ROUTLEDGE STUDIES IN THE EARLY CHRISTIAN WORLD

VISIONS OF GOD AND IDEAS ON DEIFICATION IN PATRISTIC THOUGHT

MARK EDWARDS AND
ELENA ENE D-VASILESCU

ROUTLEDGE

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Visions of God and Ideas on Deification in Patristic Thought illustrates the complexity and variety of early Christian thought on the subject of the image of God as a theological concept, and the difficulties that arise in the interpretations of particular authors who gave a cardinal place to the image of God in their expositions of Christian doctrine. The first part of this volume illustrates both the presence and the absence of the image of God in the earliest Christian literature; the second examines various studies in deification, both implicit and explicit; and the third explores the relationship between iconography and the theological notion of the image.

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INTRODUCTION

Mark Edwards and Elena Ene D-Vasilescu

In the biblical story of Jacob's dream in which the patriarch saw the angels of God ascending and descending a ladder that united the heaven and the earth (Genesis 28.12) we are not told what form or shape the angels had. The same is true of the Lord 'who stood above' this ladder supposedly uttering that he is "the God of Abraham … and of Isaac"; the latter two were real people for Jacob, and we assumed that he fathomed them looking just like him. In the morning following the night when he dreamt, the wise man, exclaiming "The Lord is in this place and I knew it not" (28.16), took the stone that had served him as a pillow and, setting it up as a landmark, named the place Bethel, "the house of the Lord" (28.19).

The God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob revealed himself from the burning bush to Moses (Exodus 3.6) and was preached by Jesus of Nazareth to those who, in the eyes of his disciples, were no longer Abraham's children.[1] In the Gospel of John he says to these disciples, "You shall see the heavens opened and the angels of God descending and ascending upon the son of Man" (John 1.51). At 6.62 he speaks of his own return to the place in which he had shared the glory of his Father, yet the evangelist claims in the prologue to have witnessed his glory on earth (1.14). In chapter 12 we learn that his glorification was the raising of the Son of Man on the Cross from which he will draw all nations to him (12.28–32; cf. 8.28). The crowd's question "Who is this Son of man?" (12.34) might have been more aptly asked by Nicodemus when Christ told him that, "even as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish but have eternal life" (3.14–15). And yet this very serpent, dedicated to God in his own house, had been removed by King Hezekiah (Kings 18.4) on the grounds that no such idol could be worthy of the God who had said, "You shall make no image of anything in heaven or on earth" (Exodus 20.4).

Who then is this Son of Man? Or, to put the question theologically, does the Incarnation merely disclose or does it also transform what is meant by our humanity? If the latter is true, has it been vouchsafed to us to ascend the ladder, to become divine in the risen Christ as he became man for our sake? And if we cannot grasp the invisible God except through images, if

he who has no proper seat is willing to receive the prayers of the nations in an edifice built with hands,[2] if he can liken himself to a graven artefact while forbidding us to venerate our own handiwork – if all this can be true at once, does it follow that we have the right to use images now in the service of a God whose body is no longer present to be seen or handled?[3] These questions cannot be dealt with independently, and therefore, while this volume is divided for convenience into three sections – on the nature of the image generally understood in theology, the image of God in the light of eschatological concerns (especially as expressed in the literature on deification) and the relationship between image and the Byzantine and meta-Byzantine icon – no chapter in any section would be entirely out of place in the other two.

What is the image of God?

That humans are made in the image of God has been an axiom of Christian theology since the first preaching of the gospel to the Gentiles. Whether it was an axiom to Jesus and his first disciples we cannot say, for the story of humanity's creation and fall is only the beginning, not the heart of the Jewish scriptures; it supplied the prophets with imagery for the restoration of Israel but did not explain the ubiquity of sin. God creates the first humans male and female, but in his image, at Genesis 1.28, having previously determined at 1.26 to create them in his image and likeness. Some commentators take this to mean that the first man bore a physical resemblance to his Creator; others deny that the Priestly Writer could have been so ingenuous. And yet it was the priest and prophet Ezekiel who, in the last days of the Solomonic Temple, had a vision of God in the "likeness of the similitude of a man" (Ezekiel 1.28), although no image of this kind is attested in the previous history of Israel. An anthropomorphic figure was surely preferable to those of the serpent and the brazen calf; and what, if not a physical resemblance between the copy and the original, is suggested by the statement at Genesis 5.3 that Seth was begotten in the image and likeness of his father, Adam? The objector will reply, no doubt, that the author must have had some reason not to say the same of Cain and Abel; the first rabbinic commentators, accepting that the body cannot be excluded from the image, inferred from Genesis 1.27 that Adam resembled God, as we no longer do, by uniting male and female in his own person. Scholarly interpretation of the term "image", however, must also take into account its third occurrence at Genesis 9.6, where the precept that bloodshed must be avenged by bloodshed is underwritten by the premise that human beings are made in God's image. The reasoning will be more intelligible if the term connotes not resemblance but ownership: God has set his seal upon all of us, and if we steal a human life from him, we must pay the forfeit with our own.

