can be traced to the Greek Fathers. For example, for Michael Ramsey, former Archbishop of Canterbury, the nature of salvation consists not in any act external to man, but in a complete “sharing in the divine life.” Some contemporary Anglican theologians expound the doctrine of theosis in terms of the alleged “openness” of being by using Rahner’s notion of Christology as transcendent anthropology. Thus, we can clearly see in Anglicanism an attempt to recover the Eastern Christian concept of salvation as a genuine participation in the life of God.


Miller, Toward a Fuller Vision.

A. M. Ramsey, “What Is Anglican Theology?” Theology 48 (1945): 2. He does not employ, however, the strictly theological terms “deification” or “theosis.” In accordance with his belief that for Anglican theology “only the Biblical categories can rule” (ibid., 4), he expounds his theology of the transfiguring of persons in terms derived directly from biblical vocabulary; hence his preference for the words “Godlikeness” and “Christlikeness.” “But this fact,” Miller comments, “should not keep us from seeing the essential harmony between Ramsey’s use of ‘Christlikeness’ and ‘transfiguration’ and the Orthodox doctrine of deification.” Miller, 122.

For example, Macquarrie writes: “Manhood and Godhood are not taken to be fixed natures infinitely far apart. Rather, manhood is an open, emerging nature, which transcends towards Godhood, in virtue of that image of God in which humanity was created.” J. Macquarrie, “The Humanity of Christ,” Theology 74 (1971): 245. Macquarrie links Rahner’s view that man’s nature is open, in the sense of being capable of self-transcendence with Meyendorff’s claim that the Byzantine divinization of human nature does not mean its abolition but rather its coming to full humanity. See also Mascall, The Openness of Being.
The same tendency can be traced in the contemporary Lutheran Church. Some Lutheran theologians talk about theosis as a solid subject of Luther’s scholarly research. T. Mannermaa points out that theosis as the formulation for a structure in Luther’s theology is “extreme,” in the sense that the matter it names usually appears under other topics, such as the real presence of Christ in the believer, the union of Christ and the Christian, joyous exchange, etc. Nevertheless, Luther also uses the term Vergottlichung, as the ancient church used it, to express his general understanding of faith. Mannermaa notes that the terms deificatio and Vergottlichung appear in Luther’s texts more often than the term theologica crucis.

While Nygren disputed the association of the Greek idea of deification with Luther’s understanding,² Bengt Hoffman shows that

See Simo Peura and Antti Raunic, eds., Luther und Theosis: Vergottlichung als Thema der abendländischen Theologie Helsinki: Luther-Agricola-Gesellschaft, 1994. This book reproduces ten papers that deal with theosis and how it relates to Luther’s theology. For a brief review of these papers, see the book review by Louis J. Reith in Church History 63 (1994): 448-449.


Ibid. Simo E. Peura also points out in his dissertation that Luther’s concept of deification is not marginal, but central. When Luther uses it, he thinks of a real change in man, who in faith receives the righteousness of God.

Luther was in total agreement with the Patristic tradition of redemption.

Although Luther staunchly contended for the extrinsic and forensic character of justification, he nevertheless believed that God's justifying grace must make experiential contact with the sinful human being. Regeneration is therefore correlative with justification, and indeed might be regarded as the subjective pole of justification. Thus, what is Vergöttlichung for Luther?

Luther does not differentiate, as does subsequent Lutheranism, between the person and the work of Christ. Christ Himself, both His person and His work, is the righteousness of man before God. Faith means justification precisely on the basis of

—Bengt Hoffman, Luther and the Mystics (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1976). Franz Posset tries to trace Luther's German wording concerning "deification" back to the Western late medieval authors and sources that contain the notion of vergöttet or durchgöttet. F. Posset, "'Deification' in the German Spirituality of the Late Middle Ages and in Luther: An Ecumenical Historical Perspective," Archiv für Reformationsgeschichte 84 (1993): 103-126.

See Donald G.Bloesch, God the Almighty: The Power, Wisdom, Holiness, Love (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1995), 235. Posset affirms that it was under the influence of Melanchton and others that the forensic doctrine of justification by faith was articulated and the connection between justification and sanctification, which for Luther was indissoluble, was severed. Posset, 125. See also Kenneth L. Bakken, "Holy Spirit and Theosis: Toward a Lutheran Theology of Healing," SVTQ 38 (1994): 409. The Lutheran theologian Gerhard Forde blames the forensic metaphor itself for the total division of spiritual life from justification. Gerhard O. Forde, Justification by Faith--A Matter of Death and Life (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1982), 43. According to him, both traditional Lutheranism and traditional Catholicism are caught in the same "legal scheme."

Christ’s person being present in it: in ipsa fide Christus adest.

Thus, faith means participation in the being of God.

Christ, who is present in faith, brings love with Him, because Christ is God in His essence, and God is love. Since Christ is truly present in faith, the Christian, too, has in a certain sense “two natures”—in the theological sense of the concept of nature. The “divine nature” of the believer is Christ Himself. The Christian no longer lives himself, but rather Christ lives in him. The “human nature” of the believer is his neighbor’s burden and misery, which he, like Christ, takes upon himself. Luther concludes his theological summation, the treatise on the freedom of a Christian, with the idea that the Christian

It was Lutheran and Orthodox interchange in Finland that suggests that the Lutheran equivalent to the Orthodox concept of theosis is found in Luther’s statement “in faith itself Christ is present.” Hannu T. Kamppuri, ed., Dialogue Between Neighbors: The Theological Conversations Between the Evangelical-Lutheran Church of Finland and the Russian Orthodox Church, 1970-1986 (Helsinki: Publication of the Luther-Agricola Society, 1986), 13. For more on this, see Ross Aden, “Justification and Sanctification: A Conversation Between Lutheranism and Orthodoxy,” SVTC 39 (1994): 101-109; idem, “Justification and Divinization [in Lutheran-Orthodox Dialogue],” Dialog Minnesota 32 (Spring 1993): 102-107. Ross affirms that both Orthodoxy’s ‘deifying grace’ and Lutheranism’s ‘faith’ change us from within.

The concept of deification reappeared in Luther’s perception of the Christian as a bearer of divine love. When divine love is poured into us by the Holy Spirit, we become “gods” and “saviors,” since we are then literally conduits of divine energy. Luther was careful to specify that this deifying work is an act of God’s grace and that we are only instruments. Irwing Singer suggests that the distance between Plotinus and Luther may not be so great after all in The Nature of Love, 2d ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), 1:338-339.
lives not in himself, but in Christ and in his neighbor. This is Luther’s doctrine of Vergottlichung.

Faith filled with the energy of love--divine-human participation--is considered to be the very essence of the other Protestant tradition, namely, Methodism. It is not a secret that John Wesley, the founder of Methodism, was significantly indebted to the Christianity of the early centuries, particularly in its Greek and Syriac forms. John Wesley’s love for the early Church Fathers had developed early in his life and never abated. His acquaintance with the Greek Church Fathers had a very important consequence: the discovery of theosis as the organizing principle of his ordo salutis.’ McCormick points out that “in rediscovering the eastern notion of divine-human interaction, he [Wesley]

For more on Luther’s idea of Christ’s presence in faith, see Tuomo Mannermaa, Der im Glauben gegenwartige Christus: Rechtfertigung und Vergottung zum okumenischen Dialog (Hannover: Lutherisches Verlagshaus, 1989). It is important to note that Luther’s Vergottlichung does not signify any change in substance. God does not stop being God and man does not stop being man. For a very helpful discussion on the subject, see also P. Wilson-Kastner, “On Partaking of the Divine Nature: Luther’s Dependence on Augustine,” Andrews University Seminary Studies 22 (1984): 113-124.


recovered the ‘foundation of faith.’ This is why Wesley’s characteristic definition of salvation has a remarkable “Eastern” tone. He says:

By salvation, I mean, not barely (according to the vulgar notion): deliverance from hell, or going to heaven, but a present deliverance from sin, a restoration of the soul to its primitive health, its original purity; a recovery of the divine nature; the renewal of our souls after the image of God in righteousness and true holiness, in justice, mercy, and truth.

Wesley’s dominant therapeutic interest ultimately led him to center soteriology on sanctification rather than justification. And here is the closest resemblance between Orthodoxy and Wesley. Both are convinced that Christ-likeness is not simply infused in believers instantaneously; it is developed progressively through a responsible appropriation of the grace which God provides. In his soteriology, Wesley conjoins the Western motif of pardon and the Eastern motif of participation. This gave A. Outler the right to propose the thesis that Wesley’s legacy and place in the Christian tradition lay in his “third alternative,” his synthesis of pardon and participation as “pardon in order to participate,” a synthesis

Ibid.


The extensive commonalities between Wesley and Orthodoxy on issues of sanctification surely warrant the claim that the final form of Wesley’s doctrine is heavily indebted to the early Greek theologians, but this is not to deny that other Western voices echo some of these points and also contributed to Wesley, nor is it to deny that Wesley differs from some aspects of the Orthodox understanding of deification. For example, Wesley was uncomfortable with such mystical elements of Orthodox theology as the “vision of divine light.” See Maddox, 40.

Ibid., 39.
of sola fide and holy living. Although not all scholars share this assessment, in any case, Wesley is remarkable among Western Christian thinkers in understanding that the goal of the Christian life: Christian perfection, renewal of the imago Dei, is inseparably linked to the way of life.

Summary

This chapter analyzed the doctrine of theosis in historical perspective. By summarizing what we have explored we may say that by the fourth century both the terminology and general outlines of the Christian version of deification were well established. Even before Nicea we can clearly distinguish between an Irenaean tradition, which conceived of salvation in quite a physical way—flesh is deified or immortalized—and the Origenistic tradition, which viewed deification as the liberation of the soul from the body. Although the notion of theosis was fundamental in most of


T. Martin, for example, thinks that the recent attempt to relate John Wesley to Eastern Orthodoxy labors under some serious methodological problems. Although Cutler’s suggestions may be correct, Martin says, a careful method must be developed in order to establish this relationship. The comparison is complicated because Wesley is not being compared to eighteenth-century Orthodoxy, but to the Greek Fathers of the first four or five centuries, the reference to which as Eastern Orthodox is anachronistic as well as misleading. See Troy W. Martin, “John Wesley’s Exegetical Orientation: East or West?” WTJ 26 (1991): 136.

R. Williams writes about two strands to the classical Patristic view of deification, one emphasizing the communication of divine attributes to Christians, the other concentrating on the Christian’s participation in intra-divine relationship. “Deification,” 106.
the Greek Fathers, it is difficult, however, to determine what it was. The principal words used are filled with many different nuances. Even within the writings of any one particular Father, it is difficult to ascertain whether theosis has primarily an eschatological, physical, metaphysical, or mystical significance. Although the details of the process of theosis remain somewhat vague and lacking in precision, it is not a mere allegory or a metaphor to illustrate communion with God. The full clarification of the term theosis had to await the resolution of the conflict over the deity of Christ. "The church could not specify what it meant to promise that man would become divine until it had specified what it meant to confess that Christ had always been divine."

We have seen that the concept of theosis was closely tied to two classic problems of the Patristic period--the trinitarian theology of Nicaea developed by Athanasius, and the Christology leading to Chalcedon, elaborated especially in the writings of the Cappadocians. It was shown that the main Patristic argument for the divinity of Christ and the Spirit was soteriological: If salvation was understood as "deification," obviously, only God

Bilaniuk is right when he notes that we find no separate treatise on theosis or theopoeisis in the Greek Fathers. Bilaniuk, "The Mystery," 352.

could "deify." Thus, we can see the connection between Christology and soteriology among the Fathers.

The Incarnation is crucial for theosis. There is a tendency in the Fathers to think that the whole creative work of God is brought to its conclusion in the Incarnation. The Incarnation is understood as the ultimate, unsurpassable fulfillment of things. The Incarnation is the telos precisely because it admits of nothing further. As Daniélou says:

In the person of the Incarnate Word, the union between the two natures, man and God, is such that no better identification is conceivable, for the humanity taken by the Word becomes the personal nature of the Son of God himself. By this union, the purpose of mankind's existence was completely achieved.

The mystical element in the understanding of theosis comes fully with Pseudo-Dionysius through Gregory of Nyssa and Symeon the New Theologian and culminates in the synthesis of Gregory Palamas, who emphasized the essence-energies distinction in God to distance the understanding of the union with God from Plotinian pantheism. Meyendorff affirms:

The union with God mentioned by the Fathers never amounts to a disintegration of the human person into the divine.

This does not mean that the meaning of theosis can be relegated to a functional role, that is, to see it only as an instrument used by the Fathers to bolster their shaky arguments for the divinity of the Son and the Spirit. If we do so, the whole theological enterprise in the East from the third to the fifth century would become immediately suspect. See M. F. Wiles, "Soteriological Arguments in the Fathers," Studia Patristica, vol. 9, part 3, TUGA 94, ed. F. L. Cross (Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 1966), 321-325.

Daniélou, The Lord of History, 192.
infinite; but, on the contrary, it is the fulfillment of his free and personal destiny.

In all Patristic statements concerning the "being" of divinized man, although ontologically expressed, the difference, or, in the language of Gregory of Nyssa, the infinite gap between the prototype and the image is constantly stressed. We were introduced here to one of the central paradoxes of Christian theology, which tried "to hold together the realities of divine otherness and divine union." As has been mentioned above, the major attempt to solve this paradox was made by Gregory Palamas during the fourteenth century.

The doctrine of theosis as it was developed in the history of Christian thought shows the "unmistakable imprint of a biblical-classical synthesis in which the ontological categories of Greco-Roman philosophy have been united with the personal-dramatic categories of biblical faith." As a result, the notion of

Meyendorff, Christ in Eastern Christian Thought, 129.


Bloesch, 205. W. Rusch points out that it was in two places that the Greek Fathers discovered materials that enabled them to work out their view of divinization—the Bible and Platonic tradition (135). H. Koester affirms that when the first Christian thinkers elaborated the doctrine of theosis, it was already well established in the Greco-Roman world. "The dividing line between humanity and deity was partially obliterated." H. Koester, "The Divine Human Being," HTR 78 (1985): 243. M. Himmerich indicates that the doctrine of theosis was developed within the confines of
salvation in the Fathers stressed the reunion with God rather than the unmerited forgiveness of sins. However, it was not a matter of either/or, since Orthodox theology held to both these conceptions. Yet, the mystical understanding of union with God overshadowed the biblical categories describing salvation in the context of the covenant, the sanctuary with its daily sacrifices, and the day of Atonement.

We have also seen that in Russian religious thought in the second part of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th century the Patristic idea of theosis received a sophianic coloration using the notions of 'Godmanhood' and 'pan-unity' as its main expressions. At the same time, even the 'ecclesiastical' tradition of that period does not employ the idea of theosis in describing salvation. It is only in Florovsky’s celebrated Patristic, or neo-Patristic synthesis that the notion of theosis returns back to the soteriological vocabulary of the Orthodox Church.

We may also conclude that the concept of theosis is not foreign to Western Christianity, grounded as it is in common Patristic sources. But this concept has not been developed consistently or put forward as a central focus for an understanding of salvation and Christian life.

Having in mind this historical background of the doctrine of theosis, the next step in this study is to look at Vladimir Lossky’s understanding of the issue.

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a philosophical and metaphysical system combining in itself Platonic, Aristotelian, Stoic, Hebrew, and New Testament sources (188).
CHAPTER III

ANALYSIS OF LOSSKY'S DOCTRINE OF THEOSIS

I have already shown in chapter 1 the significance of the doctrine of theosis for the Orthodox Church. This theme has received special attention from many contemporary theologians. Vladimir Lossky is one of those for whom the significance of theosis is difficult to overestimate.

Lossky never dealt with the issue of theosis specifically as a concrete doctrine, nonetheless all he has written revolved around theosis as a major theme of Christian theology. Actually, theology for him is a means of theosis. Theology is never an end in itself. The ultimate end of theologizing, as Lossky understood it, was attaining the union with God, or theosis. This means that theosis for Lossky is not just one of the Christian doctrines, or

See the review of literature in chapter 1.

Mystical Theology, 9. Since I quote Lossky extensively in this chapter, his name is omitted in the footnotes. All other authors' names will be provided as usual.

Lossky considers the dogmatic battles the Church has waged down the centuries as dominated by the constant preoccupation at each moment of her history with the possibility of attaining the fullness of union with God for all Christians. The theological doctrines which have been elaborated in the course of these struggles, Lossky says, "can be treated in the most direct relation to the vital end—that of union with God—to the attainment of which they are subservient." Ibid., 11.

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even the doctrine as such; it is "the supreme end," the "mystical
centre," which continually was at stake in the history of
Christianity whether when the Church struggled against the
Gnostics, or Arians, Nestorians or Apollinarians, Monophysites or
Iconoclasts. The same is true with Lossky himself, who, treating
the different themes of Eastern Orthodox theology, tried always to
defend the possibility, the manner, and the means of our union
with God.

This chapter deals with different aspects of the idea of
theosis in Lossky’s writings. In discussing them I follow the
same order Lossky chose in his major work The Mystical Theology of
the Eastern Church. First, I present the epistemological aspect
of theosis, exploring Lossky’s approach to the question, How do we
know God? Then I discuss the “theological” and “economical”
aspects of theosis. Finally, the ecclesiological and moral
dimensions of theosis are discussed. This integral presentation
of theosis in Lossky will bring us to a more objective evaluation
of the doctrine in chapter 4.

Epistemological Aspect of Theosis

The whole purpose of theological epistemology for Lossky is
to help the faithful to attain to theosis. It is not a question
of having ideas about God or of talking about Him; it is a matter
of entering into a concrete relationship with Him. Gaining just
some knowledge of God is “an imperfect way” of doing theology for

Ibid., 10. Lossky emphatically claims that in opposing all
those heresies, the Church was guided by only one motivation—the
saving reality of theosis for man.
Lossky. It is exactly in this sense that his theology can be referred to as mystical.

Theology and Mysticism

First, the term "mystical theology", as it appears in Lossky, should be clarified. As Allchin points out, by the term "mystical theology" Lossky did not mean "a study of the psychological states of those with a special gift for prayer, still less an enquiry into ecstasy and visions. He referred to the way in which the truth . . . is to be experienced and appropriated personally by each believer." Thus, in a certain sense, as Morrel notes, the title of Lossky's major work is a bit misleading. The theme of the Essai sur la Theologie Mystique is not so much mystical theology in the ordinary sense as a "dogmatic theology in its relation to the life of the soul in grace."

For Lossky, all theology is mystical. Taking the Metropolitan Philaret of Moscow as a spokesman of this attitude, Lossky comments:

Mystical Theology, 25.


Morrel, "The Theology of Vladimir Lossky," 36.

In this sense Lossky is faithful to the Eastern tradition which, according to him, has never made a sharp distinction between mysticism and theology. He disagrees with H. Bergson who in his Les Deux sources de la morale et de la religion (Paris, 1932; Eng. trans., 1935), draws the distinction between a vital or dynamic religion of the mystics and static religion of the dogmaticians and the churches. Mystical Theology, 7.

Filaret, 4:148.
We must live the dogma expressing a revealed truth, which
appears to us as an unfathomable mystery, in such a fashion
that instead of assimilating the mystery to our mode of
understanding, we should, on the contrary, look for a
profound change, an inner transformation of spirit, enabling
us to experience it mystically.

Elaborating on this thought, Lossky continues: "Far from being
mutually opposed, theology and mysticism support and complete each
other. One is impossible without the other." There is no
Christian mysticism without theology, but, above all, there is no
teology without mysticism. "Thus," Lossky concludes, "if we
would speak of mystical theology in the eastern tradition we
cannot do otherwise than consider it within the dogmatic setting
of the Orthodox Church."

This theological approach puts certain requirements on the
theologian. Doing theology, for Lossky, is far from being just an
intellectual exercise. "It is an existential attitude which
involves the whole man: there is no theology apart from
experience; it is necessary to change, to become a new man."

Lossky states quite categorically that "no one who does not follow
the path of union with God can be a theologian." Then he
expresses what would be the core of his epistemology: "The way of
the knowledge of God is necessarily the way of deification." To
undertake a task of doing theology one is to be prepared at every

-Mystical Theology, 8.
Ibid.
Ibid., 14.
"Ibid., 39.
Ibid.
step to have his ways of thinking transformed by the renewing of his mind. Thinking theologically means, for Lossky, thinking with a deified mind. This brings us closer to Lossky's view of the knowledge of God.

**Episteme and Gnosis**

There are, according to Lossky, two routes to the knowledge of God. The first, *episteme*, operates with searching and reasoning and is characteristic of scientific and philosophical epistemology; the second, *gnosis*, is the contemplative and existential way to knowledge and constitutes the so-called mystical epistemology leading to *theosis*.

*Episteme* allows for limited knowledge of some properties of those objects that can be observed, and by analyzing these properties one can form concepts. Lossky agrees that *episteme*, indispensable to the human ability to think, "constitutes at once a necessity and hindrance." *Episteme* deals with "historical work here below." It is "adapted to space and time, to environments and points in time." Yet, when we talk about the knowledge of

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In this stress on the fundamentally mystical finality and character of all theology, Lossky's work stands in sharp contrast to the mainstream of Western tradition, where mystical theology has been thought of as a department, or division, within theology, rather than as a feature of all theology. The term stands for one limited area of theological investigation, also called "mystical experience," "mystical phenomena," or, more generally, "the spiritual life," "spirituality." In the East, however, at least according to Lossky, mystical theology is not subject matter at all. Rather, it is a mode of doing all theology, it is "the unicum necessarium of theological existence." See Aidan Nichols, *Light from the East* (London: Sheed & Ward, 1995), 27.

*Orthodox Theology, 14.*
God, episteme becomes a hindrance because of "the feverish illusion of concepts." When theologians approach God in this way they replace the true knowledge of God with "mental schemata" which are "ultimately empty," but whose use can "intoxicate" the proper understanding of God. Thus, for Lossky, a theology that constitutes itself into a system is always dangerous, since "it imprisons in the enclosed sphere of thought the reality to which it must open thought." Due to "the radical lack of correspondence between our mind and the reality it wishes to attain," episteme is totally inadequate when it speaks about knowledge of God. Theology therefore has to follow a different way, described by Lossky as the way of gnosis.

Gnosis, in distinction from episteme, transcends space and time, and as contemplation it is "an exit to the state of a future age, a vision of what is beyond history, a projection of eschatology into the instant." Gnosis is not the result of human endeavor, but a divine gift received through a revelatory encounter. Lossky says:

Authentic gnosis is inseparable from a charisma, an illumination by grace which transforms our intelligence. And since the object of contemplation is a personal existence and presence, true gnosis implies encounter, reciprocity, faith

*Ibid.
*Ibid., 15.
Ibid.

*In the Image and Likeness of God, 13.
Orthodox Theology, 14.
as a personal adherence to the personal presence of God Who reveals Himself. This encounter initiated by God takes the form of "I-Thou," where Thou is "the living God of the Bible, the Absolute, certainly, but a personal Absolute." In this revelatory encounter, God affirms himself to be at the same time immanent and transcendent. Lossky comments: "God is immanent and transcendent at the same time: immanence and transcendence mutually imply one another." In the dialectic of transcendence and immanence, God is both knowable and unknowable. What is knowable, however, is not the product of human rational endeavor but a free gift of God, which is appropriated by faith. While all theological knowledge, according to Lossky, is based upon revelation, it is not an end in itself. Rather, the purpose of revelation and true gnosis is theosis.

In order to explain the relation between gnosis and theosis, Lossky uses two pairs of concepts: katabasis and anabasis; and oikonomia and theologia. Oikonomia describes God's movement

Ibid., 13.
Ibid., 27.
Ibid., 31.

The notion of faith is important for gnosis. According to Lossky, faith is "our participatory adherence to the presence of Him Who reveals Himself" (italics mine). Orthodox Theology, 16. Faith is therefore not "a psychological attitude" or "mere fidelity," but "an ontological relationship between man and God, an internally objective relationship." Ibid. Although Lossky defines faith as "ontological participation," he does not clarify how it is then distinct from theosis. Ibid., 17.

*Mystical Theology, 9; Orthodox Theology, 25.

*In the Image and Likeness of God, 15, 97.
manwards, which is a movement of descent: katabasis. Katabasis is not a way of knowledge, but only the means whereby "essential goodness, natural sanctity, and royal dignity flow from the Father, through the Only-Begotten, to the Spirit." In order to know God, one has to follow the way of theologia anabasis, which is gnosis "of God considered in Himself, outside of His creative and redemptive economy." Like Pseudo-Dionysius, Lossky affirms that gnosis is a way of spiritual ascent anabasis: beyond all perceptive and rational faculties "in order to be able to attain in perfect ignorance to union with Him who transcends all being and all knowledge." Following the Greek Fathers' exegesis of Moses' ascent to meet God on the mountain, Lossky affirms that the content of gnosis, which one acquires when going beyond everything that exists and arriving at the extreme height of the knowable, is in fact not knowledge but, rather, a "mystical union with God,"

Ibid., 15-16. Here Lossky follows the teaching of Basil in his Treatise on the Spirit.

In the Image and Likeness of God, 16.

Ibid., 15-16.

See P. Spearritt, A Philosophical Enquiry into Dionysian Mysticism (Bosingen: Rotex-Druckdienst, 1975), 173-182.

Mystical Theology, 27.

The theme of Moses drawing near to God in the darkness of Sinai is the favorite symbol of the Fathers for conveying the idea of God's incomprehensibility. See, for example, Gregory of Nyssa Life of Moses: Gregory of Nazianzus Orations 28.2-3; 36.28. For a recent study on this, see Belden C. Lane, "The Sinai Image in the Apophatic Tradition," SVTQ 39 (1995): 47-69.

Mystical Theology, 28.
described by Pseudo-Dionysius as "knowing nothing." Moreover, due to the fact that, in contrast with episteme, gnosis surpasses human intellectual capacities, the purpose of this way is not to develop a positive theological system but to attain union with God i.e., theosis. Thus, true knowledge of God actually leads to a "personal relationship expressed in terms of reciprocity: reciprocity with the object of theology (which, in reality, is a subject), reciprocity also with those to whom the theological word is addressed." Consequently, theology at its best, according to Lossky, is communion: "I know as I am known."

Yet, even if gnosis is knowledge beyond words, in order to be communicated it has to be translated into theological language and subsequently organized, more or less, into a system. This leads us, in turn, to the distinction between apophasic and cataphatic theologies.

**Apophasis - The Way to Theosis**

Following Pseudo-Dionysius, Lossky affirms that there are two approaches to theology: cataphatic and apophasic. Cataphatic or positive theology leads us to some knowledge of God, but it "is an imperfect way." The imperfection of positive theology resides

See Pseudo-Dionysius The Mystical Theology 1.3.1000C-1001A.

Orthodox Theology, 15-16.

Ibid., 16.

Pseudo-Dionysius The Mystical Theology 1.997A-1048B.

in both its method and content. Methodologically, affirmative theology begins with the loftier, more congruous comparisons and then proceeds down to the less appropriate ones; or, as Lossky explains, "a descent from the superior degrees of being to the inferior." Likewise, the content has a descending character due to the link between concepts and the level of theological reflection.

However, if cataphatic theology follows a downward path, one may ask how the human mind can ever reach the loftier places? Pseudo-Dionysius responds by asserting that positive theology originates in the Scriptures which contain the divine truth revealed by God in His manward movement of economic descent. However, the concepts or the words of Scripture do not describe God as He is in Himself since He is always beyond everything that exists. Similarly, Lossky argues that while God reveals Himself as wisdom, love, and goodness "intelligible attributes," His nature remains unknowable in its depths, and therefore our

Pseudo-Dionysius expresses this imperfection by arguing: "When we made assertions we begin with the first things, moved down through intermediate terms until we reached the last things." Pseudo-Dionysius The Mystical Theology 1.1025B.

*Mystical Theology, 28.*

As Pseudo-Dionysius confirms: "In the earlier books my argument travelled downward from the most exalted to the humblest categories, taking in on this downward path an ever-increasing number of ideas which multiplied with every stage of descent." Pseudo-Dionysius The Mystical Theology 3.1033C.

Pseudo-Dionysius The Divine Names 1.1.585B-588A.

Ibid., 1.4.592B.
concepts must always be prevented from "being enclosed within their limited meanings."

Thus, what is the function of cataphatic or affirmative theology for Lossky? Surely, it is not a way of union or theosis since it "comes down towards us: a ladder of 'theophanies' or manifestations of God in creation." Rather, its purpose is "to guide us and to fit our faculties for the contemplation of that which transcends all understanding." It is apophasis, which is a true ascent towards union or theosis.

Lossky argues that "all true theology is fundamentally apophatic" because, as I noted earlier, the way of the knowledge of God for him is necessarily the way of theosis. Here is how he describes the apophatic way:

The negative way of the knowledge of God is an ascendant undertaking of the mind that progressively eliminates all positive attributes of the object it wishes to attain, in order to culminate finally in a kind of apprehension by supreme ignorance of Him who cannot be an object of knowledge.

