

EASTERN ORTHODOXY
Sundays in July @ Grace Community Church
August 2, 2026 at 9AM
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PRAY!

Good morning, I want to acknowledge that we have way too much information in the handout to cover in the time allotted this morning. But I also want you to know that I sent the full version of my notes, to the media team so that you will have them when this seminar is posted to the website. The notes in front of me is about double what you have in front of you. So, if you are a note taker, then feel free to have at it. But also know that you will have access to my notes when the recording is posted to the GCC website. That said, let me introduce myself ...

Personal Background:

- Name
- My wife, Tessie, and I have been married for 14 years (May 2012).
- We have 4 children together, a girl and 3 boys, whose ages range from 6 to 13.
- I began my pastoral ministry in 2010, so I have been pastoring for about 16 years
- I currently serve as a pastor/elder of a church in Torrance, CA called Redeemed South Bay, which we planted in 2013.
- This Fall, I plan to begin teaching at Los Angeles Bible Training School.
- My pastoral ministry began before my seminary studies. Yet, in God's perfect timing, in the Fall 2014 I began attending TMS and I just could not get enough. I received a MDiv in 2019, ThM in 2022, and PhD in 2025.
 - o My ThM/PhD was focused in theological studies.
 - o My dissertation was titled, "Eastern Orthodoxy's Doctrine of *Theosis* versus Biblical Christian Sanctification," in which I argued that Eastern Orthodoxy's doctrine of *theosis* obscures and prevents biblical Christian sanctification.
 - o I am pretty sure that is why I was invited here to speak on Eastern Orthodoxy!
- Enough about me for now ...

Question: Are a few of you willing to share what brings you to a seminar entitled: "Eastern Orthodoxy"? Or maybe, what you are hoping to get out of this morning's session? Anyone willing to answer in 3 sentences or less ...

How did I get into studying Eastern Orthodoxy?

- The first time Eastern Orthodoxy (EO) entered my personal world was around 2009 when I heard that some members of the church I was attending at the time converted to EO. Back then, I was uneducated about EO so their conversion did not mean much to me at the time. I figured EO was the Roman Catholicism's cousin. Nevertheless, the conversions stuck in the back of my mind.
- Fast forward to the year 2020, I was pursuing my ThM and I was in a class called "Seminar on Soteriology with Dr. James Mook," which presented me with the

opportunity to write a research paper comparing the biblical notion of union with Christ with EO's *theosis*. I was interested to learn about what these people converted to.

- Long story short, that paper, along with encouragement from some of my professors, ignited a fire that became my PhD studies and dissertation.
- Over the last couple decades, my experience has become a small trend. Just yesterday I received an email from a TMS grad, who is pastoring on the East Coast and he was asking for my dissertation because a former member of his church converted to EO. Indeed, several of my Christian brothers and sister have experienced church members or friends converting to EO.
- So, that brings us to today ...

Outline:

- What is the Eastern Orthodox Church?
- *Theosis*: The Center of Eastern Orthodox Theology
- What are some problems with Eastern Orthodoxy's *theosis*?
- Practical Considerations and Questions (if time permits)

What is the Eastern Orthodox Church?

- Definition: The Eastern Orthodox Church (EOC) consists of a family of independent (autocephalous) churches in fellowship with the Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople (Istanbul), distinguished from churches of the West (Roman Catholic and Protestant) and churches of areas farther east, known as Oriental Orthodox churches (e.g., Coptic Orthodox, Syrian Orthodox, Armenian Orthodox, Ethiopian Orthodox, Eritrean Orthodox). The Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople holds a place of prominence due to the history of the EOC, yet he does not have authority over the EOC, since each church is autonomous. The family of self-governing churches includes the churches of Constantinople (Istanbul), Alexandria, Antioch, Jerusalem, Russia, Serbia, Romania, Bulgaria, Georgia, Cyprus, Greece, Poland, Albania, and the Czech Lands and Slovakia.¹ This family of independent churches is theologically united by the ecumenical documents from the seven Ecumenical Councils (Nicaea I AD 325, Constantinople I AD 381, Ephesus AD 431, Chalcedon AD 451, Constantinople II AD 553, Constantinople III AD 680–81, and Nicaea II AD 787) and each church employs some version of the Byzantine Liturgy.
 - o EO refers to the entirety of the EOC along with its doctrines, traditions, systems, history, and theology.
- The Eastern Church and Western Church officially split in AD1054, but several political and theological differences indicated separation prior to 1054.

¹ In addition to these fourteen fully independent or fully autocephalous churches, there are other churches in the EOC that are recognized by some, but not all, autocephalous churches as autocephalous themselves; these churches include the churches of America and Ukraine. Moreover, there are other churches within the EOC that are identified as autonomous or semi-autonomous, but not fully independent; these churches include the churches of Sinai, Finland, Estonia, Japan, China, and Macedonia. Furthermore, there are many Eastern Orthodox people dispersed throughout western Europe and Australia. Such persons are under the jurisdiction of one of the independent churches.

- The EOC believes that it is the one true church and claims to worship as the early church did.
- Four Pillars (Emphases) of the EOC
 - **PILLAR # 1—Tradition:** The Church is authoritative over the Scriptures. Scripture forms part of Church Tradition. As such, Church Tradition (Creeds, Councils, Greek Church Fathers, and the Bible [EO's version of Scripture]) are equals as the source of doctrine.
 - **PILLAR #2—Mysticism:** An inner spiritual experience that cannot be fully quantified or objectified.
 - Vladimir Lossky says, "The eastern tradition has never made a sharp distinction between mysticism and theology; between personal experiences of the divine mysteries and the dogma affirmed by the Church.... 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. Far from being mutually opposed, theology and mysticism complete each other. One is impossible without the other. If the mystical experience is a personal working out of the content of the common faith, theology is an expression, for the profit of all, of that which can be experienced by everyone. Outside the truth kept by the whole Church personal experience would be deprived of all certainty, of all objectivity. It would be a mingling of truth and of falsehood, of reality and illusion: 'mysticism' in the bad sense of the word. On the other hand, the teaching of the Church would have no hold on souls if it did not to some degree express an inner experience of truth, granted in different measure to each one of the faithful. There is, therefore, no Christian mysticism without theology; but, above all, there is no theology without mysticism."²
 - **PILLAR #3—Apophaticism ("negative theology"):** Knowledge of God obtained through negation.
 - Lossky writes, "The negative way of the knowledge of God is an ascending 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. We can say that it is an intellectual experience of the mind's failure when confronted with something beyond conceivable. In fact, consciousness of the failure of human understanding constitutes an element common to all that we can call *apophasis*, or negative theology, whether this apophasis remains within the limits of intellection, simply declaring the radical lack of correspondence between our mind and the reality it wishes to attain, or whether it wishes to surpass the limits of understanding, imparting to the ignorance of what God is in

² Lossky, *The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Orthodox Church*, 8–9.

His inaccessible nature the value of a mystical knowledge superior to the intellect.”³

- **PILLAR #4—Theosis (“deification” or “divinization”):** *Theosis* is the overall theme of EO’s theology. In short, “*theosis*” means “becoming God.” EO does not believe that humans can become one with God’s essence. Rather, EO bifurcates the nature of God and says that God’s exists in both “essence” and “energies.” Creation partakes of God’s “energies” and not God’s “essence” to become deified. (Energies a.k.a. powers or grace).
- There we have an introduction to the EOC ...

Theosis: The Center of Eastern Orthodox Theology? (The question mark should not be there)

- Introduction
 - A key theological difference between the EOC and churches embracing Reformed soteriology is the concept of Christian transformation.
 - In EO the concept of Christians transformation is *theosis*. (We will define *theosis* in detail shortly.)
 - *Theosis* (also known as deification or divinization) is an expansive doctrine in EO that entails God’s plan for creation before the Fall as well as the process of salvation after the Fall.
 - While the doctrine of deification has been historically and primarily regarded as a theological pillar of EO, recently some within western theological traditions have embraced *theosis*.
- Definitions:
 - *Theosis* can also be referred to as deification or divinization. Eastern Orthodoxy’s understanding of the *theosis* of man is two-fold. First, *theosis*, or attaining the likeness of God, is the primordial task, or initial vocation, given to mankind in the garden of Eden. Second, subsequent to mankind’s first sin, *theosis* is the process of redemption for mankind wherein believers are ever-increasingly transformed into God’s likeness by sharing in the divine life of the Triune God, through the Son, by the Spirit, so that by God’s grace (i.e., divine energies) humans become what Christ is by nature.
 - OR, the doctrine of *theosis* in Eastern Orthodoxy (EO) is an expansive concept that entails God’s plan for creation to consummation. In soteriological terms, EO’s *theosis* is the process of redemption wherein fallen man can increasingly and perpetually be transformed into the likeness of God by sharing in the divine life of the Trinity via God’s energies so that what Christ is by nature believers become by grace (as defined by EO).
 - Divine Energies? Eastern Orthodoxy endorses a distinction in God’s nature. This distinction is between divine essence and divine energies. According to EO, both God’s essence and His energies are uncreated, inseparable, and truly divine; and yet, God’s essence and His energies are distinct. Eastern Orthodoxy maintains that God’s essence is inaccessible, unknowable, incommunicable, and

³ Lossky, *In the Image and Likeness of God*, 13 (italics original).

transcendent. However, EO affirms that God is accessible, knowable, communicated, and revealed in His energies. Specifically, divine energies are the means by which man can participate in the divine life of the Trinity (i.e., experience *theosis*) without becoming God's essence. In EO, God's energies can be referred to as His "operations," "powers," "glory," or "grace." Also, the concept of divine energies is both fundamental and unique to Eastern Orthodox theology.

- NOTE: *Theosis* has been regarded primarily as a doctrine of the Eastern Orthodox Church (EOC). Historically, Western churches have questioned the legitimacy of EO's doctrine of deification. However, the modern ecumenical movement includes theologians who associate with one another though traditionally holding diverging soteriological views. Recently, some Roman Catholic and Protestant theologians have embraced notions of *theosis* and have sought to reconcile deification with their theological traditions. Such theologians, often speaking in the terms of "participation" and "transformation," hold that a concept of *theosis* is biblical and should be accepted and articulated among all Christian traditions. Nevertheless, it is necessary to accurately define EO's concept of *theosis* before seeking to reconcile *theosis* with any other theological tradition.