But what if God himself became man? We could then maintain the physical resemblance without implying that in his own nature God is subject to the finitude and frailty of his own creatures. Paul (though Origen misunderstood him[4]) is surely speaking of the incarnate Christ when he styles him the image of the invisible God (Colossians 1.15) and goes on to say that the fullness of the Godhead dwells in him bodily (Col 2.9). Since Christ was not "male and female", Paul asserts that he is the head of the man while the man is the head of the woman (1 Corinthians 11.3), and that therefore it is the man, as distinct from the woman, who is the image and glory of God (1 Cor 11.7).[5] Some Gnostics of the second century drew a contrast between the hermaphroditic man above and the moribund body below which lesser powers have fashioned in his image; Irenaeus, reclaiming Paul for the catholic tradition, retorts that the body too is in the image of God (*Against Heresies* 5.6.1) because it was always the purpose of the Word, or second person of the Trinity, to display his true image and likeness in the flesh. If he found few disciples among those whom we now call Orthodox, the reason may be that fear of anthropomorphism had been intensified by Gnostic teaching on the Heavenly Man. When Christians deployed the old pagan argument that our upright posture proves our superiority to the beasts, they upheld the pagan view that we owe this status to the intellect, not to the body in which it is housed. The image therefore resides either in the status itself – the dominion over the natural world that God accords to humanity at Genesis 1.29–30 – or else in the moral and intellectual faculties that enable us to exercise this status. Most agreed with Theodoret in preferring the second of these interpretations:

> But one could find another, yet more exact resemblance in the human soul, for it has in itself both the rational (*logikon*) and the vital faculty. Now it is intellect that begets *logos* (word/reason), and together with the *logos* comes forth *pneuma* (spirit/breath), not begotten as *logos* is, but always accompanying *logos* and coming forth with it when it is begotten. Now this pertains to a human as the image, for which reason neither his *logos* nor his *pneuma* subsists by itself.
>
> But in the Holy Trinity we acknowledge three subsisting persons (*hypostaseis*), unconfusedly united and each self-subsistent. For God the Logos has been begotten before the ages from the Father, but is inseparable from the one who begot him; and the All-Holy Spirit proceeds from the one who is God and Father, yet is known in his own *hypostasis*.[6]

This notion that we possess the image by virtue of our humanity is not rejected even by Augustine and those who followed him, though he held that both our moral and our rational capacities have been greatly impaired

by the Fall. In Luther's view we retain only feeble traces of the image,[7] but Calvin believed that enough has survived to confer a true, though not saving knowledge of God even where the gospel is yet unknown.[8] It may strike us as a paradox that as theology grew more anthropocentric, it became less common to locate the image within the creature: Albrecht Ritschl stands at the head of the school that identified it with the status of Man as God's vicegerent in nature.[9] Protesting that it is not our task to realize the kingdom of God – and certainly not the task of the German church to realize it through political hegemony – Karl Barth asseverates that the image is nothing intrinsic to us. It is no prerogative or power that we possess by being human, but the privilege of divine fellowship, vouchsafed to us only by the Father's grace through the obedience of his Son. We are the image of God because God became man, not because there is anything in man that resembles God. The Word's condescension to us, while it puts us under the yoke of obedience, is not to be pre-empted by any mystical aspiration to communion with the Father;[10] Christ's work, as Balthasar says in the wake of Barth, is effected not by our imitation of him but by his own *kenosis* or self-emptying on our behalf.[11]

It may be that some early Christians would have endorsed Barth's reservations. Markus Vinzent's chapter on *The Martyrdom of Polycarp* suggests that Christians of the late second century regarded Christ as a model of fortitude under extreme tribulation, but did not see his risen body as the instrument of their own resurrection to glory. In other words, they did not suspect that to be like Christ it was necessary (as Paul would say) to be "in Christ": for all we know, the language of the apostle was no more familiar to them than the closing chapters of our canonical gospels. Thus, even if they regarded Christ not only as Lord but as God, it would not follow that they had any expectation of becoming gods by participation in his glorious body. On the other hand, as Mark Edwards's chapter on Irenaeus reminds us, this near-contemporary of the authors of the *Martyrdom* undoubtedly believed that the perfection of the image and likeness of God in Adam's progeny had been rendered possible only by the ministry, death and resurrection of the incarnate Word. The questions of whether he held the likeness to have been wholly or partially conferred on Adam at the outset, and of whether he held the image to be defective in those who lacked the Holy Spirit, are not easily answered from his own writings as they have come down to us. It is not in doubt, however, that he regarded Jesus Christ as the second person of the Trinity, and that both Christ's resurrection and the sharing of his flesh and blood in the Eucharist were in his eyes the necessary preconditions for the Holy Spirit's shaping of the image and likeness of God. Edwards contends that when Irenaeus contrasts the childlike state of Adam and Eve with the perfection of those who are "in Christ", he is developing a metaphor which was addressed to nascent Christians in the letter to the Ephesians: the vulnerable state of the protoplasts thus prefigures that of

every believer to whom the heretics offer the fruit of illusory knowledge. His knowledge of this letter, whatever its date, is sufficiently proved by his adoption of the term *anakephalaiôsis* ("recapitulation"), though he applies it predominantly to the work of Christ on earth and not, as Paul or his imitator does at Ephesians 1.10, to the consummation of that work in heaven. He may therefore be regarded as an early exponent of "realized" (or, more accurately, of proleptic) eschatology; at the same time (in contrast, perhaps, to some modern adherents of this thesis), he confidently anticipates an age to come in which the saints will resemble God as closely as is permitted to finite creatures.