Orthodox Theology, 33. In fact, Lossky, following Gregory of Nyssa, argues that "the ladder of cataphatic theology," which discloses the divine names drawn primarily from Scripture, is not intended to become rational concepts whereby our minds construct "a positive science of the divine nature." Mystical Theology, 40.

Mystical Theology, 39.

Ibid., 40.

'Yannaras calls apophaticism the fundamental presupposition of orthodoxy. For him, the denial of apophaticism was a foundation or seed in the "legal" mentality of the Western Christian tradition. Yannaras, Elements of Faith, 154-155.

'In the Image and Likeness of God, 13.
A common element to all that we call apophasis, or negative theology, is “consciousness of the failure of human understanding” confronted with something beyond the conceivable.

The negative apophasic way attempts to know God not in what He is but in what He is not. It proceeds by a series of negations. On the lower steps one eliminates the images drawn from the material objects “least calculated to lead spirits inexperienced in contemplation into error.” What seems obvious at the beginning of the ascent, that “God is not fire, He is not stone,” becomes less and less obvious as one excludes the most lofty attributes and attains to the height of contemplation, when one has even to affirm that “God is not being, He is not good.” At each step of ascent one has to guard oneself against the danger of making these loftier images or ideas “an idol of God.” Once the heights have been attained, speculation gradually gives place to contemplation, knowledge to experience, for, “in casting off the concepts which shackle the spirit, the apophatic disposition reveals boundless horizons of contemplation at each step of positive theology.”

Consequently, apophatic theology refuses any attempt to form concepts about God and to organize them in a systematic construct according to human ways of thought. Apophaticism, argues Lossky,

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Mystical Theology, 40.

Ibid. See also Orthodox Theology, 32.

'Mystical Theology, 40.

'Ibid.
is "above all, an attitude of mind which refuses to form concepts about God." On the contrary, by pointing to mystical union with God, apophatic theology is "an existential attitude which involves the whole man." This is why Lossky considers apophaticism to be a criterion, "the sure sign of an attitude of mind conformed to truth."

Summarizing Lossky's understanding of the way to know God, we may conclude that theology for him is never abstract, working through concepts, but contemplative, raising the mind to those realities which pass all understanding. All true theology is apophatic. Apophatic theology is the way which actually leads not to knowledge but to union with God i.e., theosis. Lossky hastens to remind us that, in his union with God, man is not dissolved into an impersonal resorption into the divine nature as it is in Plotinian ecstasy, but "has access to a face to face encounter with God, a union without confusion according to grace."

However, the question of union with God, and of mystical experience in general, raises the issue of the accessibility and/or inaccessibility of God's nature. What does Lossky actually mean when he affirms the way of theosis? This leads us closer to Lossky's understanding of God's being.

Mystical Theology, 38-39.

Ibid., 39.

Ibid.

*Ibid., 43.

Orthodox Theology, 32. For a distinction between Plotinian and Dionysian union with God, see Mystical Theology, 38.
I come now to the heart of Lossky’s teaching on theosis—his view of God. It is impossible to define theosis without first defining God, because theosis is “participation in God,” “union with God,” even “becoming God.” In discussing this issue I follow Lossky’s distinction between the two modes of divine existence.

Lossky clearly distinguishes between theologia and oikonomia. Theologia is “everything which can be said of God considered in Himself, outside of His creative and redemptive economy,” while oikonomia is the exterior manifestations of God in relation to His creation, to the domain of “economy,” the divine activity, or dispensation, existence ad extra, “in the radiance of the essential glory of God.” It is exactly this distinction that allows us to talk about “theological” and “economical” aspects of%

This distinction, according to Lossky, goes back to the fourth and even to the third century and remains common to most of the Greek Fathers and to all the Byzantine tradition. In the Image and Likeness of God, 15. Cf. V. Lossky, “The Problem of the Vision Face to Face and Byzantine Patristic Tradition,” JOTR 17 (1972): 242.

In the Image and Likeness of God, 15.

Mystical Theology, 71.

\textsuperscript{1} In the Image and Likeness of God, 91; Mystical Theology, 82. It should be mentioned that the Western tradition uses the terms theologia and oikonomia somewhat differently from the way they are used in the East. For general orientation see G. G. Blum, “Oikonomia und Theologie: Der Hintergrund einer konfessionellen Differenz zwischen Ostlichem und Westlichem Christentum,” Ostkirchliche Studien 33 (1984): 281-301. For the varying understandings in East and West of the term “theology,” see also W. Kern and F. J. Niemann, Theologische Erkenntnislehre (Düsseldorf: Patmos Verlages, 1981), 41-42.
theosis in Lossky. I start with the discussion of the first aspect, which is, according to Lossky, the “divine existence in the essence,” or what is also referred to in Western theology as “immanent Trinity.”

“Trinity as Such”

Orthodox teaching on the Trinity is the foundation of its reflection on theosis. The very fact that God is triune assumes importance for understanding both the divine action in deification as well as human persons themselves since humanity was created in the image of the triune God.

The dogma of the Trinity, according to Lossky, is “the keystone of the arch of all theological thought,” the “summit of theology.” This dogma belongs to the region that the Greek Fathers called theologis par excellence. This is why any divergence in trinitarian theology, insignificant as it may seem, has decisive importance for Lossky. The difference between the Eastern and Western conceptions of the Trinity determines the

Contemporary Orthodox scholar John Breck, although recognizing the artificial character of this distinction, nevertheless finds it useful insofar as “it enables us to affirm that our knowledge of God is not limited to his mighty acts within history but includes a perception or vision of God as he is within himself, apart from his relationship to creation.” Breck, “Divine Initiative: Salvation in Orthodox Theology,” 106-107.

Mystical Theology, 82.


In the Image and Likeness of God, 80, 90.
whole character of theological thought and especially the understanding of salvation.

When we speak of the Trinity in itself, Lossky says, we "are confessing, in our poor and always defective human language, the mode of existence of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, one sole God who cannot but be Trinity, because He is the Living God of Revelation." Lossky is convinced that if God is truly "the Living God of Revelation" and not the simple essence of the philosophers, He can only be God the Trinity. For Lossky, this is a primordial truth, incapable of being based on any process of reasoning whatever, because all reasoning, all truth, and all thought prove to be posterior to the Trinity, the basis of all being and all knowledge.

Lossky affirms that in the tradition of the Eastern Church there is no place for a theology—and even less for mysticism—of the divine essence. The goal of Orthodox spirituality, the ultimate purpose of theosis, is not the vision of the divine essence, but a participation in the divine life of the Holy Trinity. The Trinity, therefore, is the unshakeable foundation of all spiritual life, of all experience. "It is the Trinity that we seek in seeking after God, when we search for the fullness of being, for the end and meaning of existence." If we reject the Trinity as the sole ground of all reality and of all thought, then, according to Lossky, "we are committed to a road that leads nowhere; we end

\[\text{Ibid.}, \ 39.\]
\[\text{Ibid.}, \ 97.\]

\textit{Mystical Theology}, 65.
in an aporia, in folly, in the disintegration of our being, in spiritual death."

What are the major characteristics of the Trinity? First of all, Lossky affirms that the Trinity is an absolute stability. "There is no interior process in the Godhead; no 'dialectic' of the three persons; no becoming; no 'tragedy in the Absolute', which might necessitate the trinitarian development of the divine being." Second, there is no dependence in relation to created beings on the part of the Trinity. Even though the created order did not exist, God would still be Trinity--Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Third, Lossky affirms the antinomical character of the Trinity, which is both unity and diversity.

Lossky points out that there has always been a tendency in the history of Christian thought to shatter the antinomy by rationalizing either unity or diversity. This is why, he says, the Church has defended so vehemently the mystery of the Holy Trinity against the natural tendencies of the human mind, which strive to suppress it by reducing the Trinity to unity, in making

Ibid., 66.

Ibid., 45. Thus, when we use such expressions as procession, generation, inner determination as applied to Trinity--involving, as they do, the ideas of time, becoming, and intention--we show only, as Lossky believes, to what extent our language, indeed our thought, is poor and deficient before the primordial mystery of revelation.

In doing this Lossky follows Gregory of Nazianzus's definition of Trias, "name which unites things united by nature, and never allows those which are inseparable to be scattered by a number which separates." Gregory of Nazianzus Orations 23.10. He also quotes Maximus the Confessor, for whom God is "identically monad and triad," he is at once "unitrinity and triunity, with the double equation of 1=3, of 3=1." Orthodox Theology, 44.
it an essence of the philosophers with three modes of
manifestation (unitarianism or Sabellian modalism), or by dividing
it into three distinct beings, a tendency that is seen in Arius.
The Orthodox Church, argues Lossky, “seizes in a single movement,
with a single adhesion, the unity and the diversity of God.”

Lossky argues that Western thought most frequently took as
its starting point the unity of essence or nature of God, and
thence passed to the consideration of the three persons, while the
Greeks followed the opposite course—from the three persons to the
one nature. Regarding theosis, Lossky sees great danger in the

Mystical Theology, 48; Orthodox Theology, 36-37.

Orthodox Theology, 38. Zizioulas helps us to grasp this
antinomy when he indicates that divine unity is not to be
interpreted primarily in abstract or essentialist terms, as a
unity of nature or substance. It is to be interpreted in personal
terms, as a unity expressed through the interrelationship or
koinonia of the three hypostases. In the words of Zizioulas, “the
being of God is a relational being: without the concept of
communion it would not be possible to speak of the being of God.”
John Zizioulas, Being as Communion: Studies in Personhood and the
Church (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1985), 17.

Mystical Theology, 56. Historians of Christian theology
unanimously recognize that already by the fourth century the
formulations of the Trinitarian doctrine, which can be defined as
“Cappadocian” and “Augustinian,” were two distinct systems of
thought which determined the later developments of theology in the
East and in the West. See Meyendorff, “The Holy Trinity in
Palamite Theology,” 25; Burgess, 2. Meyendorff emphasizes the fact
that the East refused to identify God’s being with the concept of
“simple essence,” while the West admitted this identification “on
the basis of Greek philosophical presuppositions.” Byzantine
Theology, 188. In many ways Thomas Aquinas was indebted to the
Trinitarian theology of Augustine, who argued that the starting
point for Trinitarian theology should not be the Father as such,
but the divine essence or nature. Thus, the word Triadic would be
more congenial to the Eastern tradition than Triune. Triadic means
three who are one; Triune is a unity which consists of three.
Eastern tradition considers the persons first, then the one
reality of God which is behind them. Western tradition considers
the one essence first, while the persons are reduced to
relationship within the essence.
tendency to stress the unity of nature at the expense of the real
distinction between the persons. If God is reduced to the "simple
essence," the Trinitarian theology ceases to be a theology of
union that leads a human person to the intimate communion with the
Holy Trinity. The Orthodox Trinity provides us with a foundation
for theosis because it points to the fact that ultimate reality is
not just essence, or even "a person confined in his own self," but
"that ultimate reality--God--is interpersonal relationship." This
leads us to the first distinction in God affirmed by the Orthodox
theology and which is of great importance for the idea of theosis--
a distinction between ousia and hypostasis.

Ousia/Hypostasis Distinction

The great problem of the fourth century--trinitarian century
par excellence, according to Lossky--was to express at once divine
unity and diversity, the coincidence in God of the monad and the
triad. It was a question of finding a distinction of terms which
should express this antinomy without giving pre-eminence either to
integrity of, or the differentiation within, the Godhead, and
without falling into the error of a Sabellian unitarianism or a
pagan tritheism. It was the Cappadocian Fathers who used two
philosophical categories--ousia and hypostasis--to express the
ontological integrity of each person in the Trinity and to render
the "prodigiously new reality which Christianity alone reveals:

*Mystical Theology, 48.
Harakas, Toward Transfigured Life, 26.
Mystical Theology, 50.
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namely, that of personhood--in God as in man, since man is in the image of God." Therefore, what significance does this distinction mean for the doctrine of theosis?

Lossky starts by giving a definition of the two terms as they were used in the historical context of Trinitarian controversy, exposing their synonymical character. Both had the same meaning. He says:

The two terms would thus appear to be more or less synonymous; ousia meaning an individual substance, while being capable at the same time of denoting the essence common to many individuals; hypostasis, on the other hand, meaning existence in general, but capable also of application to individual substances.

To express the truth of the One God by reality common to the three, the Fathers appropriated the concept of ousia. This word, denoting “essence,” also had an ontological resonance, being derived from the feminine participle of the verb “to be.” As Orthodox Theology, 40. Lossky emphatically says that “Christian theology does not know an abstract divinity; God cannot be conceived outside of the three persons.” Ibid., 45. Zizioulas calls this, namely the identification of the idea of person with that of hypostasis, a historic revolution in the history of philosophy. Being as Communion, 36. This was really a revolutionary idea especially if we have in mind that only a generation before the Cappadccians the term hypostasis was fully identified with that of ousia or substance. (See, for example, the Creed of Nicaea’s apparent identification of the terms ousia and hypostasis. Thomas A. Marsh, The Triune God: A Biblical Historical, and Theological Study (Mystic, CT: Twenty-Third Publications, 1994), 111.) Indeed, the Latin term substantia would be literally translated into Greek as hypostasis.

'Mystical Theology, 51.

In this case ousia just means the fact of participation in being. But, as Yannaras notes, we cannot speak about participation in being in regard to God, who is Being itself, the fullness of every possibility for existence and life. Therefore the apophatic formulation “Being beyond all being,” which the Fathers often used, is closer to the expression of the truth of one God. See

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such, Lossky points out, it could well be used to stress the ontological unity of divinity. The problem lays in expressing the idea of diversity in God, an idea totally foreign to Greek philosophy, since the notion of “otherness” inevitably led to disintegration of being. The Fathers used the concept of *hypostasis*, which was very close in meaning to the word *ousia*, to express the idea of Personhood in God. The relative equivalence of the two words, says Lossky, favored the elaboration of a Christian language. By stressing the equal dignity of the two terms, the Fathers avoided the risk of giving the preponderance to impersonal essence. “The Fathers,” Lossky argues, “by specializing their [ousia, hypostasis] meaning, came to be able, without external hindrance, to root personhood in being, and to personalize ontology.”

Lossky sees the genius of the Fathers in using the two synonyms to distinguish in God that which is common--ousia from that which is particular--hypostasis. But were they not in danger of introducing tritheism by defending the fullness and integrity of each person? Following the logic of Aristotelian philosophy, the term *ousia*, as applied to man, means the one human nature or

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\[1\] *Orthodox Theology*, 40. Lossky notes that this term was already present in the concept of *homoousios*, “Christianized by the council of Nicaea.” Both *ousia* and *homoousios* referred to identity of essence, although *homoousios* indicated to two irreducibly different persons.

\[2\] *Orthodox Theology*, 41.

\[3\] *Mystical Theology*, 51. See also *In the Image and Likeness of God*, 112, 134.
substance that is general and is shared by all human beings, while hypostases mean concrete human beings: John, George, Basil. Theological difficulty arises when, in the case of human beings, we must have three men when we talk about hypostases, whereas in the Trinity we do not imply three Gods, but one. Lossky affirms that the divine ousia is not "an abstract idea of divinity, a rational essence binding three divine individuals, as humanity for example is common to three men." The reason why human beings cannot be one and many at the same time can be explained in the following fashion.

As regards humanity, the existence of nature precedes the existence of a particular individual. When John or George or Basil is born, human nature already exists; they, therefore, represent and embody only part of that human nature. No human individual can be said to be the bearer of the totality of human nature. Because of this each human person can be conceived of as an individual, i.e., as an entity independent ontologically from other human beings. While individuals divide the nature to which they belong, there is nothing of the sort in the Trinity, where

See, for example, Basil Letters 236.6: 38.5.

Orthodox Theology, 41.

every hypostasis assumes divine nature in its fullness. Since God by definition has not had a beginning, the three persons of the Trinity do not share a pre-existing or logically prior-to-them divine nature, but coincide with it. Thus, multiplicity in God does not involve a division of His nature, as it happens with man.

It is impossible, therefore, to say that there is an essence of God that exists apart from the three hypostases. It is by virtue of relations to each other that they 'hypostases' together constitute ousia. Moreover, it is impossible to say that in God any of the three persons exist or can exist in separation from the other persons. "The three constitute such an unbreakable unity that individualism is absolutely inconceivable in their case."

Lossky writes: "Individuals are at once opposite and repetitive: each possesses its fraction of nature; but indefinitely divided, it is always the same nature, without authentic diversity. The hypostases, on the other hand, are infinitely united and infinitely different: they are the divine nature, but none possesses it, none breaks it to own it exclusively." Orthodox Theology, 42. It can be seen that the concepts of person and individual are not the same in Orthodox theology. Lossky makes it even more clear when he discusses the Greek notion of prosopon and Latin persona. Neither of these two terms designated the idea of personhood as it was developed by the Fathers. Both prosopon and persona denoted, Lossky admits, "the delimiting, deceptive, and finally illusory aspect of the individual: not the open-face of personal being, but the masked-face of impersonal being." Ibid., 40-41. Ancient philosophy, Lossky concludes, "was indeed ignorant of the meaning of personhood. Greek thought did not go beyond an 'atomic' conception of the individual." Ibid., 42.

As Yannaras indicates, "persons hypostasize essence, they give it an hypostasis, that is, real and specific existence. Essence exists only 'in persons'; persons are the mode of existence of essence." Elements of Faith, 27.

'Mystical Theology, 54. See also Zizioulas, "The Doctrine of the Holy Trinity," 48.'
Trinitarian theology thus opens to us a new aspect of both divine and human reality: that of personhood. This concept, Lossky thinks, is incomparable, the wholly-other. Actually it is more than just a concept that can be defined. Lossky writes that "only a thought methodologically 'deconceptualized' by apophasis can evoke the mystery of personhood." It is only to be seized through a personal relationship (i.e., theosis).

It is exactly by defending the doctrine of theosis that Lossky repudiated the Western Trinitarian theology where "the equilibrium between essence and hypostases is broken." For him the Western (Augustinian) conception of God is based upon and limited by an essentialistic view of God, in which the distinctions between the Persons were identified with mutual relations. When nature assumes the first place in our conception of Trinitarian dogma, Lossky argues, "the religious reality of God in Trinity is inevitably obscured in some measure and gives place

Mystical Theology, 42-43.

Although Lossky is very cautious not to conceptualize the idea of personhood, he clearly goes in the direction of a relational definition. Person can be most adequately defined only in relation to 'another' or an 'other-orientation'.

In the Image and Likeness of God, 93.

"He describes the general character of the Western triadology as "a pre-eminence of natural unity over personal trinity, as an ontological primacy of the essence over the hypostases." In the Image and Likeness of God, 77. For a more detailed discussion on Augustinian Trinitarian theology, see W. R. O’Conner, "The Concept of the Person in St. Augustine’s De Trinitate," Augustinian Studies 13 (1982): 133-143. See also Colin E. Gunton, The Promise of Trinitarian Theology (Edinbugh: T. & T. Clark, 1991), 38-40."
to a certain philosophy of essence." There is no need to say what a devastating effect this Trinitarian approach has to the doctrine of theosis. The personal relationship of man to the living God is not relationship to the Persons of God but rather to the essence of God. Lossky writes:

Indeed, in the doctrinal conditions peculiar to the West all properly theocentric speculation runs the risk of considering the nature before the persons and becoming a mysticism of 'the divine abyss', as in the Gottheit of Meister Eckhart; of becoming an impersonal apophasism of the divine-nothingness prior to the Trinity. Thus by a paradoxical circuit we return through Christianity to the mysticism of the neo-platonists.

The vision of God as both One and Three is, first of all, a vision of living Persons to whom the human being relates as a person. It makes the Christian experience distinct from the Neo-platonic communion with the One. Theosis, therefore, is "an acceptance of human persons within a divine life, which already is itself a fellowship of love between three coeternal Persons, welcoming humanity within their mutuality."

There is another problem in Trinitarian theology which has great significance for the doctrine of theosis— it is what Lossky calls "the relation of origin" of the hypostases, or the procession of Persons.

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Mystical Theology, 64.

Ibid., 65.

As Meyendorff notes, "God is not an impersonal, transcendent One, but the Father, the Son, and the Spirit, united without confusion and manifesting to creatures not only an abstraction of love but its only authentic reality." Meyendorff, "Theosis in the Eastern Christian Tradition," 476.

Ibid., 475.
The Procession of Persons

The relation of origin, according to Lossky, is the only characteristic of the hypostases which is exclusively proper to each, and which is never found in the others. The Son and the Holy Spirit "are distinguished by the different mode of their origin: the Son is begotten, the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father. This is sufficient to distinguish them."

The most frequently cited difference between Eastern and Western theology concerns the mystery of the origin or procession of the Holy Spirit. Eastern Christianity almost universally declares that the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father through the Son, while the West, at least since the tenth-eleventh century, has argued that the Third Person issues from the Father and the Son. The Orthodox Church is opposed to the Western doctrine of the Double Procession of the Holy Spirit. The reason Eastern Orthodoxy rejects the filioque is because it is perceived as distorting the relationship of the persons of the Holy Trinity.

Mystical Theology, 55. Lossky emphasizes that this relation must be understood only apophatically. "It is above all a negation," Lossky writes, "showing us that the Father is neither the Son nor the Holy Spirit; that the Son is neither the Father nor the Spirit; that the Holy Spirit is neither the Father nor the Son." Ibid., 54. Following Gregory of Nazianzus and John of Damascus, Lossky affirms incomprehensibility of generation and procession. See Gregory of Nazianzus Orations 31.9; John of Damascus An Exact Exposition of the Orthodox Faith 1.8.

In contemporary Orthodoxy there are, in fact, two approaches to this question. Some theologians do not consider the Latin doctrine of the Double Procession as heretical; it may be accepted as a theological opinion (theologoumenon). The others regard filioque as a heresy that produces a fatal distortion of the Trinity. Lossky is the chief exponent of the latter view in the twentieth century.
tending to depersonalize the Holy Spirit, particularly, and the Holy Trinity as a whole.

Filioque, for Lossky, is more than tolerable theological opinion. He sees in the procession of the Holy Spirit at utroque a tendency to stress the unity of nature at the expense of the real distinction between the persons. Lossky argues:

The relationships of origin which do not bring the Son and the Spirit back directly to the unique source, to the Father—the one as begotten, the other as proceeding—become a system of relationships within the one essence: something logically posterior to the essence.

The filioquist triadology gives rise to a dyad, according to Lossky, where the Father and the Son represent one nature while the Holy Spirit serves as "the bond between the Father and the Son." Thus, the hypostatic characteristics (paternity, generation, procession), Lossky concludes,

find themselves more or less swallowed up in the nature or essence which, differentiated by relationships ... becomes the principle of unity within the Trinity. The relationships, instead of being characteristics of the hypostases, are identified with them.

Since the divine persons lack distinguishable identity and tend to disappear into the all-embracing oneness of God, the doctrine of

For reasons why Orthodoxy regards filioque as dangerous and heretical, see Timothy Ware, The Orthodox Church (New York: Penguin Books, 1993), 213-215. Harakas sees in the filioque a tendency to stress the unity of the nature of God at the expense of a true distinction among the persons of the Trinity, which consequently weakens the main thrust of the trinitarian emphasis on the personal interrelatedness of the Holy Trinity. Harakas, Toward Transfigured Life, 27.

Mystical Theology, 57.

Ibid.
theosis, understood as a real participation, comes to be threatened by the idea of pantheism.

Monarchy of the Father

The filioque issue is closely connected with the idea of the monarchy of the Father, which has been traditionally defended by the Orthodox Church and which is of great importance for Lossky's understanding of theosis. The Greek Fathers maintained that the principle of unity in the Trinity is the person of the Father. To confess the unity of the nature for them is to recognize the Father as the unique Source of the persons who receive from Him this same nature. The Father is at the same time the Source of the relations whence the hypostases receive their distinctive characteristics. "In causing the persons to proceed," Lossky writes, "he [the Father] lays down their relations of origin—generation and procession—in regard to the unique principle of Godhead." In insisting upon the monarchy of the Father—unique source of the Godhead and principle of the unity of the three persons—Lossky was defending a conception of the Trinity that he considered to be more concrete, more personal, than the Western

See Athanasius Against Arians 4.1; Gregory of Nazianzus Orations 31.14.

Mystical Theology, 58. The East opposed the filioque particularly because it seemed to impair the monarchy of the Father by acknowledging two principles of Godhead. Mark Eugenicus, Metropolitan of Ephesus, who was the leading Greek representative in the Council of Ferrara-Florence (1438-39), argued that the filioque doctrine implied directly that the Son was a principle or cause of procession. This introduced a dyarchy, two principles, and two causes in the Holy Trinity, which was contrary to the Patristic tradition.
conception. The idea of monarchy, he believes, denotes the unity and the difference in God, "starting from a personal principle." The 'one God' is the Father, and not the one substance, as Augustine and medieval Scholasticism would affirm. The Cappadocian attaching the cause not to the "One" (God's nature) but to the person, the Father, is of great importance for Lossky, because only the idea of personhood as ontological principle makes the doctrine of theosis meaningful.

Lossky agrees that the idea of the monarchy of the Father may confer upon Him a certain pre-eminence as the divine person, because one can find here the idea of causality applied to the person of the Father. In Greek Patristic literature, the Father is often called the cause of the hypostases of the Son and the Holy Spirit, or even the "divinity-source." Answering this problem, Lossky appeals again to the help of apophaticism. He says that "not only the image of 'cause,' but also such terms as 'production,' 'procreation,' and 'origin' ought to be seen as inadequate expressions of a reality which is foreign to all becoming, to all process, to all beginning." In the Image and Likeness of God, 32. It is in our experience, Lossky argues, that the cause is superior to the effect, but "in God there is no extrapolation of cause and effect, but causality within one and the same nature." Orthodox Theology, 47. "This unique cause [the Father]," continues Lossky, "is not prior to his effects, for in the Trinity there is no priority and posteriority. He is not superior to his effects, for the perfect cause cannot produce inferior effects. He is thus the cause of their equality with himself." In the Image and Likeness of God, 32.

Orthodox Theology, 46. As Prestige pointed out, "the doctrine of monarchy had begun by basing the unity of God on the single Person of the Father." Prestige, 254.

Zizioulas calls this idea revolutionary, since, according to him, the philosophical scandal of the Trinity can be resolved only if substance gives way to personhood as the causing principle or arché in ontology. Zizioulas, "The Doctrine of the Holy Trinity," 52.
The second distinction in God that has immense significance for the issue discussed here, is the Essence/Energy distinction. Lossky argues that it was the need to establish a dogmatic basis for union with God (theosis) which impelled the Eastern Church to formulate her teaching on the distinction between God’s essence and His energies. He takes seriously the explicitness of Peter’s words: “partakers of the divine nature” (2 Pet 1:4), claiming that “it would be childish, not to say impious, to see in these words only a rhetorical expression or metaphor,” although he recognizes that these words appear “to be in conflict with so many other passages of Holy Scripture . . . about the absolute incommunicability of the divine being.” For that reason, he asks a legitimate question: If the participation Peter is talking about is real, what is the nature of the relationship by which we are able to enter into union with the Holy Trinity?

Answering this question, Lossky categorically denies any possibility for man to be united to the very essence of God and to participate in it “even in the very least degree.” If this were the case, God would then no longer be Trinity, but He would have as many hypostases as there would be persons participating in His essence. “God . . . is and remains inaccessible to us in His

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Mystical Theology, 71.

Ibid., 67.

Ibid., 68.

Ibid., 70.
essence." Lossky also denies the possibility of the hypostatic union which is proper to the Son alone, who combined in Himself both divine and human natures. As human beings, we are unable to participate in either the essence or the hypostases of the Holy Trinity. Nevertheless, the participation in God is not an illusion. As Lossky says, we are “compelled” to recognize in God a distinction other than that between the essence and hypostases, and according to which He is accessible—a distinction between God’s essence, which is inaccessible, unknowable, and incommunicable; and the energies or divine operations, in which God manifests Himself, communicates, and gives Himself.

In agreement with the Byzantine tradition, Lossky emphasizes the reality of God’s presence in His energies. He writes: “The Suvediç, or energies, in which God proceeds forth, are God Himself; but not according to His substance.” Energies are not effects of a divine cause, as creatures are. They “are not treated, formed ex nihilo, but flow eternally from the one essence of the Trinity.” Lossky points out that God is in no way diminished in His energies; He is still the same God, the same Trinity.

Ibid.

Ibid. See also In the Image and Likeness of God, 39.

Mystical Theology, 72.

Ibid., 73. Lossky describes divine energies as the mode of existence of the Trinity “outside” of its essence. Thus, God “exists both in His essence and outside of His essence.” Ibid.
Essence/energies distinction is not merely an intellectual distinction. It is "a strictly concrete reality" for Lossky. However, this distinction does not derogate the idea of divine simplicity, for "simplicity does not mean uniformity or absence of distinction—otherwise Christianity would not be the religion of the Holy Trinity." Nor does this distinction admit any kind of composition in God, for the energies are not elements of the divine being which can be conceived of separately from the Trinity.

