

THE INFLUENCE OF THEOSIS ON EARLY EVANGELICALSIM

By

Kevin Schular, B.A.

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AUTHOR: Rev. Kevin Schular

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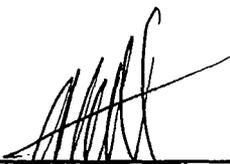
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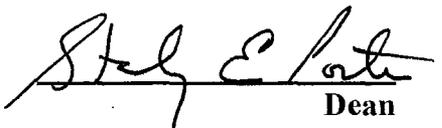
**KEVIN SCHULAR**

**is hereby accepted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of**

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**First Reader and Advisor**

  
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**Second Reader**

  
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**Dean**

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## Abstract

### The Influence of Theosis on Early Evangelicalism

Kevin Schular  
McMaster Divinity College  
M.A. in Christian Studies, 2007

The purpose of this thesis is to discover the influence that the Patristic father's concept of deification, called "theosis", had on Evangelicalism. The writings of the Patristic Fathers on theosis were grouped into four main categories: participation in the divine nature, recapitulation, union of the soul with God and progress of the soul in eternity. These four categories create a template that was used in determining the influence of theosis on Evangelicalism. In the middle of the eighteenth century a powerful religious movement swept across the British Isles and its possessions in North America, growing into what is known today as Evangelicalism. This research will show that theosis was present in the theology of early evangelical leaders such as John and Charles Wesley, Jonathan Edwards and in particular, George Whitefield. While many good biographies are available on Whitefield, little has been written concerning the influence of theosis of his ministry.

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## INTRODUCTION

In the middle of the eighteenth century a powerful religious movement swept across the British Isles and its possessions in North America. Initially referred to as the Great Awakening in America and the Methodist Revival in England, this movement grew into what is known today as Evangelicalism. This period of church history produced many outstanding leaders with a deep commitment to follow Jesus Christ. Their dedication and passion gave leadership to the fledgling movement and saw the renewal of the Christian church among English-speaking peoples.

The purpose of this thesis is to discover the influence that the Patristic father's concept of deification, called "theosis", had on Evangelicalism. This research will show that theosis was present in the theology of early evangelical leaders such as John and Charles Wesley, Jonathan Edwards and George Whitefield. They did not refer to theosis by name, and the possible reasons for that will be delineated. However, the premise of this thesis is that they personally held these views and also incorporated the main tenets of theosis in their theologies and writing.

Scholars have already speculated on theosis in the Wesleys and Edwards. Michael J. Christensen has written how John Wesley's idea of perfectionism is attributed to his reading of theosis.<sup>1</sup> Also, Paul Ramsey shows there is substantial evidence of theosis being incorporated into Edwards' theology.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Michael Christensen, "Theosis and Sanctification: John Wesley's Reformulation of a Patristic Doctrine", *Wesleyan Theological Journal*, 31, No. 2, (1996): 71-94.

<sup>2</sup> Paul Ramsey, ed., *Works of Jonathan Edwards*, Volume 8, (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1989).

A contemporary of the above men, George Whitefield, was also greatly used of God in both England and Colonial America. He was a colleague of the Wesleys and an admirer of Edwards. Virtually nothing has been written on the influence of theosis in his life and ministry.<sup>3</sup> By researching the primary sources from these four men, and especially that of Whitefield, this thesis will attempt to rectify the gap in this area of study on his life and ministry.

### A. Literature Review

To appreciate the question of this thesis, a precise definition and thorough explanation of theosis must be clearly understood. This is the focus of the first chapter and it required reading primary sources from the early church fathers as well as referencing many scholarly books and articles. Although theosis has been studied, discussed and critiqued for nineteen centuries it continues to be relevant in the present. Several contemporary academic works are available to read and compare with the ancient writings on this topic. Three excellent works from the twenty-first century were especially helpful for this study: *Theosis: Deification in Christian Theology*, edited by Stephan Finlan and Vladimir Kharlamov,<sup>4</sup> Emil Bartos' *Deification in Eastern Orthodox Theology*<sup>5</sup> and *The Mystery of Faith*, by Bishop Hilarion Alfeyev.<sup>6</sup> These three books thoroughly document the growth of the doctrine of theosis from the early church to the present. Their research reveals that the various proponents of theosis through the centuries upheld the same basic principles of the doctrine. Alfeyev wrote from the

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<sup>3</sup> The only article discovered that even alludes to Whitefield and theosis is Robert Rakestraw, "Becoming Like God: An Evangelical Doctrine of Theosis," *Journal of Evangelical Theology* (1997): 257-269. See Chapter Five for fuller discussion.

<sup>4</sup> Stephen Finlan and Vladimir Kharlamov, eds., *Theosis: Deification in Christian Theology* (Eugene, Oregon: Pickwick Publications, 2006).

<sup>5</sup> Emil Bartos, *Deification in Eastern Orthodox Theology* (Carlisle, UK: Paternoster Press, 1999).

<sup>6</sup> Bishop Hilarion Alfeyev, *The Mystery of Faith* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 2002).

position as a bishop in the Orthodox Church while Finlan and Kharlamov wrote and edited a series of articles that were published in one volume. While being very thorough on the subject of theosis, they did not deal with how evangelicals have understood or incorporated theosis into their theology.

Other Orthodox writers were read to grasp fully the teaching of theosis. Vladimir Lossky's three books *In the Image and Likeness of God*,<sup>7</sup> *Orthodox Theology*,<sup>8</sup> and *The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church*<sup>9</sup> each contributed pertinent historical data to this thesis as well as how to apply spiritually the principles of theosis to one's life. Robert Stephanopoulos' *The New Man*<sup>10</sup> was valuable because it was written in a less formal manner than Lossky. *The Orthodox Way*,<sup>11</sup> by Bishop Kallistos Ware and *Deification in Eastern Orthodox Theology*<sup>12</sup> by Ware's doctoral student Emil Bartos rounded out the study of the history and main tenets of theosis. Other articles read for the chapter on theosis included Trevor Ling's *A History of Religion East and West*,<sup>13</sup> Anthony J. Tambasco's *A Theology of Atonement and Paul's Vision of Christianity*<sup>14</sup> and Georges Florovsky's *Creation and Redemption*.<sup>15</sup>

Gregory of Nyssa had direct or indirect influence on the theology of the early evangelicals that are the focus of this thesis. For this reason Gregory's writings were chosen as representative of the Patristic Fathers' teaching on theosis. His many sermons

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<sup>7</sup> Vladimir Lossky, *In the Image and Likeness of God* (London: Mowbrays Publisher, 1974).

<sup>8</sup> Vladimir Lossky, *Orthodox Theology* (New York: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1978).

<sup>9</sup> Vladimir Lossky, *The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church* (London: Clarke and Co., 1957).

<sup>10</sup> Robert Stephanopoulos, *The New Man* (New Brunswick, NJ: Standard Press, 1973).

<sup>11</sup> Bishop Kalistos Ware, *The Orthodox Way* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1995).

<sup>12</sup> Emil Bartos, *Deification in Eastern Orthodox Theology* (London: Paternoster Press, 2003).

<sup>13</sup> Trevor Ling, *A History of Religion East and West* (Toronto: Macmillan Publisher, 1968).

<sup>14</sup> Anthony J. Tambasco, *A Theology of Atonement and Paul's Vision of Christianity* (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1991).

<sup>15</sup> Georges Florovsky, *Creation and Redemption, Volume Three* (Belmont, MA: Norland Publishing, 1976).

and writings were accessed for this manuscript from the Classic Christian Ethereal Library.<sup>16</sup> The translation of Gregory's works was under the editorial supervision of Philip Schaff, professor of Church History at Union Theological Seminary, but in Schaff's introduction he acknowledges that he must "offer a special acknowledgment of the invaluable help he has received from the exact and philosophical scholarship of the Rev. J. H. Lupton, Surmaster of St. Paul's School."<sup>17</sup> Several scholarly works that delineated certain aspects of Gregory's teachings were also referenced. In *Grace and Human Freedom according to St. Gregory of Nyssa*<sup>18</sup> Verna E.F. Harrison carefully explores the synergy between freedom of the will and God's will. *The Platonism of Gregory of Nyssa*<sup>19</sup> by Harold Cherniss and *Cosmic Man, The Divine Presence*<sup>20</sup> by Paulos Mar Gregorios were both beneficial in showing how Gregory chose to use some platonic concepts while rejecting others for being unbiblical. Werner Jaeger's *Two Rediscovered Works of Ancient Christian Literature: Gregory of Nyssa and Macarius*<sup>21</sup> was an excellent source to show the link between Gregory and Macarius the Egyptian, whose writings would make such an impression on the Wesley brothers.

The discussion of theosis would not be complete without referencing the impact Plato and Neo-Platonism had upon the formation of this doctrine. Various works from Plato were read including portions of *Phaedo*, *Timmaeus*, and *Republic*<sup>22</sup> to discern

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<sup>16</sup> Gregory of Nyssa, "Dogmatic Treatises." *Classic Christian Ethereal Library*, Database on-line. <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/schaff/npnf205.viii.html>. Accessed March 16, 2005.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> Verna E.F. Harrison, *Grace and Human Freedom according to St. Gregory of Nyssa* (Queenston, ON: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1992).

<sup>19</sup> Harold Cherniss, *The Platonism of Gregory of Nyssa* (New York: Burt Franklin Publishers, 1971).

<sup>20</sup> Paulos Mar Gregorios, *Cosmic Man, the Divine Presence* (New York: Paragon House, 1988).

<sup>21</sup> Werner Jaeger, *Two Rediscovered Works of Ancient Christian Literature: Gregory of Nyssa and Macarius* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1954).

<sup>22</sup> *The Portable Plato*, Scott Buchanan, ed., (New York: Penguin Books, 1976).

Plato's use of forms, his view of the soul and immortality. The Neo-Platonist, Plotinus, and a section of his *Enneads*<sup>23</sup> were also read since it was Neo-Platonism that most directly influenced the Patristic Fathers' thought.

Contemporary evangelical writers were also researched. Daniel B. Clendenin's *Eastern Orthodox Christianity: A Western Perspective*<sup>24</sup> and *Eastern Orthodox Theology: A Contemporary Reader*<sup>25</sup> were helpful in giving western perspective on the teachings of theosis as preserved in the Eastern Orthodox Church. Clark H. Pinnock's *Flame of Love: A Theology of the Holy Spirit*<sup>26</sup> was invaluable in detailing the concept of union of the soul with God as one of the main tenets of theosis. Veli-Matti Karkkainen's *Pneumatology*<sup>27</sup> was helpful in the same vein as well as recounting the dialogue in recent years between Western Churches (eg. Lutherans and Anglicans) and the Eastern Orthodox Church. *Spiritual Theology*<sup>28</sup> by Simon Chan gives a concise study of theosis and, since he writes from an Asian perspective, adds to the discussion by showing how the doctrine could be better integrated among western evangelicals. *Becoming Like God: An Evangelical Doctrine of Theosis* by Robert V. Rakestraw provided good definitions and presented an excellent apology for reemphasizing the teaching of theosis among evangelicals today. These five evangelical writers not only outline and defend theosis but

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<sup>23</sup> Plotinus, *The Enneads*. <http://etext.library.adelaide.edu.au/mirror/classics.mit.edu/Plotinus/enneads.html>. Accessed January 4, 2006.