Image and eschatology: Deification

Close readers of scripture (as all the Fathers were) will have observed an inconsistency between God's purpose and his act on the sixth day of creation. "Let us", he says at Genesis 1.26, "create man in our image and likeness", but in the next verse man (or rather humankind) is created in his image, yet male and female, with no mention of the likeness. Modern scholars assure us that nothing is lost, since "image and likeness" is a Hebrew pleonasm, and there are early Christian writers of great authority who concur. Since it followed for Gregory of Nyssa that creation as male and female is implied in the creation of the image, he maintains that the subject of this verse is the inner man, whose existence is logically prior to that of the body and hence to the differentiation of the sexes.[12] Origen, on the other hand, read Genesis 1.27 as most modern critics do, to mean that the human race is divided into males and females; since this is the respect in which we least resemble God, he inferred that the likeness, though promised to us by a Creator who cannot lie, has not yet been accorded to us, and must be earned by the exercise of virtue in this world or in those to come. Augustine, who believed in only one world after this, opined that the properties which constitute the image are those that are also predicated of God himself, while properties such as courage or perseverance, which are laudable in humans but not predicable of God, pertain to the likeness.[13] In contrast to Origen, therefore, he treats the likeness as a concomitant of bodily existence; he has thus reversed the usage of Irenaeus, for whom the image resides in the body and is therefore common to all, whereas the likeness is peculiar to the elect who have received the Holy Spirit.[14] Irenaeus differs from Origen in holding that Adam possessed but lost the likeness, or at least a foretaste of it; in associating the image with the body he differs from Maximus the Confessor, who nonetheless ensured that his distinction between the abiding image and the forfeited likeness would become canonical in the eastern church.

Origen described the acquisition of the likeness as *theopoiêsis*, or being made divine. Gregory Nazianzen's term *theôsis* is the one that has been taken up in the Orthodox tradition, though Nazianzen himself does not equate

this "divinization" with the recovery of the likeness in contradistinction to the image. Orthodox apologists have maintained that biblical warrant can be found for this doctrine at 2 Peter 1.4, which promises *koinônia* (fellowship or participation) in the divine nature to those who have turned to Jesus Christ from the corruptions of this world.[15] The equivalent terms, however, are almost wholly absent from the vocabulary of Latin Christendom. In Augustine's work, Gerald Bonner has noted twelve occurrences of the verb *deificare* and its cognates, sometimes with reference to the inspiration of the scriptures, but never with the implication that human beings are destined to be gods.[16] The saints in heaven will be impeccable and incorruptible, but only by divine fiat; to imagine this state, or even a renewal of Adam's state, in the present life would be to suppose that one could live in this world without sin. That is a heresy (though a venial one) because in this world the "body of death" will always remain an impediment to glorification; only of the saints of eastern Christendom was it said that the incandescence within imparted a visible radiance to the flesh. Not only the scholastic theologians but also the mystics of the western tradition – leaving aside the "heretics" Eriugena and Eckhart – were wholly at one with Augustine in their reluctance to use the term *deus* in a manner that masked the infinite gulf between God and his image. At the same time, they maintained a strong belief in both the possibility and the necessity of regeneration. Augustine himself opined that it was possible for us, through the contemplation of the Trinity, to do what Adam had failed to do: to advance from mere scientia, or knowledge of creaturely things, to *sapientia*, the knowledge of our relation to the Creator. Perfection was impossible, regeneration mandatory, and the fruits of it visible in the bodily exercise of virtue which Augustine, as we have seen, equates with the likeness rather than the image of God.

Yet it is one thing to say that we cannot be wholly righteous, and another to think ourselves righteous enough already; it is one thing to be aware that the body perishes, and another to hold that only the perishable can have meaning for us. Scholars of more than one denomination have traced the waning of the medieval sense that we are not yet in full possession of our humanity to the Reformation of the sixteenth century. Charles Taylor's narrative has its roots in Weber.[17] As a result (he argues) of the swift advance in knowledge, increasing mastery of nature and the flow of wealth from the New World, European Christians – and especially the seafaring Protestants of northern Europe – began to see the world as a giant emporium, created only to satisfy human wants and to offer scope to human commercial enterprise.[18] The Creator thus became answerable to the appetites of his creatures, the Pauline promise of transfiguration became redundant and the preacher's task was not so much to emphasize the frailty of human affairs as to assure us that success in this world is the guarantee of election in the next.

The doctrine of deification was not lost in the Middle Ages, though it was certainly more conspicuous in the Byzantine than in the catholic tradition.[19]

According to Reinhold Niebuhr, however, Christian thought in western Europe since the Reformation has fluttered uneasily between two poles.[20] At one pole stands the catholic, the optimist or perfectibilist, who admits that God alone can bestow the perfection which is wanting in us, yet errs by regarding his own church not as a brotherhood of sinners, but as a school of the Spirit on earth, in which the truth is taught without defect or blemish. At the other pole stands the Protestant, the pessimistic follower of Luther,[21] who perceives that sin in this world is inescapable, and is therefore all too prone to despair of any change for the better, in himself or in society at large. Setting the Word of God against the church, he easily falls into bibliolatry, or even into the idolatry of political states which guarantee the hegemony of the true faith or secure it from molestation. For the Catholic, the hereafter is already present, while the Protestant holds that we have no duty here but to await it; the latter may go so far as to deny that we have the image, while the former too often forgets that the likeness is still to be attained.