The essence/energies distinction is of great importance for the doctrine of theosis, since it establishes the real character of our union with God, preserving at the same time God's transcendence. The defense of the divine simplicity along Aristotelian lines, starting from a philosophical concept of essence as pure act which "cannot admit anything to be God that is not the very essence of God," leads definitely to the impossibility of the reality of theosis.

The doctrine of divine energies has an application to the idea of grace, for it is by this name, Lossky says, that we know the "deifying energies" which the Holy Spirit communicates to us. This doctrine makes it possible to explain how the Trinity, being

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*Ibid., 76.*

*Ibid., 79.* What Lossky is actually saying is that the idea of divine simplicity—at least in the way in which it is presented in the manuals of theology—originates in human philosophy rather than in divine revelation.

*Ibid., 77.*

*Ibid., 86.*
incommunicable in essence, can at the same time come and dwell within us (John 14:23). In receiving divine grace—the deifying energies—a Christian believer really receives the indwelling of the Holy Trinity, for “in the energies He is, He exists, He eternally manifests Himself.”

Thus, the essence/energies distinction is of great importance for Lossky, for it states the dogmatic basis for the real character of theosis. The distinction between the essence and the energies makes it possible to preserve the real, not metaphorical, meaning of Peter’s words, “partakers of the divine nature.” The union to which we are called, Lossky argues, is “union with God in His energies,” it is “union by grace making us participate in the divine nature, without our essence becoming thereby the essence of God.” Appealing to Maximus the Confessor, Lossky affirms that in the process of theosis “we are by grace (that is to say, in the

Ibid., 59. Theosis is impossible for Western theology, since the Western conception of grace implies the idea of causality, grace being represented as an effect of the divine Cause, exactly as in act of creation. In the West, grace has been understood to be primarily God’s extrinsic act of forgiveness (Protestants) or power, enabling us to recover God-likeness and, thereby, God’s acceptance (Catholicism). But they both consider this power as a product of the Holy Spirit (created grace), not the Holy Spirit per se. Orthodoxy has rejected the antinomy between “grace” and “nature” common in the West. In contrast with the Western distinction between the Spirit and grace, Orthodoxy views grace as the actual presence of God’s Spirit (uncreated grace), deifying man. See E. L. Mascall, “Grace and Nature in East and West,” CQR 164 (1963): 181-198. On complementary and compenetrative character of grace and nature, see Paul Evdokimov, L’Orthodoxie (Neuchâtel, Switzerland: Éditions Delachaux et Niestlé, 1965), 88.

'Mystical Theology, 87.
This discussion on the divine energies leads us closer to the "economical" aspect of theosis, which is a manifestation of God-the-Trinity in creation.

"Economical" Aspect of Theosis

Lossky refers to the creation of the universe and the whole salvific activity of God as "the economic manifestation of the Trinity." First I discuss Lossky's understanding of the idea of creation and what significance it has for the doctrine of theosis.

Creation ex nihilo

Creation of the world ex nihilo, for Lossky, "is not a truth of a philosophical order, but rather an article of faith," a revealed truth that should be grasped again only apophatically. God has not created from something, but from what is not, from "nothingness." Creation ex nihilo means, for Lossky, an act producing something which is 'outside of God'--the production of an entirely new subject, with no origin of any kind either in the divine nature or in any matter or potentially of being external to God.'

Maximus Book of Ambiguities PG 91.1308B, quoted in ibid.
Orthodox Theology, 55; cf. Mystical Theology, 100.
Mystical Theology, 91.
'Ibid., 92.
As a result, we are dealing with a subject that is entirely "other," ontologically different from God. God creates something that is ontologically different from Him or, as Lossky expresses, "has no ontological foundation . . . in the divine essence." The foundation of creation is not the essence but the will and the energies of God.

The notion of creation has nothing to do with the idea of spreading out, infinite diffusion, or emanation of divinity producing something "in virtue of some necessity of the divine nature." Creation is a free act of God, and this free act, Lossky says, is "the sole foundation of the existence of all beings." In

As John of Damascus notes, the creation is removed from God "not by place but by nature." See his Exposition of the Orthodox Faith 1.13. Lossky affirms that only in Christianity, or more precisely in the Judaeo-Christian tradition, the notion of creation ex nihilo is affirmed. He refers to the second book of Maccabees (2 Macc 7:28) as an authoritative source where the idea of creation ex nihilo finds its first expression in the Bible. Mystical Theology, 92; cf. Orthodox Theology, 51. Ancient philosophy, according to him, knows nothing of creation in the absolute sense of the word. See Lossky's discussion on the idea of creation in Platonic tradition in Mystical Theology, 91-92, and Orthodox Theology, 51-52.

Mystical Theology, 93. In emphasizing an ontological abyss between God and creation, Lossky repeatedly asserts that creation ex nihilo is the work of the will of God and not of His nature. It is on this basis that John of Damascus opposed the creation of the world to the generation of the Word. See also Orthodox Theology, 53.

Meyendorff makes this clear when he says: "It is because the divine persons--or hypostases--are conceived not simply as expressions of the divine essence (or 'internal relation' within God) that it is possible to say that divine acts are voluntary acts, and that, therefore, the act of creation is not a necessary effulgence of divine essence but a result of the omnipotent divine will." Meyendorff, "Creation in the History of Orthodox Theology," 34.

'Mystical Theology, 93.
the act of creation, God "was under no necessity of any kind
whatever."

Such understanding of creation removes the idea of
ontological participation of creation in God in any real sense.
On the other hand, Lossky affirms the "cosmological dynamism" of
creation. Although creatures from the moment of their first
condition are separate from God, "their end and final fulfilment
lies in union with Him or deification."

Creation of Man

The Bible's description of the creation of man, Lossky notes,
marks some distinctive features that are very important for the
doctrine of theosis. It is no longer the creative command
addressed to the earth; but the special expression of a decision
of God (Gen 1:26). It is not an arbitrary decision of monad, but
a collaborative decision of divine Persons. "The Trinity

Ibid.

There is no room for cosmogony becoming a theogony in such
an understanding, as it actually goes on in Oriental religions or
Neo-Platonism. See Orthodox Theology, 52.

Mystical Theology, 99. This idea is stressed by Pseudo-
Dionysius in whom the notion of creation is so close to that of
deification that it is hard to distinguish between the first state
of creatures and their final end, union with God. Lossky calls
this initial state of the created cosmos as being in "an unstable
perfection" in which "the fullness of union is not yet achieved."  
Ibid., 97.

Ibid., 116.

In this decision, as Yannaras notes, Christian hermeneutics
has always distinguished the first revelation of God as Trinity.
Yannaras, Elements of Faith, 54.
consulted within itself before creating" man. Why does the creation of man demand this council of the Three instead of a simple order to the earth as in the case with the animals? Lossky answers: "This is because man, a personal being, needs the affirmation of the personal aspect of God in whose image he is made."

Another distinctive element in the creation of man, Lossky points out, is a "breath of life." When the Scripture says that God "breathed in his [man's] face a breath of life" (Gen 2:7), this demonstrated the communication to man of certain marks of the very existence of God. It does not mean, Lossky argues, that we ought to deduce from this "the uncreated character of the soul" or see in man "a mixture of God and animal." The "divine breath" points to a mode of creation, by virtue of which the human spirit is intimately connected with grace. Commenting on Gregory of Nazianzus's expression, a "particle of divinity," Lossky writes:

This means that uncreated grace is implicated in the creative act itself, and that the soul receives at once life and... 

John of Damascus calls this "the eternal and unchanging Counsel of God." De imaginibus 1.20, quoted in Mystical Theology, 94.

Orthodox Theology, 67. According to Lossky, the mystery of the singular and plural in man reflects the mystery of the singular and plural in God.

Yannaras notes that for the Hebrews (and for the Semitic peoples generally) to breathe in the face of someone else was always an act of the deepest symbolism: it meant that you transmitted to the other "your breath, something very inwardly yours, your own selfconsciousness or your spirit." Elements of Faith, 54.

'Mystical Theology, 117.'
Accordingly, it is a participation in the divine energy proper to the "living soul" that is meant by the phrase "particle of divinity," rather than carrying in oneself "a portion of the Deity." There is nothing about human nature that is uncreated. Nothing about it may be said to be without a beginning. Grace gives life to the human being; it is this grace that is "the real principle of our existence."

Lossky emphasizes the dynamic character of Eastern anthropology by pointing to the fact that Adam, although created perfect, "was neither a 'pure nature' nor a deified man." The perfection of the first man before the Fall enclosed, above all, the capacity to communicate with God, to be united more and more with the fullness of the Godhead. This leads us clearly to the purpose of God's creation of man. Man was called, as Maximus affirmed, "to reunite by love created with uncreated nature, showing the two in unity and identity through the acquisition of grace." "Man is thus," Lossky comments, "to reunite by grace two
natures in his created hypostasis, to become 'a created god,' a 'god by grace'." In this process of theosis, Adam was destined to overcome divisions that constitute creation and reunite in himself the whole of the created cosmos and to become deified with it. It is not occasionally that Lossky talks about "spiritual geocentrism":

The earth is spiritually central because . . . man, penetrating the indefiniteness of the visible to bind it again to the invisible, is the central being of creation, the being who reunites in himself the sensible and the intelligible and thus participates, richer than the angels, in all the orders of 'earth' and of 'heaven'.

Whatever pertains to human existence is related to God through the fact that human beings are created in the image and likeness of God. What does this fact mean for Lossky and how does it relate to the doctrine of theosis?

*Mystical Theology,* 126. Summarizing the teaching of Irenaeus, Athanasius, and Maximus the Confessor, the Orthodox theologian Evdokimov affirms: "God created the world in order that He Himself might become man in this world and in order that man can become god by grace. . . . In His designs God decided to unite Himself with humanity in order to deify man." Evdokimov, *L'Orthodoxie,* 62. Marta Ryk notes that this assertion includes not only the goal of creation but also the aim of the Incarnation of the Son of God. See M. Ryk, "The Holy Spirit's Role in the Deification of Man According to Contemporary Orthodox Theology (1925-1972)," *Diakonia* 10 (1975): 112.

Lossky refers to five divisions of created order that Maximus the Confessor describes--between uncreated and created nature, between intelligible and sensitive universe, between the heaven and the earth, between the whole earth and paradise, and finally, the division into sexes. See *Mystical Theology,* 108; *Orthodox Theology,* 74.

*Mystical Theology,* 109. Lossky asserts that "in his way to union with God, man in no way leaves creatures aside, but gathers together . . . the whole cosmos disordered by sin." Ibid., 111.

*Orthodox Theology,* 64.
Image and Likeness of God

Orthodox religious thought lays the utmost emphasis on the image of God in man. The whole doctrine of theosis is based on "the idea of the human person made according to the image and likeness of God the Holy Trinity." It is because of theosis that the theme of the image has such great importance for Orthodox thought. Lossky affirms that we are justified in speaking of a "theology of the image." According to him, the theme of the image "must belong to the 'essence of Christianity'.”

The exact meaning of the Greek expression kat’ eikona kai kat’ homoiosin, which is the Septuagint version of Gen 1:26, has challenged Christian thinkers since the second century, yet its content has never been clearly defined. The problem, as Lossky underlines, is the great difficulty of determining the true context in which the books of the Old Testament were written. He says:

In the purely Hebraic text of the Bible, interpreted in the historic context in which the books of the Old Testament were

Ware, Orthodox Church, 220.

Ibid., 231.

Nellas says that the "image" theme "serves as an axis around which not only Orthodox cosmology but also Orthodox anthropology and christology itself are organized." See Nellas, Deification in Christ, 22. Harakas calls image, likeness, and theosis as the great doctrines of Christian anthropology. See Harakas, Transfigured Life, 235.

In the Image and Likeness of God, 125.

Ibid., 126. He writes, "There is no branch of theological teaching which can be entirely isolated from the problem of the image without danger of severing it from the living stock of Christian tradition."
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.

The Fathers use the term "image" in their works extensively, but if we try to find in them a clear definition of what it is in man that corresponds to the divine image, "we run the risk of losing ourselves amidst varying assertions" not only from author to author, but in the treatises of a single writer. Nevertheless, modern Orthodox theologians agree that a lack of clear and definitive formulations of the sense of the phrase "in the image" in the teaching of the Fathers does not imply a corresponding lack of clear orientation. According to Lossky,

All the Fathers of the Church, both of East and of West, are agreed in seeing a certain co-ordination, a primordial correspondence between the being of man and the being of God in the fact of the creation of man in the image and likeness of God.

Lossky sees this correspondence first of all in the ability of man to have a relationship with God. "He [God] does not refuse," Lossky writes, "personal relationship, living intercourse with men, with a people; He speaks to them and they reply." The relational aspect of the image is of special importance for

\[\text{Ibid., 129. See also Mystical Theology, 116.}\]

\[\text{Mystical Theology, 115. For a review of different views on the image in the Greek Fathers, see Zachary C. Xintaras, "Man--the Image of God According to the Greek Fathers," GCTR 1 (1954): 48-62.}\]

\[\text{Nellas, Deification, 23.}\]

\[\text{Mystical Theology, 114.}\]

\[\text{\textquote{In the Image and Likeness, 129. Martin Buber says: \"It was Israel who first understood and--much more--lived life as a dialogue between man and God.\" Quoted in ibid.}\]
Orthodox theology. To believe that man is made in God’s image is to believe that man is created for communion and union with God.

To emphasize the dynamic character of the image, Lossky follows a tradition going back to Irenaeus, and distinguishes ‘image’ and ‘likeness’ as potentiality and actuality, respectively, the capacity for communion with God and the realization of it. The basis for the realization of this communion, according to Lossky, is the idea of personhood which is implied in the notion of the image.

Lossky stresses the idea that man, made in the image of God, “is a personal being confronted with a personal God.” I have already shown that the concept of the person or hypostasis, irreducible to nature or to any part of it, is very important in Eastern Trinitarian theology. The same is true for Orthodox anthropology. Lossky summarizes the core of the patristic doctrine on the image of God as follows:

See Ware, The Orthodox Church, 67; Sherrard, 141.


Traditionally, Orthodox theology has approached the subject of theosis through the distinct meaning given to the two terms image and likeness. However, there is no consensus among the Fathers on the exegesis of Gen 1:26-27. Irenaeus, Clement, and Origen assert a distinction between image and likeness, whereas Athanasius and Cyril of Alexandria consider them as synonymous.

Many contemporary Orthodox theologians agree that ‘likeness’ implies the idea of dynamic progress. See Meyendorff, Byzantine Theology, 139; Mantzaridis, The Deification of Man, 22; Ware, The Orthodox Church, 219.

Mystical Theology, 124.

See above, 163-167.
Because created in the image of God, man is to be seen as a personal being, a person who is not to be controlled by nature, but who can himself control nature in assimilating it to its divine Archetype.

Developing this idea, Lossky draws parallels with the Trinitarian model of God affirming that "the human person is not a part of humanity, any more than the persons of the Trinity are parts of God." Because of this the image of God does not refer just to one department of human existence—the spiritual, in opposition to the material—but signifies the whole man, as a single living hypostasis. Moreover, the first man who contained in himself the whole of human nature was also a unique person, so that the divine image proper to the person of Adam was applied to the whole of mankind, to universal man. Lossky does not see in the multiplication of persons in the race of Adam any sort of contradiction with the ontological unity of the nature that is common to all men, because "the hypostasis does not divide the nature, giving place to many distinct natures." At the same time, he realizes that this distinction of nature and person in man is "no less difficult to grasp than the analogous distinction of the one nature and three persons in God." Actually, Lossky reminds us, we do not know the person, the human hypostasis in its true (i.e., sinless) condition. That is why, Lossky says, we should clearly distinguish between two words: person and individual.

Ibid., 120. See also Orthodox Theology, 71.

Mystical Theology, 120.

Ibid., 123. Cf. Orthodox Theology, 41-42.

Mystical Theology, 121.
Lossky recognizes that in the theological language of both East and West the term "human person" coincides with that of "human individual." In our habitual thinking these two words seem to be synonyms. In Lossky's theology of theosis, however, these two concepts differ considerably. "On the lower degrees of being," Lossky argues, "hypostases are only individuals, individual beings: they only receive the character of persons when it becomes a question of spiritual beings, man, the angels or God." The person/individual distinction is due to the fall of the first Adam. Because of the fall, Lossky affirms, human nature was divided into many individuals, and as such it lost its likeness to the divine nature (i.e., the ability for personal relationship and communion). Referring to Adam and Eve, who were one nature, "one flesh," before they sinned, he says:

It was only as a consequence of sin that these two first human persons became two separate natures; two individuals, with exterior relationships between them—the desire of the woman being to her husband, and he exercising rule over her (Gen 3:16).

In the Image and Likeness of God, 117.

Mystical Theology, 123.

In the Image and Likeness of God, 106-107. Ware stresses the idea that the individual signifies the human being in isolation, the person signifies the human being in relationship, in communion. See Ware, "The Trinity," 135. On personal distinctiveness as revealed only within the framework of direct personal relationship and communion, see C. Yannaras, The Freedom of Morality (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1984), 22-24.

'Mystical Theology, 123.
The original unity of nature and communion was re-established by Christ and in the Church, which is the body of Christ, as is shown below.

Thus, according to Lossky's interpretation of the Imago Dei, man has been endowed by God with the gift of being a person, with the capacity for personal relationship and communion with other human beings and with God. With regard to theosis, this means that the difference between uncreated and created, the difference between God's nature and man's nature, can be overcome at the level of the common mode of existence, the mode of personal existence. This truth has been revealed to us by the Incarnation of God, by the Person of Jesus Christ.

The Incarnation of the Son

It is in the context of the Incarnation, Lossky argues, that the creation of man in the image of God receives all its theological value. The dogma of the Incarnation, he says, "contains implicitly the whole doctrine of what is the 'Image' par excellence." The "image of the invisible God" (Col 1:15), the hypostasis of the Son, is a "short and clear declaration of the nature of the Father." Man, created in the image and likeness of God, had then the Son of God as his Archetype. That is why the

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Yannaras understands the Imago Dei as "existence in the same mode [personhood], in which God exists." Yannaras, Elements of Faith, 58.

In the Image and Likeness of God, 136.

Ouspensky and Lossky, 69.

Gregory of Nazianzus Orations 30.20.
Incarnation of the Son renews the image that was distorted through the sin of man. It is not only a perfect theophany but also the realization of the perfect Man, to which the first Adam was unable to attain.

Incarnation is extremely important for Lossky because it is directly connected to the issue of theosis. In the descent of God to the "ultimate limit of our fallen human condition," a descent which opened to men a path of ascent, "the unlimited vistas of the union of created beings with the Divinity," Lossky sees "the very essence of Christianity."

What was the main purpose of Incarnation according to Lossky? His answer is clear: "The Son is incarnated to make possible the union of man with God." Lossky sees three major obstacles to this union: nature, sin, and death. The mere fact of Incarnation overcomes the first obstacle: the separation of the two natures, that of man and that of God. Lossky affirms:

The profound meaning of the Incarnation resides in this physical and metaphysical vision of nature metamorphosized by grace, in this restoration henceforth acquired by human nature, in this breach opened through the opaqueness of death that leads to deification.'

Pelikan points out that "for Orthodoxy, . . . the reality of the incarnation in a material human body was indispensable to salvation and deification." Pelikan, The Christian Tradition, 2:227. The importance of Incarnation for the realization of true humanity of man is such that Basil the Great calls the day of Christ's birth truly and not metaphorically "the birthday of mankind." Basil On the Nativity of Christ 6.

In the Image and Likeness of God, 97.

Orthodox Theology, 92.

Ibid. See also Mystical Theology, 135. Tsirpanlis emphasizes the same idea when he says: "The need of the Incarnate God for deifying man does not arise merely and primarily from the fact
By His death on the cross, Christ removes the obstacle of sin, and by His resurrection He takes from death its "sting." But the Incarnation itself is seen to be directly related to the ultimate goal of man: to know union with God. Lossky writes:

If this union has been accomplished in the divine person of the Son, who is God become man, it is necessary that each human person, in turn, should become god by grace, or "a partaker of the divine nature," according to St. Peter's expression (II Peter 1:4).

Why does Incarnation have so great an importance for theosis?

To answer this question I need to expose briefly some excerpts of christological discussion in Lossky's writings. According to the christological dogma formulated at Chalcedon, Christ's hypostasis "encapsulates two natures." Christ is at once true God consubstantial with the Father by His divinity; and true man consubstantial with us by His humanity. What is most significant for us in this discussion is the human nature of Christ.

that man's nature is sin infected, but from the fact that man is a mere creature." See his Introduction to Eastern Patristic Thought and Orthodox Theology (Collegeville, MI: Liturgical Press, 1991), 66.

Orthodox Theology, 92; see also, Mystical Theology, 135-136.

This brings us the question of Duns Scotus who held, in common with other Franciscan theologians as against the Thomists, that the Incarnation would have taken place irrespectively of the Fall. This question has never stood at the center of attention in Byzantium. The major exception to this is given by Maximus the Confessor. It is an "unreal question" for Lossky. See Orthodox Theology, 98; Mystical Theology, 136-137.

In the Image and Likeness of God, 98.

Orthodox Theology, 95.
Lossky says that in the one and same act of Incarnation "the Word assumed human nature, gave it its existence, and deified it." Humanity, assumed by Christ, received its being in the Divine hypostasis. The humanity of Christ did not exist before as a distinct nature. Therefore, strictly speaking, it is not a question of the union of two natures or even that assumption, but "of the unity [italics mine] of two natures in the person of the Word from the moment of His incarnation." Divinity and humanity, however separated they may appear by that "infinite chasm which yawns between created and uncreated," are reconciled in the unity of one person. The humanity of Christ had the immortal and incorruptible character of the nature of Adam before he sinned, but Christ submitted it voluntarily to the condition of our fallen nature. "Christ assumes not only human nature but also that which was against nature, the consequences of sin, though He Himself

Mystical Theology, 142.

The question, Did the Saviour take universal, archetypal humanity, or individualized manhood, did he become Man or a man, from an Orthodox point of view, is an issue of theologoumena not dogma. The same is true regarding the human nature of Christ 'fallen or unfallen'. However, as is often emphasized by Orthodox scholars, Christ, when He had taken an individual and concrete human nature, united to Himself the whole human pleroma, and by that union He redeemed, restored, perfected and transfigured it. See, for example, Constantine Scouteris, "Church and Justification: An Orthodox Approach to the Issue of Justification and Collective Faith," GOTR 28 (1983): 145. See also Meyendorff, Byzantine Theology, 47.

Orthodox Theology, 93-94.

'Ibid., 95.
remained outside original sin in virtue of His Virginal birth." He was human and subject to temptation, but He was sinless.

Lossky discusses the Incarnation in a context of the celebrated "kenotic" passage in Phil 2:5-11. Although, as I mentioned earlier, Lossky avoids to conceptualize personhood, the idea of kenosis help us to grasp what his understanding of personhood is. Kenosis is a self-abandoning, self-emptying mode of personal existence, for Lossky. In this mode "the person expresses itself most truly in that it renounces to exist for itself." The person fulfills itself in "emptying." Developing this theme Lossky goes even beyond the Incarnation when, following the 'kenotic' tradition of Russian religious thought, he affirms that Christ's 'emptying Himself'
is not a sudden decision, nor an act, but the manifestation of His very being, of personhood, which is no longer a willing of His own, but His very hypostatic reality as the expression of the trinitarian will. ... There is therefore a profound continuity between the personal being of the Son as renunciation and His earthly kenosis.

'Mystical Theology, 142.

Ibid. Ware comments: "His sinlessness was moral, not ontological; as regards his humanity, he was sinless by virtue of his will, not of his nature. Sin was a real possibility for him as man." Ware, "Salvation and Theosis," 173. But most Greek writers assume that Christ took unfallen human nature. Ibid.

See above, 146, n. 4.

'Mystical Theology, 144.

'See Gorodetsky, The Humiliated Christ in Modern Russian Thought.

'Orthodox Theology, 101.
This 'kenotic' motif as a determining characteristic of personhood seems to be important for Lossky’s understanding of theosis as a personal relationship.

As a result of the union of the two natures, the humanity of Christ was deified, that is, permeated by the divine energies. Theosis, as a transformation of human nature by the presence of the divine, took place in the humanity of Christ the very moment of His conception. This deified humanity, according to Lossky, resplendent with the light of His divinity, manifested itself only once: on the mount of Tabor according to the Orthodox tradition where the transfigured Christ appeared to the three apostles. Christ’s humanity, being indwelt perichoretai by divinity, “becomes God-like, i.e., divine-energies-like.” This


Orthodox Theology, 102; Mystical Theology, 148-149.

Following John of Damascus: Exposition of the Orthodox Faith 6.19), Lossky affirms: “Christ underwent no change at that moment even in His human nature, but a change occurred in the awareness of the apostles, who for a time received the eternal light of His Master as He was, resplendent in the eternal light of His Godhead. The apostles were taken out of history and given a glimpse of eternal realities.” See Mystical Theology, 223. The nature of the light of the Transfiguration is of great importance for Lossky for it concerns the reality of mystical experience, “the possibility of conscious communion with God.” Ibid., 220-221. Cf. idem, “The Problem of the Vision Face to Face,” 252.

Aghiorgoussis, “Christian Existentialism,” 34. See also Tsirpanlis, Introduction, 77.
perichōrēsis, or permeation, for John of Damascus, is unilateral: it comes from the divine side and not from the fleshly side.

"However," Lossky says, "the Divinity, having once penetrated the flesh, gives to it an ineffable faculty of penetrating Divinity." This does not mean that deity becomes humanity, nor that humanity is transformed into deity. The two natures of Christ remain distinct and unmixed with one another.

It is Christ's deified humanity that becomes the point of contact for the salvation and theosis of men. Emphatically, Lossky says, "The fire of His divinity forever embraces human nature: that is why the saints, while remaining men, can participate in divinity and become God through grace." Because "theosis has already happened objectively in the person and the

John of Damascus Exposition of the Orthodox Faith, 3.3. The term perichōrēsis for describing the relationship between the divine and human natures of Christ was first used by Maximus the Confessor (see above, 79-80). It is also applied to interpersonal relations of the divine Persons in Palamas. See Prestige, 257-260; Meyendorff, Byzantine Theology, 185-186. Meyendorff points out that we cannot talk about an absolute reciprocity of perichōrēsis. We may speak in theosis of the flesh, but not "carnification" of the Deity. Moreover, the Son's hypostasis becomes incarnate but not the divine nature. Meyendorff, Christ in Eastern Christian Thought, 170.

Mystical Theology, 145-146.

Ibid., 145. Meyendorff comments that a deified humanity does not in any way lose its human characteristics. Quite to the contrary. These characteristics become even more real and authentic by contact with the divine model according to which they were created. Byzantine Theology, 164; see also idem, Christ in Eastern Christian Thought, 86.

'Orthodox Theology, 99-100.
work of Christ," the humanity of Christ, penetrated with divine energy, becomes the source of theosis for men. Lossky says:

What is deified in Christ is His human nature assumed in its fullness by the divine person. What must be deified in us is our entire nature, belonging to our person which must enter into union with God, and become a person created in two natures: a human nature which is deified, and a nature or, rather, divine energy, that deifies.

Lossky points out that the Fathers of the so-called Christological centuries, by formulating a dogma of Christ as both divine and human, never lost sight of the question concerning our union with God. He writes:

The usual arguments they bring up against unorthodox doctrines refer particularly to the fullness of our union, our deification, which becomes impossible if one separates the two natures of Christ, as Nestorius did, or if one only ascribes to Him one divine nature, like the Monophysites, or if one curtails one part of human nature, like Apollinarius, or if one only sees in Him a single divine will and operation, like the Monothelites.

It is clear now why any violation of the integrity of the teaching about Christ was and is still regarded by Orthodox Christians as having destructive soteriological and spiritual consequences, particularly regarding the doctrine of theosis. This is why a correct interpretation of the person and the mission of Christ is absolutely vital to the proper understanding and application of the doctrine of theosis for Lossky.

Stephanopoulos, 160.

Mystical Theology, 155.

Ibid., 154.

See his discussion on Christological distortions in Orthodox Theology, 95-107.
Redemption and Theosis

According to Lossky, redemption appears as one of the stages in Christ’s work, a stage conditioned by sin and the historic reality of the fallen world. The main purpose of redemption is the removal of two obstacles: that of death and sin as its root. Lossky says that the way to theosis, which was planned for the first man, would be impossible until human nature triumphs over sin and death. Thus, “the last and fully positive end of man thereupon implies a negative aspect: salvation.” In the fullness of the divine plan, salvation or redemption appears accordingly not as an end but as a negative means. It would be absurd, according to Lossky, “to fold it about itself, to make it a goal in itself.” The only real goal is theosis, the only “essential reality” remains union with God. “What does it matter being saved from death, from Hell, if it is not to lose oneself in God?” he asks. In the divine economy of the Son, redemption first

Mystical Theology, 137.