<sup>24</sup> Daniel B. Clendenin, *Eastern Orthodox Theology: A Contemporary Reader* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1995).

<sup>25</sup> Daniel B. Clendenin, *Eastern Orthodox Christianity: A Western Perspective* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1994).

<sup>26</sup> Clark H. Pinnock, *Flame of Love, A Theology of the Holy Spirit* (Downer's Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 1996).

<sup>27</sup> Veli-Matti Karkkainen, *Pneumatology: The Holy Spirit in Ecumenical, International and Contextual Perspective* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic Press, 2002).

<sup>28</sup> Simon Chan, *Spiritual Theology: A Systematic Study of the Christian Life* (Downer's Grove, IL, Intervarsity Press, 1998).

seek to show how evangelicalism has been shaped by, and benefited from, theosis.

Material for the chapter on Jonathan Edwards was plentiful and required careful selection to avoid being overwhelmed by the sheer volume of research. He wrote several major theological works and many of his sermons have been reprinted or are available online as well. Primary sources for Edwards' incorporation of theosis in his theology included studying sermons such as *A Divine and Supernatural Light*,<sup>29</sup> and the fifteen sermon series *Charity and its Fruits*.<sup>30</sup> Written works included *A Treatise Concerning Religious Affections*,<sup>31</sup> in which Edwards discussed the evidence of true conversion. His *Dissertation on the End for Which God Created the World*,<sup>32</sup> in which he postulated that God made the world to provide a bride for His Son to fellowship with through all eternity, as well as eighty of his over eleven hundred *Miscellanies*,<sup>33</sup> were also carefully studied and helped to discern theosis in his theology. His two autobiographical accounts, *A Personal Narrative*,<sup>34</sup> and *A Faithful Narrative of the Surprising Work of God*,<sup>35</sup> were also read. Two biographies were read as well. *Jonathan Edwards*,<sup>36</sup> by Clarence Faust and Thomas Johnson, was first published in 1935. When compared with *Jonathan Edwards, America's Evangelical*,<sup>37</sup> by Philip F. Gura, published in 2005, the two biographies served to bracket traditional and recent commentary on Edwards' life and work. Although the biographies were informative and included many aspects of his

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<sup>29</sup> Jonathan Edwards, "A Divine and Supernatural Light", *A Jonathan Edwards Reader*, Edited by John E. Smith, Harry S. Stout and Kenneth P. Minkema (New Haven and London, Yale University Press, 1995).

<sup>30</sup> Ramsey, ed., *Works of Jonathan Edwards*, Volume 8.

<sup>31</sup> Jonathan Edwards, "A Treatise Concerning Religious Affections," *A Jonathan Edwards Reader*.

<sup>32</sup> Ramsey, ed., *Works of Jonathan Edwards*, Volume 8.

<sup>33</sup> *Works of Jonathan Edwards, Miscellanies*, Volume 13, Thomas Schaeffer ed. (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1994).

<sup>34</sup> Jonathan Edwards, "A Personal Narrative," *A Jonathan Edwards Reader*.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., "A Faithful Narrative of the Surprising Work of God."

<sup>36</sup> Clarence Faust and Thomas Johnson, *Jonathan Edwards* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1981).

<sup>37</sup> Philip Gura, *Jonathan Edwards: America's Evangelical* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2005).

theology, they did not shed any light on the influence of theosis in Edwards' theology. Mark A. Noll's *The Rise of Evangelicalism: The Age of Edwards, Whitefield and the Wesleys*<sup>38</sup> gave the historical context for not only Edwards, but for Wesley and Whitefield as well.

Scholarly works read on Edwards start with the towering twenty five volume series published by Yale University: *The Works of Jonathan Edwards. Volumes 1 and 8*, both edited by Paul Ramsey, and *Volume 22*, edited by Harry Stout. These volumes were an excellent resource on Edwards' ethical writings, preaching and theology of the will. E. Brooks Holifield's *Theology in America: Christian Thought from the Age of the Puritans to the Civil War*<sup>39</sup> has an excellent chapter on Edwards' theology plus many other references to his impact on theology in America throughout the volume.

Edwards was strongly influenced by Platonism arising from seventeenth century thinkers at Cambridge University. Several journal articles were read to discern how this particular view of Platonism and theosis was blended into his theology. Good material on this aspect included: Michael J. McClymond's "Jonathan Edwards, Philosophical Theologian,"<sup>40</sup> Emily Stipes Watts' "The Neoplatonic Basis of Jonathan Edwards' True Virtue,"<sup>41</sup> Stuart Brown's "Platonic Idealism in Modern Philosophy,"<sup>42</sup> and David W.

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<sup>38</sup> Mark A. Noll, *The Rise of Evangelicalism: The Age of Edwards, Whitefield and the Wesleys* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 2003).

<sup>39</sup> E. Brooks Holifield, *Theology in America: Christian Thought from the Age of the Puritans to the Civil War*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003): 102-26

<sup>40</sup> Michael J. McClymond, "Salvation as Divinization: Jonathan Edwards, Gregory of Palamas and the Theological Uses of Neoplatonism", in *Jonathan Edwards, Philosophical Theologian*, ed. Paul Helm and Oliver D. Crisp (Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2003): 139-160.

<sup>41</sup> Emily Stipes Watts, "The Neoplatonic Basis of Jonathan Edwards' 'True Virtue'", *Early American Literature, Volume 10*, (1975-76): 179-189.

<sup>42</sup> Stuart Brown, "Platonic Idealism in Modern Philosophy from Malebranche to Berkeley", *The Cambridge Platonists in Philosophical Context: Politics, Metaphysics and Religion*, ed. G. A. J. Rogers, J.M. Vienne and Y.C. Zarka (London: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1997): 197-213.

Dockrill's "The Heritage of Patristic Platonism."<sup>43</sup> The similarity between Edwards and Gregory of Nyssa was discussed by Patricia Wilson-Kastner in her article "God's Infinity and His Relationship to Creation in the Theologies of Gregory of Nyssa and Jonathan Edwards."<sup>44</sup>

With such a wealth of material to draw from, Edwards' writings that dealt primarily with his philosophy or other theological concepts were left out. There is good reason to believe he referenced theosis in many of his other works but there was more than enough material in the documents cited to support the thesis.

There is also a tremendous amount of source materials for the following chapter on the Wesley brothers. John and Charles were prolific writers. The primary sources for the Wesleys started with *The Works of John Wesley*.<sup>45</sup> This fourteen-volume set contains Wesley's sermons, writings and his journal. This proved to be a rich resource and many examples of theosis were found in these pages.

Others have also discerned theosis in the Wesleys as well. Methodist scholar and historian, Albert Outler, edited a volume simply entitled *John Wesley*,<sup>46</sup> and contributed "The Essays of Albert C. Outler" published in *The Wesleyan Theological Heritage*.<sup>47</sup> In these pages Outler contends that the Patristic Fathers and in particular, Gregory of Nyssa, had a direct impact on Wesley. Also, four articles from the *Wesleyan Theological Journal* provided good support for the question of this thesis: Steve McCormick's "Theosis in

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<sup>43</sup> David W. Dockrill, "The Heritage of Patristic Platonism" *The Cambridge Platonists in Philosophical Context: Politics, Metaphysics and Religion*, ed. G. A. J. Rogers, J.M. Vienne and Y.C. Zarka (London: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1997): 55-78.

<sup>44</sup> Patricia Wilson-Kastner, "God's Infinity and His Relationship to Creation in the Theologies of Gregory of Nyssa and Jonathan Edwards", *Foundations: A Baptist Journal of History and Thought* (1978): 304-321.

<sup>45</sup> Thomas Jackson, ed., *The Works of John Wesley, Volumes 1- 14*, (London, John Mason Publisher, 1831).

<sup>46</sup> Albert C. Outler, ed., *John Wesley*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980).

<sup>47</sup> Thomas C. Oden and Leicester R. Longden, eds., *The Wesleyan Theological Heritage: Essays of Albert C. Outler* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1991): 55-74, 159-174, 189-210.

Chrysostom and Wesley: An Eastern Paradigm of Faith and Love,”<sup>48</sup> William H. Shontz’s “Anglican Influence on John Wesley’s Soteriology,”<sup>49</sup> Michael J. Christensen’s “Theosis and Sanctification: John Wesley’s Reformulation of a Patristic Doctrine,”<sup>50</sup> and Timothy L. Smith’s “George Whitefield and Wesleyan Perfectionism.”<sup>51</sup> These authors took great care to show how Wesley’s theology was influenced by theosis learned through the guidance of his parents, Anglican teachers at Oxford, and the Patristic Fathers. A further article from *Methodist History* by Mark T. Kurowski, “The First Step toward Grace: John Wesley’s Use of the Spiritual Homilies of Macarius the Great”<sup>52</sup> was an excellent source to show Wesley’s usage of Macarius’ sermons in his theology. Anglican writer A.M. Allchin has authored two books on the extent of theosis within the Church of England: *Participation in God*<sup>53</sup> and *The Kingdom of Love and Knowledge*.<sup>54</sup> Both volumes discuss the effect of theosis upon the Wesleys, and how Charles employed the doctrine in many of his hymns.

A contemporary of the Wesleys, Alexander Knox, wrote his observations on the Methodist revival in *Remains of Alexander Knox*.<sup>55</sup> Having already read Wesley’s journal, this biographical material supplied additional background, although Knox does give an analysis of Wesley’s theology that was helpful for this paper.

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<sup>48</sup> Steve McCormick, “Theosis in Chrysostom and Wesley: An Eastern Paradigm of Faith and Love” *Wesleyan Theological Journal*, 26, (1991): 25-45.

<sup>49</sup> William H. Shontz, “Anglican Influence of John Wesley’s Soteriology” *Wesleyan Theological Journal*, 32, No. 1, (1997): 33-52.

<sup>50</sup> Michael Christensen, “Theosis and Sanctification: John Wesley’s Reformulation of a Patristic Doctrine”, *Wesleyan Theological Journal*, 31, No. 2, (1996): 71-94.

<sup>51</sup> Timothy L. Smith, “George Whitefield and Wesleyan Perfectionism”, *Wesleyan Theological Journal*, 19 (1984): 46-70.

<sup>52</sup> Mark T. Kurowski, “The First Step Toward Grace: John Wesley’s Use of the Spiritual Homilies of Macarius the Great”, *Methodist History* 36, No. 2 (January 1998): 113-124.

<sup>53</sup> A.M. Allchin, *Participation in God: A Forgotten Strand in Anglicanism* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1988).

<sup>54</sup> A.M. Allchin, *The Kingdom of Love and Knowledge* (New York: The Seabury Press, 1982).

<sup>55</sup> Alexander Knox, *Remains of Alexander Knox* (London: Duncan and Malcolm, 1844).