- The Philosophical Background of EO's *Theosis*

- Plato and Platonic philosophy strongly influenced the concept of Christian deification. Plato asserted that evil and good were necessarily present in mortal nature and the earth; therefore, he concluded that one should escape from the earth to the dwelling place of the gods by becoming divine.
- At least four of Plato's ontological principles would influence EO's doctrine of deification.
 - **Principle #1—Dualism:** The soul is one's true self and the soul must be prioritized over the body.
 - Superiority of the soul over the body
 - Body was a hindrance to the soul
 - Soul was the "true self"
 - Divinity was found in the soul, which needs to escape the body
 - **Principle # 2—Tripartite Soul:** The soul comprises three parts (rational, spirited, and appetitive), which need to be in harmony with one another. The soul became tripartite once it was placed in the human body.
 - Soul comprises three parts
 - Reason (rational principle; higher portion)
 - Desire (irrational or appetitive principle; lower portion)
 - Spirit (spirited principle; middle portion)
 - Insisted that each portion of the soul must be in harmony to experience wholeness
 - The multi-portioned soul allowed for intense internal struggles in man
 - Ultimately, Plato believed that an inward self-focus could harmonize the principle parts of the soul.

- **Principle #3—The Superiority/Priority of Reason (or Mind):** The highest (or “divine”) part of the soul is “reason” or “mind” (the rational portion), which is preexistent and immortal. The priority of “reason” is necessary for deification.
 - Reason, the highest part of the soul, must take precedence over the other parts of the soul
 - Reason was the part of the soul that was “divine”
 - Believed in the preexistence of the soul
 - Thought that the soul was both corrupted and took it tripartite form at birth
 - Therefore, reason must reign in man for man to master himself and to become like god again (i.e., experience *theosis*).
- **Principle #4—Two Worlds of Reality:** Reality exists in two worlds. The higher “world of being” contains the essence of all things (the “Forms” or “Ideas”) and is accessible by reason. The “lower world of becoming” contains replicas of the Forms (the “many”) and is accessible by human senses. The goal of philosophy is to journey from the “lower” to the “higher.”
 - A “higher” world of being and a “lower” world of becoming
 - Higher world is accessible through human “reason,” lower world is perceived through human senses
 - The world of becoming constantly changes, but the world of being is immutable
 - The physical objects and items in the lower world (i.e., the “Many”) are imitations of their essence (i.e., the “Forms” or “Ideas”) in the higher world.
 - According to Plato, because knowledge of the “Ideas” is imperceptible to human senses, “Ideas” can be engaged only by reason through contemplation, which resulted in understanding truth, while engaging “the many” resulted in opinion.
 - Thus, philosophical contemplation was necessary for deification.
- These philosophical principles influenced later philosophers and the doctrine of deification. Most importantly, these concepts influenced Greek Church Fathers, whose works are foundational to EO theology.
 - The idea that the Greek Church Fathers were influenced heavily by Plato is not contested. John R. Lenz writes, “Greek patristic theology stresses the fact that Plato’s soul is akin to the divine nature, whereas in Western Christianity immortality is conferred as a gift from God.”⁴
 - Each of the Platonic themes we surveyed above are observed in several Greek Fathers.
 - For example, Clement of Alexandria advocated for the integration of philosophy and biblical tradition. Specifically, Clement sought to answer

⁴ Lenz, “Deification of the Philosopher in Classical Greece,” 53.

how man could become like God and commune with Him by harmonizing philosophy and Scripture.

- Origen serves as another example. Origen differs from Clement in that he was not eager to accept Greek philosophy as a whole into his theology. Rather, Origen thought that philosophy was a field that honed one's skill in dialogue and debate. Nevertheless, Platonic thought is evident in Origen's works.
 - NOTE: Admittedly, Clement and Origen were not strict Platonists. Rather, they often tried to harmonize, whether explicitly or implicitly, Platonic ideas with Christian concepts. Clement of Alexandria was openly favorable to the unification of philosophy and Christianity, while Origen was less so. However, Platonic themes can be detected in both of their writings. Also, a helpful resource, Louis Markos, *From Plato to Christ: How Platonic Thought Shaped the Christian Faith* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2021).
 - Plato's virtue of divinization, along with his four principles outlined above (dualism, the tripartite soul, the priority of "reason," and the two worlds of reality) can be detected in Eastern patristic works.
 - Plato is a helpful introduction to the philosophical background of EO's deification, but the doctrine developed throughout history.
- The Historical Development of EO's *Theosis*
- NOTE 1: This historical development of *theosis* is from EO's perspective. I do not intend to suggest that the conclusions of contemporary EO concerning patristic writings are the same conclusions of the Greek Church Fathers themselves.
 - NOTE 2: EO's later and contemporary doctrine of *theosis* differs significantly from earlier patristic writings.
 - That said, let's look at six eras to consider the evolution of EO's *theosis*. The following is a survey and is far from exhaustive. Only select historical figures and their novel contributions to EO's divinization are presented (Early Christian Concepts, The Early Alexandrian Concepts, The Late Alexandrian Concepts, The Cappadocian Concepts, A Monastic Concept, and The Medieval Concepts).
 - Early Christian Concepts of *Theosis*
 - Justin Martyr
 - Martyr indicated that the "sons of god" in Psalm 82 were Adam and Eve, who fell, but that "all men are deemed worthy of becoming 'gods.'"
 - Though Justin did not indicate explicitly how men became "gods," EO sees his treatment of Psalm 82 as a biblical ground for *theosis*.
 - Irenaeus of Lyons
 - EO interprets Irenaeus as providing a means toward deification.
 - Irenaeus quoted from Psalm 82 and identified the "gods" as the church, those who have received adoption.

- Irenaeus wrote, “the Word of God, our Lord Jesus Christ, who did, through His transcendent love, become what we are, that He might bring us to be even what He is Himself.”
 - Irenaeus’ well-known phrase is the first of many statements from the Church Fathers that became known as “exchange formula” sayings.
 - From such sayings Eastern Orthodox theology holds that Christ’s incarnation was the first necessary occurrence if man was to be deified after the Fall.
- Irenaeus made a distinction between the “image” of God in man and the “likeness” of God in man.
 - Eastern Orthodoxy understands the “image” of God to be the potential for man to become like God, while the “likeness” is the realization of that potential.
 - This distinction would go on to be profoundly influential in EO’s doctrine of divinization.
- From Irenaeus, EO sees sacramental (baptismal and eucharistic), incarnational, and objective (goal of life) aspects of *theosis*.
- The Early Alexandrian Concepts of *Theosis*
 - Clement
 - We already noted Greek philosophy’s effect on Clement.
 - He also emphasized receiving and observing the Scriptures in the context of the church.
 - He highlighted the necessity to imitate the Lord, Jesus.
 - While Clement adhered to a kind of sacramentalism, he also emphasized self-transcendence and contemplation à la Platonic philosophy.
 - From Clement, EO sees ecclesial (church), philosophical (contemplative), and transcendental aspects of *theosis*.
 - Origen
 - While Origen agreed with much of what has been suggested already, his suggestion of participation in divine glory was an advancement.
 - In addition, Origen believed that the divine nature of Christ deified his human nature. According to Origen, Christ’s deified flesh is His mortal body (along with His human soul within His body) uniting with the Logos to possess the highest powers after having participated in divinity, resulting in His humanity becoming God.
 - From Origen, EO sees participatory (divine glory) and incarnational (i.e., divinized flesh) aspects of *theosis*.
- The Late Alexandrian Concepts of *Theosis*
 - Athanasius
 - Athanasius suggested that Christ’s deified flesh made the human race’s deification possible.

- He taught that the Word joined Himself to human nature and so also human nature, by being joined to the Word from heaven, would be carried to heaven and share in eternal life.
 - Also, Athanasius favored an ascetic life for the process of spiritual maturation.
 - From Athanasius, EO sees universal (comprehensive), eschatological, and ascetical aspects of *theosis*.
- Cyril
 - Cyril accentuated the Holy Spirit's role in *theosis* and the Christian's participation in the life of the Trinity.
 - For Cyril, the Christian's involvement in the Trinity is an ascent to sonship by the Spirit, through the Son, wherein the Christian receives, by grace, the honor that belongs to Christ by nature.
 - From Cyril, EO sees spiritual (Holy Spirit) and participatory (Trinitarian) aspects of *theosis*.
- The Cappadocian (Basil of Caesarea, Gregory of Nazianzus, and Gregory of Nyssa) Concepts of *Theosis*
 - Basil
 - Basil, along with the other Cappadocians, were especially philosophical. That said, Basil stressed a spiritual/mystical aspect of *theosis*, in which he said the Holy Spirit enables those whom He has illumined to advance beyond norms to "being made God."
 - He also stated that deification not only had personal benefits, but that the one being deified "sends forth their grace to others."
 - From Basil, EO sees spiritual (mystical) and communal aspects of *theosis*.
 - Gregory of Nazianzus
 - Nazianzus highly esteemed an ascetic life for *theosis*.
 - He was the first Greek Father to explicitly mention an ecstatic aspect of *theosis*. This ecstatic feature appears where Gregory speaks of one who is said to undergo an out-of-body experience as the soul, or intellect, travels to God being "rapt up [raptured] before its time."
 - He emphasized the role of the Christian priest in deifying those under his care.
 - From Nazianzus, EO sees ecstatic and liturgical aspects of *theosis*.
 - Gregory of Nyssa
 - Nyssa believed that the communion of Christ's divine nature and Christ's human flesh enabled the deification of the Christian. He expressed this belief with the concept of mingling, or blending, through the Eucharist.
 - In speaking of the deification of Christ's human nature, Nyssa presented an analogy of "a drop of vinegar mingled in the deep to be sea." He concluded, "by reason that the natural quality of this liquid [the drop of vinegar] does not continue in the infinity of that [the deep] which overwhelms it." The drop of vinegar represents

Christ's human nature and the deep (the sea) represents His divinity. Nyssa posited that the human nature of Christ was overwhelmed by His divine nature.