Ibid., 135.

Orthodox Theology, 94.

Breck emphasizes the same idea that salvation is merely the negative aspect of God’s plan which purpose was to achieve liberation from the consequences of sin. See Breck, “Divine Initiative,” 116.

Orthodox Theology, 111.

Ibid. Staniloae agrees with Lossky when he affirms: “Christ does not become incarnate and die simply for the sake of an external reconciliation with us and in order to make us righteous before him. The purpose of the incarnation was . . . our complete and eternal union with him.” Theology and the Church, 198. In connection with this, Arseniev points out that redemption is not perfect if it does not work in us and in the whole creation. N. Arseniev, Revelation of Life Eternal (New York: St.
abolishes the radical obstacles (sin and death) that separate man from God, and second, restores the potentiality of “likeness,” opening the way toward theosis.

Redemption, although a biblical notion, is just one salvific metaphor for Lossky, which cannot contain in itself the incomprehensible immensity of the work of Christ. In the Bible, Lossky says, redemption, as a juridical image of the work of Christ, is found side by side with many other images. Thus, it should not be hardened, for “this would be to build an indefensible relationship of rights between God and humanity.” Rather, we must relocate this image among “the almost infinite number of other images, each like a facet of an event ineffable in itself.” Consequently, when we use the word “redemption,” as we presently do, as a generic term designating the saving work of Christ in all its fulness, we should not forget, Lossky says, that this juridical expression has the character of an image or simile:


Orthodox Theology, 111. Coolidge indicates how redemption and theosis are distinct: “Redemption merely restores in us our original capacity for synergetic love lost in the Fall. Deification begins with the actualization of such a capacity in the rite of baptism (hence, baptism is the point of convergence of redemption and deification) and would have culminated in its first sense if Adam had completed our vocation. Hence, what we mean by deification is the actualization of our synergetic capacity restored by redemption.” Coolidge, 272.

· See In the Image and Likeness of God, 100-101.

Orthodox Theology, 111.

· Ibid.
Christ is the Redeemer in the same sense that He is the Warrior, victorious over death, the perfect Sacrificer, etc.

Thus, Lossky believes that redemption, though appearing to be the central aspect of the dispensation of the Son toward the fallen world, is just "one aspect of the vaster dispensation of the Holy Trinity toward being created ex nihilo and called to reach deification freely—to reach union with God, so that 'God may be all in all'." Redemption as salvation from sin is an immediate aim, whereas the union with God—theosis of those whom Christ ransomed by His death—is the ultimate realization of the eternal plan of God. This final realization, however, involves the dispensation of another divine Person, sent into the world after the Son—the Holy Spirit. The work of the Holy Spirit, although distinct but not separable from that of the Incarnate Word, leads us directly to the ecclesiological aspect of theosis.

**Ecclesiological Aspect of Theosis**

The actual accomplishment of theosis is realized through the Church, which Palamas called "communion of theosis." Many Orthodox theologians say that theosis is not in any way an

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In the Image and Likeness of God, 101. Lossky considers Anselm's mistake in the attempt "to see an adequate expression of the mystery of our redemption accomplished by Christ in the juridical relations implied by the word 'redemption'." Ibid.

Ibid., 103; see also 110.

In this sense, as Marta Ryk points out, "the work of the Incarnation, Redemption and the deification of man not only supplement each other but in the divine economy one cannot exist without the other." Ryk, 113-114.

individual attainment by man, but the fruit of his incorporation and progress within the Church. This fact is crucial for Lossky who calls the Church “the very focal point of union with God.” “It is the pure and incorruptible realm of the Church,” Lossky affirms, “where one attains union with God.” All the conditions necessary to attain union with God in this present life are given in the Church. This is why the Greek Fathers, Lossky says, liken the Church to the earthly paradise in which the first people were to have gained access to the state of theosis. It is exactly from this point of view that I examine Lossky’s ecclesiology: The Church is regarded as the sphere wherein the union of human persons with God is accomplished.

Lossky emphasizes two aspects (two principles) of the Church: Christological and Pneumatological. This means that the Church is founded on a twofold divine economy: the work of Christ and the work of the Holy Spirit. “The work of both persons forms the foundation of the Church. The work of both is requisite that we

Harakas, for example, affirms that the growing toward theosis is never a private affair, and is always a communal and ecclesial experience. It is the view of Eastern Orthodox Christianity that the relationship with God can take place in its fullness and completeness only within the Church. Harakas, “Eastern Orthodox Christianity’s Ultimate Reality and Meaning: Triune God and Theosis,” 218. *Mystical Theology*, 140.

Ibid., 155.

Ibid., 179. But the Church even surpasses the earthly paradise, according to Lossky. The state of Christians is better than the condition of the first man, for we no longer run the risk of losing our communion with God. The presence of the Holy Spirit in the Church, which is the condition of theosis, cannot be lost.

Ibid., 184.
may attain to union with God” (italics mine). In its Christological aspect, the Church is presented as “the complement of the glorified humanity of Christ, as a continuation of the Incarnation.” She is “the new body of humanity,” of which Christ became the Head. As such, the Church appears as an organism having two natures, two operations, and two wills. “It is a theandric organism, both divine and human”; it is a union of the creature with God, fulfilled in the person of Christ; it is “our nature recapitulated by Christ and contained within His hypostasis.”

The idea of our ultimate theosis cannot be expressed on a Christological basis alone, however. Lossky asserts that it demands a Pneumatological development as well. The work of Christ is just an indispensable precondition of the deifying work of the Holy Spirit. Lossky writes:

Ibid., 166.

In the Image and Likeness of God, 187.

Mystical Theology, 166.

‘This is why, Lossky points out, Irenaeus attributed to the Church the title of “Son of God.” Ibid., 164. See Irenaeus Against Heresies 4.33.14.

Mystical Theology, 184.

Ibid. See also 190: In the Image and Likeness of God, 108.

In the Image and Likeness of God, 103.

The creature has become fit to receive the Holy Spirit and He descends into the world and fills with His presence the Church which has been redeemed, washed and purified by the blood of Christ.

In this sense, the work of the Holy Spirit is not subordinate in relation to that of the Son. "Pentecost is not a 'continuation' of the Incarnation," Lossky declares. "It is its sequel, its result." It is the Person of the Holy Spirit who, according to Lossky, communicates divinity to Christians within the Church, in making them 'partakers of the divine nature', "in conferring the fire of deity, uncreated grace, upon those who become members of the Body of Christ." Lossky points out that in the theology of the Eastern Church grace usually signifies all the abundance of the divine nature, insofar as it is communicated to men, the deity which operates outside the essence and gives itself, the divine nature of which we partake through the uncreated energies.

Hence, if the work of Christ concerns human nature, which He recapitulated in His hypostasis, the work of the Holy Spirit concerns persons, granting them the possibility of fulfilling the likeness in the common nature. The one lends His hypostasis to the nature, the other gives His divinity to the persons. "Thus," Lossky says, "the work of Christ unifies; the work of the Holy

Mystical Theology, 159.

Ibid.

Ibid., 162.

'The divine identity of the Holy Spirit is a basic coordinate of the Orthodox idea of theosis. This is why the struggle against Arius, who did not accept the substantial co-equality and co-sovereignty of the divine persons, was about the nature of salvation. See Meyendorff, The Byzantine Legacy in the Orthodox Church, 155.
Spirit diversifies. Yet, the one is impossible without the other.” The work of Christ and the work of the Holy Spirit are inseparable. Lossky boldly asserts:

The Holy Spirit who rests like a royal unction upon the humanity of the Son, Head of the Church, communicating Himself to each member of this body, creates, so to speak, many Christs, many of the Lord’s anointed: persons in the way of deification by the side of the divine Person.

Yet, as Lossky points out, if our nature finds itself brought into the body of Christ, human persons are in no way caught up in “a blind physical process of deification, abolishing freedom and annihilating the persons themselves.” Grace does not destroy freedom, for it is not a unitive force, according to Lossky. The union which is accomplished in the Person of Christ must be fulfilled in our persons by the Holy Spirit and our own freedom.

Mystical Theology, 167; see also In the Image and Likeness of God, 177-178. Based on these two elements—Christological unity and Pneumatological diversity—as inseparable from one another, Lossky develops the Trinitarian image of the Church as simultaneously displaying unity of nature and diversity of persons. Ibid., 188-189.

Ibid., 174.

Ibid., 184. See also In the Image and Likeness of God, 189.

This leads us to the very important concept in Orthodox soteriology—the idea of synergy or co-operation of man with God in which the union or theosis is fulfilled. See on this, Mystical Theology, 196-199. Orthodox theology has always rejected all theories of predestination and electionism as well as universalism or apokatastasis, which imply in one way or another that persons would be saved without their own desire and willing cooperation. For a detailed exposition of the Orthodox doctrine of “synergy” see Ioannis Kalogirou, The Orthodox Teaching Concerning “Synergy” in Man’s Justification and Its Treatment by the Heterodox (Thessalonike: n.p., 1953); see also Borovoy, 42; Harakas, Toward Transfigured Life, 232-233; Hopko, 339; Ware, “Salvation and Theosis,” 180. Pelikan notes that “the antithesis between divine grace and human freedom, which dogged Western theology for many centuries, did not present a problem in that form for Eastern Christian thought.” Pelikan, The Christian Tradition, 2:12.
Thus, the Church has an antinomic character, that is, she is at one and the same time organic and personal; an accent both of necessity and of freedom, of objectivity and subjectivity, fulfilment and becoming. In its Christological aspect, the Church appears as "a perfect stability," as "the immovable foundation" (Eph 2:20-22); in its Pneumatological aspect, the Church has a dynamic character, it reaches out toward its final goal, towards the union of each human person with God.

Theosis finds its practical expression and existential application in the sacramental structure of the Orthodox Church. According to the Orthodox tradition, in the sacraments or mysteries, divine energies are present. By participation in the mysteries, man may receive those deifying energies, and through them overcome "the natural laws of his psycho-physical self" and become god. The sacraments of the Church, in particular baptism and the Holy Eucharist, are the divine actions by which the sacramental grace of God is communicated to the faithful. Lossky calls the sacraments "the objective conditions" of our union with God. He concludes:

The sacraments of the Church, freely given to our nature, render us apt for the spiritual life in which the union of

Mystical Theology, 184-185; In the Image and Likeness of God, 178.

Mystical Theology, 191-192.

According to Evdokimov, the sacraments are "the epiphany and effusion of deifying energies." Paul Evdokimov, L'Esprit Saint dans la tradition orthodoxe (Paris: Editions du Cerf, 1969), 97.

'Sherrard, 44. Orthodox theologians affirm an actual and real presence of Christ in the mysteries which makes theosis possible and real. See, for example, Stephanopoulos, 160.
our persons with God is accomplished. In the Church our nature receives all the objective conditions of this union. Baptism, which is, according to Lossky, an image of the death of Christ and the means by which we become united to the body of Christ, is already the beginning of our resurrection to a new life and theosis. In the Eastern Church, after baptism, confirmation immediately follows, which is the invisible descendence of the Holy Spirit upon the newly baptized. The Holy Spirit recreates our nature by purifying it and uniting it to the body of Christ. He bestows the common energy of the Holy Trinity, which is divine grace upon human persons. As a result of this descending of the Holy Spirit during both baptism and holy chrism, “the Trinity dwells within us and deifies us.”

The incarnate Logos calls us to share in His saved and glorified humanity through eucharistic communion. The eucharist

Mystical Theology, 193.

“It is on account of this intimate connection between the two sacraments of baptism and confirmation,” Lossky says, “that the uncreated and deifying gift, which the descent of the Holy Spirit confers upon the members of the Church, is frequently referred to as ‘baptismal grace’.” This baptismal grace, which is “inalienable and personal” to each member of Christ’s Church, is the foundation of all Christian life. Ibid., 171.

Ibid.

Meyendorff points out that theosis is centered in the life of worship and sacraments, especially in the eucharist. Therefore, the life of Christians must always be rooted in the liturgy. Meyendorff, “Liturgy and Spirituality: Eastern Liturgical Theology,” in Christian Spirituality, 1:350-363. Jonathan Morse in his article “Fruits of the Eucharist: Henosis and Theosis,” Diakonia 17 (1982): 127-142, says that the goal of every Christian’s life (which is also fruits of the Eucharist) is henosis, which is union with Christ, and theosis, which is sharing in the divine nature. He uses an ancient oriental argument that a common meal binds the table companions into a fellowship.
is the mystery which not only "represents" the life of Christ and offers it to our "contemplation," it is the moment and the place in which Christ’s deified humanity becomes ours. According to Lossky, "the sacrament of the body and the blood is a realization of the unity of our nature both with Christ and, at the same time, with all the members of the Church." It is in the eucharist that the Church appears as a single nature united to Christ.

Concerning the deifying effect of the eucharist, Lossky wrote:

In the Church and through the sacraments our nature enters into union with the divine nature in the hypostasis of the Son, the Head of His mystical body. Our humanity becomes consubstantial with the deified humanity, united with the person of Christ.

It is the eucharist that, according to Lossky, heals us, nourishes us, and fortifies us, both spiritually and bodily. But the eucharist as well as other sacraments of the Church are not magical means; they do not produce theosis in an automatic way.

An effort on the part of man is necessary as well. Although deified grace is given in the Church through the sacraments, grace

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Meyendorff, Byzantine Theology, 105; idem, Christ in Eastern Christian Thought, 200. Morse notes that "the Christ we receive as spiritual nourishment cannot be separated from the Christ who was crucified." Morse, 133. According to the Orthodox understanding, sacrifice was replaced by eucharistic bread and wine. It is the flesh and blood of Christ that we partake in. The Fathers sometimes expressed this in very crude almost cannibalistic language. If it were anything else, we could not participate in the glorified body of Christ. Our redemption would be incomplete. Scuiry argues: "The eucharist cannot be simply a symbolic or spiritual presence of the Logos. It must be in fact the deified body of the risen Lord if our restoration is to be a fact." Scuiry, 41.

Mystical Theology, 180.

Ibid., 181.

'Orthodox Theology, 78.
must be appropriated by the free, ascetic effort of man. This leads us to the last aspect of theosis in Lossky’s theology.

**The Moral Aspect of Theosis**

The moral aspect of theosis concerns the human part in it. If the Church gives us all the means or, as Lossky calls them, the objective conditions for theosis, man, from his side, “must produce the necessary subjective conditions.” This subjective aspect of our union with God constitutes the way of union that Lossky calls the Christian life.

It should be remembered that Lossky understands theosis as synergy, as cooperation of man with God. This cooperation of the two wills, divine and human, brings to the surface, at least in the Western mind, the issue of merits. However, as Lossky comments, the notion of merit is foreign to the Eastern tradition. This question has never had in the Eastern Church the urgency that it assumed in the West from the time of Augustine onwards. Lossky sees the explanation in the general attitude of Eastern theology towards grace and free will. According to him, the Eastern tradition never separates these two elements: “Grace and human freedom are manifested simultaneously and cannot be conceived apart from each other.” Participation of our free will is an

—Mystical Theology, 196.

For a good introductory discussion on the issue of merits and faith and a comparison of the Orthodox position with Roman Catholic and Protestant views, see Bulgakov, *The Orthodox Church*, 107-109.

Mystical Theology, 197. Macarius of Egypt said: “The will of man is an essential condition, for without it God does nothing.”
integral part in our conversion. Lossky describes conversion as a "free act," just as sin also is a voluntary separation from God. In this sense, conversion may be defined as "a constant effort of the will turned towards God."

The way of union or life of a Christian is a constant effort of the will, it is "an unceasing vigilance of spirit," it is always the ascent towards more perfect union. This ascent, Lossky says, is achieved simultaneously on two different but closely interrelated levels: that of action (praxis) and that of contemplation (theoria). The two are inseparable and both constitute the active Christian life. The Christian life is always dynamic; it is an unceasing development; it is an invisible struggle for reordering our lives. Following Isaac the Syrian, Lossky distinguishes three stages in the way of union: penitence, purification, and perfection. Penitence (metanoia) is a conversion of the will. Although it is the beginning of the way of union, Lossky does not consider conversion as an act, as "a passing moment, a stage to be left behind." Conversion for him is "a condition which must continue permanently, the constant attitude." It has no end.

Macarius of Egypt Spiritual Homilies 27.10, quoted in ibid. Mystical Theology, 200.
'Ibid., 204.
'Ibid.
'This conception of repentance, Lossky argues, corresponds to the apophatic attitude towards God: "The more one is united to Him, the more one becomes aware of His unknowability, and, in the same way, the more perfect one becomes, the more one is aware of one's own imperfection." Ibid., 204-205.
The next aspect of Christian life is inward purification (katharsis). Katharsis is connected with nepsis, vigilance or spiritual sobriety, by which Lossky means the negation of all uncontrolled and impure passions. The climax of praxis and theoria is a state of impassibility (apatheia), the freedom of nature, which is no longer subject to passions or affected by anything. It is the highest degree of self-possession, the mastery of the passions, an entire peace of spirit. In the state of apatheia, the soul is prepared for the deifying unity.

Union with God, Lossky believes, cannot take place outside of prayer. Prayer is "the motive power behind all human efforts, and behind the whole of the spiritual life." Prayer is above all the personal relationship of man with God. Outside of this relationship, theosis cannot be realized. In the beginning, prayer is "unquiet," it is a petition which is "anxious, and weighed down with preoccupations and fears." This prayer is no

In Orthodox tradition, evil is overcome by a complex set of activities known under the collective name of askeisis. Askeisis is a striving towards the realization of the divine plan of theosis. It has a wide application in the Christian life. It has been used to refer to the study of Scripture, to the practice of piety, to prayer and fasting, to austere asceticism, and as a technical term referring to the monastic life with special reference to the penitential practice.

Ibid., 203.

Actually this state, according to Lossky, is a renunciation of the realm of created things and gaining access to that of the uncreated. It is an "existential liberation involving the whole being." Ibid., 38.

Ibid., 206.

Ibid., 207.
more than a preparation for a true prayer, which is "pure prayer." In this state, man does not "have" prayers, but he "becomes" prayer and makes his life the unceasing communion with God. It is the end of praxis, Lossky affirms, since "nothing inconsistent with prayer can any longer gain access to the mind, nor turn aside the will which is now directed towards God, and united to the divine will." This prayer is called spiritual prayer or contemplation. It is absolute peace and rest (hesychia), the silence of the spirit, which is even more than prayer. Hesychia is not an aim in itself but it is the way to holiness, the means of theosis. Not everyone comes to this stage, which is sometimes called ekstasis, for, as Lossky comments:

in it a man leaves his own being and is no longer conscious whether he is in this life or in the world to come; he belongs to God and no longer to himself; he is his own master no more but is guided by the Holy Spirit.

The fruit of prayer is divine love, which is, for Lossky, "simply grace, appropriated in the depths of our being." Love is "an uncreated gift," "a divine energy," which continually inflames the soul and unites it to God by the power of the Holy Spirit. Love is not of this world, for it is the name of God Himself. This is why love is so important for the way of union. Love of

Ibid.
Ibid., 208.
Ibid.
Ibid., 212.

As Harakas points out, "The theology of the Holy Trinity as a communion of persons in love, an 'agapaic community' stands as the ultimate pattern of true human existence." Harakas, Toward
God is necessarily bound up with love of one's neighbor, which is, Lossky suggests, the sign of having acquired the true love of God. More than any other aspect of the Christian life, love is subject to development, fulfillment, growth toward the full communion with God, the achievement of theosis.

Although the way of theosis is introduced into our hearts by the Holy Spirit even in this present life, theosis cannot be fully realized on this side of parousia. The perfect union with God, Lossky argues, will be fulfilled only in the age to come.

Pointing to the eschatological aspect of theosis, Lossky writes:

> It belongs to the age to come, when the Church will be perfected in the Holy Spirit, when created nature and uncreated fullness will be united in human persons who will become deified human hypostases.

Until the consummation of the ages, until the resurrection of the dead and the Last Judgment, the Church, Lossky affirms, will have no human person having attained perfect union with God.

Transfigured Life, 170.

Mystical Theology, 114.

Ibid., 183. It should be mentioned that Orthodox theologians do not limit the eschatology to the “last things.” See, for example, Alexander Schmemann, “Liturgy and Eschatology,” Sobornost’ 7 (1985): 6-14. Lossky affirms that the eschatological era began with the descent of the Holy Spirit. The realization of “the eschatological Promise” is “the inner mystery of the Church.” In the Image and Likeness of God, 224; see also Mystical Theology, 179. But it is in the parousia that the final theosis will be fully revealed, when “the whole created universe will enter into perfect union with God.” Ibid., 235.

Mystical Theology, 193.

Ibid. The only human person for whom Lossky reserves the “mystery of the final vocation” as already realized is Mary the Mother of God. According to him, she is “the first human hypostasis in whom was fulfilled the final end for which the world
Summary

Different aspects of theosis were discussed in this chapter. First, the epistemological dimension of theosis was investigated. According to Lossky, the knowledge of God is necessarily the way of theosis. He makes a distinction between episteme as characteristic of scientific and philosophical epistemology, which is actually an inadequate way of approaching God, and gnosis as the contemplative and existential way to knowledge which leads to theosis. The purpose of true gnosis is always theosis. It is also the way of apophasis, the way of refusing any attempts to form concepts about God and to organize them in a system. Apophasis ultimately leads to union with God (i.e., theosis). In this union, Lossky says, man is not dissolved into an impersonal resorption into the divine nature as it is in Plotinus's philosophy, but "has access to a face to face encounter with God, a union without confusion according to grace."

Distinction between the two modes of divine existence (theologia and oikonomia) is important for understanding theosis by Lossky. This distinction allows us to talk about "theological" (Trinity as such) and "economical" (divine activity ad extra) aspects of theosis in Lossky's writings. The ultimate purpose of theosis, Lossky concludes, is not the vision of the divine essence or participation in it, but participation in the divine life of

was created." Ibid., 194; cf. Vladimir Lossky, The Meaning of Icons (In Collaboration with L. Ouspensky) (Boston: Boston Book & Art Shop, Inc., 1952), 76; see also In the Image and Likeness of God, 208, 224.

"Orthodox Theology, 32.
the Holy Trinity. In connection to this, two crucial distinctions have been explained: a distinction between ousia and hypostasis and essence/energy distinction. The reality of those distinctions states the dogmatic basis for the real, not the metaphorical, character of theosis. The union to which we are called (2 Pet 1:4), Lossky argues, is "union with God in His energies," it is "union by grace making us participate in the divine nature, without our essence becoming thereby the essence of God."

The creation of the world ex nihilo, the creation of man in the image and likeness of God, and the Incarnation of the Son are the main points of discussion on the "economical" dimension of theosis. Although the notion of creation ex nihilo deprives the idea of ontological participation of creation in God in any real sense, the final fulfillment of man lies in union with God. Actually, man was created in the image of God so that he could have a personal relationship with God. The main purpose of the creation of man in the image of God is to achieve theosis. The Incarnation of the Son restored this possibility, which was lost because of Adam's fall. It is Christ's deified humanity that becomes the point of contact for the salvation and theosis of man.

The actual accomplishment of theosis is realized through the Church, which is "the very focal point of union with God." Lossky discusses two aspects of the Church: Christological and Pneumatological, both of which are indispensable for theosis. The

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'Mystical Theology, 87.
'Ibid., 140.

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Church is presented as “the new body” of the deified humanity of Christ (Christological aspect) in which Christian believers are called to participate through the ministry of the Holy Spirit who confers to them “the fire of deity, uncreated grace”.

Pneumatological aspect. Theosis finds its practical expression in the sacraments of the Orthodox Church, which Lossky calls “the objective conditions” of our union with God.

Participation of man’s free will is an integral part of theosis. This subjective aspect of our union with God constitutes the way of union, which Lossky generally calls the Christian life. Christian life for Lossky is always dynamic, it is an unceasing ascent to union with God. Although, he says, the way of theosis is introduced into our hearts even in this life, perfect union with God will be fulfilled only in the age to come.

This chapter presented an integral picture of Lossky’s view of theosis as a many-faceted doctrine. Chapter 4 offers an evaluation of the main presuppositions for this doctrine in Lossky’s works.
CHAPTER IV

EVALUATION OF LOSSKY'S DOCTRINE OF THEOSIS

We have seen so far that theosis in its Trinitarian, Christological, Pneumatological, anthropological, ecclesial, moral, and eschatological dimensions is the cornerstone of Orthodox soteriology, which is deeply rooted in Greek Patristic and Byzantine traditions. From exposing Lossky's view on theosis, it is clear that this doctrine is crucial for Lossky's understanding of salvation as well. As was indicated in chapter 1, in the West soteriological thought has been expressed in different categories. Moreover, for the Western Church the idea of theosis has generally been considered heretical, as being borrowed from Greek philosophy and pagan religions, rather than from the Holy Scriptures. In evaluating Lossky's doctrine of theosis, however, I do not place this doctrine against any Western soteriological position. The present chapter evaluates the doctrine of theosis in the writings of Lossky using the criteria of adequacy and internal consistency. I use the criterion of adequacy to show the conformity of Lossky's system with the Bible and Patristic tradition, and criterion of internal consistency to

See above, 9-13.

See above, 4; 24.
demonstrate how consistent Lossky is in his use of certain concepts, propositions, and arguments. Without any attempt to alter Lossky's understanding of the relationship between the Bible and Tradition, the present chapter's task is directed by the two main questions raised in the first chapter. First, is Lossky's soteriological position biblical? And second, is Lossky's understanding of theosis in agreement with the tradition he belongs to? To answer those questions I first analyze the biblical presuppositions for the idea of theosis in Lossky. Then I examine Lossky's place in the Orthodox tradition, placing him against the background of the sophiological controversy of 1935-1936. Finally, using the principle of internal consistency, I critically evaluate the three theological (philosophical) presuppositions: apophasis, as Lossky's main method of theologyizing, and two crucial distinctions that lay the foundation for the reality of theosis—the distinction between essence/energy and the person/nature distinction.

The Biblical Roots of Theosis

The notion of theosis has been generally considered to be foreign to Western Christianity, borrowed from Greek philosophy and religion, rather than from the Bible. Some Western scholars have often alleged that this idea developed under the influence of Platonism, Stoicism, the pagan Mystery Religions, or other movements in the Hellenic world. Others think that it was R. Franks traced the concept of theosis back through Neo-Platonism to Plato, thence to Dionysios and primitive Orphism, concluding that, because of such questionable ancestry, deification cannot be considered a viable category of Christian

See, for example, Watson, Greek Philosophy and the Christian Notion of God. The author affirms that "the desire to grow like to God is the very life blood of Plotinus's philosophy" (70). See also Ruth Majercik, "Plotinus and Greek Mysticism," in Mysticism and the Mystical Experience, ed. Donald H. Bishop (London: Associated University Presses, 1995), 38-61.

Ernst Benz, "Der 'Obermensch'-Begriff in der Theologie der alten Kirche," in Studien zum Neuen Testament und zur Patristik, ed. Erich Klostermann, TUGal 77 (Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 1961), 136. Such a protagonist of theosis as Gross claims that the Old Testament opens up theological perspectives which, by the time of the Wisdom literature, may be described as deification "sans le mot." Gross, 70. O. Faller, analyzing the differences between theosis in Christian tradition and deification in Greek philosophy, pointed out that the word theosis reflected biblical "concepts," not biblical words or "texts." O. Faller, "Griechische Vergöttung und christliche Vergöttlichung," Gregorianum 6 (1925): 421.
of communion appears absent from Greek thought." It can be located only in the context of revelation where "initiative belongs to God, while implying a human response, the free response of faith and love."

The questions I ask in examining the biblical presuppositions for theosis in Lossky are the following: Which biblical texts or ideas are important background sources for Orthodox soteriology and how does Lossky treat them? Can those passages in the Bible be interpreted as the basis for theosis? It is interesting that, in spite of the significance of theosis for Lossky, we do not find that he makes any attempt to provide solid biblical support for this doctrine, whereas at the same time the number of witnesses from Tradition is overwhelming. It seems that, since the Tradition of the Church Fathers speaks so definitely about the matter, the biblical backing of the doctrine is beyond debate for Lossky.

The most fundamental biblical text used by the Fathers to support the idea of theosis in the Old Testament was the Genesis account on the creation of man in God's image (Gen 1:26-27). This theme has great importance for Lossky. By the very fact of creation in the image and likeness of God, man was brought to a higher level than other creatures. While realizing the difficulty

Orthodox Theology, 16. He notes that the idea of communion with God is found, in a partially biblical context, only in Philc. Ibid.

Ibid.

For a brief discussion of the idea of the image of God in the Greek Fathers, see Xintaras, "Man--the Image of God According to the Greek Fathers."
of a clear definition of this notion from the biblical context, Lossky favors a relational understanding of the image.