The chapter on George Whitefield was of great personal interest but, as mentioned above, there is a lack of scholarship on his theology. Many good biographies are available but the focus of these is primarily on his life, work and leadership in the early days of Evangelicalism but say nothing about the influence of theosis on his theology. Several biographies were thoroughly read including Arnold Dallimore's *George Whitefield*,<sup>56</sup> A. S. Billingsley's *The Life of the Great Preacher, Reverend George Whitefield, "Prince of Pulpit Orators," with The Secret of His Success, and Specimens Of His Sermons*,<sup>57</sup> John Gillies' *Memoirs of the Life of the Reverend George Whitefield*,<sup>58</sup> A.D. Belden's *George Whitefield - The Awakener*,<sup>59</sup> and the rather sardonic, Harry S. Stout's *The Divine Dramatist: George Whitefield and the Rise of Modern Evangelicalism*.<sup>60</sup>

Primary sources for Whitefield were his sermons, accessed online from both the *Anglican Library*<sup>61</sup> and the Classic Christian Ethereal Library.<sup>62</sup> A six-volume set of *George Whitefield's Works*<sup>63</sup> has been reprinted by Quinta Publications in England. This set included *George Whitefield's Journals*,<sup>64</sup> his sermons and letters. In spite of a lack of scholarship on his theology, theosis is readily discerned in his preaching and writing. The

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<sup>56</sup> Arnold Dallimore, *George Whitefield: The Life and Times of the Great Evangelist of the Eighteenth-Century Revival* (London: The Banner of Truth Trust, Volume 1, 1970).

<sup>57</sup> A.S. Billingsley, *The Life of the Great Preacher, Reverend George Whitefield, "Prince of Pulpit Orators", with the Secret of His Success and Specimens of His Sermons* (Philadelphia and Chicago: P.W. Ziegler & Co., 1878).

<sup>58</sup> John Gillies, *Memoirs of the Life of the Reverend George Whitefield* (London: Edward and Charles Dilly Publisher, 1772).

<sup>59</sup> Albert D. Belden, *George Whitefield, the Awakener: A Modern Study of the Evangelical Revival* (London: Sampson, Low and Marston, 1930).

<sup>60</sup> Harry S. Stout, *The Divine Dramatist: George Whitefield and the Rise of Modern Evangelicalism* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1991).

<sup>61</sup> *The Anglican Library*, 2001, [www.anglicanlibrary.org/whitefield](http://www.anglicanlibrary.org/whitefield).

<sup>62</sup> *Classic Christian Ethereal Library*, <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/whitefield/sermons.ii.html>.

<sup>63</sup> *Works of George Whitefield*, Volume 1-6 (Shropshire, England: Quinta Press, 2000).

<sup>64</sup> William Wale, ed.; *George Whitefield's Journals* (London: Banner of Truth Trust, 1960).

concept of deification or theosis in Whitefield has never been explored. Consequently, this thesis will contribute to the understanding of how his concept of theosis influenced his theology.

## **B. Outline of the Thesis**

The thesis is divided into six chapters. The first chapter will be devoted to understanding theosis. The influence of Platonism and Neo-Platonism on Patristic theology will be discussed. The writings of the Patristic Fathers on theosis will be categorized into four main categories so as to give a clear definition of theosis. Chapter Two will define evangelicalism and give a survey of its history. The next chapters will feature brief biographical sketches of the key leaders of early Evangelicalism: Edwards, the Wesleys, and Whitefield. Their education, early influences, the times they lived in and their revival ministries will be highlighted; but the main focus will be to discover how they incorporated the four main aspects of theosis in their theology, preaching and methodology. Particular attention will be given to sermons and books from these men that reveal the influence of theosis on their theologies.

The Introduction has explained and outlined the direction of this thesis. Attention must now be directed to defining and understanding theosis.

## CHAPTER ONE

### UNDERSTANDING THEOSIS

“God made Himself man, that man might become God.”<sup>1</sup> So wrote Athanasius in the fourth century A.D. and this short statement has come to represent the very heart of the Patristic Fathers’ perception of salvation and reconciliation with God. This statement has been affirmed by other Patristic Fathers, from the second to sixth century.

The definition of the salvation of man as his deification was a standard element of Eastern theology. After Theophilus, Ireneæus, Hippolytus, and Origen, it is found in all the Fathers of the ancient Church including passages from Ephraem, Gregory of Nyssa, Gregory of Nazianzus, Apollonarius, Macarius, Pseudo-Hippolytus and Dionysus the Areopagite.<sup>2</sup>

Gregory Nanzianus was perhaps the most emphatic when he asserted that “man has been ordered to become God.”<sup>3</sup> These Patristic Fathers were fully convinced that this was the complete plan of God for humanity.

Athanasius used the word *theopoië* which literally means “to make God” or “to make divine.”<sup>4</sup> Despite the potential for confusion, Athanasius does not appear to explain what *theopoië* meant.<sup>5</sup> He believed that his readers knew his meaning and agreed with his position, as will be explained below.

The term commonly used to summarize this body of theology is *theosis*. “The

<sup>1</sup> Alfeyev, *The Mystery of Faith*, 191.

<sup>2</sup> Adolf Harnack, *History of Dogma, Volume 3* (New York: Dover Publications 1961), 164.

<sup>3</sup> Clendenin, *Eastern Orthodox Theology: A Contemporary Reader*, 184.

<sup>4</sup> Finlan and Kharlamov, eds., *Theosis: Deification in Christian Theology*, 7.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 5. “The church fathers of the late second to fourth centuries – Ireneaus, Clement of Alexandria, Origen, Athanasius, Gregory of Nyssa and Gregory of Nanzianus – make theosis a major theme, yet none of them defines the term or discusses it at sufficient length to clear up ambiguities; they seem to assume that its content is common knowledge in the Christian community.”

word ‘theosis’ is the transliteration of a Greek word meaning ‘deification.’”<sup>6</sup> This doctrine was prominent in the early church and remains at the core of Eastern Orthodox theology to this day. The central teaching is that God descended to the ultimate limit of humanity’s fallen condition, even death, in order to open the path of ascent for fallen humanity to achieve union with God. As Stavropoulos writes: “Theosis! What does this profound word mean? It means the elevation of the human being to the divine sphere, to the atmosphere of God. It means the union of the human with the divine. This is the essence of theosis.”<sup>7</sup>

Theosis must be understood as a process rather than one event at a point in time. It is the process of becoming “in Christ” and God’s plan for believers to fulfill all they were created for. As Allchin notes, “the Christian life, fully realized and lived, is nothing less than participation in the Divine life – it is theosis, deification.”<sup>8</sup>

### **A. Platonism**

Before a full understanding of the teaching of theosis can be appropriated, a brief survey must be made of the impact that one man’s philosophy contributed to the development of theosis. Plato was the ancient Greek philosopher (427-347 B.C.) who became one of history’s most influential thinkers. Following the death of his mentor, Socrates (ca. 470-399 B.C.), he traveled through Greece, Egypt and Sicily. Eventually he returned to his native city of Athens and established a school of philosophy, the world renowned Academy.

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<sup>6</sup> Rakestraw, *Becoming Like God: An Evangelical Doctrine of Theosis*, 260. “It is not easy to give a definition of theosis, since so many aspects of Christian truth are utilized by those who advance the teaching, and different writers and traditions emphasize different truths. The word ‘theosis’ is the transliteration of the Greek word meaning ‘deification’ - being made God.”

<sup>7</sup> Christoforos Stavropoulos, *Partakers of the Divine Nature* (Minneapolis: Light & Life Pub., 1976), 184.

<sup>8</sup> A.M. Allchin, *The Kingdom of Love and Knowledge*, 105.

Scholarship on Plato is an enormous field and one that is constantly changing. This thesis seeks to show only how Plato was read by the Patristic Fathers and is not an attempt explain or defend one school of thought above another about Plato. During his life he wrote over twenty works that are still in existence today. From his later works, which were more philosophical in nature, came his teachings that have made such an impact on the Christian religion.

In one such work, *Timaeus*, Plato expounded his views on form and cosmology and showed his belief that the world and human beings were created.<sup>9</sup> Plato reasoned that because the world has form and beauty there must be a Creator. The beauty of the earth reveals that “the framer of this universe of change was good, and what is good has no particle of envy in it; being therefore without envy he wished all things to be as like himself as possible.”<sup>10</sup> Plato also taught that humans were created and are composed of four forms: the first is mere material compound; the second is the form given by the secondary gods which is the body that hosts the soul; the third is the soul itself, created by the Demiurge and finally humans in their purest form actually build within themselves the being they are supposed to become. The forms “appear as the thoughts of God and have often been interpreted this way in both pre-Christian Platonism and in Christian philosophy since Augustine. The Demiurge (craftsman) who appears to be God, fashions

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<sup>9</sup> Plato, *Timaeus*, <http://etext.library.adelaide.classics.mit.edu/Plato/timaeus.html>. “Now everything that becomes or is created must of necessity be created by some cause, for without a cause nothing can be created. The work of the creator, whenever he looks to the unchangeable and fashions the form and nature of his work after an unchangeable pattern, must necessarily be made fair and perfect; but when he looks to the created only, and uses a created pattern, it is not fair or perfect. Was the heaven then or the world, always in existence and without beginning? or created, and had it a beginning? Created, I reply. Now that which is created must, as we affirm, of necessity be created by a cause. But the father and maker of this universe is past finding out; and even if we found him, to tell of him to all men would be impossible. Every one will see that he must have looked to, the eternal; for the world is the fairest of creations and he is the best of causes.”

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

pre-existing matter by patterning it after the forms.”<sup>11</sup> Plato held that all that humans can sense in the world is actually a replica of the eternal, original ‘form’, which can only be comprehended by the soul.

Another of his works, *Phaedo*, set forth his teaching on the immortality of the soul.<sup>12</sup> Death occurs when the soul is separated from the body and goes to its judgment. Those who lived just, ethical lives will be rewarded with a better afterlife. “The unjust will be judged, penalized and corrected ‘under the earth’ while the just are ‘exalted in a heavenly place.’”<sup>13</sup>

These teachings espoused by Plato in his writings and Academy had an enormous influence on western philosophy and religion. An early Christian leader, Justin Martyr was one of many who “welcomed classical philosophy. He believed that the God of Plato is the God of the Bible; that Socrates, like Abraham, was a ‘Christian before Christ’ and his death was an example for Christian martyrs.”<sup>14</sup>

Many of the Patristic Fathers borrowed language and images from Plato but also reached conclusions that were much different from his cosmology or anthropology. They built upon the basic premise of Plato’s philosophy because they observed fragments of Christian truth in his works; but they did find substantial disagreements with Plato as well.<sup>15</sup> According to him and his Neo-Platonist successors, the soul is enlightened by

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<sup>11</sup> G.R. Habermas, “Plato”, *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, J. Van Engen, ed., (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1990), 859.

<sup>12</sup> Plato, *Phaedo*, *The Portable Plato*, 262. “What do we call that principle which does not admit of death? The immortal, he said. And does the soul admit of death? No. Then the soul is immortal? Yes, the soul when attacked by death cannot perish.”

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 277.