- From this idea, Nyssa suggested an ontological concept of *theosis* that occurred first in Christ's human nature and that occurs also in the Christian. For all intents and purposes, Nyssa's analogy implies a loss of human nature altogether. At minimum, his metaphor supports an intensification of mystical ontology in EO's *theosis*.
- From Nyssa, EO sees an ontological (mystical) aspect of *theosis*.
- A Monastic Concept of *Theosis*
 - The Alexandrians and Cappadocians primarily conceived the Greek patristic concept of *theosis*. From the sixth century onward the Eastern Orthodox concept of deification could not be expressed adequately without reference to one or more of these Greek Fathers. However, with the rise of monasticism, the doctrine of divinization continued to develop. No other monk would contribute more to EO's *theosis*, than Maximus (a.k.a. "Maximos") the Confessor.
 - Maximus the Confessor
 - In his *Commentary on the Lord's Prayer*, he systematized an approach to divinization through the seven mysteries (theology, adoption in grace, equality with angels, participation in eternal life, the restoration of nature, abolition of the law of sin, and the destruction of evil).
 - In *On the Ecclesiastical Mystagogy*, Maximus argued that man is the link between the material and spiritual worlds and it is man's task to bring the whole cosmos to God; in this way, *theosis* has both personal and cosmological aspects. As a result, Maximus taught that every detail of the Church's liturgical worship provided an important contribution to *theosis*.
 - Also, Maximus identified two ages of existence. The first age is when God became man. The other age is when man is becoming God. Maximus spiritualized the two ages to adhere to the Christian life and suggested that there are two existences of the Christian. The Christian's first existence is "the ages of flesh." The other existence is "the ages that will follow." As such, Maximus set forth two ages of deification. In the present age, "the ages of flesh," the Christian is active in *theosis*. Yet, in the future age, "the ages that will follow," the Christian's experience of *theosis* will be passive and perpetual.
 - From Maximus, EO sees ethical (present/active), eschatological (future/passive), and liturgical (details) aspects of *theosis*.
- The Medieval Concepts of *Theosis*
 - John of Damascus (AD 675–749)

- John of Damascus argued for the prominence of icons, which influenced the EOC's ecclesial and sacramental approaches to deification.⁵
- Gregory Palamas (1296–1359)
 - Gregory Palamas (AD 1296–1359) developed a distinction between God's essence and God's uncreated energies. He argued that God's essence does not condescend to deify man, but that the uncreated energies of God were the means of Christian deification. The distinction between the essence and uncreated energies of God became a vital tenet of EO's theological tradition.⁶ (We defined "divine energies" earlier and will discuss more.)
- While modern Eastern Orthodox theologians continue to expound the doctrine of *theosis*, the major tenets of the doctrine were primarily completed within the timeframe observed in this study.
- Modern Eastern Orthodox Definitions of *Theosis*
 - From EO's perspective, its contemporary concept of *theosis* is a result of the philosophical background and historical development of *theosis*.
 - Modern definitions and descriptions of *theosis* from Eastern Orthodox resources highlight Platonic themes such as *theosis* as man's highest goal, self-transcendence, spiritual ascent, restoration, philosophical journey, and purification from passions exist in these definitions. However, these definitions also incorporate Scripture and Christian theology.
 - BEWARE: DISCRETION ADVISED ... "He who defines the term, wins the battle."
- The Broad Concept of *Theosis*
 - The broad concept of *theosis* in EO has to do with God's purpose for creation and the initial task that He gave to mankind. However, EO holds that this broad idea of deification was disturbed by the first sin of mankind. This disruption gives way to the soteriological concept of *theosis*.
 - *Theosis* From Creation to Consummation
 - For EO, *theosis* is simply the consummation of creation. As a matter of fact, from the Eastern Orthodox perspective, creation was made to be deified.
 - One Eastern Orthodox scholar says, "God originally intended to make holy and to exalt His created universe by contact with the eternal life and power of divinity."⁷
 - Andrew Louth says, "Deification is not to be equated with redemption. Christ certainly came to save us, and in our response to his saving action and word we are redeemed; but deification belongs to a broader conception of the divine οἰκονομία:

⁵ See, John of Damascus, *Three Treatises on the Divine Images*.

⁶ See Palamas, *The Triads*.

⁷ Thomas, *Deification in the Eastern Orthodox Tradition*, 18.

deification is the fulfillment of creation, not just the rectification of the Fall. One way of putting this is to think in terms of an arch stretching from creation to deification, representing what is and remains God's intention: the creation of the cosmos that, through humankind, is destined to share in the divine life, to be deified."⁸

- So, EO claims that prior to the Fall God's goal and purpose for creation was divinization. Eastern Orthodoxy affirms that God's initial creation was good, yet that it was to be perfected through *theosis* with or without sin's occurrence.
- The quote from Louth above introduces not only the goal of, but also the vehicle for, creation's deification. That is, EO understands *theosis* as the primordial task of mankind.
 - Louth says, "Humankind, fashioned in his (God's) image to be a microcosm and bond of the cosmos, was to have a key role in the process of creation's deification."⁹ In other words, man is central to God's plan of *theosis* because he was created in the image of God as the pinnacle and picture of all creation.
 - EO contends that God created man in His "image" to obtain His "likeness." For instance, Harry M. Boosalis says, "For Orthodox anthropology, the term 'image' has a different meaning from the term 'likeness.' 'Image' may be seen as the potential inherent in man for sanctification, while 'likeness' refers to its perfection. Or in other words, one could say 'image' implies 'potentiality', whereas 'likeness' implies 'actuality.'"¹⁰ The theological significance of this distinction between "image" and "likeness" is that *theosis* can be defended as the primordial task of mankind.
 - Accordingly, the "image" of God in man serves as the canvas upon which His "likeness" is to be painted. However, at man's creation there was no immediate guarantee that he would actualize his potential for *theosis*. This lack of guarantee is due to God creating man as a free being.
 - In EO, man's freedom corresponds to the "image" of God.
 - In *Dogmatic Theology* Vladimir Lossky argues that:
 - "To be in the image of God, the Fathers maintain, in the last analysis, is to be a personal being, that is to say, a free, responsible being." (p. 86)
 - God created man as free and responsible because God wanted to call man to the optimal vocation of deification. (p. 87)

⁸ Louth, "The Place of *Theosis* in Orthodox Theology," 34–35.

⁹ Louth, "The Place of *Theosis* in Orthodox Theology," 36.

¹⁰ Boosalis, *Taught by God*, 107.

- “Personal beings constitute the peak of creation, since they become God by a free choice and grace.... God creates beings who, like him—let us recall the Divine Councils of Genesis—can decide and choose.” (pp. 87–88)
 - “God becomes *powerless* before human freedom; he cannot violate the latter because freedom proceeds from his omnipotence. Certainly, man was created by the will of God alone, but he cannot be deified by it alone. A single will for creation, but two for deification. A single will to generate the image, but two to make the image into a likeness.” (p. 88)
 - Lossky’s understanding of man’s freedom at creation is representative of contemporary Eastern Orthodox theology.¹¹ The total freedom of mankind is central in EO and its theology.
- *Theosis* Disturbed by the Fall of Mankind
 - EO’s view of the Fall is important to understand soteriological *theosis*.
 - Eastern Orthodoxy places emphasis on the serpent’s role as tempter, which softens the guilt of man before a holy God.
 - Yet, EO also stresses Adam and Eve’s freedom of choice so that man is responsible for the Fall.
 - Orthodox scholar, Bruce Ware, identifies the Fall as Adam’s refusal to accept his vocation of *theosis*.¹²
 - The Fall forms EO’s turning point on *theosis*.
 - Yannaras explains the importance of the Fall to EO’s doctrine of *theosis*, saying, “for the Christian tradition the reference to the fall of man is not simply a particular twist to its anthropological theorizing, but the axis or “key” to understanding man, the world and history. On the one side the truth of the fall and on the other the truth of the *deification* of man define the fact of the Church itself and give meaning to its existence and its historical mission.”¹³
 - God’s intention for creation was deification. However, the Fall is man’s choice to forego the process of deification as God initially commanded. Nevertheless, according to EO, God’s plan for a deified world remains. Thus, the Fall is the first interpretive key to

¹¹ For instances of other modern Eastern Orthodox theologians on man created as a free being, see Boosalis, *Orthodox Spiritual Life*, 29–30; Mantzaridis, *The Deification of Man*, 22; Ware, *The Orthodox Way*, 65; Yannaras, *Elements of Faith*, 57.

¹² Ware, *The Orthodox Way*, 216.

¹³ Yannaras, *Elements of Faith*, 75 (italics original).

understand how God will fulfill His intention after it was disturbed by the Fall.

- Before understanding EO's concept of *theosis* after the Fall one must grasp EO's beliefs about the consequences of the Fall.
- EO's view of the effects of the Fall can be understood in Andrew Louth's terms of a greater arch and a lesser arch. If the greater arch is the arch from creation to consummation, then the Fall introduced a lesser arch. The lesser arch is the arch from the Fall to redemption. In EO's thought, the lesser arch is subservient to the greater arch and does not deviate from God's goal of a deified creation. The results of the Fall identify what needs to be redeemed in order to make God's plan of a deified creation, through mankind, come to fruition. So, what are these effects?
 - Moral Effects
 - Man began a moral digression at the Fall.
 - Man is now inclined toward evil, rather than good.
 - Man's morality was truck by sin, but not debased.
 - Physical Effects
 - Disease entered the world.
 - Difficult labor came forth.
 - Ultimately, death resulted.
 - Death, rather than sin, is emphasized in EO as a result of the Fall.
 - Louth contends that the church fathers "explore what it means for the world to come under the sway of death, rather than under the sway of sin," then says, "The world under the sway of death is a world characterized by corruption, disintegration; it is a world in which it is impossible to achieve anything, where all human intentions are like building on sand—they are impermanent, fragile. In fact, it seems to me to be suggested that it is not so much sin that causes death, as death that causes sin, by sapping our determination, for nothing that we do has any permanence; it is all being carried away by the corruption that has been unleashed on the world."¹⁴
 - Cosmic Effects
 - Mankind lost Paradise.
 - The Fall caused the process of deification to cease so that neither man nor creation could be deified.
 - Negative Effects (That which did not change)
 - God's relationship with man did not change.