Many instances can be found in the Old Testament which apply the epithet "gods" to men. The most prominent of these for the Christian doctrine of theosis is Ps 82:6. While many Greek Fathers repeatedly used it in the context of this doctrine, Lossky does not place much emphasis on this argument in support of theosis.

In the New Testament, the classic passage for the idea of theosis is 2 Pet 1:4, which affirms that through God's "great and precious promises" man "may participate in the divine nature." Peter's dictum that the faithful take part in the "divine nature" is for Orthodoxy the very definition of salvation. Unfortunately, the text is somewhat obscure and thus is not without difficulties.

See above, 163-167. For an evaluation of this idea in Lossky, see below, "The Idea of Personhood and Theosis," pp. 259-274.

For scriptural examples of the title of divinity applied to men, see Gen 6:2; Exod 4:16; 7:1; 11:6; 22:8; Pss 3:7; 110:1-3; Isa 9:6. Many of the passages cited were taken over in the Christological tradition, which, Norman notes, tended to preclude their use as deification texts by the Fathers. Norman, 51, n. 2.

Although the context of this passage seems to apply to judges who represented God despite their mortality (cf. vss. 1 and 7), the use of the phrase, "I have said you are gods" by Jesus in John 10:34-36 clearly justifies a much broader interpretation on the part of his followers.

See, for example, Justin Martyr Dialogue with Trypho 124; Origen Commentary on John 29.27.29.

because, as even Orthodox scholars admit, it affirms what
Orthodoxy adamantly rejects—that our participation is in the very
nature of God. Because of the importance Lossky attaches to this
text, we need to pay more attention to it.

The expression “partakers of the divine nature” stands by
itself in the Scriptures; there are really no texts that can be
brought into connection with it. Lossky makes the point by
claiming that Peter was the first to write that we must “become
partakers of the divine nature.” He also admits that this
expression “appears to be in conflict with so many other passages
of Holy Scripture.”\footnote{Breck, “Divine Initiative,” 119. The author points out that
language was fluid in the time when Peter’s epistle was produced
and he recalls that even in the fourth century Cyril of Alexandria
could speak of “one nature (physis) of God incarnate.” Ibid.}

It seems that salvation is pictured here in
ontological terms as escaping from one kind of reality (the
perishable being of this world) in order to participate in another
kind of reality (the imperishable nature of God). Such an
ontological conception of salvation was quite common in the
religious movements of the Hellenistic world, especially those
influenced by Platonism, but it stands in stark contrast to the

\footnote{Sidebottom calls the phrase ‘partakers of the divine nature’
“the strikingly original note in 2 Peter.” E. J. Sidebottom,
*James, Jude and 2 Peter*, New Century Bible Commentary (Grand
Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982), 106.}

\footnote{Orthodox Theology, 92.}

\footnote{Mythical Theology, 68.}

For example, Philo is talking about an ecstatic union in
which the soul is “transformed into a divine being, to the point
of becoming akin to God and truly divine.” Philo Questions and
Answers on Exodus 2.29. Louis Jacobs points out that Philo was the
first Jew to teach that there is something divine in the human

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overall teaching of the Bible, according to which salvation is not a liberation from this created world but rather a liberation from the bondage of sin. Lossky rigorously affirms that "it would be childish, not to say impious, to see in these words [2 Pet 1:4] only a rhetorical expression or metaphor." At the same time, he realizes the difficulty in admitting the reality of union with divine nature which is inaccessible to man, affirming, after Gregory Palamas, the antinomical character of theology: "We attain to participation in the divine nature, and yet at the same time it remains totally inaccessible." However, in defending the reality of this union, Lossky does not limit himself to mere affirmation of antinomy, but is seeking the possible solution to this enigmatic text. In doing so, he imposes the essence/energies distinction on the idea of God, which the author of this epistle hardly had in mind. Lossky says: "The distinction between the essence and the energies ... makes it possible to preserve the soul. Louis Jacobs, Religion and the Individual: A Jewish Perspective (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 45. He cites On the Special Laws 4.24 where Philo speaks of the human soul as an "effulgence of the blessed nature of the Godhead." The same is with Neoplatonism whose principal theme is the ascent and return of the soul to the One. Plotinus affirms, "Our concern is not merely to be sinless but to be God." Plotinus Enneads 1.2.6: 6.7.31. This is why Käsemann wrote: "It would be hard to find in the whole New Testament a sentence which, in its expression, its individual motifs and its whole trend, more clearly marks the relapse of Christianity into Hellenistic dualism." E. Käsemann, Essays on New Testament Themes (London: SCM, 1964), 179-180.

'Mystical Theology, 67.

'Ibid., 69.
real meaning of St. Peter's words 'partakers of the divine nature'."

It seems to me that a more preferable hermeneutical approach to 2 Pet 1:4 would be to put the expression theias koinonoi phuseos, first, against the context of the entire epistle. The immediate context of 2 Pet 1 points in a direction of moral development or such virtues as goodness, love, mercy, and long-suffering. It seems from 1:5-7 that the moral attributes of God are what Peter had in mind when he spoke of sharing the divine nature. In this life, the believer participates in God's nature by reflecting His virtues. Second, the biblical context affirms the covenantal, rather than ontological, language in discussing the relationship between God and man. This preponderance found in the Bible should be taken in consideration as well. Consequently,

Ibid., 37. See also idem, In the Image and Likeness of God, 56.


For an example of this approach, see Al Wolters, "'Partakers of the Deity': A Covenantal Reading of 2 Peter 1:4," Calvin Theological Journal 25 (1990): 28-44. The author gives an alternative interpretation of theias koinonoi phuseos as "partakers of the Deity," which is no less solid exegetically than the traditional one, but which has no overtones of ontological participation in the being of God, referring instead to the believer's partnership with God in the covenant, a notion that is not at all strange to the New Testament or the Bible as a whole. It is in fact, according to Wolters, one of the central ideas of the Bible, one that ties together the Old and New Testaments.

the notion of salvation as theosis does not find any significant scriptural support in 2 Pet 1:4.

Some theologians find more solid ground for the idea of theosis in the writings of Paul and John. Two themes are of special importance in the writings of Paul: filial adoption (Gal 3:26; 4:5; Rom 9:15, 23; 9:26; Eph 1:5), and so-called “Christ mysticism”: expressions such as en Christo and syn Christo, and the exclamation, “It is no longer I who live, but it is Christ who lives in me” (Gal 2:20).

The same line of thinking is further developed in the Johannine writings. John advocates a spiritual rebirth enabling believers to become children of God (John 1:12-13; 3:5), and develops the concept of mutual indwelling expressed by the Greek verb menein (John 6:56; 14:17; 1 John 3:24; 4:13). As far as I know, Lossky does not elaborate the biblical theme of filial adoption in connection to theosis. But, when he discusses the Johannine concept of ‘dwelling’ or ‘abiding’, referring to John 14:13, he again imposes ontological meaning on it. He states:

This doctrine [essence/energy distinction] makes it possible to understand how the Trinity can remain incomminicable in essence and at the same time come and dwell within us, according to the promise of Christ (John xiv, 23).

"Corduan notes, "Certainly scriptural statements, such as 2 Peter 1:4, deserve the same consideration as other passages. But it is very hard to turn this verse into the fundamental principle of the Gospel." W. Corduan, Mysticism: An Evangelical Option? (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1991), 102.

"For a fuller discussion of the biblical evidences in Patristic sources, see Ware, "Salvation and Theosis in Orthodox Theology," 169-172.

Mystical Theology, 96.
His line of reasoning is familiar enough: since God's essence is incommunicable, only the real distinction between divine essence and energies makes the idea of 'dwelling' meaningful. This means that God dwells in us by the energies. This understanding of 'indwelling', however, can hardly be appropriate as a basis for theosis if we have in mind the context in which John discusses this idea. The concept of 'abiding' in John means the keeping of God's Word (1 John 2:5, 24), bearing fruit (John 15:5), which is a life conforming to God's will and bringing about sanctification and love to one another (John 14:20-21; 1 John 2:9-10).

The problem with such a hermeneutical approach is not Lossky's only. There has been a tendency in Christian tradition, both Western and Eastern, to treat some words of Scripture as technical terms bearing a fixed philosophico-theological meaning. The result has been that such central words as, for example, psuchē, pneuma, and phusis are treated as logical concepts—often understood in highly theoretical ways—rather than semantic bearers of meaning according to the context. In dealing with the biblical words referring to the idea of theosis, Lossky sometimes leans in the same direction. He takes for granted the Patristic metaphysical use of some biblical words without analyzing them in their biblical context. The most evident example of reading the biblical text primarily in terms of philosophical tradition, rather than in terms of its canonical context, is, as we have seen, Lossky's interpretation of 2 Pet 1:4.

As a result of a philosophico-theological interpretation of
the Bible, one line of Scriptural texts, expressing the idea of
creation returning back to God through the process of theosis, was
overemphasized in the Orthodox tradition, whereas the bulk of
biblical material having no less soteriological significance was
underestimated. The extrabiblical word theosis overshadowed the
covenantal, sacrificial, and substitutionary notions of the Bible
in the writings of Lossky, which led practically to the exclusion
of such biblical concepts as dikaiosune, hilasterion, iatron,
katalaggē, and cognate words, closely connected with
soteriological language of both the Old and New Testaments, from
his vocabulary.

This leads us to consider another problem in this context:
dichotomizing of both Scriptures and the process of salvation
itself. Lossky contrasts sanctification in the Old Testament,
which is by obedience to the Law, to the one in the New Testament,
which is by union with God. He writes:

Saintliness, as active sanctification of all being and the
free assimilation of human nature to that of God, can only
manifest itself after the work of Christ, by the conscious
grasping of this work. That is why the Law is essential to
the Old Testament, and the relationship of man and God is not
union but alliance, guaranteed by loyalty to the Law.

However, obedience to the Law and union with God does not exclude
each other in the Bible. According to Lossky, the Old Testament

'For a thorough discussion on these concepts see David Hill,
Greek Words and Hebrew Meanings: Studies in the Semantics of

Lossky refers to the covenant of Sinai in Exod 19:5-6.

Orthodox Theology, 86.
does not know "the intimate sanctification by grace," while the New Testament, as a result of the work of Christ, manifests an active sanctification of all being and the free assimilation of human nature to that of God. In the Old Testament, grace is "an effect produced in the soul by the divine will acting externally upon the person," while in the New Testament grace is "the divine life which is opened up within us in the Holy Spirit."

Such contrasts may be the result of Lossky's treatment of divine salvific activity only in the context of unity of divine and human natures in the process of Incarnation. Theosis as a way of union with God, therefore, must be unknown in the Old Testament dispensation. Such an approach is in danger of presupposing the existence of two different ways of salvation for the Old and New Testament dispensations which, in turn, threatens the integrity of the Holy Scriptures' message.

Thus, although Lossky is trying to establish a firm biblical basis for the doctrine of theosis, his interpretation of some texts (2 Pet 1:4; John 14:23) is clearly presupposed by a philosophico-theological meaning, which the Greek Fathers imposed in biblical words. He looks at the biblical texts through Patristic glasses. Moreover, the emphasis on theosis leads him to

Ibid., 85-86.

*Mystical Theology*, 172.

For another example of such an interpretation see *Mystical Theology*, 76, where Lossky interprets Hab 3:3-4 in the context of essence/energy distinction by pointing out that "the Bible abounds in texts which according to the tradition of the Eastern Church [italics mine] refer to the divine energies."
underestimate the Old Testament, to a selective use of the biblical material and its submission to his dogmatic synthesis.

In proposing such a criticism, however, we should take into consideration Lossky's concept of the relationship between Scripture and tradition (teaching of the Fathers) as the criteria for his theological method. Although he distinguishes between Scripture and Tradition, he never separates or divides them, affirming one source for revelation, which is the Holy Tradition. For Lossky, "Tradition in its primary notion is not the revealed content, but the unique mode of receiving Revelation, a faculty owed to the Holy Spirit, who renders the Church capable of knowing." Tradition is the life of the Spirit in the Church, who

In the Orthodox Church tradition is not regarded as another source of revelation. The Orthodox Church emphasizes the unity of the source of revelation when it establishes this formula, "Holy Scripture and Holy Tradition." "There is general agreement today," writes N. Nissiotis, "to speak of the sources of revelation by bringing together Scripture and Tradition as two expressions of one and the same thing, that is to say, the event of God's revealing Himself to His world in Christ." Nikos Nissiotis, "The Unity of Scripture and Tradition," GOTR 11 (1965-66): 184. Moreover, the Orthodox Church teaches that Tradition has a priority both in time and authority over the Bible. Meyendorff affirms: "Scripture, while complete in itself . . . presupposes Tradition" as the "milieu in which it becomes understandable and meaningful." John Meyendorff, "The Meaning of Tradition," in Scripture and Ecumenism, ed. L. D. Swidler (Pittsburgh, PA: Duquesne University Press, 1965), 46. What I am questioning here, however, is not the Orthodox (and Lossky's) understanding of the relationship between Scripture and tradition, but the reliability of Lossky's hermeneutics.

Lossky expresses his understanding of 'Tradition' as distinct from 'scripts' and from 'traditions' (dogmatic formulations of the Church) in "La Tradition et les traditions," Messager de l'Exarchat du Patriarche russe en Europe occidentale 30-31 (1959): 101-121.

In the Image and Likeness of God, 155.
alone is the ultimate criterion of truth. Only in the Church is one able to recognize in full consciousness the fullness of revelation, because the Church alone possesses the Tradition, which is "the knowledge in the Holy Spirit of the Incarnate Word." Bearing this in mind, we may hardly expect to find in Lossky's writings an interpretation of biblical texts (connected to the doctrine of theosis) different from the one that Tradition affirms. It is this 'traditional' understanding of salvation that Lossky defended in his controversy with Bulgakov who, according to him, instead of working within the tradition, promoted an alien philosophical system in the vein of the sophiological school. A discussion on this controversy places Lossky against the immediate historical and philosophical background and helps us to realize how far Lossky himself may stand within the same tradition regarding the issue of theosis.

The Idea of "God-manhood" and Theosis

Lossky deals with Bulgakov's sophiology in his Spor o Sofii in which he analyzes in detail Ukaz Moskovskoi Patriarkhii. He condemns Bulgakov's teaching and his Dokladnaiia Zapiska where the latter tries to defend his position as being orthodox. Following

"Ibid., 152. Cf. idem, Mystical Theology, 188, 236.

"In the Image and Likeness of God, 155. In another place, Lossky emphasizes the importance of the Church's judgement on the contents of either Holy Scriptures or Church Fathers and the use that she has made of it. Idem, Mystical Theology, 25.

Metropolitan Sergius (Stragorodsky), Lossky characterizes Bulgakov's method of theologizing as working outside tradition and subordinated to an alien philosophical system. In his rationalism and cataphatic treatment of the divine ousia, Bulgakov, Lossky argues, resembles the early gnostics. Bulgakov does not realize that apophaticism, as opposed to pagan gnosia and philosophy, is not a subdivision of theology but "the unique path for all theological thought," the main condition for our reception of revelation. Lossky considers the identification of Sophia with the divine nature as Bulgakov's "fundamental error," protesting that apophatic theology alone can dare to approach the divine mystery. Bulgakov, Lossky claims, ignores the fundamental distinction between God's essence, which is imparticipable, and His energies. Bulgakov's sophiology leads finally to the distortion of the Orthodox idea of theosis by grace. Instead of being the ultimate goal of humankind, theosis is considered by Bulgakov as a primordial fact, which makes his whole system static.

*Spor o Sofii,* 19. Lossky views the search for the ontological bridge between God and creation as a "false theme of his [Bulgakov's] theologizing." Ibid., 20.

Ibid., 21-22.

*Mystical Theology,* 30. See also Newman, 42-43.

'Sophia, according to Lossky, was viewed in Orthodox tradition as one among the divine names or energies. As such, it is neither a hypostasis nor an impersonal "principle" but a function exercised by the three hypostases of the Godhead, and, like all energies, possessed by them in common, as Palamas repeatedly stated. *Spor o Sofii,* 28. Cf. *Orthodox Theology,* 15. *Sophia* is also applied by Lossky to those who strive to know God. Ibid., 17.

'Spor o Sofii,* 37.
and anthropocentric. Manhood is viewed as an apotheosis of both the created order and the heavenly realm. The image of God in man "makes him divinized at the very moment of creation," it makes him "a created god."

In close connection to Bulgakov's sophianic anthropocentrism stands his ambiguous teaching on the uncreatedness of the human soul or hypostasis, which Lossky associates with Origenism. Lossky writes: "To Bulgakov's teaching that human soul, 'though destined for being in time, was created in the divine timelessness', must be opposed the following: human soul was created in time although it is destined for eternity." Only by excluding any thought about the preexistence of creaturely being—either in time or in timelessness—can "created" and "uncreated," creature and Creator, world and God be clearly distinguished. On this condition only, Lossky argues, it is possible to teach theosis as an ultimate goal of the whole creation without losing a distinction between the deified man, "created god," "God by grace", and his Creator, "God by nature and above nature." Lossky thinks that in the sophianic system the personal relationship between God and man is replaced by the natural-cosmic relation of the divine Sophia to the creaturely sophia through the human soul, which is divine in its origin but is penetrated into created nature. He argues that there is no place in this scheme for the

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*Ibid.,* 42.


freedom of human beings because it is enslaved with the natural process of apokatastasis. "How to combine the 'sophianic determinism' of this involuntary cosmic process of theosis of the whole created nature," asks Lossky, "with the free will of created being without which the very idea of person is untenable?" To solve this problem on the basis of the sophianic system is impossible for Lossky.

Much of Lossky's critique concerns Bulgakov's doctrine of Incarnation, mainly the problem of occasionalism. Was the Incarnation contingent upon the Fall, and so accidental or occasional, or was it eternally part of God's plan for creation? Bulgakov, Lossky claims, goes against the patristic consensus which definitely connects the Incarnation with the Fall. For Bulgakov, the Incarnation is the crown of created being; it is for this sake that the world was made. How then, Lossky asks, can the Incarnation be other than a necessity? From Bulgakov's logic, Lossky argues, an even more problematic corollary follows:

If the Incarnation is the purpose of the world and not the means of its salvation from sin, one of two things must follow: either the world is necessary to God, i.e. God is a being dependent on what is external to Him, or else the creation of the world manifests, if not a 'divine catastrophe', then, in any case, an act bestowing existence

Ibid., 45.

Ibid., 46.

On Lossky's attitude to Duns Scotus's problem, see Mystical Theology, 136-137.

Ibid., 51-52. Lossky identifies Bulgakov's position here with the absolute determinism of Calvin. Ibid., 53.
on something imperfect, a world including in itself not merely the possibility . . . but also the reality of evil.

Since the Fall is "natural" to creation, is not God then responsible for sin by creating this imperfect world? Lossky’s fundamental objection is that Bulgakov’s system is clearly determinist. The freedom of God and the freedom of created beings are equally obscured. The notion of a free, personal encounter or dialogue between God and the independent “other” whom he has created becomes meaningless. Both the free act of God’s condescension in the process of salvation and the free response of men to Christ are excluded. The historical life of Jesus, his sufferings and death, lose much of their significance. This is especially so because Bulgakov’s scheme allows no creative role at all to the humanity of Jesus. Lossky affirms that “Godmanhood” is essentially a monophysite idea, because the human will of Jesus is swallowed up in a generalized theandric will. Identification of the personality of Christ with nous, which is not a part of his human nature, leads, as a result, to “new Apollinarianism.”

Ibid., 55.

The very history of our world then, Lossky argues, is meaningless and the Bible telling about the “God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob” is the most ridiculous book. Ibid., 50.

Ibid., 71-73.

'Spor o Soifii, 65-66, 70. God-man Jesus Christ, according to Bulgakov, is not the perfect God and perfect Man in the unity of one hypostasis, but rather something between them--neither God nor man, a bearer of a new nature of God-manhood. Ibid., 64.

Ibid., 62-63. Since the human (created) nous in the person of Christ is replaced by Logos then “all spiritual life of humanity is transferred into divinity, moreover, it becomes the internal tragedy of the Holy Trinity itself.” Ibid., 64.
Moreover, having reduced personality to nous, Bulgakov does not leave any room in his scheme for the doctrine of personal sanctification by the Holy Spirit. "The Christology of Father Bulgakov," Lossky concludes,

diffuses itself in a cosmic 'panchristism', swallowing up both the Holy Spirit and the Church, and in the same way, annihilating the human personality in a sophianic-natural process of divinization.

Ecclesiologically, this means simply that Christ, as the Head of the Church, includes in his glorified Body the whole of human nature rather than the totality of redeemed human persons. Lossky concludes his Spor o Sofii by affirming that the battle against sophiology is a battle for Orthodox ecclesiology, a battle against determinism and impersonalism, against Bulgakov's fundamental error of confusing nature and person.

As a way of summary, one may say that Lossky rejects absolutely the notion of Sophia, both divine and creaturely, as deterministic and destructive for divine and human freedom. He also condemns the idea of "God-manhood" as jeopardizing the reality of Christ's humanity and tending to reduce the Incarnation to the manifestation of a cosmic process. In this "false cosmism"

Ibid., 61. Williams comments that it is "an automatic and crudely physicalist soteriology, in which human persons are absorbed into the divine hypostasis of Christ." Williams, "The Theology of Lossky," 56.

By his vague, confused, and "Docetic" view of the Church, Bulgakov, Lossky argues, dissolves the Church in cosmos, in creaturely Sophia, making theosis meaningless. Theosis can be achieved only in a "'historical', concrete, tangible" Church with her sacraments, hierarchy, and canonical structure. Spor o Sofii, 81.

For a brief summary of this, see ibid., 92-93.
of Bulgakov, theosis, as based on a free human response, becomes meaningless.

We have seen so far that Lossky's views on theosis were shaped in the atmosphere of a search for the organic unity of created and uncreated orders, which was the main concern of Sophiologists. Although Lossky characterizes the Sophiological system as developing themes outside the Orthodox tradition and as subordinated to the deterministic tendencies excluding a personal relationship with God, his struggle to present theosis as the ultimate purpose of the whole creation and a sophiologist wish for vseedinstvo coincides in their general orientation. Realizing, however, that all attempts to accommodate the sophiological approach to the problem of salvation within an Orthodox framework have failed, Lossky seeks a deeper integration of his system into historical Christianity and the 'ecclesiastical tradition' of more recent times. It is here that we find the main premises for Lossky's doctrine of theosis.

The Main Presuppositions

Three main theological presuppositions stand behind Lossky's doctrine of theosis. The first is apophasis, a major characteristic of Lossky's theology. Two others allow Lossky to state the dogmatic basis for the real character of theosis. They

'Ibid., 78.

The only exception might be Evgeny Trubetskoi, whom Lossky regarded as the only one of the sophiological school who remained "perfectly orthodox in his theological thought." Mystical Theology, 133, n. 1. I would note also some closeness of Lossky to S. Frank with his sensitivity for the personal. See above, 132.
are two major distinctions which lay the foundation for the real, not metaphorical, meaning of theosis: the distinction between divine essence and divine energies, and the distinction between nature and person. While the first distinction mainly concerns the "theological" aspect of theosis, the second one includes the "economical" as well. In evaluating those premises, I use the principle of adequacy and internal consistency.

Apophatic Approach

The core of Lossky's epistemology is well expressed in the following statement: "The way of the knowledge of God is necessarily the way of deification." While all theological knowledge, according to Lossky, is based upon revelation, it is not an end in itself. Rather, the purpose of revelation and true gnosis is theosis. As a true follower of Pseudo-Dionysius, Lossky affirms that true gnosis is a way of spiritual ascent beyond all perceptive and rational faculties of man. The concept of gnosis is, in fact, no knowledge but, rather, a mystical union with God, a "knowing nothing." The main purpose of this "knowing" is not to develop a positive theological system but to attain union with God, i.e., theosis. At the basis of this epistemology lies apophaticism, which, as we have seen, determines Lossky's approach to theology in general. Apophatic theology refuses any attempt to form concepts about God and to organize them in a systematic construct according to human ways of thought. This is why, Lossky argues, the concepts or the words of Scripture do not describe God.

See above, 155.
as He is in Himself. God is always beyond everything that exists. This approach, however, creates some problems.

First of all, if negative theology begins by denying the appropriateness of the human mind and language to know God, then one may enquire concerning the role of Scriptures and dogmas, since these are themselves expressed in concepts. To answer this question, Lossky borrows from Gregory of Nissa's allegorical interpretation of Moses' ascent on Mount Sinai, pointing to the cataphatic way with its different levels in theology, each appropriate to different capacities of human understanding. In this multi-level theological construct, the words of Scripture, the dogmas of the Church, and her liturgical life serve primarily as the starting and guiding points in an ever-ascending process of contemplation, which has theosis as its final goal. This answer, however, hardly agrees with an overall cataphatic orientation of the Scriptural narrative. Although mystical experience is present in the Bible (Job 42:5; 2 Cor 12:2-4), it is never maintained as a predominant practice or the ultimate goal of the believer's spiritual journey.

It was Philo, actually, who first used Moses' climb to the mountain of Sinai as the prototype of a mystical ascent of the soul and union with God. Philo De Vita Mosis 2.51.

Gregory's interpretation of Moses' ascent appears to suggest a stratification of the community concerning the accessibility to loftier heights of contemplation, and Lossky attempts to correct it by arguing that the negative way is not "an esoteric teaching hidden from the profane; nor is it a gnostic separation between those who are spiritual, psychic or carnal, but a school of contemplation wherein each receives his share in the experience of the Christian mystery lived by the Church." Mystical Theology, 41.
Second, in Lossky's approach, apophasis inappropriately disjoins economy and theology. According to Lossky, oikonomia is a way of descent (katabasis), while theologia is a way of ascent (anabasis). The first way is the basis for kataphatic theology; the second, for apophatic. Orthodox theologians do not deny the need for a balance between kataphatic and apophatic theology, but Lossky is willing to say that while kataphatic theology leads us to some knowledge of God, ever imperfect, apophatic theology is "the perfect way" because it leads to total ignorance. While, Lossky argues, we cannot know God outside the economy, "one must abandon the descending line of revelation of the nature of the Father through the Son in the Spirit, in order to be able to recognize the consubstantiality of the three hypostases beyond all manifesting economy." According to Lossky, the apophatic approach, i.e., the negation of all the attributes of God that might be found in the economy (love, goodness, wisdom, and so forth), allows the true theologian to speak of God in Himself, outside of any engagement in the oikonomia. Lossky, thus, sees apophasis as the method for knowledge of God as God is in God-self. It is striking that Lossky departs here from the Greek patristic understanding of apophasis, which acknowledged that God is unknowable in God-self, but knowable on the basis of energies, that is, on the basis of oikonomia.

Further, since, according to the idea of personhood which Lossky develops in his theology, being is considered always as

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*In the Image and Likeness of God, 16.*
being in relation, as being toward another, it is actually impossible to say what something is by itself, or in itself. This is particularly clear in the case of God. God's existence is grasped in relationship to us. We do not know God in God-self or by God-self. If we try to determine what God is apart from how God exists concretely in the relationship to His creation, then we violate the unity of theologia and oikonomia as well as the Cappadocian principle that to exist as person in communion is more ultimate than to be. Therefore, the goal of theology is not knowledge of God, "as God is in God-self" disjoined from God's self-revelation in the economy; the true goal of theology is knowledge of God, which is inseparable from who God is in God's concrete existence in Christ and the Holy Spirit.

Finally, it seems that Lossky's approach to theology distorts the scriptural view of the knowledge of God. The knowledge of God in the Bible is not based primarily upon discursive thought or rational contemplation, but upon experience, which is always definite, local, temporal, and particular. Blackman comments:

Knowledge for the Hebrews was not knowledge of abstract principles, or of a reality conceived of as beyond phenomena. Reality was what happens, and knowledge meant apprehension of that.

In Hebrew thought, to "know" someone was to experience that one, rather than merely to intellectualize. To "know" someone was to share an intimate personal relationship with him or her. The Hebrew verb yada, "to know," means to encounter, experience, and

*A Theological Word Book of the Bible (1951), s.v. "Know, Knowledge."
share in an intimate way. In sum, in biblical Hebrew, the verb yada denotes “an act involving concern, inner engagement, dedication, or attachment to a person. It also means to have sympathy, pity, or affection for someone.” The prophets also taught the idea of knowledge as action. To “know” God was to walk faithfully in His ways and to live out the terms of His covenant. In ancient Israel, knowledge that did not issue in appropriate action was not true knowledge at all. The idea of knowledge embraces the whole human personality: his mind, his feelings, and his deeds. There is no true knowledge of God that does not involve the whole of a man’s personality. “A man’s ‘theology’ should engage his passions as well as his thoughts, and must call forth not only the response ’I understand,’ but ’I love’ and ’I will’."