At the same time, Niebuhr argues that both Catholic optimism and Protestant pessimism have been opposed since the sixteenth century by a new third way which appeared to offer a godless, or at least Godless, route to perfection. In an age that had witnessed the taming of the seas and the penetration of the heavens, not everyone could believe that there were mysteries that the mind would never fathom, or goods that would always be unattainable without divine assistance. For authors such as Paracelsus and Pico della Mirandola,[22] there has been not so much a fall as a great forgetting, so that Moses and other prophets or philosophers have preserved no more than splinters of a universal wisdom. When these are reunited, the resultant mirror shows us not our common wretchedness but the native glory of the human intellect. For Niebuhr, as for many other scholars, this pride in the merely human is a dark twin to the rebirth of classical learning, yet it may also have its origins in the western rediscovery of Byzantium and of esoteric traditions which purported to be Mosaic. If Pico could maintain that we are capable of living the angelic life which makes us one with God, it was his friend, the cabbalist Reuchlin, who recalled that the church itself had once proclaimed the deification of the elect:

> This is what used to be called "deification", when exterior sense passes from the immediate object to the inner sense, and that passes to the imagination, imagination to thought, thought to reason, reason to understanding, understanding to reflection and reflection to the light which enlightens man and clasps itself to that enlightenment.[23]

When the Church turned its face from the Enlightenment, with its less otherworldly notions of perfection, it did not turn to Byzantium or the Cabbala; where it clung to the Bible, it preached the mystery revealed rather

than the mystery to come, with all the contempt of the secular western mind for both Greek and Jew. For all the vigour with which it urged that God does not answer the casuistry of the sceptic or the atheist, the church of the eighteenth century often justifies Voltaire's *bon mot* that God made man in his image and man has been returning the compliment ever since. And yet it is this inexorable worldliness of Christian existence in the modern era that has led some Christians to dream of a world in which we are more than human. C.S. Lewis, an Ulster Protestant but an Oxford Platonist, wrote of this change with vivid anticipation:

> It is a serious thing to live in a society of possible gods and goddesses, to remember that the dullest and most uninteresting person you can talk to may one day be a creature which, if you saw it now, you would be strongly tempted to worship.[24]

We may wonder how literally Lewis intended this use of terms which he knew well enough to be pagan rather than Christian. Does he mean to imply that differentiation of sex will not be annihilated but preserved by deification? Karl Barth maintained that, because to be in God's image is to be made for fellowship with him, the companionship of male and female is the manifest evidence of our destiny;[25] Lewis, however, disliked the little Barth that he had read. In any case, Barth was hostile to any notion of a human capacity for self-transcendence. Even the resurrection, he maintained, had added nothing to the glory of the Son of Man on Calvary, and the only love enjoined by Christ was sacrificial *agape*, not the winged *eros* of the Platonists, which strove presumptuously to cross the infinite gulf that God alone could bridge by his descent. Deification therefore lay outside the purview of Nygren,[26] Barth and Brunner – or, for that matter, of Schweitzer and Bultmann, who, though not liberal in the German sense, agreed with the liberal Protestants in holding the scriptures answerable to the critical and philosophic scrutiny that we apply to other texts. To them it was no longer possible to attribute John 10.35 to Christ himself; and even if it was a dominical utterance, this proved only that the title "Son of God" connoted less than the Fathers imagined. The authenticity of 2 Peter was doubted, or rather few doubted that it was spurious; and once again, even if genuine, 2 Peter 1.4 spoke to the philologist only of fellowship, not of assimilation to God. Many in the Protestant world endorsed Kant's demonstration of the necessary limits of human reason, without taking up his argument that if the moral law is to be obeyed we must be given immortality in order to attain the spontaneous holiness that belongs to God by nature. Those who turned to Heidegger proclaimed a new life, in which "authenticity of being" corresponded to spiritual discernment in the older vocabulary. The modern man who escapes from heteronomy, however, was not expected to show the visible tokens of rebirth that Paul expected of the spiritual man; he entertained

no hope that his body would be transformed into the likeness of the Lord's body; and he spoke of the ground of being in a manner that would have sounded atheistic to any Christian of the past nineteen centuries.

Such Catholics as Rahner gave a Heideggerian colour to more traditional accounts of God, creation and the afterlife; yet even when he is arguing, with Henri de Lubac and Pierre Teilhard de Chardin,[27] for the gradual realization of a divine plan in the cosmos, the term "deification" eludes him, though it is often donated to him by his modern exegetes.[28] This addition to the catholic lexicon is the gift of the *nouvelle théologie* with its project of *ressourcement*, the replenishment of ecclesiastical teaching from its wellsprings. De Lubac made a speciality of Origen, while Jean Daniélou collected texts from Gregory of Nyssa to illustrate the future glorification of humanity;[29] above all, it was Hans Urs von Balthasar's ponderous study of Maximus the Confessor that redeemed the word *theôsis* from suspicion.[30] The times were favourable, for the Catholic theologians who attended the Second Vatican Council acknowledged a duty not only to wish but to work for ecumenical harmony. It needs hardly be said that this enterprise was particularly congenial for those who dared to hope for the salvation of all humanity, an expectation cherished by the Greek fathers who had most warmly espoused the concept of *theôsis*.

Today this doctrine of *apokatastasis*, or universal restoration, receives some countenance even in the more bibliolatrous of Protestant circles. It is true that the unbiblical terms "*theôsis*" and "deification" seldom figure in the systematic theologies that emerge from the reformed and evangelical communions; but it may no longer be universally true, if it ever was so, that Protestant eschatology proclaims a new life which is simply a prolongation of the old one. Since the nineteenth century, the more catholic strain in Anglican thought has espoused a "theology of the incarnation",[31] according to which salvation is effected not only by Christ's death but by the corporate gathering of humanity into his life, his suffering and his resurrection. If incorporation into Christ entails Christ-likeness, it will also entail *theôsis*, since Christ is assumed without question in the catholic tradition to be God. Where this logic is explicit, deification has become a 40th article for Anglicans who are ready to waive a number of the original 39. The study of early Christian thought, in this as in other cases, shadows the interests of constructive theologians: studies in the history of the doctrine of deification, from the earliest times to the late Byzantine era, have begun to populate the shelves of libraries. Few, one imagines, are so frequently taken down as Norman Russell's *The Doctrine of Deification in the Greek Fathers*,[32] which is even wider in scope than its title indicates, as the first of its appendices is devoted to Augustine. It is not the aim of the present volume to challenge the erudition of this monumental work or to improve upon its comprehensive reply to the scepticism of both Catholic and Protestant theologians of the last century. Our aim is to ensure that discussion is not cut short before it has reached its logical termination.