¹⁴ Louth, *Introducing Eastern Orthodox Theology*, 70–71.

- The prioritization of death over sin as a key consequence of the Fall leads to EO's notion that the relationship between God and man was essentially unchanged after the Fall.
 - God did not reject man.
 - God did not remove His image from man.
 - God did not take away man's freedom.
 - Ware asserts, "The aspect of *free choice* is particularly important for an understanding of man as made in God's image. As God is free, so likewise man is free. And, being free, each human being realizes the divine image within himself in his own distinctive fashion."¹⁵
 - God did not remove man's ability to reason effectively.
 - Alfeyev writes, "God's kindness toward man was not lost after the Fall, just as man's striving for God was not lost. Man preserves the ability to perform good works, which are accomplished *with the help* of divine goodness, but *not exclusively* thanks to divine goodness, as the Protestants think."¹⁶
 - Adam's guilt was not inherited by the sum of mankind.
 - Man did not inherit a sinful nature.
- Positive Effects (That which did change)
 - The image of God is corrupted in man.
 - Boosalis says, "Man is thus created and called to grow, as an icon in the divine *image*, into the fullness of divine *likeness*. Although he has fallen from his original splendor, and in spite of the fact that he is now born into a fallen state; into a world of sickness and suffering; into a world of dysfunction and death—still, man retains the image of God in which he was initially created. According to the Orthodox Church, the image of God in fallen man is certainly distorted and disfigured, but it has not been entirely annihilated or completely destroyed. Furthermore, the goal of Orthodox spiritual life is not simply to restore the 'image of God', to restore that 'icon' of God according to which man was originally created. Even more than

¹⁵ Ware, *The Orthodox Way*, 65 (italics original).

¹⁶ Alfeyev, *Doctrine and Teaching of the Orthodox Church*, 254 (italics original).

that, it is to attain to the ‘likeness of God’ in Christ.”¹⁷

- *Theosis* is halted.
- Man is now inclined toward evil yet remains free to choose God and do good.
- Man inherits corruption and mortality.
- Man’s freedom—before and after the Fall—is paramount in EO.
 - On one hand, EO holds that the Fall mars the image of God in man so that he is inclined toward evil. On the other hand, this marring has no considerable effect on man’s freedom.
 - Ware writes, “The Orthodox tradition, without minimizing the effects of the fall, does not however believe that it resulted in a ‘total depravity,’ such as the Calvinists assert in their more pessimistic moments. The divine image in man was obscured but not obliterated.”¹⁸
 - Boosalis contends the image of God in man “has not been entirely annihilated—as is taught by those Protestant confessions that have inherited the Calvinistic teaching of total depravity.”¹⁹
- Original sin, or “ancestral sin” as preferred in EO, has to do with the transmittance of Adam’s sin, and its effects, to his descendants. EO adheres to the belief that the consequences of Adam’s sin extend to all mankind. However, EO distinguishes the Western and Eastern concepts of original sin. From EO’s perspective, the Western Latin doctrine of original sin goes too far since it is linked with “original guilt.” Mankind’s inclination to sin, rather than entrance into a sinful state, is crucial to EO. EO emphasizes that Adam’s sin brings about corruption and mortality to mankind and creation, but that it is only personal acts of sin for which men are counted guilty.
 - Ware says, “Orthodox do not say, as Calvin said, that humans after the fall were utterly depraved and incapable of good desires. They cannot agree with Augustine, when he writes that humans are under ‘a harsh necessity’ of committing sin.”²⁰ Therefore, Ware rejects the historic

¹⁷ Boosalis, *Taught by God*, 106.

¹⁸ Ware, *The Orthodox Way*, 80.

¹⁹ Boosalis, *Orthodox Spiritual Life*, 29.

²⁰ Ware, *The Orthodox Church*, 217. Elsewhere, Ware states, “But does it also imply an inherited *guilt*? Here Orthodoxy is more guarded. Original sin is not to be interpreted in juridical or quasi-biological terms, as if it were some physical ‘taint’ of guilt, transmitted through sexual intercourse. This picture, which normally passes for the Augustinian view, is unacceptable to Orthodoxy.” Ware, *The Orthodox Way*, 80–81 (italics original).

- notion of many Western Christians “that whatever a person does in a fallen and unredeemed state, since it is tainted by original guilt, cannot be pleasing to God.”²¹
- Hilarion Alfeyev writes, “In Orthodox tradition, based on the theological legacy of the Eastern fathers, the concept of Original Sin as an inheritance of guilt is alien.”²²
 - Pomazansky warns against defining original sin too precisely and summarizes EO’s doctrine of original sin, saying, “original sin is understood by Orthodox theology as a sinful inclination which has entered into mankind and become a spiritual disease.”²³
 - Alfeyev posits, “the Orthodox Church teaches that man’s free will can be guided entirely to sinful acts, but not that it inevitably must be.”²⁴
 - BIG PICTURE: *Theosis* was and is God’s plan for creation. *Theosis* was to occur through man. *Theosis* was disturbed by the Fall. There are several effects of the Fall. But, above all, the Fall cause deification to cease/pause for the moment. While EO acknowledges divine favor toward OT believers, such favor was not sufficient to reinstate the process of *theosis*. Rather, Eastern Orthodox theology contends that the incarnation of God was the necessary act for man’s *theosis* to be reestablished. As Ware says, “Sin blocked the path to union with God. Since we could not come to God, He came to us.”²⁵
 - The Soteriological Concept of *Theosis*
 - In EO, Christ’s person is central to the doctrine of divinization. The divine Word Himself became man so that man might become divine. Eastern Orthodoxy contends that Christ’s humanity was the first to experience *theosis* and that a believer’s deification would follow a like course. In this way, *theosis* is EO’s concept of man’s salvation, and this salvation serves as the means to a deified creation.
 - The Nature of Soteriological *Theosis*
 - The Deification of Christ
 - To understand EO’s view on the nature—the essential features—of soteriological *theosis*, one must look at Christ’s deification.
 - For EO, the incarnation and deification imply each other. Christ’s humanity was deified, and the human believer is to follow a similar pattern

²¹ Ware, *The Orthodox Church*, 218.

²² Alfeyev, *Doctrine and Teaching of the Orthodox Church*, 253.

²³ Pomazansky, *Orthodox Dogmatic Theology*, 169.

²⁴ Alfeyev, *Doctrine and Teaching of the Orthodox Church*, 254.

²⁵ Ware, *The Orthodox Church*, 218.

- Lossky says, “God descends to the world and becomes man, and man is raised towards divine fullness and becomes god, because the union of two natures, the divine and human, has been determined in the eternal counsel of God, and because it is the final end for which the world has been created.”²⁶
- Eastern Orthodoxy affirms two unmixed, unchangeable, indivisible, and inseparable natures, one divine and one human, in the person of Christ. Yet, as Lossky says, each nature “being united hypostatically without being transformed into one another, they permeate one another.”²⁷
- For Lossky, this permeation stems from the divine nature penetrating the human nature; however, once the flesh is permeated by the divine then the flesh obtains an inexpressible capability to penetrate the divine. Lossky concludes, “The humanity of Christ is a deified nature that is permeated by the divine energies from the moment of the Incarnation.”²⁸
- For EO, the deified humanity of Christ is the access point for all humanity’s deification.
 - Georgios I. Mantzaridis states, “When the Logos of God took on human nature, He bestowed on it the fullness of His grace and delivered it from the bonds of corruption and death. The consequence of this hypostatic union in Christ of the two natures was the deification of the human nature He assumed.”²⁹
 - So, in the person of Christ, God’s “image” in man was regenerated, and the possibility to attain God’s “likeness” was reinstated for humanity.³⁰
 - Lossky posits that it is because of the incarnation, specifically the deified humanity of Christ, that “saints,

²⁶ Lossky, *The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church*, 136.

²⁷ Lossky, *The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church*, 145.

²⁸ Lossky, *The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church*, 145–46.

²⁹ Mantzaridis, *The Deification of Man*, 29. Later Mantzaridis states, “In the person of Christ existed, in its entirety, human nature individually particularized, which, being hypostatically unified with the Logos of God, was deified and received the fullness of the divine energy.” Ibid., 30. This quote clarifies EO’s view that Christ’s deified human nature represents the entire human race’s reinstated ability for *theosis* in Christ, rather than an individual human’s ability to be deified in the same way Christ was.

³⁰ Mantzaridis, *The Deification of Man*, 29.

while remaining human, can partake of the divinity and become God by grace.”³¹

- The deification of Christ’s humanity, which is the elevation of his human nature by divine energies through the incarnation, sets the course for humanity’s deification.
- The Deification of Man
 - EO’s position on Christ’s deified humanity leads to its claim that man’s deification follows suit. However, there is a distinction. While Christ’s human nature was divinized by the fullness of divine energy, mankind is deified by receiving from the fullness of divine energy by sharing in Christ’s deified humanity.
 - Nassif explains, “Humans can never become God by nature, as though it were possible for us to become fourth persons of the Trinity. On the contrary, humans become by grace what Christ was by his divinized human nature.... We can be divinized by participating in the incarnate deified humanity of the Son.”³²
 - Though man cannot become God by nature, according to EO, by cooperating with and partaking of the divine energies, man rises above human attributes and energies to the divine and supernatural sphere, yet without becoming God Himself.
 - Overall, broadly speaking, *theosis* is man’s process of meeting the optimal level of his natural ability. Yet, strictly speaking, *theosis* is man’s surpassing of his natural optimal level and perpetually venturing into the divine level, without becoming God Himself.
 - EO’s *theosis* is the God-given destiny of mankind that temporarily ceased due to Adam’s sin, but reconvened in Christ so that mankind might become God by grace, though not by nature. In soteriological *theosis*, as Ware says, “The human being does not become God by nature, but is merely a ‘created god,’ a god by grace or by status.”
- The Means of Soteriological *Theosis*
 - The Energies of God (a.k.a., God’s “operations,” “powers,” “glory,” or “grace” in EO)
 - EO distinguishes between the essence and energies of God (both are uncreated and truly God, yet distinct).
 - In essence, God is unknowable, but in energies He is knowable and revealed.
 - His (divine) energies are the ever-present and overarching means to *theosis*. In other words, God’s energies deify.