It is in the sphere of knowledge that the differences between Hebrew and Greek worldviews become perhaps most decisively pronounced. The Greek words gnosis and ginoskó, during the time of the translation of the Old Testament into Greek, had a meaning separate from the Hebrew meaning of yada. The basic Greek meaning implied a contemplation of an object from a distance and not

Although it sounds similar to what Lossky is talking about gnosis in his later writings (see above, 150-151), encounter he refers to is of more mystical and contemplative character due to the overall apophatic character of his theology.


‘Ibid., 41.
necessarily a direct personal encounter or experience between the object and the person gaining the knowledge. In the Greek understanding, knowledge was more impersonal as compared to the Hebrew understanding, since the Greek philosophers used the idea of knowledge to refer to a contemplation as opposed to a personal encounter or experience. However, the New Testament writers’ understanding of knowledge was basically the same as that of the Old Testament writers. Generally, these writers did not use gnosko to imply a speculative knowledge based on intellectual comprehension and contemplation. Paul, for example, emphasized the Hebrew meaning of “knowledge” when he used the phrases “knowledge of God” or “knowing God.” For him, these phrases implied an intimate relationship based upon a responsible obedience to God and His will. This kind of knowledge was gained from the concrete revelation of God in history through the Incarnation of the Son and manifestation of the Holy Spirit. Therefore, Lossky’s distinction between episteme as dealing with “historical work here below” and “adopted to space and time,” and gnosia as transcending space and time, as a “vision of what is beyond history,” seems to be unbiblical. The knowledge of God in the Bible is always the knowledge of God’s actions, of God’s salvific activity in history; it is an experience of this activity and willingness to obey God’s will. It seems that apophaticism,


as it is understood by Lossky, is foreign to biblical revelation, and Lossky’s doctrine of theosis as based on the apophatic approach fails to meet the criterion of adequacy we set in the beginning of the chapter for the evaluation of Lossky’s system.

Essence/Energies Distinction

The second important presupposition for the doctrine of theosis in Lossky is the essence/energy distinction. At least four central issues emerge in connection with this distinction in Lossky’s thought. First, does Lossky express a consensus of his Greek patristic predecessors as regards this distinction? Is Nectarianism, of which he is a faithful devotee, a natural outcome of the preceding tradition? These questions are closely related to a second issue. Is the distinction between essence and energies epistemological or ontological? That is, does Lossky mean to describe the limited conditions under which we know God, or does he mean that God’s inexpressible essence is ontologically distinct from God’s self-communication to His creation? Third, does the essence/persons/energies framework further widen the gulf between theologia and oikonomia by setting up the divine persons as a kind of intermediary level between essence and energies and thus removing human persons from direct contact with the divine persons? Finally, does Lossky’s view of God as expressed in the

It should be mentioned that apophatic theology, although having a long history within Christian tradition (starting from Origen, going through Gregory of Nyssa, and culminating in the great mystical vision of Pseudo-Dionysius), originated actually in Greek philosophy. For a good analysis of this theme, see A. Louth, The Origins of the Christian Mystical Tradition: From Plato to Denys (Oxford: Clarendon, 1981). Lossky himself recognizes this fact. In the Image and Likeness of God, 19.
categories of essence and energies correspond to the biblical picture of God?

The Problem with Tradition

Lossky’s persistent claim that homogeneous, continuous tradition of the essence/energies distinction has existed in the Orthodox Church since the Cappadocian Fathers is taken for granted among many Orthodox scholars. Certainly the Cappadocians and, later, Maximus the Confessor do speak of the divine essence that is unknowable in itself, and the divine energies, or light and glory that surround the essence, but the question is not whether...

"Mystical Theology, 71.

Thus, G. Patacsi defends the idea that “a historical continuity and a doctrinal concordance exists... between the theology of the Fathers and that of... Gregory Palamas, with respect to the divine energies.” G. Patacsi, “Palamism Before Palamas,” ECR 9 (1977): 64. Meyendorff affirms that the essence/energies distinction is based upon the Chaledonian, post-Chaledonian, and Maximian understanding of salvation. Meyendorff, Christ in Eastern Christian Thought, 210-211. Thomas Anastos argues that the doctrine of theosis spun through the terms and logic of the essence, energies, and hypostasis scheme previously embodied by Palamas’s predecessors; Palamas just radicalized the scheme (335-349). See also Florovsky, St. Gregory Palamas and the Tradition of the Fathers, 1:116; Ware, “God Hidden,” 129. Mantzaridis, however, agrees that while from the very beginning the Church accepted the distinction between the essence and the energy, initially this distinction was expressed in an imprecise and indefinite way. Mantzaridis, “Tradition and Renewal in the Theology of Saint Gregory Palamas,” 15. It is quite difficult to reconcile the strong anti-Palamite position of many bishops during Palamas’s time with affirmation by contemporary Orthodox theologians that the essence/energy distinction was taught before Palamas by many Greek Fathers. See V. Veniaminov, “On the Life and Theological Heritage of St. Gregory Palamas, Archbishop of Thessalonica,” The Journal of the Moscow Patriarchate 4 (1985): 75.

See, for example, Basil Letters 234: Gregory of Nyssa Against Eunomius 12. However, in the anti-Eunomian writings of the Cappadocians, the essence-energy distinction does not receive the same stress and prominence as in the theosis structure of Palamas.
the Cappadocians distinguished between essence and energies. They most certainly did. The question is whether the distinction means the same in their writings as it does for Gregory Palamas and Lossky, namely, that the divine ousia is ontologically distinct from the divine energeiai. With regard to this question, many scholars cast doubt on the alleged Patristic pedigree of Palamism. Williams, after analyzing the terms ousia and energeiai in their historical context, comes to the conclusion that "the widely diffused idea which Lossky did a great deal to popularize that the Palamite distinction, as a metaphysical scheme, goes back to the Cappadocians is quite plainly mistaken." It seems that Lossky in his neo-Patristic synthesis tends to interpret the early

Thus, the Byzantinist Endre von Ivánka holds that a real distinction between essence and energies contradicts the thought of the Greek Fathers. According to him, Palamism is a reversion to a Platonic idea of participation by the creature in successive levels of God's being. E. von Ivánka, "Palamismus und Vatertradition," in Plato christianus: Übernahme und Umgestaltung des Platonismus durch die Vater (Einsiedeln: Johannes Verlag, 1964), 425-443. Van Rossum affirms that the theology of the Cappadocian Fathers does not lead to the assumption of a real distinction between the divine essence and energies since the historical context in which their writings were done did not deal with the problem of the relation between the divine essence and energies (178). In regard to Ante-Nicene Fathers, Contos affirms, the ontological essence/energy distinction was even more unthinkable since the Incarnate Logos was often considered to be the dunamis or energeia of the Father. Contos, "The Essence-Energies Structure," 285. See also Trethowan, "Lossky on Mystical Theology," 243. The very fact that the doctrine of essence/energy distinction was formally accepted and elaborated only at the Councils in Constantinople in 1341 and 1351 is a clear evidence that this distinction was not considered to be as important in Cappadocians as it became in Palamas in the context of theosis.


Ibid., 174.
Fathers in light of the later tradition, mainly Palamism. Moreover, at times he speaks "as if no time, no shift in language or philosophy, occurred between fourth and fourteenth centuries." As a result, he ignores the evidence that points to a more complex interpretation of the Cappadocian writings.

The Problem with Ontology

As has been mentioned previously, Lossky, following Gregory Palamas, made a real distinction between the incommunicable divine essence and the communicable divine energies to reconcile what otherwise would be mutually contradictory propositions: the creature becomes God by grace (theosis); God utterly transcends and is imparticipable by the creature. The problem facing Gregory and Lossky, as I have shown in the previous chapters, was soteriological and spiritual—to establish a reality of theosis.

This approach is criticized by Daniélou who is certain that the antithesis of God's essence and His energies in the context of theosis is a later development. Jean S. J. Daniélou, "Introduction," to La déification de l'homme selon la doctrine des Pères grecs by M. Lot-Borodine (Paris: Editions du Cerf, 1970), 15.

LaCugna, 13".

Von Ivánka, for example, points out that any possibility of a strict distinction between the divine essence and the divine energies in the Cappadocians of the Palamite kind is ruled out by various passages in which the energeiai or dunameis are themselves said to be unknowable or incomprehensible. Von Ivánka, passim.

"See above, 173-177.

'It is important to note that the Palamite doctrine of energies was developed on the basis of experience and, therefore, cannot be considered as a metaphysical or philosophical theory. Ullmann, for example, emphasizes the very limited appropriateness of comparing spirituality with (academic) theology. Palamas was not trying to set up a theological distinction, but was defending a spiritual praxis from the suspicion of heresy. Wolfgang Ullmann,
According to them, for theosis to be real, the distinction between essence and energies must be also real, i.e., ontological. If the distinction is epistemological only, there cannot be a real reification of the human being. However, when we analyze the philosophical apparatus used to support the idea of theosis by both Gregory and Lossky, we meet with serious difficulties in their systems. These difficulties result from the incautious and sometimes unjustified introduction and use of elements of Greek philosophy foreign to biblical thinking. I refer here primarily to two concepts: ousia and energeia.

In classical philosophy, a wide range of senses existed in which these terms could be used. For Plato, ousia denotes a particular being, a particular thing whose idea is located "beyond the essence." The Platonic notion of participation is important here. A thing receives its actuality to a greater or lesser extent, depending on the degree to which it participates in the form or idea that lies behind it. Two ontological planes are


A real distinction is a distinction of being, in contrast to a logical (epistemological) distinction, or distinction of reason.

For the Western theologians shaped by categories of Aristotelian philosophy, if both essence and energies are divine, and if they are ontologically distinct, then there are two gods. Jüngst first advanced this criticism, and it has since received varying degrees of consent among Western theologians (1777-1818).

For a good analysis of the philosophical milieu from which ousia and energeia were originally borrowed, see Williams, "The Theology of Lossky," 169-172.

"Plato Republic 6.509b."
established by Plato, that of the particular things (the level of the "sensible"), and that of the ideas behind them (the level of the "intelligible"). While essence and energy may be identified in the level of particular things, there is also a dimension of beyondness in Plato’s ontology. Aristotle eliminates two Platonic ontological planes. Energy, for him, signifies the attributes or the form of a thing, an ousia. Although distinguished in a practical, human sense, from essence, energy is one with ousia. The far more important distinction in Aristotle is between power (dunamis) and energy (energeia), in which dunamis denotes the potentiality of an essence, and energeia its actuality. In actual things, essence and energy are one and the same. There is nothing beyond the essence for Aristotle, therefore, as R. Williams notes,

This Platonic notion "beyond the essence" later became extremely important for the mystical writings of the Eastern Church, especially through the influence of Pseudo-Dionysius.

There is an ambiguity in the concept of ousia, which permeates the whole of Aristotelian Metaphysics. J. Owens, The Doctrine of Being in the Aristotelian Metaphysics (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1951), 309.

Aristotle Metaphysics, 1048b, 9-17; 1065b, 5-7.

'Aristotle’s identification of essence and energy later became a feature of Western scholasticism, which identifies God’s essence or substance as pure actuality. This also defines the Augustinian concept of the unity of God, understood in terms of the simplicity of God (an identity of God’s essence and God’s attributes). M. Schmaus, Die Psychologische Trinitatslehre des Heiligen Augustinus (Münster: Aschendorffsche Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1967). The important distinction for Western theology remains the distinction that Aristotle had emphasized: that between potentiality and actuality. This distinction is later to find expression in a distinction between essence and existence in Thomas Aquinas—a distinction that Yannaras considers as an invaluable link between East and West. Rowan G. Williams, "The Theology of Personhood: A Study of the Thought of Christos Yannaras," Sobornost’ 6 (Winter 1972): 424.
it makes no sense to speak of Aristotle's God as epekeina tes ousias.

In neo-Platonism, the Absolute, or the One, is beyond ousia. From the supersubstantial One issues Nous, which contains the fullness of being and which is ousia par excellence. From Nous issues psychê, which animates the world, actualizing the intelligible determinations and forms of things in a material universe. Thus, the neo-Platonists' main concern is a problem of relation of all things to each other, of part to whole, many to one. Aristotle's ousia, a simple entity with its definitions, is submerged in a swamp of speculations about the degrees of being, the manner in which being is 'shared out' among entities in the world.

In this quite complicated context, the Fathers began to speak of ousia. And, although the Fathers of Nicaea and Athanasius in declaring Christ homoousios with the Father probably had no intention of employing ousia in a technical or philosophical sense, the word rapidly acquired such a sense and came to be used by the Cappadocians and others to express what Aristotle had called deuteræ ousia in the Categories. At the same time, the

Williams, "The Theology of Lossky," 170.


'Williams, "The Theology of Lossky," 171.
Christian mystical tradition tended to speak of God in a strongly neo-Platonic manner, asserting God's transcendence of ousia. This latter tendency reached its climax in Pseudo-Dionysius with his repeated insistence that God is 'superessential', and survived in Maximus and Gregory Palamas.

The same ambiguity can be seen in the employment of the term energeia. For Aristotle, as was indicated, it simply means 'actuality'. Plotinus follows Aristotle in envisaging the One as energeia, although for later neo-Platonics—Porphyry, Iamblichus, and Proclus, for whom the triadic structure of reality became a commonplace—energeia was considered to be the third in a triad after ousia and dunamis. It designates the manner in which an entity actively participates, and thus tends towards primitive ontological simplicity. In addition to these various senses of energeia, there was in Hellenistic thought a long-standing tradition of speaking of God or the gods as present in the world en dunamei, or as knowable through their dunameis. We see God's powers in action in the world. All these usages of energeia remind us that the word was by no means a clearly defined

Palamas in very strong terms says that God is not phusis at all. If the world is phusis, God is not, and vice versa. Lossky sees in this a good example of vacillation between the logical and metaphysical senses of a term. Ibid., 172.

Armstrong, 314.

Philo sometimes uses similar language to underline God's total transcendence: all we see and know in the world is the remote effect of God's dunameis. Philo On the Unchangeableness of God 78.
technical term, and could still be used in the Hellenistic world to simply mean 'act' or 'operation'.

It is in this non-technical sense, Williams argues, that the Cappadocians, with their deep indebtedness to Philo, used the word energeia without a strict essence/energy distinction of the Palamite kind. Basically, the Cappadocian position seems to be that God's ousia cannot be known by man as God knows it. What we know of God, we know through His acts in the world. This simple scheme was not complicated by the problem of 'participation' and was strictly epistemological. The problem with Lossky, as Palamas before him, is that, in order to safeguard a view of participation in God (theosis), he hardened the essence/energy distinction (used by the Cappadocians basically as an epistemological tactic) into an ontological distinction in God Himself, and by confusing terminology greatly weakened the consistency and intelligibility of his system. With a certain carelessness in the use of such terms as ousia and energeia, and a failure to recognize that the words have sharply distinct senses in different systems, Palamas


Dionysius is chiefly responsible for proposing a distinction of the Palamite kind by his adaptation of Proclus's cosmology. The multiplication of the One in the 'henads' of Proclus's system becomes the 'diffusion' of God in His dunameis in Dionysius. These dunameis are multiple modes of God's existence in which creatures participate in the divine being. Pseudo-Dionysius On the Divine Names 9.7. Maximus, although developing a metaphysical orientation of the Dionysian scheme, in his polemic against monoenergists goes back to the Aristotelian sense, envisaging energeia simply as ousia in action. Maximus the Confessor Disputatio cum Pyrrho.
and Lossky placed the concept of theosis on this shaky metaphysical foundation.

Following Aristotelian metaphysics, the most universally applicable definition of ousia as 'being there' points towards an identification of ousia with energeia. Being there, in actuality, ousia is a real entity (the 'first' or 'primary' substance); and since all that can be said of it is by way of defining it, its 'secondary' substance is simply 'being there', actuality, energeia. Palamas himself insists that, logically, there can be no such thing as non-actual essence. ousia, by its very nature, must be energeia. There can be no ousia as an isolated core of pure unmoving interiority. If ousia is thus regarded as an abstract notion, it is evident that knowledge of any ousia in itself is unthinkable: there is nothing to know. What is known is 'essence-in-act', the properties of a thing experienced as affecting the knowing subject. Thus, to say that knowledge is of energeia rather than ousia is to state the obvious.

We have here, in fact, the roots of the Thomist conception of God as actus essendi, being-in-act. Since ens or esse, the 'essence-in-its-act-of-existing' is seen as primary, it is possible to assert a real communication with God in actu, while still denying that a finite intellect can know God as He knows Himself. Aquinas Summa Theologica 1.12.7. By maintaining real, 'existential' communication between essences as they are in actu, we are not making an awkward division between 'essence' and 'not-essence', rather we are defining the mode in which essence exists.

Palamas Capita 136.

To clarify the terminology I am using, the Scholastic distinction between first and second act should be taken into consideration. By 'first act' was meant the form of a thing, and by 'second act' the operation of the thing. Thus, 'act' suggests in this terminology both actuality and activity.
What then becomes of the 'essential' unknowability of God? Clearly we know God only insofar as He acts upon us, as He is 'present' to us, never as He is 'present' to Himself. Any quest for knowledge of God or of God's ousia 'in itself', therefore, is doomed to failure. It is based on the thinking that the divine ousia exists 'by itself'. Thus, it seems that Gregory Palamas has built a theology around an idea of essence/energy distinction that not only cannot stand up to philosophical scrutiny, it also, as we shall later see, undermines the very basis of Orthodox trinitarian theology. Lossky's fondness for Palamite language defining 'incomprehensibility' as an inherent property of the divine ousia is puzzling. He does not want to say that God's unknowable character is a function of the weakness or limitation of our finite minds; but what else can it be? It seems that the difficulties and inconsistencies of Lossky's writings on the problem of how God is known and participated in by men are the result of his rather uncritical use of a tradition pervaded by philosophical and logical inconsistencies.

The practice of speaking of God as ousia created the serious problem for the idea of participation (having part in). It is practically impossible to extract a consistent account of what participation in energies means from Lossky's writings. On the one hand, he talks about energies as communicating 'God' or

Williams clearly demonstrates that Palamism is, philosophically, a rather unhappy marriage of Aristotelian and Neoplatonic systems, a mixture of extreme realism of Neoplatonic metaphysics and Aristotelian logic. Williams, "The Philosophical Structures of Palamism," 27-44.
'divinity' or the divine life; on the other, "his naively materialistic idea of participation impels him to deny that we ever really come into contact with the divine nature at all, since it is incommunicable." Trethowan suggests that instead of distinguishing God's nature from His energies in order to give a meaning to God's incomprehensibility and inaccessibility, it would be more logical and more consistent to distinguish our knowledge of Him, which is always limited, from God Himself. "There are not two distinct 'parts' in God, but there are two distinct partners in the union of grace, God and ourselves." Theosis had an acceptable sense only if it would be conceived intentionally: the subject 'becomes' the object insofar as the object occupies and 'informs' the subject. In this sense, theosis is identification of man's will with the will of God. We are united with God because we know and love Him. What other kind of union with Him is conceivable? Lossky would not agree with this interpretation, although in developing his understanding of theosis he goes beyond the Palamite concrete and too materialistic scheme of participation.

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In the Image and Likeness of God, 40-41.

See Williams, "The Theology of Lossky," 167.

Trethowan, "Lossky on Mystical Theology," 244-245.

'Ibid., 244.

Williams, "The Theology of Lossky," 184.
The Gap Between Theologia and Oikonomia

As was pointed out in chapter 3, Lossky clearly distinguishes between theologia and oikonomia. It is this distinction that allowed us to talk about "theological" and "economical" aspects of theosis in Lossky. Factually, theologia is a sphere of essence whereas oikonomia is a sphere of energies. However, it is this distinction that creates a problem for a theology of theosis, which is by God the Father through Christ and in the Holy Spirit.

According to Lossky, as we have seen, God's ousia exists trihypostatically: as Father, Son, and Spirit. The three persons do not have a common ousia, they are the divine ousia. This means that the divine ousia is not something elevated beyond the divine persons and, thus, can be identified with them. Since the divine hypostases belong to the imparticipable and unknowable essence of God, and since they enter into communion with the creature through energies, not personally, Lossky's theology widens the gap between theologia and oikonomia by postulating a divine realm comprised of persons not directly accessible to the creature. Even though the energies are 'enhypostasized' (i.e., express what the divine persons are), the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are a step removed from the economy of salvation. Consequently, while God's relation to creation follows a certain Trinitarian order (i.e., from the Father, through the Son, in the Spirit), in fact the office of each Person, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit in particular, fades into the background because that mystical union

In the Image and Likeness of God, 15; cf. Mystical Theology, 71, 82.
with God is realized through the energies which are impersonal. Such an approach runs the risk of confusing the energies with the hypostases of the Son or the Spirit, which is what we meet in some Patristic writings where the energies and the hypostases are not clearly differentiated. Lossky realizes this risk when, commenting on Irenaeus and Basil, he affirms: "The Son who renders visible the hidden nature of the Father is here almost identified with the manifesting energies." Actually, Lossky himself does not succeed in drawing a clear distinction between the hypostasis of the Son and the divine energies when he says: "In the energies He is, He exists, He eternally manifests Himself." It seems that Lossky is not sure where to place the energies in the Trinitarian scheme, and consequently ascribes them a 'middle ground' between immanent and economic Trinity. On the one hand, they belong to the sphere of theologia as eternal and inseparable forces of the Trinity existing independently of the creative act; on the other, they belong to the domain of oikonomia, for it is in His energies that God manifests Himself to

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'For the most striking examples of such a confusion, see Paul Negrut, "Orthodox Soteriology: Theosis," Churchman 109 (1995): 168, n. 77.

'"For that which is invisible of the Son is the Father, and that which is visible of the Father is the Son." Irenaeus Against Heresies 4.6.

"The Son shows forth in Himself the Father in His fullness, shining forth in all His glory and splendour." Basil Against Eunomius 2.17.

'Mystical Theology, 84.

'Ibid., 89.'
the creatures. In any case, the essence/energy distinction as understood ontologically precludes identification of the divine Persons with energies. And since the divine persons belong to the imparticpable essence of God, though expressed through the energies, they do not enter into direct communion with the creature. What soteriological functions are left to the Father, Son, and Spirit? How could they enter the world, if they belong to that level in God, which is defined as being unalterably beyond the sphere of any soteriological contact? The lack of essential connectedness between the divine Persons and the economy of salvation, due to Lossky's strict distinction between theologia and oikonomia, leads eventually to the conclusion that the Trinity is soteriologically functionless. It is here, Wendebourg says, that the fundamental difference between Palamas's system, to which Lossky clings, and the classical patristic doctrine of the Trinity is clearly seen. She says:

The distinction in God, which in the eyes of the fourth century allowed men to understand his action and revelation in the world as action and revelation of his innermost, essential being, according to Palamas is raised above any connection with the world and history, closed up in itself.  

Ibid., 92.

Some Orthodox theologians became aware of this problem. Thus, Timidis points out: "A God who is reluctant to be with us, who sends us alternative powers and energies, contradicts the very sense of Christ's Incarnation." E. Timidis, "God's Immutability and Communicability," in Theological Dialogue Between Orthodox and Reformed Churches, ed. Thomas F. Torrance (Edinburgh: Scottish Academic Press, 1985), 46.

Wendebourg, “From the Cappadocian Fathers to Gregory Palamas: The Defeat of Trinitarian Theology,” 196.
For his part, Lossky would explicitly deny that his distinction between theologia and oikonomia, which is unavoidable for the affirmation of an ontological character of theosis, leads to the ‘defeat’ of trinitarian theology. However, this finale is inevitable if theologia and oikonomia are ontologically distinct.

By using ontological language in his understanding of God, Lossky is trying to make his idea of theosis meaningful, but it brings him in tension with a God of Revelation.

The Problem with a God of Revelation

It is evident that the doctrine of theosis, as based on the essence/energy distinction, is a clear example of a biblical-classical synthesis in which the ontological categories of Greek philosophy have been united with the ‘personal-dramatic’ categories of biblical faith. Whatever arguments may be advanced in favor of using such terms as ‘essence’ and ‘energies’, they still risk being misunderstood on account of their impersonal character. Therefore, in our understanding of salvation it might

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It should be mentioned that the relationship between theologia and oikonomia remains weak within the Latin doctrine of the Trinity as well. However, there is almost unanimous agreement that the immanent and economic Trinity must be viewed as essentially related. See Christoph Schwöbel, "Introduction," in Trinitarian Theology Today, ed. C. Schwöbel (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1995), 7. Rahner’s solution to this problem was tersely phrased in the statement: "The immanent Trinity is the economic Trinity, and the economic Trinity is the immanent Trinity." K. Rahner, The Trinity, trans. J. Donceel (London: Burns and Oates, 1979), 27. It is not that there is no more to God than what is revealed to us, nor that we know exactly what God’s inner being is like when we speak of the Trinity. It is rather that God essentially is such as to be authentically revealed as a Trinitarian God.

'Bloesch, 205.
be better to use more intimate and personal expressions in line with those presented by the Holy Scriptures.

Although the biblical doctrine of God is underdetermined, that is, one cannot tell from the text alone how far God is spoken of literally, and how far what is said is a figure of speech, what is clear in the final biblical view is that God is the one and only Creator; that God calls Abraham and his descendants into a special relationship of loyalty and love; that God teaches through the prophets a way of justice and mercy; and that God judges evil and wills all humans to acknowledge the divine power and glory. Further speculation on the exact nature of the divine being, His power, knowledge, and goodness, is totally absent from the Bible. The whole force of Jewish reflection is focused instead on the requirements of Torah, the fostering of justice among humans, and of a relationship of love and joy with God. In this sense, Ward argues, biblical thought remains intensely practical, and its theoretical content remains largely at the level of metaphors or images for the relationship of the Creator, Judge, and Savior to human creatures. The God of the Bible is a "dynamic, responsive, passionate God who continually does new things and weaves human decisions into his larger purpose." All that one can say of God is founded on prophetic experience, which is of how God relates to


Ibid., 19. Many distinctive and profound insights into the character of God have been provided by twentieth-century Jewish theologians. Martin Buber emphasizes the personal nature of God in his Ich und Du. Abraham Heschel develops Buber’s thought, writing that "to the prophet, God is always apprehended, experienced, and conceived as a Subject, never as an object" (485).
humans in 'pathos and relationship'. Thus, "the prophets experience what he [God] utters, not what he is . . . not the mystery of God's essence, but rather the mystery of his relation to man." This Old Testament view of God as personal and dynamic, as interactively related to creation, is further developed in the New Testament, which adds the belief, already implicit in much Jewish thought, that God does not only stand in relationship to humans as an external Will, shaping history to its purposes, but He enters into the historical process sharing His unitive love with man.

This personalistic and dynamic understanding of God is inexpressible in Greek philosophical terms. Therefore, the ontological notion alone is a misrepresentation of the ultimate mystery of the divine being. Of that mystery one can say nothing. The mystery must always be preserved, but it needs no philosophical concepts to do so. What is unutterable and incomprehensible cannot be described, even by negations. The primary stress of Scripture is, surely, on knowing rather than unknowing. God has opened Himself to man in a covenant of life and knowledge, and wherever the language of covenant is found in Scripture a cataphatic theology is presupposed. In this sense, also, Lossky's emphatic apophaticism seems to be unscriptural. Therefore, God is to be understood not in terms of abstract concepts of essence and energies but in terms of His self-

Heschel, 484.

Bloesch rightly notes that "neither theologians nor philosophers can define God, but God can and does define Himself." Bloesch, 36. See above, 240.
revelation in salvation history. There is no dichotomy in the Bible (as there is in Hellenistic tradition) between essence as the inherent, unchanging nature of a thing and existence, which suggests contingency, temporality, and materiality. By using Thomistic language, essence and existence are one in God. The God of revelation transcends the polarity of essentialism and existentialism. Since the biblical writers had no ontological presuppositions, God is never described in the Bible as a metaphysical being. Anthropomorphic and anthropopathic language about God, instead, is used in the biblical narration. Therefore, as LaCugna concludes, “an ontological distinction between God in se and God pro nobis, is, finally, inconsistent with biblical revelation.”

The Idea of Personhood and Theosis

Thus far, major problems caused by the Palamite ontological distinction between essence and energies both for the Bible and tradition have been discussed. It seems that Lossky is aware of these difficulties, therefore in his later writings he tries to

For a cogent articulation of the inseparability of God’s action and being, see T. Torrance, The Ground and Grammar of Theology (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1980), 153.

On this basis, Norman notes, the glib assumption that the Bible’s ‘sharp distinction’ between God and man precludes theosis is ill-conceived. In fact, this is an example of Greek philosophical metaphysics read into the text. Norman, 28.

LaCugna, 6.

integrate the Palamite distinction into a system whose keynote is the relation and distinction between nature and person. This shift from ‘nature’ to ‘person’, from substance metaphysics to a metaphysics of relations, has immense significance for the doctrine of theosis, since it puts the discussion of theosis on a totally different level—the level where existential categories of person and freedom, rather than ontological notions of essence and energy, play a major role. On this level, theosis is understood mainly as a personal communion and a free striving for reaching the likeness of God. This actualization of personhood opens a new page in the dialogue between Eastern and Western traditions.