<sup>14</sup> Tim Dowley, *Eerdman’s Handbook to the History of Christianity* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdman’s Publishing Company, 1987), 110.

<sup>15</sup> The teachings of Gregory of Nyssa and his areas of disagreement with Plato and Neoplatonism will be examined below.

gnosis and intellectual contemplation. It does not need renewal or to overcome sin; whereas Christianity teaches that the restoration of the soul depends on divine Grace. For the Patristic Fathers, the decision about how to use Plato in teaching Christian truth was whether or not it conformed to the scriptures and Christian spiritual experience.

Nonetheless, Plato's teaching and writing had far-reaching influence on Christian theology. Habermas notes the effects of Plato's philosophy long after his death.

It inspired the Neoplatonism of Plotinus in the third century A.D., which emphasized the mystical implications of Plato's thought. Christian thought also came under the influence of Platonism, as scholars from the third century such as Clement of Alexandria and Origen mixed this Greek philosophy with their theology. In particular, Augustine's interpretation of Plato dominated Christian thought for the next thousand years after his death in the fifth century.<sup>16</sup>

Augustine's contributions to theology are well known and it is important to note his reliance on Plato<sup>17</sup> to show the influence Platonism had on the early church fathers.

Athanasius could make the statement, "God made Himself man, that man might become God", and not feel the need to immediately explain his statement, because the concept of divinization was already deeply embedded within his culture. "Greek mythology taught that some of their 'gods' were of human origin. Platonists, Stoics, and Cynics all spoke of something divine within humans."<sup>18</sup> Also the Roman emperors claimed to be divine. Athanasius differed in this respect with divinization: only Christians could be divinized. The Son of God has united himself with humanity, making

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<sup>16</sup> Habermas, "Plato", ed., J. Van Engen, *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, 861.

<sup>17</sup> David W. Dockrill, *The Heritage of Patristic Platonism*, 55. "The Platonism of the philosophically minded Fathers cannot be ignored nor can affinities between aspects of Christian dogma and certain Platonic doctrines be overlooked. 'Some of those who are united in fellowship with us in the grace of Christ', Augustine writes, 'are amazed when they hear or read that Plato had a conception of God, which they recognize as agreeing in many respects with the truth of our religion.'"

<sup>18</sup> Harnack, *History of Dogma*, 337.

divinization possible, but it is also necessary for individuals to unite themselves with the Son of God to complete the spiritual union.

## **B. Neo-Platonism**

Plotinus (205-270 A.D.) revised Platonism and this new reading of Plato had a powerful influence on early Christian leaders such as Origen.<sup>19</sup> Plotinus' student, Porphyry, published his mentor's teachings in the *Enneads*. He also claimed that Plotinus "had the mystical experience of union with the divine of four occasions, and the description of union in the *Enneads* is one of the classics of mysticism."<sup>20</sup>

The Patristic Fathers incorporated the cosmology of Plotinus into their theology. Plotinus taught that humans are a microcosm of the universe "containing matter, nature, soul and mind which longs to be reunited with the One. Contemplation is the most perfect human activity and by it may be achieved a state of ecstasy, an experience of unification."<sup>21</sup> Plotinus sought union with the One through human means of mental concentration and an ascetic lifestyle and sought no assistance from divine grace. Self-purification was the method that led to deification.

Christian thinkers were able to build upon this foundation and develop a biblical understanding of theosis. Since many early Christians were influenced by Plotinus and Neo-Platonism, the concept of divinization was easily incorporated into Christianity with the biblical support of such texts as 2 Peter 1:4. These and other passages supporting theosis will be dealt with later.

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<sup>19</sup> Dockrill, *The Heritage of Patristic Platonism*, 55, "Amongst the Fathers, some held that Plato and other Greek thinkers were indebted, in one way or another, to the revealed teachings of Moses and some of the early Hebrew prophets."

<sup>20</sup> E. Ferguson, "Neo-Platonism", ed., J. Van Engen, *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, 756.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 757.

Origen (185-254 A.D.) was among the first to attempt to describe the Christian faith in terms of the Platonic philosophical ideas of his time. He turned to Platonism to show that the material world was only a passing phase and that one's focus should be on the transcendent, spiritual world. However his teachings went beyond what others could accept. "His speculations about the pre-existence of souls and universal salvation were repudiated. But Greek Christian theology continued to be concerned with the problem which Origen tackled – the relationship of philosophy and the Christian tradition."<sup>22</sup>

Origen's writings on the teaching of Platonism being synthesized with theosis were further expanded by a brilliant scholar of the fourth century. Gregory of Nyssa (335–394 A.D.) was part of a famous Christian family. His father was Basil the Elder, his older brother was Basil the Great and his sister was St. Macrina. He is known as one of the Cappadocian Fathers because he was from that region in what is now modern-day Turkey.

Gregory studied Plato, Aristotle, and Plotinus and for a time he pursued a secular career in rhetoric. In 371 he was ordained Bishop of Nyssa a city in the region of Cappadocia. Gregory is also known for his strong defense of the Trinitarian/Nicene position and gave the opening address at the Council of Constantinople in 381. Gregory is held in highest regard by the Eastern Orthodox Church. "Maximus the Confessor (580-662) called Gregory the Universal Teacher and the Second Council of Nicea (787) spoke of Gregory as 'named by everybody as Father of the Fathers.'"<sup>23</sup>

It is his incorporation of Platonism into the doctrine of theosis that is of interest for this thesis. As shall be shown, his writings had a direct impact on the theology of John

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<sup>22</sup> Tim Dowley, ed., *Eerdman's Handbook to the History of Christianity*, 104.

<sup>23</sup> Gregorios, *Cosmic Man, The Divine Presence*, xiv.

Wesley and George Whitefield, and indirectly on Jonathan Edwards, by way of the Cambridge Platonists.

An example of Gregory's reliance upon Platonism can be found in his treatise *On the Soul and Resurrection*.<sup>24</sup> He described the soul as a receptacle and that the Christian's virtues are really Christ's presence in the believer, not mere imitations of them. As the receptacle fills it is no longer static. As it reaches capacity the divine goodness which fills it also increases its capacity so that it can receive more. It continually expands in size and receptivity so that there can be no limit to its growth. So the soul can make spiritual progress even if it is only slightly receptive to grace. As more grace is thirsted for, the receptacle expands to receive more grace. One must choose to allow God to pour His life into them. Human freedom plays a key role in the process. The receptacle can freely choose to be filled with either Christ's water of life or some fluid waste of the world and

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<sup>24</sup> Gregory of Nyssa, "On the Soul and Resurrection," *Christian Classic Ethereal Library*, [www.ccel.org/ccel/schaff/npnf2-05/](http://www.ccel.org/ccel/schaff/npnf2-05/) (accessed January 5, 2006). Gregory showed his use of Platonism as a framework but then appealed to scripture as highest authority: "We must therefore neglect the Platonic chariot and the pair of horses of dissimilar forces yoked to it, and their driver, whereby the philosopher allegorizes these facts about the soul; we must neglect also all that is said by the philosopher who succeeded him. (Plotinus) We must neglect all before and since their time, whether they philosophized in prose or in verse, and we will adopt, as the guide of our reasoning, the Scripture, which lays it down as an axiom that there is no excellence in the soul which is not a property as well of the Divine nature." Gregory did not accept everything Plato taught. Later on in the treatise he disagreed with Plato about trans-migration of the soul: "As for the thinkers outside our own system of thought, they have, with all their diverse ways of looking at things, approached and touched the doctrine of the Resurrection: while none of them exactly coincide with us, they have in no case wholly abandoned such an expectation. Some indeed make human nature vile in, maintaining that a soul becomes alternately that of a man and of something irrational; that it transmigrates into various bodies, changing at pleasure from the man into fowl, fish, or beast, and then returning to human kind. While some extend this absurdity even to trees and shrubs, others of them hold only thus much—that the soul exchanges one man for another man, so that the life of humanity is continued always by means of the same souls, which are being born perpetually first in one generation, then in another. As for ourselves, we take our stand upon the tenets of the Church, and assert that it will be well to accept those in accord with the doctrine of the Resurrection." In another treatise, *Life of Moses*, Gregory wrote "pagan philosophy says that the soul is immortal but it also says that souls pass from body to body. It acknowledges [God] as creator, but says He needed matter for creation. It affirms that He is both good and powerful, but that in all things He submits to the necessity of fate." He summarized Greek philosophy as "always in labor but never giving birth."

its sin.

Grace is God's own life present and active in the soul. It is like the sun's radiance coming through the windows or water from an unending spring. It is not a creation or substitute for Him, it is God being present in His creation. If one fails to receive it is not because the supply is short. Rather they are like people who stumble because they close their eyes when the light is all around them. Grace enlarges the soul's capacity to receive grace and then fills it again and again in a process of eternal growth. Humans were created to be receptacles of divine nature. These receptacles are capable of unending expansion.

Gregory used the philosophy of Plato and Plotinus regarding divinization as a framework for presenting the doctrine of theosis. For this he has been hailed as "the first Christian who successfully imported into orthodox dogma so much Platonism that one may say he invented the means of making Christianity an excuse for becoming a Platonist."<sup>25</sup>

While incorporating Platonism, Gregory was still able to differentiate between Greek philosophy and biblical theology. He strongly disagreed with Plotinus' view, described above, that humanity is only a microcosm of nature.

How mean and how unworthy of the majesty of man are the fancies of some heathen writers when they say that man is a little world, composed of the same elements with the universe. Those who bestow on human nature such praise forget that they are dignifying man with the attributes of the gnat and mouse, for they too are composed of these four elements.<sup>26</sup>

Gregory does use the model of Platonic cosmology but expands on it by building a

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<sup>25</sup> Cherniss, *The Platonism of Gregory of Nyssa* (New York: Burt Franklin Publisher, 1971), 48.

<sup>26</sup> Gregory of Nyssa, "Dogmatic Treatises," *Christian Classic Ethereal Library*, [www.ccel.org/ccel/schaff/npnf2-05/](http://www.ccel.org/ccel/schaff/npnf2-05/) (accessed March 16, 2005).

scriptural basis for his position of divinization, not just a philosophical one.

Man is a microcosm, a little world. He is the center of created life and made in the image of God. It is precisely in this divine image that the cosmic meaning of man is revealed. Since man is the head of God's creation he must realize in himself the union and harmony of everything and unite all the universe back to God. But man did not fulfill his calling. He turned away from the light (God) and was overcome by inertia and his impetus toward God weakened. This led to his disintegration, the microcosm, resulting in cosmic disintegration and catastrophe for all creation.<sup>27</sup>

Many more examples could be included but suffice it to say that Platonism was the structure within which the Patristic Fathers like Gregory of Nyssa developed the doctrine of theosis. A further look at Platonism will come in Chapter Three as the influence of the Cambridge Platonists on Jonathan Edwards will be examined. With this brief background completed, the main tenets of theosis can now be explored.