³¹ Lossky, *Dogmatic Theology*, 115.

³² Bradley Nassif, “The Evangelical Theology of the Eastern Orthodox Church,” in *Three Views on Eastern Orthodoxy and Evangelicalism*, 47–48.

- Lossky says, “it is union with God in His energies, or union by grace making us participate in the divine nature, without our essence becoming thereby the essence of God. In deification we are by grace (that is to say, in the divine energies), all that God is by nature.”³³
- Ware explains, “When we say that the saints have been transformed or ‘deified’ by the grace of God, what we mean is that they have a direct experience of God Himself. They *know* God—that is to say, God in His energies, not in His essence.”³⁴
- God’s energies must be freely accessed. For EO, the Western concept of grace implies a supernatural causality of salvation, while the Eastern concept of grace is a natural procession of the divine energies that creation is called to partake of.
- Synergy
 - God and man must each play their role; each must cooperate with the other in *theosis*.
 - On one hand, as Ware claims, “The Orthodox Church rejects any doctrine of grace which might seem to infringe upon human freedom.” On the other hand, Ware continues, “If we are to reach full fellowship with God, we cannot do so without God’s help, yet we must also play our own part.”³⁵
 - God has played his part or fulfilled His role in offering His energies by the Son through the Spirit.
 - Man must freely choose to engage God’s energies.
 - Boosalis declares, “The deification of man thus depends on the *voluntary* submission of man’s free will to the will of God.”³⁶
 - This cooperation between God and man is the synergistic means of *theosis*. In EO, there are several specific ways to synergistically advance in *theosis*.
- The Church and Holy Liturgy
 - The Church (i.e., the EOC) is the context wherein *theosis* is realized.

³³ Lossky, *The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church*, 87. Later, Lossky declares, “In the tradition of the Eastern Church grace usually signifies all the abundance of the divine nature, in so far as it is communicated to men; the deity which operates outside the essence and gives itself, the divine nature of which we partake through uncreated energies.” Ibid., 162–63.

³⁴ Ware, *The Orthodox Church*, 66 (italics original).

³⁵ Ware, *The Orthodox Church*, 215.

³⁶ Boosalis, *Orthodox Spiritual Life*, 40 (italics original).

- Archimandrite George, “Everything in the Church leads to *Theosis* ... The Church alone is the place of *Theosis*.”³⁷
- Ware explains that the realization of *theosis* involves a sharing of common life and fellowship in the EOC, for the EOC is “the means appointed by God whereby we may acquire the sanctifying Spirit and be transformed into the divine likeness.”³⁸
- The Holy, or Divine, Liturgy is the corporate worship service of the EOC. The Liturgy is where God meets His people. The aspects of liturgy deify those who participate in them.
- These ecclesial and liturgical aspects of *theosis* are unique to EO. For the EOC considers herself to be the true church.³⁹
 - Ware states, “Orthodoxy teaches that *outside the Church there is no salvation*.”⁴⁰
- The Sacraments (Mysteries)
 - In one sense, the sacraments (mysteries) of the EOC integrate with the ecclesial and liturgical means of divinization. It is in the context of the EOC that the sacraments are manifest. However, isolating the sacramental means of *theosis* proves helpful to grasp how EO views the mysteries’ effect in deification.
 - Generally, the EOC acknowledges seven mysteries. These sacraments include baptism, chrismation, eucharist, repentance (confession), holy orders (ordination), marriage, and the anointing of the sick.
 - The mysteries are the means of access to deification. Mantzaridis explains, “The regeneration and deification of human nature achieved in Christ is rendered accessible to all through the sacraments of the Church.”⁴¹ While all sacraments are important in the EOC, the mysteries of baptism and the eucharist are fundamental.

³⁷ George, *Theosis*, 36.

³⁸ Ware, *The Orthodox Church*, 231.

³⁹ Alfeyev declares, “Concerning the examination of the theme of the unity of the Church, one need only say that the Orthodox Church always identified itself with the One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic Church, which is spoken of in the Creed; all the other Christian confessions were considered by it to have fallen away from ecclesial unity.” Alfeyev, *Doctrine and Teaching of the Orthodox Church*, 408. Likewise, Ware says, “Orthodoxy, believing that the Church on earth has remained and must remain visibly one, naturally also believes itself to be that one visible Church.... Orthodox believe that they are the true Church, not on account of any personal merit, but by the grace of God.” Ware, *The Orthodox Church*, 239.

⁴⁰ Ware, *The Orthodox Church*, 240 (italics original).

⁴¹ Mantzaridis, *The Deification of Man*, 41.

- Deification begins at baptism. EO teaches that baptism effectively regenerates and cleanses the participant of sin.
 - Mantzaridis declares, “The regeneration of the image occurs immediately in man through the sanctifying power of the baptismal bath, which cleanses the soul of the stain of sin and restores it to its original brightness, while the possibility of realizing the ‘likeness’ is proffered initially in germinal form only, so that it may then be cultivated, not just of itself, but by man in his desire to attain God’s likeness.”⁴²
- While baptism begins *theosis*, the eucharist brings *theosis* about.
 - Lossky says, “the Eucharist is the central sacrament that does not cease restoring our nature by grace, and that constitutes the pledge of deification.”⁴³
- Hesychasm, Asceticism, and Prayer
 - Hesychasm (a movement started by the hermit Orthodox monks of Mount Athos in the 14th century that is dedicated to contemplation), asceticism, and prayer are related means that have to do with diminishing passions in order to contemplate God in stillness and silence.
 - The ultimate goal of asceticism in EO is to rise above the sphere of created things and to partake of the uncreated energies of God.
 - Staniloae claims, “The ultimate goal of asceticism is to free our nature not only from the movements of sinful appetites, but also from the ideas that appear in the mind after the cleansing from the passions. This is only to gain its independence from created things, which have enslaved our nature by the passions, and to make it long more for God.”⁴⁴
- In one sense EO sees everything that occurs in the EOC as a means of deification. As Nassif declares, “A sacrament happens whenever God’s grace is communicated through the created order. In one way or another,

⁴² Mantzaridis, *The Deification of Man*, 46.

⁴³ Lossky, *Dogmatic Theology*, 160.

⁴⁴ Staniloae, *Orthodox Spirituality*, 25.

everything in the Church is a sacrament.”⁴⁵ Some other means of EO’s *theosis* include icons⁴⁶ and *Theotokos* (the Virgin Mary).⁴⁷

- Nevertheless, the means of *theosis* explained above represent EO’s central ways to progress in divinization.
 - BIG PICTURE: EO teaches that the coming of Christ set the prospect of divinization back in motion. The nature of salvific deification concentrates on the deified humanity of Christ. According to EO, the divine nature of Christ overwhelmed His human nature so that He overcame the effects of the Fall—sin, corruption, and death. Now, through Christ, humanity is once again enabled to partake of divinity and become Gods by grace (i.e., divine energies)—not by nature. Cooperating with the energies of God in the context of the EOC is the general means of *theosis*. Yet, there are specific ways (sacraments/activities) that God communicates His energies, by which the faithful are deified.
- So, that was the 30,000-foot overview of EO’s *theosis*.
 - The philosophical background, historical development, the broad concept, and the soteriological concept of *theosis*.

What are some problems with EO’s *theosis*?

- Historical Problems
 - While the EOC claims that it is the one true, historic, universal, and apostolic church and that it worships as the early church did, that claim can and should be challenged and assessed.
 - Integration of Greek Philosophy

⁴⁵ Nassif, *The Evangelical Theology of the Orthodox Church*, 78.

⁴⁶ Ware writes, “God took a material body, thereby proving that matter can be redeemed: ‘The Word made flesh has deified the flesh,’ said John of Damascus. God has ‘deified’ matter, making it ‘spirit-bearing;’ and if flesh has become a vehicle of the Spirit, then so—though in a different way—can wood and paint. The Orthodox doctrine of icons is bound up with the Orthodox belief that the whole of God’s creation, material as well as spiritual, is to be redeemed and glorified.” Ware, *The Orthodox Church*, 32. Louth says, “They (icons) are objects of devotion, rather than works of art (though many of them are works of art of superlative quality); they are there to accompany our prayer, to mediate to us the presence of those to whom we pray; they are not there for aesthetic contemplation (though many of them are worthy of that). . . . The image or icon is part of a whole approach to theology, an approach that sees theology as illuminating the journey of the Christian into God, rather than some speculative enterprise.” Louth, *Introducing Eastern Orthodox Theology*, 113–14.

⁴⁷ Yannaras says, “She is the new Eve who recapitulates nature, not in that autonomy contrary to nature and in death, but in that participation in the Divinity which transcends nature and in the realization of eternal life. Because her own will restores the existential ‘end’ and purpose of creation generally, she gives meaning and hope to the ‘eager longing of creation.’ When the faithful seek the intercession of the Theotokos for their salvation, they are not seeking some kind of juridical mediation, but that their own ineffective will be contained within her own lifegiving will, her will which affirms the saving love of the incarnate God.” Yannaras, *Elements of Faith*, 100–1. Also, Alfeyev states, “The Orthodox Church addresses the Theotokos with the words ‘Most Holy Theotokos, save us,’ which show the participation of the Theotokos in the act of salvation and redemption (the received formula for saints is ‘pray to God for us’).” Alfeyev, *Doctrine and Teaching of the Orthodox Church*, 485.