The priority of person over nature has major implications first of all for the doctrine of God. It means that God’s ultimate reality cannot be located in essence (what it is in itself), but only in personhood: what God is toward others. It makes trinitarian theology a theology of relationship par excellence. The distinction affirms that the “essence” of God is relational and other-ward, that God exists as diverse persons.

Williams’s assertion that it is the nature-person distinction rather than the essence/energies distinction that is of more central importance to Lossky’s theology seems to be exaggerated. Williams, “The Theology of Personhood,” 421.

Zizioulas explains the misunderstanding of theosis in Western theology by its losing the perspective of personhood and operating with ‘nature’ as such. J. D. Zizioulas, “Human Capacity and Human Incapacity: A Theological Exploration of Personhood,” SJT 28 (1975): 440.
united in a communion of freedom, love, and knowledge. Only in communion can God be what God is.

For the doctrine of theosis to be meaningful on this 'personal' level, the understanding of God as relational and other-ward must correspond to a similar understanding of man. This posits two questions for Lossky: Does the irreducibility of hypostasis to essence in the Trinity take place in the realm of created being as well? Has Christian anthropology opened up a new dimension of the "personal" by discovering a notion of the human hypostasis not reducible to the level of nature or individual substances? To answer these questions, Lossky develops the theology of the image, which leans in the direction of the idea of personhood. From Lossky's perspective of nature/person distinction, to be human does not mean possessing a human nature, but to be a person. Personhood is not a part of human nature; it defines nature; it is the ontological starting point for understanding nature. It is in virtue of his character as a personal being that man is in God's image. To be created in the image of God is, according to Lossky, to be called to be persons in communion, a communion which includes personal freedom and

In connection to Lossky's emphasis on the idea of personhood and its importance for the doctrine of the Trinity, I should mention the name of L. P. Karsavin (1882-1952), Lossky's teacher at St. Petersburg University, who certainly left a positive mark on Lossky through his historical writings and especially by his book on the Fathers, Sviatye ottsy i uchiteli tserkvi. In this book, Karsavin places special emphasis on the idea of personality and its value as one of the fundamentals of Christian theology.

For a discussion on this, see above, 185-189.
personal particularity. Thus, the idea of personhood is a basis for real union with God since it sets the common mode of existence, the mode of personal existence. Further, in the most authentic contemporary Orthodox spirit, Lossky affirms: "What corresponds in us to God's image is not a part of our nature, but the person including nature in itself." This means that the image of God is the whole man. And since the body is an aspect of the person as much as is the soul, it must also be in the image of God. Lossky rejects the idea that only the nous, the soul, is primarily or exclusively in God's image. This holistic view of humanity is the grounds for Lossky's reflection on human personhood.


Orthodox Theology, 127.

In the Image and Likeness of God, 137-139. Moreover, Lossky affirms that the location of the image in nous is a legacy from the Hellenistic doctrine of connaturality (sungeneia) of the nous with God.

A non-dualist conception of human nature has been supported by both Eastern (e.g., V. Kesich, "The Biblical Understanding of Man," GOTR 20 [1975]: 9-18) and Western (e.g., W. Pannenberg, Anthropology in Theological Perspective [Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark,
Although this idea is important for understanding theosis, we must ask, however, again: How far is Lossky’s historical perspective, as regards the view of the image, compromised by his interest in dogmatic synthesis? Lossky’s assertion that the interest in the body as sharing “in the character of the image” is a fairly consistent feature of the Eastern Christian tradition from Irenaeus onwards does not correspond to the historical truth. Even without an explicit doctrine of the sungeneia of the nous with God, the understanding of the image of God by most of the Fathers is clearly “intellectualist.” This means that image resides in man’s power of reason (nous), while the body, although reflecting the soul’s dignity, is incapable of sharing the divine life. Of course, Lossky admits that there is great variety in the 1985) theologians.

In connection to this, Harakas notes that theosis is not understood to be a totally “spiritual” phenomenon. The doctrine of theosis refers to the body as well as to the soul. He emphasizes the importance of this understanding for ethics since “it prohibits a dualism that would separate the spiritual dimension of life from the physical dimensions.” Harakas, Toward Transfigured Life, 29.

See Xintaras, 48-62. Contemporary Orthodox theologian Staniloae still understands the image of God primarily as a kinship between God and man’s soul: “Man is in the image of God because, having a soul akin to God, he tends towards God and finds himself in living relationship with Him.” Staniloae, “Image, Likeness, and Deification in the Human Person,” 66. Cairns gives the following reasons for identification of the image with nous: (1) In the line of pre-Christian Greek thought, traced from Heraclitus and the Stoics to Philo, nous was considered to be a godlike element in man. (2) Nous is a characteristic, which is common for all humanity. (3) The whole terminology of the image emphasized the intellectual aspect of man’s being, and caused him to construe salvation in terms of illumination, reflection of the divine light, and vision. Cairns, 112-113.
definitions of the image proposed by the Fathers, or even by one Father, but this hardly justifies Lossky's conclusion that "the number of these definitions and their variety show us that the Fathers refrain from confining the image of God to any one part of man." Actually, the various definitions refer to distinct faculties of the nous and exclude any reference to the body. It is true that Irenaeus includes the body in the image, but "his position is simply ignored by the Greek tradition at large." In this regard, Palamas's inclusion of the body in the image and affirmation that "flesh also is being transformed and elevated, participating together with the soul in the divine communion," sounds startlingly untypical of the Patristic and Byzantine theological tradition. The general trend is undeniably towards a substantive ("intellectualist") view of the image of God rather than a relational view which Lossky is trying to defend for the sake of a 'relational' or 'personal' understanding of theosis.

As regards the image/likeness distinction, according to which image signifies a realized state, although likeness expresses something dynamic, Lossky follows a tradition going back to

'Mystical Theology, 114-118.
Ibid., 116.

It is surprising that Lossky mentions Gregory of Nyssa as a witness to the tradition that the body is in God's image (Mystical Theology, 116). Gregory's view that man's fleshly condition is added to his essential, spiritual being as the image of God in prevision of the Fall is hardly consonant with this.

'Irenaeus Against Heresies 5.6.
'Williams, "The Theology of Lossky," 113.
'Palamas The Triads 1.2.9.
Irenaeus. Thus, if the image is a personal being as such, the likeness is attained in the full 'personalization' of natural properties, the establishment of a real integration of nature into the person, so that man would become a harmonious whole. The reaching of likeness is nothing more than the striving for theosis in the Holy Spirit. Lossky keeps this distinction for the sake of his soteriological scheme, although most modern commentators refuse to accept the image/likeness distinction, resting their case on the original Jewish text in which the expression "in the image of God and after His likeness" seems to be only an example of Hebrew parallelism.

See above, 185-196. On Irenaeus, see 40-44.

Mystical Theology, 124-134, passim. Staniloae, following Lossky, emphasizes this distinction: "Likeness . . . is the entire path along which the image develops through the agency of the human will stimulated and assisted by the grace of God." Staniloae, "Image, Likeness, and Deification in the Human Person," 73.

The importance of this distinction for understanding of salvation by the Orthodox Church allows Pelikan to affirm that the doctrine of the divine image in man "developed historically not a priori from the doctrine of creation, but a posteriori from the doctrines of the incarnation and the redemption." Jaroslav Pelikan, The Christian Tradition: A History of the Development of Doctrine, vol. 5, Christian Doctrine and Modern Culture (since 1700) (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989), 209.


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The idea of person as *imago Dei* in Lossky’s understanding of theosis needs to be clarified in the light of its fidelity to the tradition Lossky belongs to. It should be noted that Lossky’s method in discussing the idea of personhood in connection to the image of God is resolutely Christocentric. The impossibility of interpreting *hypostasis* as ‘individual subsistence’ is established by an appeal to the inadmissibility of so interpreting it in Christological context. However, Lossky’s appeal to the Fathers in support of his understanding of human person is problematic. While Lossky’s assertion— that *hypostasis* as applied to the Trinity means a reality characterized by openness and capacity for relation—finds its support in the Fathers, his unambiguous statement that the image of God in man is his personal character, and that this is constituted by self-transcending openness, is simply not to be found in the Fathers.

Lossky agrees that in the modern sense the human person is nothing other than an individual numerically different from other

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In some sense Lossky seems to be self-contradictory when he says that, although the doctrine of man, as found among the Fathers of the first eight centuries, as well as later on in Byzantium and in the West, is “clearly personalistic,” he could not find “what one might call an elaborated doctrine of the human person in patristic theology.” In the *Image and Likeness of God*, 112. Williams points out that, historically, the idea that *hypostasis* was never supposed to mean anything other than ‘individual subsistent’ is indefensible. Williams, “The Theology of Lossky,” 106. *Hypostasis*, person, and individual are simply three different ways of expressing numerical distinction.
men. In this sense, a person can be described as a free intentional subject, one who knows and is known, loves and is loved, an individual identity, a unique personality endowed with certain rights, a moral agent, someone who experiences, makes decisions, and acts. This fits well with the idea that God is personal, but not at all with the idea that God is three persons. However—and Lossky agrees with this—neither the Church Fathers nor Thomas Aquinas, nor even Richard of St. Victor who refused to accept Boethius’s definition of person as an “individual substance of a rational nature,” abandoned the notion of human person, as equal to individual substance, in their anthropology. Lossky acknowledges that “in theological language, in the East as in the West, the term ‘human person’ coincides with that of ‘human individual.’” However, as I have shown in chapter 3, Lossky does

In the Image and Likeness of God, 116.

Lossky sees the problem; this is why he affirms that the notion of ‘individual’ has no place in the Trinity, otherwise, three divine persons defined in this way would amount to three gods, three beings who act independently, three conscious individuals. Ibid.


'In the Image and Likeness of God, 116-117. It should be mentioned that the philosophical, cultural, and political changes at the time of the Enlightenment reinforced the notion of person as self-consciousness. The Cartesian method isolated the self from
not stop at this declaration and develops the idea of personhood as belonging to every human being by virtue of a singular and unique relation to God who created him "in His image."

It is clear that Lossky's discussion of theosis on a 'personal' level is a result of later influences due to the recent changes in meaning of the term 'person' in contemporary thought. I suggest this is not without the influence of the personalist philosophies of Nicolas Berdiaev, Martin Buber, and others that Lossky emphasized the social and relational character of personhood.

Personality, as I have shown in chapter 2, is the central category in the writings of Nicolas Berdiaev. According to him, person is a religious category. That is to say, the human being is a person only as related to God. Their (God's and man's) the world beyond the self, and presupposed that the self can be a self by itself, apart from relationship with anything or anyone else. For an instructive survey of the meaning of personhood in modern settings, see David Brown, "Trinitarian Personhood and Individuality," in Trinity, Incarnation, and Atonement, ed. Ronald J. Feenstra and Cornelius Plantinga (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1989), 48-78. Given this framework, the doctrine of the Trinity ceased to be in the West a central dogma of Christianity. Schleiermacher, for example, relegated the doctrine of the Trinity to an appendix to Christian theology. F. Schleiermacher, The Christian Faith (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1976).

As being educated in Western environment, Lossky certainly was not unfamiliar with Whitehead's process philosophy, Sartrean existentialism, French phenomenology, and personalist philosophies which all, although different from each other, sought to go beyond the dualism and individualism of the Cartesian tradition by giving priority to interaction and participation as modes of being and knowing. For a helpful summary of the principles of critical and postcritical philosophy, as well as their bearing on religious and theological issues, see J. H. Gill, On Knowing God (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1981).

'See above, 113-116.
reciprocal relationship presented by Berdiaev as two irresistible movements towards each other, the movement of God towards man, and of man towards God, corresponds to Lossky's *oikonomia* and *theologia*, although Berdiaev's movement of man Godward is characterized by man's active creativeness rather than 'perfect ignorance' of Lossky's apophaticism.

While both Berdiaev and Lossky strongly oppose the "juridical" theory of redemption and stand for the idea of *theosis*, there are some elements in Berdiaev's philosophy that Lossky would never agree with. First, is a concept of Ungrund that leaves freedom and personality as uncreated. As a result, the doctrine of divine omnipotence ceases to mean anything: creation becomes a cooperative effort between God and man, which, in turn, makes the line between finite and infinite indistinguishable. Second, in Berdiaev's writings, we miss almost entirely the prophetic consciousness of God as both transcendent and immanent, standing over against history as Judge, yet working in and through it. The prophets believed that God had a plain word to speak to mankind, a word of rebuke, of pardon, and of exhortation. But there is little sign of this "plain speaking" in Berdiaev's interpretation of the Divine revelation. The nature of God and of His will are wrapped up in mysterious symbols and myths that yield their truth only to initiates who have trodden the

`See chapter 3 above, 151-153.

In his dealing with the doctrine of *theosis*, Lossky realizes many features of Berdiaev's existential philosophy: stress on personality, radical rejection of determinist elements in Russian religious tradition, refusal to conceptualize or "objectify" God.
mystic way. Should not personality and personal relationships rather be thought out along the line of the prophetic revelation, as in Martin Buber?

The use of the "I-Thou" category in Lossky's later writings shows clearly his dependence on personalistic ideas of Martin Buber. First, it is consonant, according to Lossky, with a dialogical understanding of religious life in the Old Testament described as relationships between a personal God and human persons. Second, in making a distinction between person and individual, Lossky echoes Buber's assertion that only "through the Thou a man becomes I," when he writes: "A person who asserts himself as an individual, and shuts himself up in the limits of

In some degree this critique could be equally applied to Lossky for whom personal relationship between God and man takes the form of mystical experience rather than a prophetic-historical encounter.

In the Image and Likeness of God, 129-132; cf. Orthodox Theology, 27.

In his central philosophical work, I and Thou, Buber made manifest the duality of the primal words I-Thou openness, directness, mutuality; and I-It (the typical subject-object relation of knowing, categorizing, and using) as the basic relationship in the life of each human being. Martin Buber, I and Thou (New York: Scribner, 1937).

"Emphasizing the idea of image as a capacity for personal relationships, Lossky quotes Buber, according to whom "the great achievement of Israel is not to have taught the one true God, who is the only God. . . . It is to have shown that it was possible in reality to speak to Him, to say 'Thou' to Him, to stand upright before His face." M. Buber, "Le message hassidique," quoted in In the Image and Likeness of God, 129.

'Buber, I and Thou, 28. For Buber, the self, when being isolated and individuated, is in danger of becoming depersonalized and enslaved by futility. He says: "The more a man, humanity, is mastered by individuality, the deeper does the I sink into unreality." Ibid., 65.
his particular nature, far from realizing himself fully becomes impoverished." It is only in "renouncing" itself, "giving itself freely," in "ceasing to exist for itself" that the person finds its full expression in the one nature common to all. Finally, as in Buber's later writings, the idea of community plays a major role in the realization of the human being as a person: the same is true for Lossky, for whom an ecclesial community is the only environment wherein the union of human persons with God is accomplished.

Lossky's idea of personhood is consonant also with the personalistic philosophy of John Macmurray, for whom personal existence is constituted by a relationship with other persons. Both Lossky and Macmurray affirm that personhood is not identical with or reducible to the "individual center of consciousness." One cannot be a person independently of one's relationships with others. In fact, for Macmurray, as for Lossky, the self withdrawn into itself, into self-reflection, is neither a true self nor a true person. Further, Macmurray's philosophy emphasizes community...
as the context in which true personhood emerges and apart from which persons do not exist at all. This idea, although expressed on the philosophical level, is indispensible for theosis, which can be realized, according to Lossky, only in the context of ecclesiological communion.

While this personalist philosophical influence cannot be denied, it was, however, within the 'ecclesiastical tradition' of more recent times that Lossky's personalistic ideas find their roots. Among those who might be considered as the most significant and interesting precursors to Lossky are Philaret of Moscow and Antony Khrapovitsky.

Lossky calls Philaret of Moscow a great Orthodox theologian of the last century. Lossky commends him for defending a mystical, experiential character of Orthodox theology as opposed to Latin scholasticism of the eighteenth-century academies. Lossky quotes him with some frequency, which is clear evidence that he regarded him as an authority of major significance. The theme of kainosis is fundamental to Philaret's thinking. The humility, self-sacrifice, and obedience of the Son of God are constantly presented as the paradigms for Christian living.

'Mystical Theology, 111.

'Ibid., 8. On the issue of Western influence on Orthodox theology in general and soteriology in particular in the eighteenth century, see Florovsky, Puti russkogo bogosioviia, chap. 4, passim.

'Mystical Theology, 8, 75, 85, 92, 105, 107, 111, 131.

'Gorodetzky, 108-114.

'Filaret, 1:153a-160b.
Moreover, he extends the kenotic theme into the innermost life of the Godhead, seeing the Trinity in terms of radical self-sacrifice. It is precisely this extension and deepening of the idea of *kenosis* that is at the heart of Lossky's exposition of personal relations between God and man and the doctrine of *theosis*.

Metropolitan Antony (Khrapovitsky) was another spokesman for an essentially experiential theology based on personalism and synergism. The distinction between person and nature is of fundamental significance for him. Lossky, however, is very critical, describing Antony's views of salvation as a purely psychological theory comparable with Abelard's theory of moral influence. A possible reason for Lossky's attitude, according to Williams, is that Sergei Stragorodsky, whom Lossky held in very high regard both as a theologian and as a Church leader, had criticized Antony's soteriology in his own study, *Pravoslavnoe uchenie o spasenii*. However, as regards the ideas of personalism and synergism, the doctrine of the Church as *imago Trinitatis*, the restoration of human nature in Christ, and free development in

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*Mystical Theology, 144-145. See also above, 193.


It seems that Lossky accepted Florovsky's judgment that Antony treats the Atonement in exclusively moral terms and ignores its ontological dimension. Florovsky, *Puti russkogo bogosloviia*, 435-438.

*Williams, "The Theology of Lossky,"* 266. Stragorodsky exposes the Orthodox teaching of salvation as opposed to the Western forensic idea of the atonement. Florovsky, *Puti russkogo bogosloviia*, 438.
grace of each particular person, liberated from its 'ego', Lossky
and Antony are in striking agreement.

For George Florovsky, whose influence on Lossky is
unquestionable, the theme of personhood is of less importance.
Florovsky does not place much emphasis on the significance of the
term hypostasis in connection to anthropology. He uses *imago
Trinitatis* for the Church, but there is almost nothing on man as
*imago Trinitatis* in Lossky's sense; nor has Florovsky much to say
about apophasis in connection with the doctrine of personhood.

The tendency to employ the features of personalistic
philosophies of recent time with their relational language betrays
not only Lossky's awareness of the problem that the essence/energy
distinction creates for the doctrine of the Trinity but also his
desire to integrate both the essence/energy and the person/nature
distinctions in a unified scheme. However, Lossky barely
succeeded in doing so. These two models never seem to be
reconciled in his writings, which makes his system inconsistent.
One can hardly resist the temptation to contrast an "impersonal"
essence with "personal" energies. It was Yannaras who made a more
successful attempt to integrate these two models in a synthesis
that clearly distinguishes "nature," "person," and "energy," and

Williams comments that although Florovsky remarks on the
novelty of the idea of personality in the ancient world, and its
absence from classical Hellenism (George Florovsky, "Bogoslovskie
otryvki," *Put' 31* [1931]: 17), he nowhere develops these points as
fully as they are developed by Lossky. Williams, "The Theology of
Lossky," 281.
at the same time demonstrates the close interrelation of the three.

Summary

This chapter evaluated Lossky’s doctrine of theosis. Two main questions raised in chapter 1 defined the scope of this evaluation: Is Lossky’s teaching on theosis biblical? and Is it in agreement with the Orthodox tradition? Two criteria were used: the criterion of adequacy to show the conformity of Lossky’s system to the Bible and Patristic tradition, and the criterion of internal consistency to evaluate Lossky’s main theological philosophical presuppositions. The findings might be summarized as follows.

Lossky strongly opposes the idea that the concept of theosis was developed in Hellenistic thought—both religious and philosophical—in the time before Christianity, and through Neoplatonism and Philonian “Judeo-hellenism” influenced Christian thought. He stands up firmly for the position that the doctrine of theosis was developed in a Christian environment and can be located therefore only in the context of revelation, which implies the initiative of God, on the one hand, and the free human response, on the other. However, by exaggerating the difference between Greek philosophy and Christian theology, and turning it even into an absolute polarity, Lossky treats the development of Eastern Christian spirituality too schematically. It seems that Lossky’s aim is to demonstrate that the Eastern tradition of

—See Appendix.
Theosis has an inner consistency and continuity deriving from a firm scriptural foundation. In dealing with the biblical material referring to the idea of theosis, Lossky, however, follows an inappropriate hermeneutical approach. He takes for granted the Patristic metaphysical interpretation of certain biblical words without analyzing them in their biblical context. The most prominent example of reading the biblical text primarily in terms of its philosophical tradition rather than its canonical context is Lossky's interpretation of 2 Pet 1:4. In defending the reality of theosis, Lossky imposes the essence/energies distinction in the idea of God, which the author of this text hardly had in mind. Such a philosophico-theological interpretation of the Bible, and a dogmatic pre-condition with the idea of theosis, leads Lossky to selective use of the biblical material and, actually, to the exclusion of the covenantal, sacrificial, and substitutive language of the Bible from his vocabulary.

The examination of Lossky's position in a sophiological controversy shows clear evidence of the author's allegiance to the ecclesiastical tradition he belonged to. Lossky's doctrine of theosis has little in common with sophiological ideas of pan-unity and God-manhood, developed by such prominent Russian religious philosophers as Soloviev, Florensky, and Bulgakov. In the "false cosmism" of the sophiological school, according to Lossky, there is no place for theosis as based on a divine initiative and a free human response. Although Lossky characterizes the sophiological system as subordinated to the determinist tendencies and as excluding personal relationship with God, his strive for theosis,
however, coincides in general orientation with the sophiologist’s wish for pan-unity.

Three main theological presuppositions for Lossky’s doctrine of theosis, as found in the Orthodox tradition, were also analyzed in this chapter: apophasis, as Lossky’s main method of doing theology; and two distinctions that lay the foundation for the real, not metaphorical, meaning of theosis: the essence/energies distinction and the distinction between nature and person.

Concerning Lossky’s apophasism, one can conclude that such an approach hardly agrees with the overall cataphatic orientation of the Scripture. Moreover, it inappropriately disjoins economy and theology and leads actually in a direction of affirming the knowledge of God beyond His revelation in economy, departing in this way even from the Greek Patristic understanding of apophasis, which acknowledged that God is unknowable in God-self. Finally, Lossky’s approach to the knowledge of God deviates from the biblical idea of knowledge, which embraces the whole human personality: his mind, his feelings, and his actions.

With regard to the essence/energy distinction, Lossky’s persistent claim that a homogeneous, continuous tradition of the essence/energies distinction has existed in the Orthodox Church since the Cappadocians reflects the author’s claim for a Neopatristic synthesis with a conspicuous tendency to interpret the early Fathers in light of the later tradition, mainly Palamism. It seems that the affirmation by both Gregory Palamas and Lossky of an ontological rather than an epistemological distinction (as it was in most of the early Fathers) between the
divine essence and the divine energies is dictated by the necessity of defending the real character of theosis. However, an analysis of the philosophical apparatus they use to support the idea of theosis reveals some difficulties in their system resulting from the incautious employment of Greek philosophical categories foreign to biblical thinking. Moreover, it seems that the ontological essence/energy distinction diminishes the soteriological function of the divine Persons, precluding them from direct communion with man. Being aware of the difficulties caused by the Palamite distinction for the Trinitarian theology, Lossky in his later writings tries to integrate the essence/energy distinction in a system where a major role belongs to a distinction between nature and person.

This shift from 'nature' to 'person' has immense significance for the doctrine of theosis, since the idea of personhood as a basis for a real union with God sets the common mode of existence between God and man, the mode of personal existence. In connection to this, Lossky develops the holistic view of human beings as created in the image and likeness of God. In affirming the personal character of the image and theosis, Lossky, however, goes beyond the Patristic tradition to follow contemporary tendencies in personalistic philosophies. Moreover, it seems that Lossky could not integrate the essence/energy and person/nature models in a unified system that would demonstrate a close interrelation of the concepts of "nature," "person," and "energy."
CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

This dissertation has examined the doctrine of theosis as it was presented in the writings of Vladimir Lossky, the leading spokesman for Orthodox theology in the contemporary Christian Church. The purpose of the study was to investigate and evaluate the biblical and philosophical-theological presuppositions of a doctrine that is traditionally considered to be strange and even heretical in Western Christianity.

Since no comprehensive study on the doctrine of theosis either in historical or systematic perspectives has been produced in English, a preparatory historical survey of this idea was necessary before analyzing theosis in Lossky's works. This was the main purpose of the second chapter. I traced the development of this idea in the Greek Fathers, in the Byzantine tradition—primarily Gregory Palamas—and in Lossky's immediate antecedents in the Russian religious thought. A concise summary of the idea of theosis in Western tradition concluded chapter 2. The description and analysis of the historical background helped us to identify two major deviations in the understanding of salvation against which Lossky held his position: a juridical view of salvation in Western theology on the one hand, and a panentheosis of the Russian sophiological school, on the other.
An examination of Lossky’s teaching on theosis, in chapter 3, has revealed that it is a remarkably unified system, where Christian epistemology, trinitarian theology, Christology, anthropology, soteriology, and ecclesiology are held together by a common theme, which is attaining union with God. Theosis is the dominant idea around which Lossky organizes various aspects of his theology. Lossky affirms apophasis, the way of refusing any attempt to form concepts about God and to organize them in a system as the only true way of knowing God, which leads to theosis. He reproaches both Western theology and the Russian sophiological school for the excessive catapnaticism and conceptualization in approaching God. Lossky argues the ontological (real, not metaphorical) character of theosis, although he affirms that in his union with God man is not dissolved into an impersonal resorption into the divine nature as it is in Plotinus’s philosophy. Affirming the ontological character of theosis, Lossky is challenged with the same paradox the Greek Fathers, starting from Athanasius, struggled with: How to hold together the realities of divine otherness and union with God. Trying to solve this paradox, Lossky exploits two crucial distinctions that were made in Orthodox theology: essence/energy and person/nature. This leads him to a distinction between the two modes of divine existence (theologia and oikonomia) and, eventually, to an even more accentuated distinction between the Christological and Pneumatological aspects of salvation. While the Palamite essence/energy distinction is of great importance for Lossky since it establishes the real character of our union with
God, preserving at the same time God's transcendence, another line of thinking, developed in a direction of establishing more 'existential' vocabulary for theosis, can be clearly seen in Lossky's later writings. As explored in this chapter, Lossky develops a theology of the image in order to attach to theosis the character of a personal relationship. According to Lossky's interpretation of the imago Dei, man has been endowed by God with the gift of being a person, with a capacity for a personal relationship and communion with other human beings and with God.

The actual accomplishment of theosis, Lossky affirms, can be realized only through the Church, which, by being "the new body" of the deified humanity of Christ, provides the 'objective conditions' of our union with God through participation in the sacraments. However, mere participation in the sacraments of the Church does not produce theosis in an automatic way. Lossky always understands theosis as a way of synergeia, or cooperation of man with God. A free, ascetic effort on the part of man is a necessary condition of our union with God. Thus, objective (divine grace) and subjective (man's free will) conditions of theosis are inseparable and always go together.

In chapter 4, I evaluated the presuppositions for Lossky's idea of theosis using two main criteria: the criterion of adequacy and the criterion of internal consistency. I used the first criterion to examine the historical-hermeneutical aspect of the problem to show how far Lossky's teaching on theosis conforms to Scripture and to the ecclesiastical tradition he belongs to. On the basis of the second criterion, internal coherence, I evaluated
the systematic-analytical side of the problem, examining the concepts, propositions, and arguments Lossky used to defend his position on theosis. Two main questions raised in the first chapter (Is Lossky’s soteriological position biblical? and, Is Lossky’s understanding of theosis in agreement with the tradition he belongs to?) guided me through this chapter. All findings were summarized at the end of chapter 4. On the basis of the analysis and evaluation of Lossky’s doctrine of theosis, I came to the following conclusions.

1. There is a lack of adequacy in the author’s system with regard to his dealing with the Scripture. This is evident, first, from Lossky’s denial of the appropriateness of the human mind and language to know God and his claim that apophaticism is the only way to the true knowledge of God. However, the overall biblical narrative is cataphatic, and the knowledge of God in the Bible is always the knowledge of God’s actions, of God’s salvific activity in history culminating in the Incarnation of the Son and the manifestation of the Holy Spirit.

2. A lack of adequacy is clearly seen in Lossky’s selective use of Scripture and in interpreting the selected material by means of philosophical categories. It is true that, in dealing with the idea of theosis, Lossky elaborates themes found in the Bible and most of the Greek Fathers, but in his dogmatic synthesis he sometimes does not allow the biblical texts to speak for themselves, reading them mainly through Patristic glasses. Moreover, preoccupation with the idea of theosis leads Lossky to
exclude the covenantal, sacrificial, and substitutive language of the Bible from his vocabulary.