The misgivings of the sceptic do not arise only from bibliolatry or confessional inertia. Whatever *theôsis* meant to Nazianzen, "deification" is the customary equivalent in English of an older and compound term, *apotheosis*, which signifies the bestowal of divinity upon some human (usually deceased), either by senatorial decree or by poetic acclamation. This was a process in which even pagans seldom believed that the gods had any part. In modern times it has been a common, if not the prevalent, view of biblical scholars that Christ himself was nothing more than a prophet to his followers until Paul or his Gentile converts chose to encumber him with divine honours to which no Jew would have pretended. When authors of this liberal persuasion become theologians, they are apt to maintain that the Jesus who lives for us is not the docetic Saviour of the Nicene Creed but the fragile man who was tempted as we are. In recreating this man as the second person of the Trinity, suddenly descending to our condition only to quit it again as miraculously as he came, the church (it is said) succumbed to a combination of vulgar mythology and artificial logic. On this view, it was never true that God became man and thus there is no possibility of man's becoming God. Among those who denied that this blending of the divine and human was indigenous to Christian thought was one of the twentieth century's foremost students of the Fathers, Maurice Wiles. In two of his best-known articles, he suggested that Christology was metaphor run wild and the Triune God a pedantic inference from the custom of baptizing in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit;[33] neither piece, however, has been so widely read as the one in which he challenges the soundness of the Athanasian argument that if Christ were not God in essence, he could not make others gods by participation.[34] To Wiles it seemed far from evident that Christ had promised to impart divinity to anyone, or that he would have been less able to impart it had he received his own divinity from the Father; in the next 40 years he heard nothing that put his doubts to rest from any eulogist of the Alexandrian patriarch.

Of course no more than an embryonic concept of *theôsis* can be discovered in the New Testament. If the evolved forms of it in the Fathers are not to be dismissed as Hellenistic changelings, it must be shown that they are consistent with, and indeed that they do something to preserve, the most primitive teachings of the Church. At the beginning of her chapter on Gregory of Nyssa, Elena Ene D-Vasilescu notes that 2 Peter 1.4 is the culmination of a short homily that ascribes to God all the virtues in which, through Jesus' words, all believers are invited to partake. It is a part of the biblical theology, therefore, to credit human beings with an innate capacity to become divine; it is also, as she goes on to show, a part of Gregory's theology. In the untrammelled movements of the rational soul we see the best analogy that the creaturely world can offer to the ubiquity of God; the soul nonetheless is on the hither side of the infinite gulf that divides the creaturely world from God, and we are so far from being able to divinize ourselves

that without Christ we cannot even regain the sinlessness of Adam before the Fall. However, this aim is possible through his grace; the most concrete reaction of people to this – and at the same time, the best way for humans to achieve *theôsis* – is through the love people show towards God and to one another. The fact that the scriptures prophesy a collective *apokatastasis*, and not merely the glorification of a handful of individuals, should put to rest any hope of bringing about this consummation by our own striving; at the same time, Vasilescu finds cause for doubting whether Gregory invariably believed that all humanity will be subsumed in the flesh of Christ, but implies that most of the time he does.

A search for *deificatio* and its cognates in Augustine will throw up only a handful of instances, and of these only a few denote the transformation of the human creature into the image or likeness of God. This is not for want of interest in these terms: in the 51st of his *Eighty-Three Questions*, he speculates that the image resides in the mind and includes those properties that are predicated both of God and of the rational creature, whereas the likeness is seen in those virtues which reveal a godlike nature but which cannot be predicated of God himself because he does not possess a body.[35] Augustine nonetheless retains at all times a strong conviction that the Creator and his creation are wholly distinct in nature: otherwise, the Incarnation would not be such a miraculous work of love. At the same time, he believes as strongly as Irenaeus[36] that the consequence of the Word's becoming flesh (John 1.14) is that the flesh is no longer doomed to fall into the nothingness from which the same Word called it into existence. As Stan Rosenberg demonstrates, the sermons of Augustine (no small part of his work) abound in exhortations to put our trust not in ourselves but in the power of the Spirit to render us immune to that dissolution of the body which we call death and that perversion of the mind which we know as sin. Cyril of Alexandria, by contrast, was inclined to treat the terms "image" and "likeness" as synonyms. Sharing with Augustine the conviction that the Fall has robbed us of the godlike character which was imparted by grace to Adam at his creation, he is equally loath to predicate divine attributes of that which is properly human. He does not, however, share the Latin Father's reluctance to speak of the deification of the flesh; Mark Edwards argues here that it is because he has such a vivid faith in this corollary of the Incarnation that he is so averse to the substitution of "human nature" for "flesh" in his Christology. In Cyril's view the Fourth Evangelist chose the word "flesh" because it does not logically connote the moral frailty and the physical perishability which are inseparable from the definition of any "nature" other than that of God.