- It is simply not true that the entire early church embraced Greek philosophy. Rather, some church fathers voiced strong opposition to the integration of philosophy with Christianity.
 - For a “softer” example, Tertullian stated, “Therefore he who shall have the fear of God, even if he be ignorant of all things else, if he has attained to the knowledge and truth of God, will possess full and perfect wisdom. This, however, is what philosophy has not clearly realized. For although, in their inquisitive disposition to search into all kinds of learning, *the philosophers* may seem to have investigated the sacred Scriptures themselves for their antiquity, and to have derived thence some of their opinions; yet because they have interpolated *these deductions* they prove that they have either despised them wholly or have not fully believed them, for in other cases also the simplicity of truth is shaken by the over-scrupulousness of an irregular belief, and that they therefore changed them, as their desire of glory grew, into products of their own mind.”⁴⁸
 - For a “harder” example, read the first three chapters of Tatian’s *Address of Tatian to the Greeks*. After setting forth “The Greeks Claim, Without Reason, The Invention of the Arts” (Ch.1), “The Vices and Errors of the Philosophers” (Ch. 2), and “Ridicule of the Philosophers” (Ch. 3), he concludes, “Wherefore be not led away by the solemn assemblies of philosophers who are no philosophers, who dogmatize one against the other, though each one vents but the crude fancies of the moment. They have, moreover, many collisions among themselves; each one hates the other; they indulge in conflicting opinions, and their arrogance makes them eager for the highest places. It would better become them, moreover, not to pay court to kings unbidden, nor to flatter men at the head of affairs, but to wait till the great ones come to them.”⁴⁹
- Later Platonic philosophy and the ideas of Gregory Palamas were not present at the time of the early church. However, much of contemporary EO is based on Palamas and later philosophy.
- Greek Fathers were not always in agreement. (Beware when you hear, “The Fathers say ...”)
 - Deserve to be understood in their own terms
 - Example: “image” and “likeness” in Genesis 1

⁴⁸ For example, see Tertullian, “*Ad Nationes*,” in *Latin Christianity: Its Founder, Tertullian*, ed. Alexander Roberts, James Donaldson, and A. Cleveland Coxe, trans. Peter Holmes, vol. 3, *ANF* (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Company, 1885), 130.

⁴⁹ Tatian, “Address of Tatian to the Greeks,” in *Fathers of the Second Century: Hermas, Tatian, Athenagoras, Theophilus, and Clement of Alexandria (Entire)*, ed. Alexander Roberts, James Donaldson, and A. Cleveland Coxe, trans. J. E. Ryland, vol. 2, *ANF* (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Company, 1885), 65–66.

- Patriarch Cyril Lucaris of Constantinople: Eastern Orthodoxy and Reformed Theology
 - In short, Lucaris was the Patriarch of Constantinople, who had been influenced by Protestant theology through his studies in the West and through his correspondence with Protestants.
 - However, it was the arrival of Antoine Leger in the Fall of AD 1628 that cemented Lucaris's Calvinistic theology. Leger was a Reformed pastor-theologian from Geneva who became a close friend and theological companion of Lucaris.
 - Lucaris wrote *The Eastern Confession of the Christian Faith* (ECCF). The confession, first published in AD 1629 at Geneva, presented a Reformed revision of the Eastern Orthodox faith.
 - On one hand, Lucaris produced the ECCF to uphold EO's traditional dogma (Trinity and the person of Christ).
 - On the other hand, Lucaris's confession was made to integrate his Protestant convictions.
 - Lucaris aimed to speak on behalf of the entire EOC.
 - Lucaris published this document as the Patriarch of Constantinople (position of prominence, historical prestige, and authoritative influence in the EOC).
 - Lucaris anticipated criticism and controversy for his confession.
 - Theology of ECCF
 - Chapter 2
 - Agrees with Reformed notion of *Sola Scriptura*. Argues Scripture is the final authority for and over the church. Thus, Scripture is the supreme source for soteriology.
 - Conflicts with EO's view that Scripture forms a part church tradition. Thus, the church has authority over the Scriptures. EO sees tradition as necessary for the Christian faith.
 - Chapter 3
 - Agrees with the Reformed doctrine of eternal unconditional election. Contends for God's monergistic acts in salvation.
 - Conflicts with EO's doctrine of free will (FW) and synergistic *theosis* (ST).
 - Chapter 13
 - Agrees with the Reformed concept of justification by faith alone. Sees faith as the instrument that lays hold of Christ's righteousness. Sees justification as the basis for sanctification.
 - Conflicts with EO's doctrine of ST and their emphasis on good works as necessary for salvation. EO rejects that justification is a result of eternal unconditional election.
 - Chapter 14

- Agrees with the Reformed notion of total depravity and regeneration by the Holy Spirit as necessary for man to do anything that is truly good.
 - Conflicts with EO's doctrine of FW, ST, and sin.
- Chapter 15
 - Agrees with the Reformed teaching that the sacraments consist of baptism and the Lord's Table only. States that genuine faith is necessary for the one who partakes of the sacrament.
 - Conflicts with EO's seven sacraments. Suggests that five mysteries of the EOC are illegitimate and thus could not accomplish spiritual progress.
- Lucaris and his ECCF embraced Reformed doctrine and largely disagreed with or were foreign to EO's traditional doctrine of *theosis*.
- The EOC's Response to Lucaris
 - The EOC's widespread response to Lucaris in confessions and councils underscores its historic dogmatic resistance to Reformed Protestant theology. The ECCF proved to be a primary stimulus for the EOC to form, articulate, and affirm its official position on much of the theology of the Protestant Reformation.
 - The Confession of Peter Mogila
 - First produced in AD 1638, Mogila's confession remains a significant influence in the EOC today.
 - The confession is written in catechetical form and serves as an educational tool for the EOC rather than as a direct attack on Lucaris's ECCF. Nevertheless, Mogila's confession was a response to Lucaris's confession.
 - Mogila's confession contradicts the ECCF in multiple ways.
 - Part 1: Q&A 1
 - Affirms faith and good works as necessary for salvation.
 - Contrasts with Ch. 13 of the ECCF, which insisted that faith alone in Christ alone justifies and saves, and that good works are the necessary witness of justification.
 - Part 1: Q&A 26
 - Asserts that God only predestines good. Protects EO's concept of free will and synergism.
 - Contrasts with Ch. 3 of the ECCF, which states that God both elects and rejects sinners solely based on His divine will. Contrasts with Ch. 14, which says that the free will of man is dead in the unregenerate.

- Part1: Q&A 99 and 101
 - Adhere to EO's view of sacramental *theosis* and the necessity of faith and good works.
 - Contrast with Ch. 13 of the ECCF, which affirmed justification by faith alone as the ground for good works. Contrast with Ch. 15, which declared baptism and the eucharist to be the only biblical sacraments.
 - Part 3: Q&A 4
 - Affirms faith and good works as necessary for salvation.
 - Contrasts with Ch. 13 of the ECCF, which affirmed justification by faith alone as the basis for progressive sanctification.
- Mogila's statements on faith and good works opposed Lucaris's doctrine of justification by faith alone in Christ alone. The strongest counters to the ECCF in Mogila's confession were against the Reformed concepts of predestination and free will.
- The Confession of Dositheus of Jerusalem
 - Unlike Mogila, Dositheus, Patriarch of Jerusalem from AD 1669–1707, wrote a confession in AD 1672 to counter Lucaris's ECCF point by point.
 - Decree 2
 - Dositheus upholds EO's belief that the church is infallible and has authority over the Scriptures.
 - Dositheus rejects Lucaris's notion that the Scriptures are the final authority for the church.
 - Decree 3
 - Dositheus acclaims EO's doctrines of free will and synergistic salvation.
 - Dositheus rejects Lucaris's notion of eternal unconditional election.
 - Decree 13
 - Dositheus affirms EO's doctrine of works as necessary for justification and sees justification as a process without any legal connotations.
 - Dositheus rejects justification by faith alone and the imputed righteousness of Christ to the believer as the basis for sanctification.
 - Decree 14
 - Dositheus upholds EO's doctrine of free will after the Fall and synergism in salvation.

- Dositheus rejects Reformed monergism, regeneration, justification by faith, and that sanctification is rooted in justification.
- Decree 15
 - Dositheus affirms EO's seven sacraments system and indicates that the sacraments are necessary for salvation.
 - Dositheus rejects the Reformed concepts of two sacraments and that sincere faith is necessary to benefit from the sacraments.
- Overall, Dositheus's confession was a comprehensive dismantling of the ECCF. Dositheus repeatedly rejected the Reformed soteriology of the ECCF. Furthermore, he regularly anathematized and called heretical those who adhere to the concepts in the ECCF.
- Councils
 - The EOC acknowledges two kinds of councils.
 - First, the EOC affirms the seven ecumenical (general) councils as authoritative and infallible.
 - Second, the EOC also recognizes local church councils. These councils are not viewed as inherently authoritative or infallible.
 - However, a local council's rulings can become authoritative (with a similar kind of authority as a general council) if they are accepted by the rest of the EOC.
 - This is important because both Mogila's and Dositheus's confessions were ratified by local church councils and accepted by the rest of the church.
 - Therefore, the confessions of Mogila and Dositheus hold authority, akin to the ecumenical councils, in the EOC.
- Council of Constantinople (AD 1638)
 - This Council set out to condemn Lucaris for his conduct and confession.
 - After addressing portions of the ECCF, the decree from this Council pronounces a total of 13 anathemas (11 against Lucaris, 2 against Lucaris sympathizers).
 - Lucaris was condemned for his views on predestination, election, and justification by faith apart from works.
 - The decree of this Council was repeated and upheld at the Council of Jerusalem (COJ) AD 1672.
- Councils of Constantinople and Jassy (AD 1642)
 - Can be considered as one synod that consists of a letter sent from Constantinople to the synod at Jassy.
 - The acts of these Councils find every chapter of the ECCF, except the 7th, to contain Calvinistic heresy.