### C. Four Tenets of Theosis

The Patristic Fathers had varied approaches to theosis and many, as noted above, have written or taught on the subject over a span of hundreds of years.<sup>28</sup> Finlan and Kharlamov have identified eighteen terms synonymous with theosis and deification:

A great variety of terms are used to communicate the idea of deification. Among the conceptual equivalents for deification are union, participation, partaking, communion/partnership, divine filiation, adoption, recreation, intertwined with the divine, similitude with God, transformation, elevation, transmutation, commingling, assimilation, intermingling, rebirth, regeneration, transfiguration.<sup>29</sup>

It is the position of this thesis that the central tenets that make up the body of the teaching about theosis can be grouped into four categories: participation in the divine nature,

<sup>27</sup> Clendenin, *Eastern Orthodox Theology: A Contemporary Reader* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1995), 38.

<sup>28</sup> Finlan and Kharlamov, eds., *Theosis: Deification in Christian Theology*, 5. "The first theological definition of theosis was given in the sixth century by Pseudo-Dionysius, but it is general and inexact: 'Divinization consists of being as much as possible like and in union with God.' The meaning of theosis varies throughout Patristic theology, sometimes even within the same author."

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 5-6.

recapitulation, union of the soul with God and progress of the soul in heaven.<sup>30</sup> The four are interwoven and are not easily isolated from one another, nor perhaps should they be. Not all readers may agree with grouping theosis into four tenets since there are many aspects to consider regarding this doctrine.<sup>31</sup> However, for the purpose of presenting theosis in this thesis, they will be considered in these four categories while remaining cognizant of the fact that they make up parts of the whole.<sup>32</sup>

## 1. Participation in the Divine Nature

The Patristic Fathers distinguished between God's essence and His energies. "God's essence remains unapproachable but His divine energies come down to us ... permeating all His creation and we experience them in the form of deifying grace and divine light."<sup>33</sup> However, our God not only came down through His energies but in His own person. The fact that "the Word became flesh and dwelt among us"<sup>34</sup> declares that God desires a close union between Him and humanity. This is the substance of the wonderful truth of the Incarnation which will be more fully discussed in the section

<sup>30</sup> The other footnotes in Section C make it clear that theosis has many aspects and cannot be easily summed up. The reasoning to categorize theosis into these four tenets was made on this basis: "Participation in the divine nature" is the central idea of theosis. It is taught by the Patristic Fathers and is used by every author quoted in this thesis; "recapitulation" is Irenaeus' term but is also employed by Karkkainen in *Pneumatology* to represent the teaching of theosis regarding the Incarnation; "union of the soul with God" is also widely used by the Patristics and in the writings quoted in this thesis but the first grasp of the concept came from Pinnock's *Flame of Love*: "progress of the soul in heaven" is taught in Gregory of Nyssa's writings but Ramsey uses it extensively in Volume 8 of *Works of Jonathan Edwards*.

<sup>31</sup> Bartos, *Deification in Eastern Orthodox Theology*, 10. "Deification is expressed through a number of different images: it is God's honouring of Christians with the title of 'gods' ... it is the attaining of likeness to God, it is the ascent of the soul to God; it is the participation of the soul in the divine attributes of immortality and incorruption; it is the transformation of human nature by divine action; it is the eschatological glorification of both soul and body; it is the union with God through participation in the divine energies."

<sup>32</sup> Finlan and Kharlamov, eds., *Theosis: Deification in Christian Theology*, 4. "Deification played an important, but not definitive, role in early Patristic theology. Despite Patristic fascination with deification, the fathers do not develop a 'doctrine' of theosis ... The idea is matched by a lack of precise definition. The church fathers argue for, rather than spell out, deification."

<sup>33</sup> Timothy Ware, *The Orthodox Church* (London: Penguin Books, 1967), 217.

<sup>34</sup> John 1:14

below on recapitulation.

In Patristic teaching, the Transfiguration of Christ is seen as the model for what every believer will experience. “The transfiguration of the person that occurs as a result of union with the Divine is variously called assimilation to God or deification.”<sup>35</sup> The Transfiguration is very significant because it reveals that union between divine nature (Christ’s) and human nature is possible.

In light of the Transfiguration and its implications for humans, the key biblical text regarding theosis is 2 Peter 1:4: “Whereby there are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises, that through these you may be partaker of the divine nature.” The goal of humanity is union with God. The first Adam sinned but the Second Adam, Jesus Christ, has done what Adam failed to do. Humans who are united by faith to Him are now partakers of His divine nature.

While forever remaining a creature, humans are transformed according to grace. The body, as well as its soul, participates in the divine life. This participation does not change one physically. Gregory of Nyssa said, “What we see does not change. An old man does not become an adolescent, wrinkles do not disappear. What is renewed is the inner being, soiled by sin and grown old in bad habits. This being returns to its childlike innocence.”<sup>36</sup> In other words, the body retains its human appearance and traits. Nothing visible disappears but all is new within. Through grace, the body is now being joined in union with God. The divine image is given to believers within themselves and the relationship between the divine and human natures through which they join together is what is meant by “participation.”

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<sup>35</sup> Alfeyev, *The Mystery of Faith*, 191.

<sup>36</sup> Clendenin, *Eastern Orthodox Theology*, 54.

The Patristic Fathers were careful to teach the distinction between the Creator and His creation. They describe only what humans can become through grace and faith, which is, a participant in the divine nature.<sup>37</sup> Deified souls are renewed and transfigured into sons and daughters of God by grace but at no time does God remove the distinction between His unknowable essence and His uncreated energies. To some, particularly those looking at theosis from a western perspective, this can sound like some form of christianized Pantheism. At first glance it might but “there is no absorption of the person in God. It is a personal union in which the distinction between Creator and creature is maintained. This is personal union, not an ontological union.”<sup>38</sup>

Participation is what produces the copy’s likeness to the original so that the likeness has something of the original present in the copy. Gregory of Nyssa gave an excellent analogy of this in his sermon, ‘On the Making of Humanity’:

The gospel calls the stamp upon the coin the image of Caesar, whereby we learn that in which was fashioned to resemble Caesar there was resemblance as to outward look but difference as to material, so also when we consider the attributes contemplated both in the Divine and human nature, in which the likeness consists we find the difference in the uncreated and created.<sup>39</sup>

Participation in the divine nature is the privilege of every believer. The manner by which it is accomplished is through the ministry of the Holy Spirit.

As noted earlier, the Patristic Fathers were very strong in the defense of the Trinity. Father, Son and Spirit were involved in creation and also in atonement. The ministry of the Spirit should not be understood separately from that of the Son. To fully

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<sup>37</sup> Finlan and Kharlamov, eds., *Theosis: Deification in Christian Theology*, 32, “For a Christian writer around 100 CE to say, ‘you may become participants of the divine nature’ (2 Peter 1:4) was to evoke not only biblical images, but also concepts of divinization that were central to the leading Hellenistic philosophies – Middle Platonism and Stoicism. Of course, 2 Peter is a Christian teaching but here he uses terminology that is recognizable from Greek philosophical traditions, and this should not be overlooked.”

<sup>38</sup> Pinnock, *Flame of Love*, 154.

<sup>39</sup> Harrison, *Grace and Human Freedom according to St. Gregory of Nyssa*, 91.

comprehend theosis fully, the place of the Spirit must be reinforced. Today's eastern theologians believe that the west has "lost the true idea of the Person of the Holy Spirit, relegating Him to a secondary position by making Him into a kind of lieutenant or deputy of the Son."<sup>40</sup> This means that the Spirit descending at Pentecost is as important as the death of Christ at Passover. While redemption is clearly the first step, only by the ministry of the Spirit can humans find full expression of the divinity of Christ. This is why theosis cannot be understood on the basis of Christ's ministry alone. The Spirit's contribution is essential! Irenaeus wrote about the "two hands of God"<sup>41</sup> showing that both the Son of God and the Holy Spirit are involved in salvation.

The Holy Spirit produces this new reality by theosis. In that process, "man does not receive a new soul but the Holy Spirit unites essentially with the whole man, body and soul."<sup>42</sup> He empowers believers to enable them to pursue union with God through participation in the divine nature. The degree that a Christian appropriates God's love and grace and yields to the transforming power of the Holy Spirit is the height to which their spiritual life will be elevated.

The Patristic Fathers viewed salvation as more than forgiveness of sin through Christ's death on the cross. "Whereas the Eastern Church has more consciously built its theology on pneumatological foundations, the whole of Western theology has emphasized Christology."<sup>43</sup> Looking at the Spirit's ministry one discerns that His emphasis is on personal transformation and union with the Trinity. Our deification and

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<sup>40</sup> Lossky, *In the Image and Likeness of God*, 103.

<sup>41</sup> Pinnock, *Flame of Love*, 149.

<sup>42</sup> Rakestraw, "Becoming Like God: An Evangelical Doctrine of Theosis," 261.

<sup>43</sup> Karkkainen, *Pneumatology*, 79.

union with God is brought to completion through the Holy Spirit. Through Him we are able to participate in the divine nature.

## 2. Recapitulation

Why did God have to become man? The Incarnation was more than Christ taking on human flesh that He might die for humanity's sins on the cross. The Patristic Fathers held that in His Incarnation, Jesus recapitulated humanity. The first Adam fell short of union with God because of sin. The second Adam<sup>44</sup> accomplished the union of the two natures in His person. Because Christ "lives" in His glorified body today, deification is a future certainty for all believers. The purpose of humanity's existence is revealed in the Incarnation of Christ. "He came down from heaven to redeem the earth, to unite man with God forever."<sup>45</sup>

The teaching of theosis is grounded in the Incarnation.<sup>46</sup> In the person of Christ deified humanity will be recreated and achieve the union God intended when He placed Adam in the Garden of Eden. "Unless we affirm with Athanasius that God became man in order that man might become God, the language of incarnation is likely to lose its true significance."<sup>47</sup>

In His Incarnation Jesus Christ assumed our common human nature in a "perfect hypostatic union of the divine and human natures thus making Christ's humanity the point of contact for the salvation and theosis of men."<sup>48</sup> In the glorified person of Jesus we see what truly deified humanity will be. It is not just being restored to Adam's state

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<sup>44</sup> I Corinthians 15:45

<sup>45</sup> Florovsky, *Creation and Redemption, Volume Three*, 95.

<sup>46</sup> Finlan and Kharlamov, eds., *Theosis, Deification in Christian Theology*, 4, "All of this depends upon, and revolves around, Christianity's central and unique idea: the Incarnation – in Christ, God lived a human life. Without the Incarnation there would be no theosis."

<sup>47</sup> Allchin, *Participation in God*, 69.