Filip Ivanovic dwells on the position held by Dionysius (Pseudo-) the Areopagite in regard to the union of humanity and God as it ties in with his ontology, epistemology, ecclesiology and aesthetic theory; the researcher also discusses its sources. It was not only Plato, with his concept of the necessity for people to flee this world in order to join the gods, who inspired

Dionysius but, among others, also Proclus, with his idea of a perpetual return (ἐπιστροφὴ) on which Mircea Eliade would substantially gloss in the twentieth century. But what is to be mostly retained from the Areopagite's position – and Ivanovic captures this aspect well – is that knowledge (ἐπιστήμη), though an important factor for one's ascent to God, can be operative to the highest degrees only in the framework of love and the ascetic life within the hierarchical structure. It may not be wholly unfair to say of this anonymous father that he offers an eschatology for the individual only, not for the world, and that the sacraments as he conceives them lack the tangibility of the incarnate Christ. As Torstein Tollefsen demonstrates, no such charge could be brought against Maximus the Confessor, in whose writings Christ is the omnipresent harbinger of redemption for those living under the curse of the Fall. For this Byzantine theologian, it is the coinherence, or *perichorêsis*, of the two natures in Christ that sanctifies humanity; the two biblical principles that have been invoked against the doctrine of *theôsis* – that we cannot be saved alone and that we cannot save ourselves – are the very principles that Maximus is determined to uphold. Tollefsen also raises the tantalizing possibility that *perichorêsis* not only endows the flesh with certain properties that we would now deem superhuman, but enables the divine nature to feel our suffering as its own.

The Image of God and Byzantine/Meta-Byzantine Icon

Early Christians, scandalized in every street by counterfeit shapes of false divinities, never tired of insisting that the image of the true God cannot be a graven idol but takes form in the life and faith of the believer. Origen records with pride that even the Jews had fallen into idolatry, but returned to their ancestral ways when abashed by the purity of Christian worship.[37] Athanasius and Hilary of Poitiers, doing away with Greeks and Arians by the same argument, declared that, whereas an idol is always a dead thing, the Incarnation revealed the fullness of the Godhead in a living image. Constantine made an icon of the Cross, and the church approved the honour paid to his images and those of his successors.[38] Sculptures of Christ, on the other hand, were clearly at odds with the Second Commandment if Christ was less than God; some argued that they were even more sacrilegious if Christ was truly God, as Cyril and the Council of Chalcedon affirmed, since no depiction of his mere flesh could be a proper medium for the adoration of his invisible nature. How could it be more lawful to depict the Word than to depict the Father with whom he was equal in nature and rank? John of Damascus urged that the identity of Jesus and the Word was in fact the one premise that could justify these devotions: he who demands our worship as God has spared us the temptation to create our own image of him by assuming a visible guise.[39] The Eucharist is an extension of that hallowing of matter which God performed in the Incarnation: why is it more absurd to

prostrate ourselves before his icon than to venerate the bread of communion as his life-giving flesh?

The western Church has been more ready to countenance the didactic use of images than the explicit worship of them; it may be for this reason that it has not maintained the embargo on the three-dimensional image which is still enforced in the east. When a new dynasty in Byzantium set its face against images, Pope Gregory III aimed a bull of excommunication at the Emperor, and the vindication of icons at the Seventh Ecumenical Council in 787 was warmly endorsed by Rome. Charlemagne, by contrast, was not prepared to learn idolatry from a rival empire, and even in Byzantium the Council was more a catalyst to discord than an instrument of reconciliation.[40] The iconophiles prevailed, but the writings of Arethas show that the charge of paganism was not yet obsolete in the tenth century. In the early modern era, Protestant reformers encouraged or countenanced the destruction of pagan images wherever they gained the ascendancy. The longest of the homilies which the clergy of the Elizabethan Church were required to preach is called "Against Peril of Idolatry": it cites the conduct of Gregory III to prove that a worshipper of icons is no friend to his lawful sovereign,[41] and dwells upon the passions aroused in celibates by painted images of the Virgin Mary in a style that was later to fire the imagination of Gothic novelists. The trees in Spenser's bower of Acrasia, a den of monastic lassitude, entice the eye and cheat the tongue with fruits of gold and silver;[42] the puritans whom he represented set out to cleanse the English church as Henry VIII had purged the monasteries.

The success of this enterprise was only sporadic, though for a time the suspicion of religious art had the curious consequence that classical myths were preferred to biblical episodes in the decoration of St Paul's Cathedral.[43] Over the last two centuries the images have returned to Anglican buildings, stained glass has become the norm and it seems that only nonconformists can find God between bare walls. This rediscovery of the visual cannot have been inspired by the ancient commonplace that pictures are "silent books" or "the books of the ignorant", since we are all more skilled in reading than in the decipherment of symbols. Nor (since Anglicans seldom philosophize) can it have its origins in nineteenth-century notions of the aesthetic as a means to the apprehension of the timeless and universal in the particular. It seems rather to be the outcome of a new ecclesiology, as the Church of England has learned to conceive itself as something more than an antitype to the Church of Rome. The attempts of the Tractarians to restore the faith of the undivided church were succeeded in the late nineteenth century by a more liberal, yet catholic, "religion of the incarnation";[44] in light of this, the quest for reunion during the twentieth century often took the form of an aspiration to a common Eucharist. Yet this would be more of a truce than a renewal of bonds, unless one believes that the church in its fullness is the body of Christ and that the unity of this body can be enhanced by

fellowship in bread and wine. For some Anglicans at least, then, the mediation of Christ's presence through the material surrogate is an established principle, although the physical veneration of the icon is still a rare (and for most, no doubt, a forbidden) practice.