3. A lack of adequacy in Lossky's system is obvious also with regard to his approaching the Fathers. For the sake of his dogmatic synthesis, Lossky sometimes treats the Fathers too schematically, ignoring the evidences that point to a more complex interpretation of the Patristic writings; sometimes he interprets the early Fathers in the light of the later tradition, and sometimes he goes beyond the Patristic tradition, as is clearly seen, for example, in his dealing with the idea of personhood in its anthropological dimension, through which he brings to his theology the elements of existentialistic and personalistic philosophies.

4. Lossky's employment of the metaphysical categories, such as essence, energy, and hypostasis, taken incautiously from the different historical and philosophical milieus, leads to a lack of internal consistency in his system, creating a tension between the essence/energy and person/nature distinctions. It seems that in describing a reality of theosis, Lossky failed to integrate the two models (essence/energy and person/nature) in a unified system that would demonstrate a close interrelation of the concepts of 'essence', 'energy', and 'person'.

The following are some considerations for facilitating a dialogue between the Eastern and Western Christian traditions and recommendations for further studies.

In evaluating Lossky's doctrine of theosis, I tried to be as objective as possible and to avoid the use of the external
criteria as provided, for example, by the Western theological tradition. It is not a secret that the tendency to evaluate the Eastern understanding of salvation by the standards of Western soteriology, and vice versa, is a characteristic feature of many theological discussions between the East and West. Each side claims to establish a kind of soteriological yardstick to serve as a universal criterion for evaluating any soteriological position. It would be much easier for us to evaluate Lossky’s idea of theosis if we had such a yardstick. However, this approach seems to be unacceptable. Neither tradition, due to the numerous historical and cultural factors that contributed to the development of their theologies of salvation, may serve as a soteriological criterion.

Does this mean that both the Western position, emphasizing a forensic idea of salvation, and the Eastern one, placing emphasis on theosis, are equally valuable, and one could view them as completely appropriate expressions of biblical truth in a particular context? This question flows naturally from our previous discussion, and it cannot be answered briefly by ‘yes’ or ‘no’. However, some considerations might be helpful.

1. Even though different emphases are influenced by different historical antecedents, this fact does not necessarily mean that the soteriological positions are equally valid. It is popular to assume that history is neutral, but, in order to make such an assertion, one must either adopt a relativistic framework (something that Lossky is not willing to do), or one must determine that the historical outlook in question is generally consistent with a higher standard of biblical truth. It is very
important for us to recognize what our understandings are and to submit these understandings to the judgment of the Scripture. Only by continually undertaking the task of evaluating whether these understandings are actually consistent with the message and emphases of the Bible can we move beyond a purely "tradition-bound" understanding of the Scripture and approach its full message more closely.

2. In formulating the soteriological position, it is crucial to consider not only the assertions of specific biblical passages but also the relative emphases given to the different concepts throughout the whole of Scripture. It is not enough simply to say that certain biblical ideas—such as legal categories in the West or the idea of theosis in the East—are the ones that certain theologians will emphasize because they are agreeable and readily comprehensible to people of that tradition. Instead, a theologian must be willing to ask whether he is actually emphasizing the ideas most central to Scripture or is neglecting important scriptural emphases. According to Lossky, legal, juridical, and forensic categories that Western theology has used to express the idea of salvation are not only overly negative and alien to the spirit of Christianity but also, when allowed to dominate, are actual distortions of the biblical message. This accent on legal concepts in the understanding of salvation, in contrast to the idea of mystical union perpetuated in the East, is seen by Lossky as the real issue that divides two soteriological positions. The following considerations are worth noting in connection to this assertion.
1. If legal categories such as justification by faith are categories that the apostle Paul uses, as Lossky himself acknowledges, then this way of interpreting the salvific activity of Christ is hardly a distortion or is unduly negative. Rather, the idea of justification and legal categories are eminently biblical.

2. Both forensic categories and the idea of union with God are present in the Bible, so the real issue here seems to be one of a difference of emphases. However, no necessity forces us to choose between the two or to see them as mutually exclusive categories that are contradictory. Rather, they, and a host of other biblical salvation motifs (adoption, reconciliation, redemption, ransom, sacrifice, forgiveness, Christus Victor, propitiation, deliverance), are complementary.

3. Although the West does not embrace the explicit notion of theosis in any sustained way, theosis, as we have seen, is not entirely absent from its tradition. The same is true with regard to the East where, in addition to theosis, a number of biblical images for salvation, including juridical ones, are affirmed. In his best moments, Lossky acknowledged the point that the biblical material presents the work of Christ from a number of different perspectives and that all of them are necessary for a complete understanding of our salvation.

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Among the Orthodox defenders of the juridical conception of salvation were the following contemporaries of Lossky: A. Beliaev, N. Malinovsky, N. Alvazov, Metropolitan Serafim (Sobolev), V. Nesmelov, and others. See Mud’iuquin, 150.
4. Another important consideration concerns the trinitarian aspect of theosis. Lossky, as we have seen, in contrast to the Western, merely "functional" doctrine of the Trinity (the one that understands the divine modes of being primarily on the basis of their economic functions), postulates a "superessental" doctrine (the one that regards the trinitarian hypostases as fundamentally independent of economic functions). This means that Western theology fails to allow for a fully developed Trinity independent of the economy, and remains, in fact, merely economy, speech not about God but merely about the activities of God. Does Lossky's charge that Western theology remains on the level of the energies have merit then? It seems that this criticism is simply untenable, since the very terms in which this critique is phrased, which assumes different levels within the Godhead, are simply not the language of Western theology. The Western understanding of the Trinity has always tended to follow Aristotle's distinction between *dunamis* and *energeia*, which led to a concept of God as pure actuality, in which essence is not distinguished from attributes. The Eastern tendency to draw a dividing line between essence and energies is actually foreign to Western theology. However (and this appears to be a good topic for a further examination), the Thomist essence/existence distinction could be—at least in intention—parallel to the essence/energies distinction in the Eastern theology.

Lossky's general view that Western spirituality is impoverished because of the loss of any concept of full participation in God, or theosis, to some extent seems justified.
"Intentional" participation is something less than ontological or "real" participation in God. For example, Barth's doctrine of redemption and reconciliation is indeed less ambitious than Lossky's doctrine of theosis. We have to note, however, that Lossky does not aim at ontological participation in the divine essence, which is unapproachable. Again we should remember that both theologies use separate terminologies and make different distinctions. Both, however, seek to safeguard the same underlying intention—to affirm the genuine relationship of man with God.

Although I have argued against Lossky's critique of the Western soteriological position, it is important to note some strengths in his theology of theosis. First, with regard to the trinitarian aspect of theosis, it seems that the doctrine of divine energies as developed by Palamas and Lossky tends to protect the personhood of the Holy Spirit, precisely by seeing the Spirit as the giver or impartor of God's energies. In the Western filioquist understanding of the Trinity, the Spirit is regarded usually as the unifying principle of the Trinity, as the bond of love between the Father and the Son. The Spirit is reduced in fact to that which in Palamite theology is called energy. Such an identification of the Spirit with power or energy leads to His

subordination to the Father and the Son. The doctrine of energies avoids this tendency, because the energies are regarded as powers or gifts of the Spirit. This emphasis on Pneumatology in expressing the soteriological position makes Lossky's theology more balanced than Western theology, which as a whole is often considered too strongly Christocentric. Actually, Lossky's soteriology can be seen as a kind of synthesis between Christology and Pneumatology.

Another positive element in Lossky's doctrine of theosis is his holistic anthropology. Theosis encompasses the human body as well as the soul. There is no place for Platonic dualism in his doctrine of theosis. Nor is there any danger of his spirituality becoming intellectualized. Lossky's doctrine of theosis views the human person as a psychosomatic unity which is actually what the Bible teaches about man. This position sounds more acceptable to the contemporary desire to think in personalist and existentialist rather than ontological and essentialist ways.

The view of salvation as a process of transformation of the whole person gives more attention to the idea of sanctification.

For an example of this Western tendency to speak of the Spirit as a gift, see Rahner, The Trinity. Rahner actually equates pneumatology with grace (120).

On this criticism of Western theology see Nissiotis, Die Theologie der Ostkirche im Okumenischen Dialog, 21-33, 51.

Zizioulas holds Lossky in high esteem with regard to this synthesis. Zizioulas, Being in Communion, 124.
which is generally neglected in Protestant tradition. It is a prevailing Lutheran tendency, for example, to separate the categories of justification and sanctification to make sure that there is no confusion of works with faith, of what sinners do, and what Christ does for them. This kind of thinking, according to Lossky, creates a deep gulf between the work of Christ from whom we receive the gifts of grace, and the life of the believer, internal as well as external. This leads in turn to the neglectful attitude to God’s demands and passivity in a spiritual life. Since, for Lossky, the hope of salvation in its broadest sense is more than hope of a divine sentence of “not guilty”—it is rather human participation in the being of God, a total sharing in the Triune life—no division can exist between justification and sanctification. Salvation and the Christian life are viewed together as the continuing process of transformation of the whole human being by the divine grace.

Traditional Protestant soteriology has continually experienced a deep tension between the assertion that forensic justification as a complete present reality has eschatological validity and the idea that progressive sanctification will be subject to a Final Judgement according to works. See, for instance, G. C. Berkouwer, Faith and Justification (Grand Rapids: MI: Eerdmans, 1954), 103. Ivan T. Blazen, a New Testament scholar from the Adventist tradition, is right when he says that all the attempts to resolve a tension between justification and sanctification have often taken “the form of minimizing or negating one or the other of these teachings.” Ivan T. Blazen, “Justification and Judgement,” Review and Herald, 21 July, 1983, 4.

Some Lutheran theologians acknowledge this problem. G. Forde, for example, holds that the forensic metaphor must no longer be allowed to dominate our theology but it should be balanced by other biblical images of salvation. Forde, 3-4. See also Aden, “Justification and Sanctification: A Conversation Between Lutheranism and Orthodoxy,” 87-109; Bakken, 409-423.
If salvation is understood as communion or participation, then it is natural and inevitable that one speaks of cooperation, of free response, and of love as ways in which fellowship with God is deepened and strengthened. Theosis is not a one-sided act of God, but it is a cooperation between God and man, a synergy. Due to the more 'existentialist' rather than 'essentialist' thinking prevailing in contemporary theology, Lossky’s teaching on cooperation, a synergy of the two wills, divine and human, in the process of theosis reflects a more balanced understanding of human free will and the human-divine relationship than it is in the Protestant tradition.

In connection with this more dynamic understanding of salvation in the Orthodox Church and in Lossky’s theology particularly, I would like to pay attention to one Western tradition which, to a certain degree, influenced the soteriological position of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, the church to which I belong. This is Methodism. I have already pointed out that John Wesley, impressed by the early Church Fathers' teaching on the Christian life, made theosis an organizing principle of his ordo salutis. In his soteriology, Wesley combined the Western motif of justification and the Eastern motif of union with God. This synthesis of the juridical and existential aspects of salvation makes up the core of the Adventist soteriology, although few realize how deep into the

*See above, 138-140.*
history of Christianity the roots of this synthesis go. Moreover, the Wesleyan-Arminian orientation of the Adventist soteriology with a persistent emphasis on sanctification and a real transformation of Christian living, attainable in this life through a free and active cooperation with God’s grace, and available to all, stays even closer to the Greek Patristic understanding of salvation rather than to the Western Augustinian tradition with its ideas of rigid predestinarianism, a total depravity which precludes a Christian ever overcoming sin in this life, and an emphasis on justification by faith alone, which seems to overlook any necessity of good works, thus leading to antinomianism. However, the linkage between the two traditions with regard to their soteriological views still needs to be explored.

Lossky’s theology in general is found in the intimate relationship to spiritual life. It seems that Western theology could regain something of its existential dynamism to become a life in God rather than mere theologizing about God. A contribution of Lossky’s doctrine of theosis to Western theology is both the holistic influence of divine grace divinizing the


— Whidden comments that of all E. White’s written material dealing directly with soteriology, the amount which addresses (and stresses) sanctification and perfection roughly outnumbers entries concerned with justification by about three to one. Whidden, “Adventist Soteriology,” 186.
whole person, body, soul and spirit, and in the dynamics of a
growth process coming out of man's free response and obedience in
love in the existential situation in which he finds himself.

Human beings are understood by Lossky as persons in
relationship, and reality as being in relation to God. Matter--
the human body and the physical environment--is highly valued in
such a theological system. The world itself is viewed
holistically and synthetically rather than mechanistically and
analytically. In this present time of ecological crisis, the
significance of such a positive theological evaluation of the
material world goes without saying. The doctrine of theosis opens
up a view of created reality not merely as an object to be
analytically investigated and controlled, but as a reality that
shares in our being, and through our transfiguring participation
in God can find its own transfiguration.

Lossky's teaching on the personhood and understanding of
reality as being in a relation to God remains relevant today.
However, it would be of great significance for the Eastern/Western
dialogue to trace the development of the idea of theosis since
Lossky's death. Three contemporary Orthodox theologians
contributed much to this theme: P. Nellas, C. Yannaras, and J.
Zizioulas. Another area for further research could be
recommended: to explore the problem of integration between the two
main models of theosis in contemporary Orthodox thought--

essence/energy and person/nature.

For a brief review, see the Appendix.
It should be said in conclusion that both soteriological traditions—*theosis* in the East and a forensic idea of salvation in the West—are valid for the experience of the contemporary Church and cannot be considered as mutually exclusive ways of thinking about God’s salvific activity in history. Both ways can be brought together into a fruitful dialogue and uncover a number of common intentions, as presented in Scripture.
Concluding this study, I give a brief review of those theologians who contributed to the theme of theosis after Lossky’s death. P. Nellas (1936-1986), in his *Deification in Christ*, affirms that the theme of theosis must become the foundational category of all theological anthropology. “Man realizes his true existence in the measure in which he is raised up towards God and is united with him.” Nellas’ starting point in establishing the doctrine of theosis, however, is not a Palamite distinction between essence and energy. The central theme of his theology is the idea of personhood in its anthropological dimension. As Lossky before him, Nellas emphasizes the fact that the basic foundation of Christian anthropology lies in the doctrine of man as created in the image of God. However, Nellas affirms, only in

The original title in Greek is Ἰόν θεοκομηνον, a phrase taken from Gregory of Nazianzus Oration 38.11, meaning literally “a living creature that is being deified.” See P. Nellas, Ἰόν θεοκομηνον (Athens: Epopteia, 1979).


Probably, this is a result of Nellas’ special interest in Nicolas Kavasilas, another prominent theologian of the fourteenth century. Although a friend of Gregory Palamas, Kavasilas did not take an active part in the hesychast controversy of 1338-47. In his main writings he refrains from discussing the specific problems raised in this controversy concerning the distinction between the essence and energies of God, the divine light of Tabor, and the use of the Jesus Prayer.

*See chapter 3, 183-189.*
the New Testament this mysteriai idea was elucidated by Paul's clear statement that the image of God par excellence is Christ, the first-born of all creation and head of the body, the Church (Col 1:15-18). Combining the Pauline theme of Christ as the image of God with the Genesis motif of man as created in the image of God, Nellas affirms that it is Jesus Christ 'the Incarnated Logos' whom man's iconic ontology reflects. This is why man's growth to full stature Nellas calls "Christification." In fact, this is the real meaning of theosis for Nellas. Since a true human being is one who is in Christ, and since the spiritual life is the life in Christ, the living of such a life cannot be realized except by the union and communion of man with Christ, a communion which in its fullness is theosis par excellence, and which, according to Nellas, has Christification as its real anthropological content. So, when Paul urges the faithful to attain to mature manhood, in the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, and to acquire Christ's mind (1 Cor 2:16) and Christ's heart (Eph 3:17), he, Nellas argues, "does not do so for reasons of external piety and sentiment; he speaks ontologically. He is not advocating an external imitation or a simple ethical improvement but a real Christification." Understood in this way, Nellas concludes,
the goal of man and the means of realizing that goal—faith, keeping the commandments, ascesis, the sacraments, the whole ecclesiastical and spiritual life—are illuminated internally and discover their organic connections with themselves, with the world and with Christ, the beginning and the end of all things.

The lack of Trinitarian emphasis in Nellas's discussion on theosis, is compensated by the insight of Christos Yannaras, one of the most creative contemporary Orthodox theologians, who tries to unite Lossky's theology with Heidegger's metaphysics. For Yannaras, as Ware remarks, concern for the person, as the locus where being or nature is apprehended, constitutes the link binding patristic theology including Palamism and Existentialism together. According to Yannaras, being is not constituted by the divine essence. It is in the personal existence of God that the comprehensive and exhaustive expression of the truth of being is found. Yannaras explains that the personal existence of the

Ibid., 40-41. Nellas's programme of re-thinking anthropology in Christological, indeed, Christocentric, terms, is markedly reminiscent of the work of the modern Catholic scholar Hans Urs von Balthasar.

In the largest sense, the aim of his writings is to relate the patristic tradition of the Orthodox Church to contemporary issues, though he sees the latter to some considerable extent through the lens provided by philosophical Existentialism. There are some attempts to look at Lossky's theology through the lens provided by Existential philosophy as well. R. Williams, for example, comments that there is a Kierkegaardian streak in Lossky (it is not surprising that he thought highly of the French Kierkegaardian scholar Jean Wahl), but it is balanced by a carefully worked out ecclesiology. Rowan Williams, "Eastern Orthodox Theology," in The Modern Theologians, ed. David F. Ford (Cambridge, MA: Blackwell, 1997), 507. See also Wecaways, Zwischen Sprache und Schweigen: Eine Erorterung der theologischen Apophase im Gespräch mit Vladimir N. Lossky und Martin Heidegger.

Father "hypostatises" being into a personal and Trinitarian communion, freely and from love begetting the Son, and causing the Holy Spirit to proceed. Yannaras calls the unity in communion of the three divine persons "God's mode of being," identifying this with the ethos of the divine life.

Man was created to become a partaker in this koinonia in the freedom of love which is the only true life for him. Thus, true life is indistinguishable from a life of a personal communion with God, because communion is in fact 'essential to being'. The hypostatic character of human nature (capacity for communion and relationship with God) is the true foundation of the imago Dei. Yannaras asserts: "The truth of the personal relationship with God, ... is the definition of man, his mode of being."

Following Lossky, Yannaras makes a clear distinction between the terms "person" and "individual". The latter reflects the mode of man's being after the Fall. Yannaras regards sin as "a mode of

Yannaras, The Freedom of Morality, 17. It should be mentioned, however, that this understanding of God, described kataphatically in terms of personhood, freedom, and the relations of love among the hypostases, differs from Lossky's apophaticism.

Ibid., 18. Therefore, love in 1 John 4:16 refers not to one among many properties of God, but to "what God is as the fulness of trinitarian and personal communion." For Yannaras, "love is singled out as the ontological category par excellence." Ibid.

Ibid., 211.

Ibid., 19.

Ibid., 20.

The life of the individual is distinct from that of the person since it is marked by fragmentation, a need for self-perpetuation, and a consumerist approach to the world. Ibid., 22, 32.
existence contrary to existence, and contrary to nature since it fragments and destroys nature." The return of man to the "true life" became available through the work of Christ, who "in his own person summed up and recreated human nature as a whole, the mode of man's existence. It is existential reality of the 'new creation' of his body, the Church." The person of Christ becomes "the axis around whom 'the children of God that were scattered abroad are gathered together,' (John 11:52) so that previously autonomous individuals form a unity of personal coinnerence and love."

So, in Yannaras's view, true life is synonymous with communion. The Church as the community of the loved and the loving, is the historic milieu for our experience of true life. Analyzing Yannaras's ecclesiology, M. Tataryn comments:

The Church is intrinsic to the very act of creating humanity: it is a product of the being of God. It is the perfect embodiment of communion because it is the context within which the uncreated and the created meet and are bound together.

For Yannaras, it is the Eucharist, which restores the communion of the uncreated and created orders. And it is the participation in the Eucharist that leads to a real, existential transfiguration or

'Ibid., 35.
Ibid., 38.
Ibid., 41.


Yannaras, The Freedom of Morality, 86.
theosis of human nature and through it the entire created order. These Yannaras' insights are based on an eschatological view of the Church. His central focus is not the Church of history. This is why his reflection upon the Church as the community of persons avoids the reality that numerous churchgoers are unconverted or, in his language, they are individuals unable or unwilling to go beyond themselves. In focusing totally on the eschatological Church, Yannaras fails to deal with the reality of individuals who, although baptised, do not perceive themselves in an active relationship with God. In fact, in distinction from Lossky, there is no discussion in Yannaras of the reality of conversion which is a sign of inadequate treatment of the Holy Spirit.

I have already mentioned that in Lossky's treatment of theosis, two schemes (Palamite essence/energy distinction and Cappadocian person/nature distinction) find themselves in tension. Yannaras's synthesis of Heidegger and Palamas seems to provide a possible solution to the problem. By underlining the fact that the relation between God and man is personal and reciprocal (a relation of communion), and therefore a confluence of personal

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It should be mentioned that, like Lossky, Yannaras continues a common theme in Orthodox theology: the cosmic dimension of true communion and theosis. Christos Yannaras, *Philosophie sans rupture* (Geneva: Labor et Fides, 1986), 65.

See above, 274, 278.

Like for Lossky, the distinction between essence and energies is very important for Yannaras. Defining God only in terms of His essence, which is, according to Yannaras, a characteristic of Western theology, leads to understanding of theosis as "a rationalistic 'improvement' of the human character." Christos Yannaras, "The Distinction Between Essence and Energies and Its Importance for Theology," *SVTQ* 19 (1975): 243.
energies, Yannaras succeeds, first, in avoiding any notion of the involvement of the Divine Essence in the finite world (as well as any identification of it with a causal abstraction), and, second, in affirming 'internal' relation between God and man through divine energies which are fully involved in the world. These energies manifest the Person of the Son of God, who created and preserve this world. It is only in this 'Personal mode' that we can apprehend the Essence of God at all: we do not and cannot know it in itself, but only as a content of the Persons of the Trinity.

Thus, although we see in Yannaras the development of the same "deification" themes Lossky explores in his theology, the difference between the two theologians in some aspects, however, is significant. If Lossky is more 'revelationist', Yannaras finds no sharp dichotomy between philosophy and theology, boldly going into thought of Heidegger, Husserl and Sartre; if Lossky pays much attention to the person of the Holy Spirit in the process of theosis, pneumatology of Yannaras is not so explicit; if traditional incarnational Christology is of a great importance for Lossky, Yannaras devotes very little space to Christology as such. In general, Yannaras's theology, integrating the two parallel models for a 'personalist ontology' (Chaicedonian nature-person model and Palamite essence-energies model), promotes more valuable link between East and West, than Lossky's one.

Williams does not consider this solution as an adequate one questioning the validity of the whole essence/energies scheme. For more detailed discussion on this see Williams, "The Theology of Personhood," 423-428.

Williams suggests that Yannaras seems to come to conclusions very close to those of Mascall that the essence-energies distinction in Orthodox theology is parallel to the essence-
The theme of koinonia (communion) and relationship with God is developed further by John Zizioulas. As for Lossky and Yannaras, the source of reality for Zizioulas is not essence but person as a relational being. Since God is trinitarian, He is a relational being by definition: He is "in His very being Koinonia." Thus, "the being of God is a relational being: without the concept of communion it would not be possible to speak of the being of God." This relational understanding of God means that communion is the very essence of true life for man as well, because by being created in the image and likeness of God, man in existence distinction in Thomas Aquinas. Williams, "The Theology of Personhood," 424.

The concept of koinonia is a key notion in Zizioulas' theology, however, he presents an important distinction between the two categories: participation (metoche) and communion (koinonia). The first describes the nature of the creature's relationship with God, whereas the second describes God's relationship with the created order. According to Zizioulas, participation is the created order's response to God's call to communion (the prior movement of God toward man). Zizioulas, Being as Communion, 15, 19.

Like Lossky, Zizioulas appeals to the theology of the Cappadocians as the basis of his claim that personhood constitutes being. See Zizioulas, "The Doctrine of the Holy Trinity: The Significance of the Cappadocian Contribution," 44-60. Similar to Lossky, he uses Buber's "I-Thou" category for affirming relational character of 'person'. Zizioulas, "Communion and Otherness," 358.


'Zizioulas, Being as Communion, 17. He boldly asserts that the Holy Trinity, rather than divine essence, is 'a primordial ontological concept.' Ibid.'
his life reflects the life of the Trinity. Echoing Yannaras, Zizioulas writes:

The only way for a true person to exist is for being and communion to coincide. The triune God offers in himself the only possibility for such an identification of being with communion; he is the revelation of true personhood.

Zizioulas, like Yannaras and Lossky, distinguishes between 'individual' and 'person', or 'biological hypostasis' and 'ecclesial hypostasis'. They exist in tension with each other. While individual is subject to the conditions of ontological necessity, person exists in freedom; while the biological hypostasis is destined to remain an individual, divided from others, the ecclesial hypostasis is communal, inclusive and catholic; while the biological hypostasis oriented to death, this freedom is not freedom from the other but freedom for the other. In this case, Zizioulas identifies freedom with love. Zizioulas, "Communion and Otherness," 358.

For Zizioulas, interpersonal Trinitarian relationship, which he calls 'the relation between communion and otherness in God', is the only model for true anthropology. See John Zizioulas, "Communion and Otherness," SVTQ 38 (1994): 352.

Zizioulas, Being as Communion, 107. In other place he writes that the Orthodox understanding of the Holy Trinity is the only way to arrive at the notion of Personhood. Idem, "Communion and Otherness," 353.

Zizioulas, Being as Communion, 53-59.

ecclesial hypostasis is eschatological, oriented to the future when it will become what it was destined to be.

The term 'ecclesial hypostasis' (sometimes also 'sacramental' or 'eucharistic hypostasis'), clearly indicates that true personal relationships can be realized in the Church only. The ecclesial hypostasis is created at baptism, which brings about a new reality. This is an ontological change, according to Zizioulas, although not in the sense that one kind of being becomes another, but the new being produced by baptism is a new person, a new being-in-relation. The celebration of the Eucharist establishes relationships which proper to the Christian community only. In the Christian community there should no longer be female and male, slave and free, Gentile and Jew, but Christ is to be all and in all. Speaking of Church as the Body of Christ and persons who participate in the Eucharist, Zizioulas expresses the idea similar to that of 'corporate personality', which means that every baptized Christian “is the whole Christ and the whole Church.”

It is obvious that neither contemporary nor historical Orthodoxy conforms to the eucharistic model Zizilous portrayed. Recognizing the fact that Orthodox praxis does not match ecclesiological theoria, Zizioulas links ‘the ecclesial hypostasis’ with eschatology, that is, with the final outcome of its existence. He adds that “the truth and the ontology of the

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2Zizioulas, Being as Communion, 61.
3Ibid., 59.
person belong to the future." Only in the fullness of time will the full human person, the God-man, become truly known. The full personhood is only expressed in Jesus Christ for the present. The Church's role is to assist humanity to grow into this full personhood, which can only be fully realized at the eschaton. However, Zizioulas, in distinction from Lossky, does not develop this aspect of the Church's role adequately. As in Yannaras, there is no discussion of the process of Christian conversion and the Church role in it.

Salvation, according to Zizioulas, "is identified with the realization of personhood in man." Theosis is the transformation of the biological into an ecclesial or sacramental personhood. The effect of theosis is "to endow [the biological] with real being, to give it a true ontology, that is, eternal life." This is a direct result of the Holy Spirit's work because "it is the function of the Holy Spirit to open up being so that it may become relational." Thus, in affirming the ecclesiological (pneumatological) aspect of theosis, understood as a realization of personhood, Zizioulas completed the shift from ontology of

Ibid., 62.

'Paul McPartlan also notes that Zizioulas gives little attention to growth in the Christian life. McPartlan, The Eucharist Makes the Church, 297.

Zizioulas, Being as Communion, 50.

Ibid., 63.

Ibid., 182, n.37.

Although Zizioulas credits Lossky with a "synthesis between Christology and Pneumatology", he blames Lossky for overdrawing the economy of the Spirit in an unnecessarily complicated fashion.
being to ‘ontology’ of koinonia and personhood, started by the Cappadocians on the Trinitarian level and extended by Lossky to the level of anthropology. There is nothing of Lossky’s preoccupation with essence/energy distinction in Zizioulas. This shift has a remarkable consequence for overcoming Western reservations about theosis, for on this account it cannot be seen as causing the loss or impairment of human nature but of causing “human beings to exist as God himself exists, that is, as free persons.”

McPartlan, 160.
This bibliography is divided into three sections: Vladimir Lossky's works, ancient sources, and secondary sources.

**Vladimir Lossky's Works**


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