<sup>48</sup> Stephanopoulos, *The New Man*, 155.

prior to the Fall but it is humanity recreated and fulfilling its purpose of creation – to be partaking in the divine nature. The early church father, Irenaeus, taught that Ephesians 1:10 showed a recapitulation or restitution of the beginning through Christ. He overcame the effects of Adam’s sin by His work on Calvary.<sup>49</sup>

The first chapter of the Bible declares that humans were created in the image and likeness of God.<sup>50</sup> This means that humanity is the crowning act of God in creation. He gave them dominion over the rest of creation and a personal relationship with God. “The Triune God, who is wholly other than man and completely hidden in unknowability, nevertheless acts out of love to elevate His creation into perfect communion with the divine life by grace.”<sup>51</sup>

According to the Greek Fathers, the terms ‘image’ and ‘likeness’ do not mean exactly the same thing. Adam was made in God’s image on the day of his creation but not in His likeness. “The expression ‘according to the image’ indicates rationality and freedom, while ‘according to the likeness’ indicates assimilation to God through virtue.”<sup>52</sup> This is what the Apostle Paul meant when he said on Mars Hill that humanity is God’s offspring.<sup>53</sup> There is between God and humans “a point of contact, an essential similarity. The gulf between creature and Creator is not impassable, for because we are God’s image we can know God and have communion with Him.”<sup>54</sup>

As Ware writes, “Man at his first creation was perfect, not so much in an actual as in a potential sense. Endowed with the image from the start he was called to acquire the

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<sup>49</sup> Pinnock, *Flame of Love*, 152.

<sup>50</sup> Genesis 1:26-27

<sup>51</sup> Stephanopoulos, *The New Man*, 151.

<sup>52</sup> Ware, *The Orthodox Church*, 224.

<sup>53</sup> Acts 17:28

<sup>54</sup> Ware, *The Orthodox Church*, 224.

likeness by his own efforts (assisted of course by the grace of God).”<sup>55</sup> Irenaeus believed that Adam was created as a child and it was necessary that he should grow into perfection.<sup>56</sup>

The influence of Plotinus and Neo-Platonism is seen here as he taught that likeness to God could be achieved through virtuous acts. The Patristic Fathers maintained that a person had to receive God’s grace first but that becoming like God was a process. “The likeness is not an endowment which man possess from the start, but a goal at which he must aim, something which he can only acquire by degrees.”<sup>57</sup> Souls are transformed as they respond to God’s initiative with ethical responses. “We possess the image of God by being rational, we receive the likeness of God by acquiring virtues. In creation I have the image but I become through the exercise of my free will in the likeness of God.”<sup>58</sup>

Humanity was made to enjoy communion with God. “Thou hast made us for Thyself and our hearts are restless till they rest in Thee.”<sup>59</sup> Yet humanity turned away from God in the Garden of Eden. When Adam sinned, the image was marred so it was necessary for God to start over with humans. The beginning point was at the place where Adam departed. “The Son of God, in His incarnation, re-creates and renews in humans the divine image soiled by the fall of Adam.”<sup>60</sup>

Gregory of Nyssa leaves no doubt about his position on the Incarnation and the fall of humanity:

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<sup>55</sup> Ibid., 225.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid., 226.

<sup>57</sup> Stephanopoulos, *The New Man*, 144.

<sup>58</sup> Clendenin, *Eastern Orthodox Christianity: A Western Perspective*, 134.

<sup>59</sup> Rex Warner, ed., Augustine, *Confessions* (New York: Penguin Signet Books, 2001), 1.

<sup>60</sup> Clendenin, *Eastern Orthodox Theology: A Contemporary Reader*, 37.

You ask the reason why God was born among men. Our diseased nature needed a healer. Man in his fall needed one to set him upright. He who had lost the gift of life stood in need of a life-giver, and he who had dropped away from his fellowship wanted one who would lead him back to the good. He who was shut up in darkness longed for the presence of the light and the captive sought for a deliverer. Christ submitted Himself to the condition of a human body. He entered life by being born, and after passing through each age of life in succession, and then tasting death, at last, only by the rising again of His own body, accomplished His object and saved man.<sup>61</sup>

Sin is seen as a combination of Satan's influence and freewill leading humans astray.

"Being free and independent, humanity would break the commandment and fall away from the bliss of Paradise. The Son's sacrifice on the Cross would then be the way for humans to return to God."<sup>62</sup> Satan's role is seen as luring Adam and Eve to try to achieve theosis in their own strength.

The devil beguiled humans with the hope of deification. They could not discern this lie since the striving for deification had already been placed in them by the Creator. Yet deification is impossible without God; thus to attempt to become His equal without His assistance is a sign of pride and delusion.<sup>63</sup>

Regardless, Adam and Eve are still considered culpable. "Out of His love for humanity, God did not want to interfere in human freedom and forcibly prevent sin. The sole responsibility for the Fall is borne by humans themselves, for they misused the freedom given by God."<sup>64</sup>

The Patristic Fathers laid great emphasis on the image of God in humanity. Humans are a living theology and because they are God's icon, one can find God by looking within one's own heart and by 'returning within himself.' This is seen in biblical

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<sup>61</sup> Gregorios, *Cosmic Man, The Divine Presence*, xiv.

<sup>62</sup> Alfeyev, *The Mystery of Faith*, 58.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, 67.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, 68.

statements such as “The kingdom of God is within you.”<sup>65</sup> Because humans are icons, each member of the human race, even the most sinful, is infinitely precious in God’s sight. God gave Adam free will, which is the power to choose between good and evil. Instead of continuing on the path marked out for him by God, Adam turned aside and disobeyed God. He set his own will above God’s will.

This view of Adam is different from the accepted Western view, which according to Eastern Orthodoxy emphasizes the legal model of atonement. They suppose it stems from the underlying assumption that the way to God is blocked by inherited sin and guilt. “In the West the essential feature of Christian life is man’s justification, whereas in the East it is his divinization. The Western view of man lays stress on original guilt, whereas the East emphasizes man’s potential goodness.”<sup>66</sup>

The Western Church formulated a different understanding of atonement. Influenced by Augustine and Anselm, the Western Church gradually moved away from viewing salvation as union with God.<sup>67</sup> In *Cur Deus Homo*, Anselm taught that God is offended by sin and that Christ is the substitute who paid humanity’s sin debt. Anselm “effectively refuted early medieval notions of the devil’s ‘rights’ over fallen mankind and also displaced earlier Eastern emphases upon Christ as victor... This theory shaped nearly all Catholic and Protestant thought on redemption down to modern times.”<sup>68</sup>

Anselm’s doctrine gave the East cause for further concern because of his focus on the payment of humanity’s sin debt by Christ to the exclusion of Christ’s triumphant victory

<sup>65</sup> Luke 17:21

<sup>66</sup> Ling, *A History of Religion East and West*, 285.

<sup>67</sup> Finlan and Kharlamov, eds., *Theosis: Deification in Christian Theology*, 8. “The Eastern Orthodox Church has retained theosis ... while the Western churches – separated by time, language and philosophy from the Greek thinkers of the early church – have dropped it. In fact, theosis does not exist for most contemporary Western theologians. In lay theology the term is perceived as either blasphemous or absurd.”

<sup>68</sup> J. Van Engen, “Anselm of Canterbury”, *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, Van Engen, ed., 53.

over death and the devil by His resurrection. As they viewed it, the western teaching now meant “the Holy Spirit was now reduced to an auxiliary or assistant’s role in redemption.”<sup>69</sup> Anselm emphasized the passion of Christ and lightly passed over Christ’s triumphant victory over death by His resurrection.

It will become evident that the Eastern emphasis is not on Christ as the substitute for humanity’s sins but on His recapitulation of what was lost through Adam. As Tambasco notes “Jesus works atonement not by appeasing an angry God but by making a representative journey of obedience, even through suffering and death.”<sup>70</sup>

Orthodoxy views redemption primarily in the Christus Victor motif. In this regard, Lossky states “It is first the abolition of radical obstacles which separate man from God, particularly sin which subjects humanity to the demons.”<sup>71</sup> Christ’s liberation of captive humanity allows for the restoration of human nature through grace. God gives the human race a new start based on the life, death and resurrection on Christ.

Christ was the last Adam, lived His life through the Spirit and offered His life to God in obedience and sacrifice. The Holy Spirit empowered Jesus to accomplish this.<sup>72</sup> Christ takes all the darkness away as representative of new Adam. This is part of the wondrous mystery of the cross.<sup>73</sup>

Paul teaches that Christ, as the Second Adam, “represented humanity in such a way that what took place in Him could be repeated in us.”<sup>74</sup> The invitation to accept His propitiatory sacrifice, rather than suffering the wrath of God, is an essential component of

<sup>69</sup> Lossky, *In the Image and Likeness of God*, 99.

<sup>70</sup> Tambasco, *A Theology of Atonement and Paul’s Vision of Christianity*, 93.

<sup>71</sup> Lossky, *Orthodox Theology*, 111.

<sup>72</sup> Acts 10:38

<sup>73</sup> I Corinthians 2:8

<sup>74</sup> Pinnock, *Flame of Love*, 97.

salvation. However the cross must also be seen as more than legal atonement for sins. It also brings reconciliation, friendship with God and recapitulation.

The Incarnation allows the Son to offer Himself freely for those who are under God's judgment because of sin. He substitutes Himself for those who are condemned and suffers death for them. In the following quotes, Vladimir Lossky evokes powerful images in outlining the role of the Son in the atonement. "The central moment of the economy of the Son, redemption, must not be separated from the divine plan as a whole. Its goal has never ceased being union with God. Divine love always pursues the same end: deification of men."<sup>75</sup> Adam's fall necessitated a change, not in God's ultimate purpose for humanity, but in the means it would be accomplished. "Sin destroyed the primitive plan, that of a direct climb of man to God. The cosmos was fractured. This wound must be healed and the abortive history of man redeemed for a new start: such are the aims of redemption."<sup>76</sup>

According to Lossky, redemption is not the end in itself but rather the beginning point of theosis:

The atonement made necessary by our sins is not an end but a means, the means to only real goal: deification. Salvation itself is only a negative moment: the only essential reality remains union with God. What does it matter being saved from death or Hell, if it is not to lose oneself in God?<sup>77</sup>

The work of Christ cannot be explained in a single metaphor. Lossky notes that redemption employs two legal aspects: a slave's debt has been paid and that a Mediator reconciled humanity to God on the cross. However, he goes on to show that other biblical images are used to illustrate atonement in Christ. Examples cited are the Good Shepherd who seeks the lost sheep, the Good Samaritan who heals the wounds of the one assaulted by thieves

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<sup>75</sup> Lossky, *Orthodox Theology*, 110.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, 111.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, 112.

(demons), the Victorious Warrior who destroys the enemies of death and hell and the Father welcoming the Prodigal Son home again.

Christ's death on the cross removed the curse of sin and now neither sin nor death can separate humanity any longer from the Father. At the moment of redemption, the demonic powers were dispossessed and a change occurred in the relationship between humanity and God. "He takes from Satan the right to dominate humanity. Sin is banished and the dominion of the Evil One crumbles. The word atonement thus acquires another sense: that of a debt repaid to the devil."<sup>78</sup> This language directly contradicts what Anselm and the Western church has held regarding Christ's atoning death.

The Patristic Fathers believed that God gave some power to the devil but removed it from him when he overstepped his boundaries and assaulted innocent humans. The devil was thoroughly defeated by the atonement, but without his rights being violated.