- All chapters of the ECCF, except the 7th, are rejected and those who would adhere to the doctrine therein are anathematized.
 - This Council ratified the confession of Peter Mogila.
 - The acts of this Council were repeated and upheld at COJ.
- Council of Jerusalem (AD 1672)
 - This Council centered on Lucaris and Reformed theology.
 - The Council denied that Lucaris actually wrote the ECCF.
 - This Council repeated and ratified the Council of Constantinople (AD 1638) and the Council of Jassy (AD 1642).
 - Dositheus's confession was ratified by this Council.
- Overall, the EOC has shown strong opposition to Reformed soteriology and the ECCF. Each point of the ECCF has been opposed by the confessions and councils presented above at least once.
 - The EOC denies eternal unconditional election, justification by faith alone in Christ alone, justification as the ground for progressive sanctification, monergistic regeneration, and man's pervasive inability to do anything pleasing to God prior to regeneration.
 - In terms of EO's *theosis*, the confessions and councils above affirm man's free will and good works as necessary to synergistically cooperate with God through the deifying agency of the EOC's sacraments.
- Biblical/Theological Problems
 - Authority of Scripture
 - Psalm 19; 2 Timothy 3:16
 - Doctrine of Sin
 - Romans 3
 - Genesis 1:26 "Image and Likeness"
 - According to EO
 - Overall, according to EO, the terms "image" and "likeness" in Genesis 1:26 form part of the biblical basis for its doctrine of *theosis*.
 - For EO, God's image is an integral reality of mankind that can be accessed by God, but is under man's free control, so that man might be deified. Thus, EO says *theosis* was the initial God-given task/vocation for mankind.
 - Additionally, EO sees a distinction between the "image" and the "likeness" of God in man. The image is the potential for *theosis*, while the likeness is the realization and progress of *theosis*.
 - Furthermore, EO contends that to be created in God's image at least entails absolute human freedom.
 - Lastly, EO believes that the absolute freedom of mankind was not hindered through the Fall.
 - Exegetical Assessment of Genesis 1:26

- If God's image and likeness is the ontological reality of man at creation, then EO's emphasis on man being created in the "image" of God to progress in the "likeness" of God by freely cooperating with God's energies is not warranted. This lack of warrant depends, in part, on the legitimacy, or lack thereof, of EO's sharp distinction between the terms "image" and "likeness" in Genesis 1:26.
- Response to EO's Distinction between "Image" and "Likeness"

Genesis 1	Genesis 5	Genesis 9
"Then God said, 'Let's make man in our <i>image</i> , after our <i>likeness</i> .'" (v. 26a)	"When God created man, he made him in the <i>likeness</i> of God." (v. 1b)	"... 'for God made man in his own <i>image</i> .'" (v. 6c)
"So God created man in his own <i>image</i> , in the <i>image</i> of God he created him; male and female he created them." (v. 27)	"When Adam had lived 130 years, he fathered a son in his own <i>likeness</i> , after his <i>image</i> , and named him Seth." (v. 3)	

- If it is true that "likeness" does not refer to *theosis*, then Genesis 1 is silent on deification as man's first task. Nevertheless, Genesis 1:28 explicitly states man's God-given task at creation, which has been referred to as the "kingdom mandate." Man, being created in God's image and likeness, was blessed by God to procreate and exercise dominion over the earth as God's mediatorial representatives. Thus, Genesis sets forth the kingdom mandate, rather than *theosis*, as the primordial task given to man by God.
- Regarding man's freedom, Augustine's concept of true freedom and choice is helpful to observe the kind of freedom that man had and exercised before the Fall.
 - True freedom: refers to man's divinely enabled ability to think, speak, and act in a manner pleasing to God in accord with God's word.
 - Choice: refers to man's ability to make decisions between options and act accordingly so that man is responsible for his decisions and actions whether good or bad.
- The distinction between choice and true freedom helps to identify the biblical concept of the Fall's effect on man's freedom. Human choice remained after the Fall; however, human true freedom was lost in the Fall. Scripture teaches God's image is distorted, yet remains, after the Fall. However, contrary to EO's doctrine, man's loss of true freedom is one way that God's image was disfigured through the Fall. As a result of the loss of true freedom, man can

no longer freely choose to obey God. Rather, man freely chooses to sin (Gen 6:5).

- In all, EO's understanding of Genesis 1:26 and its theological assertions regarding God's image and likeness are not biblically valid.
- 2 Peter 1:3–4
 - According to EO
 - Hilarion Alfeyev says, “The theme of deification grows from the roots of the New Testament teaching that people are called to become ‘partakers of the divine nature’ (2 Pet 1:4).”
 - Harry Boosalis suggests that EO's entire concept of salvation (i.e., theosis) is identified in 2 Peter 1:4.
 - Dean Stamatis states that the “Orthodox do indeed mean more than what Protestants mean with their doctrine of sanctification.” Stamatis goes on to suggest that the phrase “partakers of the divine nature” in 2 Peter 1:4 is more than a metaphor for sanctification, but that it refers to EO's *theosis*.
 - Michael Pomazansky cites 2 Peter 1:3–9 as evidence for his claim that “both the spiritual birth and further spiritual growth of a man occur through the mutual action of two principles. One of these is the Grace of the Holy Spirit; the other, man's opening of his heart for the reception of it... in other words personal effort for the reception... of Divine gifts.”
 - Norman Russell cites 2 Peter 1:3–7 from the Jerusalem Bible, then says, “This translation makes the relationship between divine action and human response particularly clear... Our admission to the eternal kingdom depends on the moral effort we make.”
 - Exegetical Assessment of 2 Peter 1:3–4
 - vv. 1–2: The Preceding Context of 2 Peter 1:3–4
 - Verses 1–2 identify the position (i.e., sinners who have been converted by God's sovereign grace through faith in Christ and who abound in the knowledge of God and Jesus) wherein one partakes of the divine nature. Unlike EO's *theosis*, the opening two verses of 2 Peter suggest that God's gift of justifying faith in Christ is the logical and positional basis for the experience of partaking of the divine nature (vv. 3–4).
 - Yet, what it means to become partakers of the divine nature needs to be explained.
 - vv. 3–4: The Primary Passage of Concern
 - In all, 2 Peter 1:3 reveals that Christ's divine power grants believers all that is necessary for a godly life through knowledge of Him.
 - In other words, the necessities for a godly life have been granted by Christ through the knowledge of Him, who called Christians by His own glory and excellence so that they will grow in godliness. In contrast to EO's doctrine of

- deification, 2 Peter 1:3 declares the sovereign, powerful, and monergistic work in conversion.
- In short, v. 3 builds on the explanation initiated in vv. 1–2 regarding how Christians can partake of the divine nature.
 - If v. 3 establishes how believers become partakers of the divine nature, then v. 4 reveals in what sense Christians partake of the divine nature.
 - The term *κοινωνοὶ* guards against any notion of becoming divine in an ontological or metaphysical sense. Specifically, Christian believers *γένησθε* (*genēsthe*) “become” *κοινωνοὶ* “partakers” (plural nominative noun) of the *φύσεως* “nature” (singular genitive noun), which is modified by *θείας* “divine” (singular genitive adjective). In short, believers become partakers; they do not become divine.
 - Overall, 2 Peter 1:4 reveals that Christians become sharers in the godly characteristics of moral holiness and eternal life.
 - Overall, vv. 3–4 do not suggest that Christians become divine through EO’s synergistic deification. Rather, this passage indicates that, as a result of divine sovereign grace through the knowledge of Christ, believers become partakers of the divine quality of moral excellence in the present and the divine quality of immortality/incorruptibility ultimately at Christ’s return.
 - vv. 5–11: The Succeeding Context of 2 Peter 1:3–4
 - While EO maintains that man must freely cooperate and synergistically partake in divine energies for *theosis*, 2 Peter presents the sole works of God the Father and Christ in salvation (vv. 1–4) before mention of human response (v. 5ff). Not only does 2 Peter speak of divine monergism in salvation prior to human response, but also believers’ moral response is based on God’s grace alone.
 - In this way, 2 Peter demonstrates that becoming partakers of the divine nature is rooted in God’s monergistic sovereign grace rather than EO’s synergism. That said, 2 Peter does insist on post-conversion toil.
 - EO claims that vv. 5–9 substantiate their doctrine of synergistic *theosis*. However, EO seemingly misses the logical order of the text. Believers diligently work *from* faith not *to* faith.
 - Therefore, any mention of synergism in 2 Peter 1:1–11 must account for divine monergism in salvation, as well as divine sovereign grace that enables believers to “make every effort.”

- If EO's *theosis* simply meant that believers undergo moral transformation through their knowledge of Christ that ultimately results in eternal life by the sovereign acts and works of God, then the doctrine would be consistent with 2 Peter 1:1–11. However, EO's doctrine of divinization goes beyond, and even opposes, 2 Peter 1:1–11.
- EO's attempt to set forth 2 Peter 1:3–4 as substantiating their concept of deification is untenable. 2 Peter 1:3–4 and its surrounding context clarify what is, and what is not meant by the phrase “partakers of the divine nature.” EO's *theosis* is not presented in 2 Peter 1:3–4.
- The “Energies of God”
 - According to EO
 - EO contends that God is unknowable and inaccessible in His essence, but that He is knowable, accessible, and reveals Himself through His energies.
 - EO claims that both the essence and the energies of God are uncreated and truly God, yet God's essence and His energies are distinct.
 - According to EO, God's energies are His method of revelation, His conveyance of knowledge to creatures, and, most important to this dissertation, His ultimate means of *theosis*.
 - Lossky indicates that deified man does not become God's essence, but that deified man does become God's energies to some extent. In other words, in EO's *theosis* man becomes God—God's energies—without becoming God—God's essence.
 - Theological Assessment of EO's “Energies” of God
 - God's “Energies” and Scripture
 - The prevailing version of EO's *theosis* that emphasizes becoming God's uncreated energies without becoming God's uncreated essence is not found in Scripture.
 - 2 Peter 1:3–4 demonstrates that believers become partakers of godly characteristics rather than becoming God's uncreated energies. Moreover, Scripture indicates that believers become new *creatures* in Christ (2 Cor 5:17; Eph 2:10; 4:22–24) rather than becoming His uncreated energies.
 - Thus, the notion of believers mystically becoming uncreated divine energies, while somehow maintaining their createdness obfuscates these biblical statements.
 - God's “Energies” and Man's Knowledge of God
 - Another problem with EO's doctrine of God's energies is that it unnecessarily complicates man's knowledge of God.
 - EO's emphasis on apophaticism and mysticism necessitates that God is completely unknowable in His essence.

Therefore, EO asserts that God is only knowable in His energies.