While the Anglican homilist was certainly right to lament the political rancour that accompanied the Iconoclastic Controversy, the combatants on both sides of this quarrel were always aware that at bottom the quarrel was about nothing less than the consequences of the Incarnation. The victory of the iconophiles owed much to the eloquence of John Damascene, who, as Dimitrios Pallis shows in his contribution to this volume, not only deduced the legitimacy of images from the Chalcedonian teaching on the two natures of Christ, but explained how the Incarnation had made it possible for the believer to grow in holiness through the regular practice of the liturgy. John went so far, it seems, as to represent matter itself as an instrument of salvation. In his hands this was a seminal notion which still guides the thinking of the eastern churches; no truth can ever be wholly new, however, and we should remember that it was Porphyry, the great enemy of the church, who taught that souls descend to this world in order to cultivate the virtues that could not be exercised in a bodiless state.[45] In this, as in other respects, he may have been a disciple of Origen,[46] who spoke of *theopoiêsis* or deification long before the term *theôsis* came into use, and whose subtle influence is observed in the footnotes to more than one piece in this volume.

Although it was not the intention of the iconophiles to bring aesthetics under the tutelage of dogmatic theology, some modern and contemporary thinkers see the visual, as disclosed to us in the iconography of the Byzantine Church and in today's meta-Byzantine liturgical pictography, as an aid to divinization. As Clemena Antonova demonstrates, they can find warrant for this in the teaching of their ancient predecessors. The visual experience provoked by an encounter with an icon can be described both in theological terms, and also, as Florensky has done, in technical aesthetic concepts, such as those of "synthetic vision" and "supplementary planes". To facilitate the understanding of how that is possible, Antonova uses some of Ha Poong Kim's linguistic coinage: "seeing spirituality" and "state of God-awareness".[47] If the pictorial construction of icons can be understood as visually rendering the way in which the Divine 'sees' the mundane world, and invites an imitation of this divine vision, the "state of God-awareness" enables people who are on the ascending path to God to relate to Him and to that which transcends words and concepts in their surroundings.

The editors hope that the present volume is a testimony to the fact that human efforts in attaining an authentic image of themselves – i.e. the semblance of Christ in them – deserve attention in contemporary theological conversations. If in the fifteenth century Pico della Mirandola was deeply preoccupied with the creative vocation of humankind in recreating the true self, further attention to this subject matter in present times might yet reveal

some underexposed aspects of it. The story of Jacob's ladder, with which we began this introduction, reminds us that not all images are perceived with the external eye – paradoxically, perhaps the most essential of them are not since Christian theology holds that each of us, incipiently if not perfectly, and inwardly if not outwardly, is already "an image of God".

Notes

1 Mark 12.2–27. Cf. Matthew 8.11–12, Luke 3.8, John 8.39.
2 Mark 11.17, quoting Jeremiah 7.11; Mark 14.58.
3 1 John 1.1, with a possible allusion to John 20.17 and 20.29.
4 At *First Principles* 1.2.6 he quotes Colossians 1.15 as "invisible image of the invisible God".
5 Calvin, *Divine Institutes* 1.15.4 holds that Paul is speaking only of the order of civil society and that man and woman are equal in the capacity for knowledge, holiness and righteousness that constitutes the true image of God.
6 *Questions on the Octateuch* 20.90ff. From the Greek text of J.F. Petruccione, *Theodoret of Cyrrhus, Questions on the Octateuch* (Washington: Catholic University of America Press, 2007), 54. The argument that humans are in God's image because they rule in his name is canvassed on the same page. Augustine's famous argument that the human intellect mirrors the triune character of God (*On the Trinity* 10.12.19) is said to lack "solidity" by Calvin, *Divine Institutes* 1.15.4.
7 See R. Niebuhr, *The Nature and Destiny of Man*, vol. 2 (London: Nisbet, 1941), 171–173.
8 See *Divine Institutes* 1.5.3–4, with T.F. Torrance, *Calvin's Doctrine of Man* (London: Lutterworth Press, 1949).
9 On his identification of human destiny with lordship over creation, see e.g. Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics III.3: The Doctrine of Creation*, trans. G. Bromiley *et al*. (London: T. and T. Clark, 1960), 18.
10 See e.g. Karl Barth, *Commentary on Romans*, 6th edition, trans. E.R. Hoskyns (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1933), 50: "From such supposed direct communion with God – genuine only when it is not genuine, when it is not romanticised into an 'experience', when it is at once dissolved and claims to be merely an open space, a sign-post, an occasion and an opportunity – there emerge precisely all those intermediary, collateral, lawless divinities and powers and authorities and principalities (viii.38) that obscure and discolour the light of the true God."
11 See Hans Urs von Balthasar, *The Glory of God, VII: Theology of the New Covenant*, trans. B. McNeil (Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark, 1988), 273–296 on what is disclosed and what remains hidden. At p. 283 he writes: "the Son offers no technical copy or physical emanation or static icon of the Father – it is in the boundless obedience of the Son that the boundless self-giving love of the Father 'appears' ". Cf Kathryn Tanner, *Jesus, Humanity and the Trinity* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2001), 18; also her *Christ the Key* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009) for a sustained defence and development of her thesis that the only true image of God is Christ the Son.
12 Gregory of Nyssa, *On the Making of Man* 16–17, in J.-P. Migne (ed.), *Patrologia Graeca* 44 (Paris, 1863), 177–192.
13 *On Diverse Questions* 51. At *On the Trinity* 11, Augustine finds a *vestigum trinitatis* in the outer man, but denies that the latter is in the image of God.
14 Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* 5.6.1.