Irenaeus, Origen and Gregory of Nyssa all show how Satan, wishing to take into his power the only being over whom he had none, is justly dispossessed. Gregory proposed the symbol of a divine ruse: on the hook of His divinity, the humanity of Christ is the bait. The devil threw himself on the prey but the hook pierces him – he cannot swallow God and dies.<sup>79</sup>

The concept of redemption must be enlarged to include a cosmological perspective. The whole of creation was affected by the cross. "The 'judgment of judgment' reconciles the fallen cosmos with God. As Gregory of Nazianzus wrote, 'A few drops of blood make the universe whole again.'"<sup>80</sup> The cross has cosmological implications:

Greek Orthodoxy sees that the whole of mankind as a single entity reflecting the image of God. This introduces a qualification to the idea of individual theosis. It is

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<sup>78</sup> Ibid., 112.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid., 114.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid., 114

not just my unity with God that becomes manifest in the final fulfillment. I see also that I am one with other men in all ages and in all times. The whole of mankind however, still retains an otherness from God, though they are in God.<sup>81</sup>

Humanity is restored in Christ, the true Adam. Many of the early Fathers take

“redemption to mean the reconciliation of the human race with God and our adoption as His children. Redemption is the manifestation of God’s love for humanity.”<sup>82</sup>

### 3. Union of the Soul with God

This concept is also known as “perichoresis - the famous Eastern term.”<sup>83</sup> Sin has marred humans so that they are incapable of self-correction. Only God in His love and mercy can raise the fallen. The original gap between Creator God and created humanity has been widened since Adam willfully rebelled. Because the first Adam was unable to fulfill the divine plan, God sent His Son to be the Second Adam. “It is in this context that Athanasius speaks of the Incarnate Lord Jesus Christ, the second Adam, ‘who was made man so that we might be made God.’”<sup>84</sup>

If humans are in God’s image, it means they possess free will. The Patristics rejected any doctrine of grace which might infringe upon human freedom. They take the term Paul used in I Corinthians 3:9 ‘synergia’ to mean “We are fellow workers with God.” If humans are to achieve full fellowship with God, it will not be done without God’s help. Both God and humans play a part in this. Both must make a contribution to the common work, although what God does is of immeasurably greater importance than what humans do. As Mantzaridis notes, “The incorporation of man into Christ and his union with God require the cooperation of two unequal but equally necessary forces:

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<sup>81</sup> Paul T. Verghese, *Freedom and Authority* (Madras, India: The Christian Literature Society, 1974), 110.

<sup>82</sup> Alfeyev, *The Mystery of Faith*, 90.

<sup>83</sup> Karkkainen, *Pneumatology*, 86.

<sup>84</sup> Stephanopoulos, *The New Man*, 155.

divine grace and human will.”<sup>85</sup> This process of elevation and transformation of the entire person is only possible as one “actively and responsibly cooperates (synergy) by faith with the grace of the Triune God made possible by the work of Jesus Christ and is ultimately completed in the Final Day”<sup>86</sup> As shall be shown in Chapter Three, this teaching proved to be of particular interest to John Wesley in his development of his position on Christian perfection.

There are limits to what the synergy between God and humans can accomplish. If one refuses to seek after Him, as Clendenin notes, “the grace of God is not able to visit those who flee salvation. Nor is human virtue of such power as to be adequate of itself to raise up to authentic life those souls who are untouched by grace.”<sup>87</sup>

Gregory of Nyssa gave solid insights about humanity’s use of freedom and he employed several analogies to make his point. One example is as follows: The sun is far above earth yet its light reaches the multitudes here. So also it is with God – His activity reaches us even though the divine nature is inaccessibly high above us. We have freedom to look away from the light. If people choose they can, by shutting their eyes, close off their perception of the light. This is not because the sun has quit shining but because they have cut themselves off from the sun’s rays. Gregory continued “It is also that someone can build a house and make no provision for sunlight to enter, he will live in a darkness of his own making since he has prevented the light from entering.”<sup>88</sup>

Those who build a windowless house have misused their freedom. The house is dark inside because no windows were included in it. The image of how grace works also

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<sup>85</sup> Georgios I. Mantzaridis, *The Deification of Man*. (New York: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1984), 23.

<sup>86</sup> Stephanopoulos, *The New Man*, 149.

<sup>87</sup> Clendenin, *Eastern Orthodox Theology*, 191.

<sup>88</sup> Harrison, *Grace and Human Freedom according to St. Gregory of Nyssa*, 23.

shows how it fails. The life that enters one through grace is God's life present within a person as the sun's light is present when it comes into a house through the windows. Humans were created with the freedom to choose and to assume personal responsibility for their choices. Gregory concluded that "Without freedom man is not man. The freedom of the human person is an essential component; without freedom it is impossible to conceive of a personal encounter between God and man."<sup>89</sup>

This position allowed the Patristic Fathers to teach that the image of God cannot be destroyed in a person, no matter how sinful or debauched one may become. God created humans in His likeness and this implies the potential to develop in His likeness. The West tends to view this position as giving too much credit to free will and too little to God. Yet the Patristics held that God invites all and compels none. "God never draws anyone to Himself by force and violence. He wishes all men to be saved but forces no one."<sup>90</sup> It is in Christ that the union of God with humans is accomplished. St. Symeon wrote, "Do you see the depth of the mysteries? Christ will have with us the same union by grace as He has with the Father by nature."<sup>91</sup> Another church father put it this way:

Every human being is recreated and renewed in Christ. The redemptive act of Christ was not accomplished for an abstract mass of people but for every single individual. It is in Christ that the whole of the human race receives justification, perfection and absolute meaning.<sup>92</sup>

To whom is redemption offered? The message of the gospels is that it is for all who believe.<sup>93</sup> In an unparalleled demonstration of divine love, Christ endured death on the cross, which provided the means for reconciliation and union between the human race

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<sup>89</sup> Ibid., 27.

<sup>90</sup> Stephanopoulos, *The New Man*, 160.

<sup>91</sup> Alfeyev, *The Mystery of Faith*, 91.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid.

<sup>93</sup> John 20:31

and God. What Adam ought to have achieved by raising himself up to God, “God achieved by descending to man. That is why the triple barrier which separates us from God – death, sin, and nature - is broken through by God in inverse order.”<sup>94</sup>

Evangelicals have often emphasized that one must have a particular moment in time when one enters God’s family. Various called being born again, saved or committing one’s life to Christ, there is an understanding that a definite decision must be made to receive Jesus.<sup>95</sup> This is how evangelicals believe the atoning sacrifice of Christ is personally appropriated. However, the early evangelical leaders, whose views will be discussed later, viewed salvation as a process or “awakening”, more in keeping with the influence of theosis on their theology.

Theosis views the atonement more in terms of a process. The teaching of synergy was shown to be the cooperation between God and humans. He gives grace and persons respond with virtuous acts. By uniting humanity and God in His own person at the Incarnation and by His victory over death and the devil by His crucifixion and resurrection, the path to union with God has been reopened. “The beginning of the spiritual life is conversion, an attitude of the will turning towards God and renouncing the world.”<sup>96</sup> Conversion may be defined as a constant effort of the will turned towards God. “Unless man turns to God of his own free will and with all his longing, unless he cries to Him in prayer with complete faith, he cannot be cured.”<sup>97</sup>

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<sup>94</sup> Ibid., 136.

<sup>95</sup> John 1:12 teaches that one must receive Christ to be able to claim they are God’s child.

<sup>96</sup> Lossky, *The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church*, 199.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid., 206.

#### 4. Progress of the Soul in Eternity

Salvation is progressive and will be ultimately realized only in eternity. Lossky notes, “Deification will only be realized in the age to come, after the resurrection of the dead. This deifying union has to be fulfilled more and more in this present life, through the transformation of our corruptible nature by adapting to eternal life.”<sup>98</sup>

The soul begins to progress spiritually with every exposure to grace. As more grace is thirsted for, the soul expands to receive more grace. This demands more than a casual enquiry for it is the presence and activity of God in the soul.

Grace is God’s own life present and active in the soul. To use Gregory of Nyssa’s analogy, it is like the sun’s radiance coming through the windows or water from an unending spring. If one fails to receive it is not because the supply is short. Rather it is like people who stumble because their eyes are closed when the light is all around them. People must choose to allow God to pour His life into them. Human freedom plays a key role in the process. The receptacle can freely choose to be filled with either Christ’s water of life or some fluid waste of the world and its sin.

Gregory believed that “the soul grows by constant participation in the divine, which is without form or limit, and is therefore inexhaustible.”<sup>99</sup> He taught that humans were created to partake of all good things from God. After death the soul will continue to increase in perfection and that the “ultimate goal of the whole human being, both body and soul, is to increase unendingly in participation of the divine good.”<sup>100</sup> Grace enlarges the soul’s capacity to receive grace and then fills it again and again in a process of eternal

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<sup>98</sup> Ibid., 196.

<sup>99</sup> Paul Ramsey, ed., *Works of Jonathan Edwards*, Volume 8, 727.

<sup>100</sup> Wilson-Kastner, “God’s Infinity and His Relationship to Creation in the Theologies of Gregory of Nyssa and Jonathan Edwards”, 308.

growth. Humans were created to be receptacles of the divine nature and are capable of unending expansion.

Scriptures such as John 17 are understood to support this teaching. Verse 23 is especially informative: “I in them and You in Me, that they may be perfect in one.” The Lord was praying about the glorious union with God that each believer will realize in eternity. “There is union but not fusion or confusion. Man still remains man, he is not swallowed up or annihilated but between him and God there continues to exist an ‘I – Thou’ relationship.”<sup>101</sup>

Humanity’s full deification is a future event. The final deification of humankind is in the Kingdom of Heaven. The Patristic Fathers did not consider death as the end but rather the beginning of a new life for which earth was merely a preparation. They prayed for the souls of the departed because prayer “can assist the person in the journey after death and that God accepts prayers not only for the righteous but also for sinners.”<sup>102</sup>

The Patristic Fathers interpreted I Peter 3:18-21 to mean that Jesus, while His body lay in the grave following the crucifixion, descended into hell and preached to those who were dead. Some Fathers held that He spoke only to those who were righteous but most agreed with Clement of Alexandria who taught that when Jesus descended into hell “his goal was nothing but the proclamation of the gospel there; in doing this, He converted all the dead. Therefore all who believed in Him will be saved, even if they had been pagans.”<sup>103</sup>

The Fathers also taught that those who failed to come to Christ in this life will

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<sup>101</sup> Ware, *The Orthodox Way*, 88.

<sup>102</sup> Alfeyev, *The Mystery of Faith*, 206.

<sup>103</sup> *Ibid.*, 210.

have another opportunity given to them in hell. “Having created human beings with free will, God accepted the responsibility of the salvation of humanity. Those who died without hearing the gospel message cannot be treated as if they deliberately rejected Him.”<sup>104</sup> Hell then becomes the abode of only those who willfully deprive themselves of God’s love. Even here participation in the divine nature is at the core of this doctrine. “All who deliberately choose evil instead of good deprive themselves of God’s mercy. The very same divine love which is a source of bliss for the righteous becomes a source of torment for sinners as they cannot participate in it and are outside of it.”<sup>105</sup> Biblical descriptions of hell as a lake of fire or everlasting torment are only symbols caused by the soul’s inability to participate fully in God.