- Scripture demonstrates that God can be known (Jer 9:24; John 17:3). The doctrine of God's incomprehensibility teaches that God can be truly known without being exhaustively known.
- While EO's essence/energies distinction seeks to uphold the Creator/creature distinction and posits that only God's energies can be known, in reality this distinction, as Ryan McGraw says, "complicates matters by creating a third category of being (i.e., God's energies)."
- In sum, EO's essence/energies distinction unnecessarily confounds the biblical basis of man's knowledge of God. Furthermore, this distinction is without warrant apart from EO's *theosis*.
- God's "Energies" and Logic
 - Robert Morey asks, "If God is God in essence because He is uncreated and eternal, and His energies are uncreated and eternal, then are not His energies part of His divine essence and being?"
 - Then he asks, "Thus, how can you become one with God's energies without becoming one with His essence?"
 - He concludes, "There is no way out of the self-contradictions inherent in the 'energy versus essence' dichotomy. The attempt to describe both the energy and essence of God as 'divine' violates the laws of logic such as the law of non-contradiction."
 - As such, EO's essence/energies distinction is illogical.
- The essence/energies distinction does not stem from the Bible. Rather, the dichotomy is derived from EO's *theosis*, which seeks to account for God's utter transcendence—His essence—and also seeks to account for how man can become God—His energies. Thus, EO's essence/energies distinction is necessitated by its own doctrine of deification rather than Scripture.
- The Sacraments (Mysteries)
 - According to EO
 - Synergistic participation in the sacraments provide fundamental access to God's deifying energies.
 - EO's baptism is believed to commence *theosis*.
 - As such, EO's baptism is foundational to its doctrine of deification and foundational to the advancement of *theosis* through the remaining sacraments of the EOC. If EO's teaching on baptism as the initiation into *theosis* is found to be inadequate, then EO's concept of sacramental deification becomes suspect. That is, if EO's baptism does not initiate *theosis* then EO's remaining sacraments should not be construed as contributing to deification.

- Theological Assessment of EO's Baptism
 - Acts 2:37–41
 - EO's belief that baptism bestows salvific blessings and commences *theosis* is in opposition to Acts 2:37–41.
 - Acts 2:37–41 indicates:
 - initial repentance is necessary for salvation (v. 38),
 - repentance is the result of both the external call of the gospel message (v. 37) and the internal call of God Himself upon a sinner (v. 39), and
 - those who were baptized were those who received the Word only (vv. 38, 41).
 - In this way, Acts 2:37–41 shows that water baptism, rather than being an effective means of salvation or the beginning of divinization, is an outward act signifying salvation.
 - It is not those who merely undergo the act of baptism that receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. Rather, it is those who have received the gospel message, repented from sin, and trusted in Christ that receive the gift of the Holy Spirit by God's gracious and effective call so that they might publicly declare their conversion through the act of baptism.
 - 1 Peter 3:21
 - While the isolated clause, "Baptism... saves you," could be used to argue for EO's baptism, Peter's main idea is that baptism "saves" insofar as it pictures a believer's union with Christ.
 - Peter posits two qualifications of his statement to clarify his main idea.
 - First, Peter writes baptism saves, "not as a removal of dirt from the body" (v. 21). This negation shows that the mere act of water baptism does not bestow blessings of salvation. Thus, EO's contention that the sacrament of baptism is infused with God's energies to grant soteriological benefits and initiate deification controverts this text.
 - Next, Peter offers a positive qualifier. Baptism saves not as a physical washing, "but as an appeal (or pledge) to God for a good conscience, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ" (v. 21). It is apparent that this clause sets forth baptism as an outward sign of salvation.
 - In other words, 1 Peter 3:21, as well as Acts 2:37–41, indicates that baptism is a symbol of God's salvific acts through the resurrection of Jesus Christ expressed outwardly by individuals who have heard and believed the gospel.

- The Word of God is the primary external method wherein God brings about faith and growth in Christ in His elect by the Spirit. In short, the Word of God is the Spirit's external means that brings elect sinners to salvation. This relationship between the Word of God and salvation is further related to baptism in that baptism is an outward visible act that signifies the salvation produced by the Spirit through the Word of God.
- Although EO maintains that baptism in the EOC effectively cleanses one from sin and begins their journey of *theosis*, the theological assessment above shows that EO's assertion is invalid. Both Acts 2:37–41 and 1 Peter 3:21 necessitate that water baptism is a visible sign of salvation rather than an effective means beginning the process of salvation.

Practical Considerations

- A positive portrayal of biblical soteriology is the best way to combat soteriological falsehood/obscurity.
- American Protestant Converts to Eastern Orthodoxy
 - I interviewed a handful of converts to EO from
 - Spiritual Experience
 - Historicism
 - Masculinity
- Eastern Orthodox Countries
 - Personal Testimonies
 - In God's good providence, during my PhD studies two Romanian women attended the church that I pastor. These women grew up in the EOC of Romania and later converted to Protestantism. One of those women is a member of our church and I interviewed during my studies. I want to quote her, but I am going to keep her name undisclosed simply because I did not ask her permission to share her name during this recording.
 - A Romanian woman, is a convert to evangelical Christianity from the Romanian Orthodox Church. She moved to the United States in 1992, after having lived in her home country of Romania for over forty years in the context of Eastern Orthodoxy.
 - She said, "Orthodox Christianity is a religion where man tries to reach God by doing things to please God, but it does not work out from a love for God. Orthodox religion does not change the heart, it does not change people from the inside, it does not have any impact on the people, it is an empty religion."
 - She said that the Romanian Orthodox Church taught her "to behave, to do good, to pray, and to confess," but she does not remember ever hearing about *theosis* or deification.
 - She recalled that she was taught that the purpose of the sacraments was "to be clean."
 - In Georgescu's context the depth of doctrine of deification was not taught to the ordinary Eastern Orthodox Christian.

From her experience, it seems that being a member of the Romanian Orthodox Church and partaking of the sacraments made one clean before God. As far as the societal outcome of EO's theology in Georgescu's situation, she said that her fellow Romanian Orthodox Christians "tried to be pious. They tried to do good deeds, but they also did so many other bad things. There was not a self-awareness of sin."

- From Georgescu's perspective, "The work of Christ is more emphasized in the Roman Catholic Church" than the Eastern Orthodox Church.
- There is another man whom some of you may know or have heard of. Pavel Togobitsky is a Russian man, who teaches Eastern Orthodox theology at an evangelical seminary in Russia. He is also a convert from the Russian Orthodox Church to evangelical Christianity. Moreover, he was the third reader of my dissertation. But before I knew he would review my work, I had the opportunity to interview him in the early stage of my PhD studies.
 - When asked about the Russian Orthodox understanding of deification, Togobitsky said, "In Russia there are two types of Orthodox people, maybe two levels. There are academic Orthodox people in the seminaries, the academies, and the Orthodox priests. And then there are ordinary people. On the academic level, they regularly use the terms '*theosis*' and 'deification' to speak of soteriology. But on the ordinary man's level, most Orthodox people never hear these terms. They are never used in ordinary church life. So, if you speak with an ordinary Orthodox man, he may not understand what you mean by 'deification.' But if you speak with an Orthodox priest with a theological education, he will know about deification and would believe in deification."
 - According to Togobitsky, the Russian Orthodox Church is divided by one's education about *theosis*, or lack thereof. This division has societal, theological, and practical outcomes. In terms of societal and theological outcomes an elitism forms with the academic class over the ordinary class. In terms of practical outcomes, those who have no knowledge deification, are less inclined to take their spirituality seriously.
 - Concerning the ordinary Russian Orthodox man's concept of salvation, Togobitsky stated, "His typical understanding would be that if you are part of the Orthodox Church, if you sometimes take part in church services, pray, light candles, and so on, then maybe after death everything will be okay. This is not so clear a picture of salvation. Of course, the concept of deification influences this situation because deification is the process of one's whole life. And people may walk at different speeds and do different activities, so for many people they hope that after death, somehow,

something good will happen. However, there is no strong influence over everyday life and there is no deep understanding of Christianity and salvation, in particular.”

- Togobitsky went on to give a statistic to illustrate the ordinary man’s experience in the Orthodox church, saying, “Sixty percent of people in Russia say they are a member of the Orthodox Church. But on Christian holidays, such as Christmas or Easter, only three to five percent of people go to churches. On regular days [non-holidays], the percentage is even lower. So, most Orthodox people never go to churches and almost never follow Orthodox Church requirements.” From Togobitsky’s perspective, the typical Russian Orthodox person thinks, “being Orthodox means being on the right side. They think, ‘I am on the right side, God is with us,’ and that is enough for most people.”
 - In the Russian Orthodox Church, the lack of theological education among the ordinary people leads to a minimalistic, if any, approach to *theosis*. It seems that the ordinary man’s hope of something good occurring to him after death stems from the fact that he is a member of the Russian Orthodox Church by birth and by baptism, rather than from an even simple understanding of biblical truth.
- Togobitsky specifically spoke to the range of personal and societal outcome of *theosis* in the Russian Orthodox Church. He said, “The Russian Orthodox style of life is that there is not large interest in everyday church activities. Closely connected to this, is the Orthodox understanding of salvation as the Way. If it is the Way then you may start in time, or even after your death, and so, many Russian people do not pay attention to salvation because of this understanding. But there is another group of people who understand salvation as the Way, but who pay huge attention to the process, and asceticism, and the use of sacred saints, and everyday activities. So, the community is divided into two parts. There are small extremely active parts who try to do all the activities, and sometimes with fear. There are other parts who do not pay attention to the Way of salvation. But the conception of Way, the conception of deification, created this situation.”
 - Togobitsky indicated two outcomes on a personal level. First, the vast majority of people disregard deification, even as members of the Russian Orthodox Church, largely because they believe salvation will occur after death. The second personal outcome is that there are a select few, who being acquainted with *theosis*, take the process very seriously. However, this second group is far from the norm. On the societal level, though the majority of Russia identifies as Christian through the Russian Orthodox Church, the nation knows little of Christ and His salvation.

Thus, the society of Russia's Orthodox Church is Christian, largely in name only.

- I have been able to connect on a few brief occasions with a missionary in the Republic of Georgia, who simply spoke of the spiritual darkness of the EOC in Georgia. He indicated that people simply believe they are God's chosen people as members of the EOC, but that there was no spiritual vitality. Indeed, prayer for faithful missionaries in Eastern Orthodox countries as they proclaim Christ.

Questions?