15 The earliest proponents of *theôsis* in fact make more of Christ's own saying at John 10.35, where, quoting Psalm 82.6 – "I have said you are gods and children of the Most High" – he infers that all "to whom the word of God came are called gods". Here it is worthy of note that "word" is a rendering of *logos*, a title of Christ at John 1.1 and 1.14. "Gods", on the other hand, though it fairly represents the Greek *theoi* in the Gospel, is rejected by some scholars in favour of "princes" as a translation of the noun *elohim* in the original Hebrew of Psalm 82.6. See Carl Mosser, "The Early Patristic Interpretation of Psalm 82", *Journal of Theological Studies* 56 (2005), 30–74, esp. 41–54 on Irenaeus.
16 G. Bonner, "Augustine's Conception of Deification", *Journal of Theological Studies* 37 (1986): 369–386.
17 See esp. Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press), 67–68 on the postponement of eschatological transformation in what he calls the age of the "buffered self".
18 See e.g. David Hume, *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion* (London, 1779), 208, where Philo avers that a good and omnipotent God would ensure that a cargo useful to society always came safe to harbour and that those entrusted with the reins of power were always wise. On Hume's denial that humans are capable of the God's-eye view, see Edward Craig, *The Mind of God and the Works of Man* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), 69–130.
19 See e.g Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* I–II, q. 112, a.1, with Ana Williams, *Deification in Aquinas and Palamas* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999).
20 Reinhold Niebuhr, *The Nature and Destiny of Man*, vol. 1 (London: Nisbet, 1941), esp. 60–72.
21 See especially Reinhold Niebuhr, *The Nature and Destiny of Man*, vol. 2 (London: Nisbet, 1941), 171–173 on the attenuation of the image of God in Luther's teaching.
22 Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, *De Hominis Dignitate*, ed. E. Garin (Pisa: Scula Normale, 1985).
23 Johann Reuchlin, *On the Art of the Kabbalah*, trans. Martin and Sarah Goodman (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1993), 47.
24 C.S. Lewis, "The Weight of Glory", in *Essay Collection and Other Short Pieces* (San Francisco: Harper Collins, 2000), 105. Lewis adds "or else a horror and a corruption such as you now meet only, if at all, in nightmare". This disjunction, if pressed, would lead us into territory that lies outside the purview of this book.
25 See Barth, *Church Dogmatics* III.1, 184–206. For sustained criticism of Barth see James Barr, *Biblical Faith and Natural Theology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993).
26 See Anders Nygren, *Agape and Eros*, trans. P.S. Watson (London: SPCK, 1963), esp. Part 2, vol. 1, 208–212, on the alleged contamination of the two loves in the Athanasian doctrine of the image.
27 See H. de Lubac, *The Religion of Teilhard de Chardin* (San Francisco: Image Books, 1968).
28 Adam Cooper, *Naturally Human, Supernaturally God: Deification in Pre-Conciliar Catholicism* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2014), 119; P.M. Collins, *Partaking in Divine Nature: Deification and Communion* (New York: T. and T. Clark, 2010), 167.
29 Jean Daniélou, *From Glory to Glory: Texts from Gregory of Nyssa's Mystical Writings*, trans., H. Musurillo (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1979, reprint 2001).
30 Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Cosmic Liturgy* (New York: Ignatius, 2003).
31 Charles Gore (ed.), *Lux Mundi: A Series of Studies in the Religion of the Incarnation* (London: John Murray 1890).

32 Norman Russell, *The Doctrine of Deification in the Greek Fathers* (Oxford: OUP, 2006).
33 Maurice Wiles, "Does Christology Rest on a Mistake?", in S.W. Sykes and J.P. Clayton (eds), *Christ, Faith and History: Cambridge Studies in Christology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1973), 3–12; "Some Reflections on the Origin of the Doctrine of the Trinity", *Journal of Theological Studies* 8 (1957): 92–106.
34 M. Wiles, "In Defence of Arius", *Journal of Theological Studies* 13 (1962): 339–347.
35 Augustine, *De Diversis Quaestionibus Octoginta Tribus* (Eighty-Three Questions), ed. A. Mutzenbecher (Turnhout: Brepols, 1975), *Quaestio* 51.4.
36 Whose teaching on the relation of image and likeness he reverses: see *Against Heresies* 5.6.1 on the presence of the image in the body.
37 *Homilies on Exodus* 2.4.
38 See Eusebius, *Demonstration of the Gospel* 5, proem 24; Athanasius, *Against the Arians* 3.6.
39 See *Three Treatises on the Divine Images*, trans. with commentary by Andrew Louth (New York: St Vladimir's Seminary, 2003).
40 For the subsequent history of the controversy see P.J. Alexander, *The Patriarch Nicephorus of Constantinople* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2001).
41 John Griffiths (ed.), *The Two Books of Homilies Appointed to be Read in Churches* (Oxford: University Press, 1859), 194.
42 *Faerie Queene*, Book 2, canto 5.
43 Krystyn Lach-Szyrma, *London Observed* (Oxford: Signal Books, 2009), 147.
44 See especially Gore, *Lux Mundi*.
45 Augustine, *City of God* 10.30, reproduced in J. Bidez, *Vie de Porphyre* (Ghent, 1913), appendix 2, 39*.
46 *First Principles* 2.6.9, with Mark Edwards, *Origen against Plato* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2002), 105.
47 Ha Poong Kim, *To See God, to See the Buddha: An Exploration of Seeing Spirituality with Meister Eckhart, Nagarjuna, and Huang Bo* (Brighton and Portland, 2010).