This sounds very close to universalism, therefore the interpretation of I Corinthians 15:22-28 is crucial. The passage speaks of God being all in all; that in Adam all die but that in Christ all shall be made alive. Origen taught this meant that all will be saved. “It is not heresy to believe in the possibility of the salvation of all and to continue to pray and hope for that. As St. John Climacus said, ‘It is not impossible for all to be saved and reconciled with God.’”<sup>106</sup> Irrespective of whether or not it is heresy, it was the Patristic teaching on the progress of the soul in eternity that formed the basis for which the possibility of universal redemption could even be considered.

The Patristics saw deification as a continuous process. “The purpose of life is a transforming friendship and union with God.”<sup>107</sup> The Spirit draws but does not coerce to believe. Although depraved, sinners can still respond. “Scripture everywhere assumes our

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<sup>104</sup> Ibid., 211.

<sup>105</sup> Ibid., 212.

<sup>106</sup> Ibid., 221.

<sup>107</sup> Pinnock, *Flame of Love*, 152.

ability to call on God and everywhere holds us responsible on account of it.”<sup>108</sup> Salvation requires the synergy between divine grace and the human will. It is participation in the divine nature.

#### **D. Conclusion**

Theosis is a doctrine developed by the Patristic Fathers and is a vast area of study. For the sake of presentation this chapter has grouped its diverse, yet interdependent concepts, into four main tenets: participation in the divine nature, recapitulation, union with God and progress of the soul in eternity. The doctrine of theosis was built upon the teachings of Plato and Neo-Platonism; however, the Patristic Fathers were careful to exclude anything from these secular philosophies they deemed unbiblical. Many of the Patristic Fathers were referenced but primary attention was given to the writings of Gregory of Nyssa. The next chapters will show how the leaders of early Evangelicalism were influenced by theosis and how they incorporated it into their ministries.

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<sup>108</sup> Ibid., 160.

## CHAPTER TWO

### A BRIEF SURVEY OF EARLY EVANGELICALISM

The eighteenth century saw the rise of a powerful religious movement that came to be known as Evangelicalism. It began within the confines of two established state churches: the Church of England and the Congregational church in Massachusetts. However, the appeal of its message and the spiritual changes it produced in the personal lives of its adherents caused it to quickly spread to other church groups and then throughout the world.

This chapter will give a brief historical overview of the emergence of Evangelicalism and its key leaders. It is necessary to note the prominent figures in the rise of Evangelicalism, as it will set the stage for the next three chapters' examination of them and the influence that the doctrine of theosis had in the development of their theology.

This thesis cannot include a detailed history of Evangelicalism and the revivals from which it sprung, for as Stearns notes, "The new evangelicalism assumed many forms: Pietism in the Germanies, the 'Great Awakening' in the English American colonies, and the rise of Methodist Societies in England."<sup>1</sup> The Germans were experiencing the same type of interest in religion during this time. Of particular note would be the Pietist movement and the Moravians who had such a great impact on John Wesley.<sup>2</sup> (See Chapter Four) The focus of this thesis will be on Evangelicalism in the

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<sup>1</sup> Raymond P. Stearns, *Pageant of Europe* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, Inc. 1961), 370.

<sup>2</sup> Wesley read a pamphlet by Philip Jakob Spener of Frankfurt entitled, "The Piety We Desire." Written in 1675, Spener proposed six remedies to revive the poor state of the German church: "There must be a return

English-speaking world.

Four ordained clergymen have been closely associated with the rise of Evangelicalism: Jonathan Edwards of Massachusetts, George Whitefield, John and Charles Wesley of England. Although they are not the only people to be involved,<sup>3</sup> these four men were acknowledged as the leaders of the movement in the eighteenth century and shaped its direction.

### A. Evangelicalism Defined

The term 'evangelical' is derived from the Greek word *euangelion*. "The English word *gospel* is the equivalent of *euangelion*. In the New Testament "it denotes the good tidings God's Kingdom and of salvation through Christ, to be received by faith, on the basis of his expiatory death, burial and resurrection."<sup>4</sup> So those who believed and proclaimed the gospel message of the New Testament came to be known as evangelicals.

Mark Noll has identified five central tenets of early Evangelicalism:

It stood for justification by faith instead of trust in human works as the path to salvation; it defended the sole sufficiency of Christ for salvation instead of the human (and often corrupted) mediations of the church; it looked to the once-for-all triumph of Christ's death on the cross instead of the repetition of Christ's sacrifice in the Catholic mass; it found final authority in the Bible as read by believers in general instead of what the Catholic Church said the Bible had to mean and it embraced the priesthood of all Christian believers in general instead of inappropriate reliance on a class of priests ordained by the church.<sup>5</sup>

Two other definitions of Evangelicalism are helpful to include in this discussion. Church

to the scriptures; lay people must again take an active role in religious life; Christians must move beyond mere acknowledgment of correct beliefs to active godliness; harsh religious controversies must be stopped and replaced with love to all believers; the ministry must be reserved for men who are true Christians; and students for the ministry must be well versed in the practices of godliness and not merely trained to parrot theories of the spiritual life." Noll, *The Rise of Evangelicalism*, 62.

<sup>3</sup> Noll's book notes other prominent leaders in the early years of evangelicalism such as Howell Harris, Daniel Rowland, Gilbert Tennent, Griffith Jones and the Countess of Huntingdon.

<sup>4</sup> W. E. Vine, *Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words* (Old Tappan, New Jersey: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1966), 167.

<sup>5</sup> Noll, *The Rise of Evangelicalism*, 16-17.

historian David Bebbington has defined Evangelicalism as having four main personal conversion experience, proclamation of the Bible, evangelism and the centrality of the cross of Christ.<sup>6</sup> Another model for Evangelicalism has been given by Timothy Smith. While recognizing there were differences among the early evangelicals, he states that they all shared a conviction in the authority of the Bible, the work of the Spirit in salvation and the necessity of evangelism.<sup>7</sup> As the subsequent chapters will show, the four men receiving attention in this thesis all give strong testimony as to personally having the conversion experience cited in the above definitions by Noll, Bebbington and Smith.

Evangelicalism is a movement that transcends denominational lines. Some denominations could be identified as exclusively evangelical in theology; but Christians with evangelical beliefs are found in all the main Protestant denominations as well as the Roman Catholic and the Eastern Orthodox Churches. Evangelicalism traces its theological heritage as being derived from the Christianity described in the New Testament. Although evangelical teaching can be found throughout all ages and of church

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<sup>6</sup> D.W. Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain: A History from the 1730s to the 1980s* (London: Unwin Hyman, 1989), 17. "Conversion, or 'the belief that lives need to be changed'; the Bible or 'the belief that all spiritual truth is to be found in its pages'; activism, or the dedication of all believers, including lay people, to live of service for God, especially as manifested in evangelism (spreading the good news) and mission (taking the gospel to other societies); and crucicentrism, or the conviction that Christ's death was the crucial matter in providing atonement for sin."

<sup>7</sup> Timothy L. Smith, "George Whitefield and Wesleyan Perfectionism," *Wesleyan Theological Journal*, 19 (1984): 54-55. "Three points of Christian belief upon which Whitefield, the Calvinist, and John and Charles Wesley, the Arminians, always agreed. Indeed, they shared these convictions with Quakers and Baptists, with the German Pietists, Mennonites, and Moravians, and with a growing majority of the heirs of the Puritans, whether Presbyterian, Anglican, or Congregationalist, in Great Britain and America. All such 'evangelicals' affirmed the moral authority of the Bible, declaring that it called human beings to a righteousness that is not only imputed to them in Christ's name but actually imparted to them by His grace. All stressed the work of the Holy Spirit in bringing sinners to repentance and faith in Christ, assuring them of forgiveness, and by His presence thereafter in their hearts nurturing in them the love and holiness that please God. And they declared it the duty of all who had discovered these truths and experienced this grace to proclaim the good news of salvation everywhere, at home and abroad. From that day until this, these three convictions have marked the boundaries of evangelical Protestantism. The Bible is its authority, the new birth its hallmark, and evangelism its mission."

history, its resurgence began with the Protestant Reformation. Since the Great Awakening in the USA and the English revival that occurred in the eighteenth century, Evangelicalism has continued as a strong religious force throughout the world.

## **B. Religious Conditions of English Peoples in the Early Eighteenth Century**

To understand the significance of the ministry of the early evangelicals it requires a look back at the religious conditions of the times in which they lived. The revivals on both continents were significant because of the low level of spirituality in its churches and people in the eighteenth century.

The year of 1660 saw tremendous political and religious upheaval in England. Following the restoration of the Stuart monarchy, Puritan clergy were replaced by the Church of England. In 1662 legislation was passed and nearly two thousand ministers were removed from their churches and homes for refusing to sign the Act of Uniformity.<sup>8</sup> In their place “the Church of England accepted as their substitutes whatever men were available, and many who were sadly lacking in both learning and Christian principles.”<sup>9</sup> Since the Puritans and Oliver Cromwell had tried to legislate piety, now any overt display of emotion or excitement in religion was labeled as “enthusiasm” and was to be shunned. This was the charge that was frequently made against the four of the clergymen that will be covered in this thesis.

About the same time a new teaching called Deism was introduced to England, which held that God was nothing more than the First Cause of all things.<sup>10</sup> He had created

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<sup>8</sup> Among these were John Bunyan and John and Charles Wesley’s grandfather. See Chapter Four.

<sup>9</sup> Dallimore, *George Whitefield*, 22.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 20. “Deism was not an organized cult but was a form of religious rationalism advocated by a number of authors. It taught that God was nothing more than the First Cause, a force that made the world

the world and humanity's sole responsibility was to acknowledge His being. It attacked the supernatural claims of the Bible and taught that Jesus was only an earnest but deluded man. Deism quickly captured the minds of many of the newly installed Anglican clergy.<sup>11</sup> It was in this environment that evangelicalism was birthed.

The spiritual condition of eighteenth-century English-speaking peoples on both sides of the Atlantic was cause for great concern. Jonathan Edwards wrote of the low spiritual temperature in the New England colonies.<sup>12</sup> In 1737, he stated that the greater part of the residents of his community were "very insensible to the things of religion and engaged in other cares and pursuits. It seemed to be a time of extraordinary dullness in religion."<sup>13</sup> In England, the conditions were not much better. "The slumber of the church was profound and had lost its grasp of any effectual faith. It could offer neither inspiration in life nor comfort in death. Christianity in England had almost ceased to exist. It was no longer the miracle-working faith it had been."<sup>14</sup>

The Evangelical Revival broke up the religious indifference in England so it is no surprise that such a movement provoked great opposition.

That the evangelists and their methods were the fruit of fanaticism was the conviction of ninety-nine percent of the clergy; while all the baser sort regarded the preachers with hatred. ... Again and again Whitefield was stoned, on two occasions he came very near to being murdered. At Wednesbury, Wesley owed his life solely to his own calm and courage that restrained the fury of the mob. Bulls, goaded to madness, were driven into the midst of the crowds of listeners; packs of hounds were urged against the worshipers; stones, mud, rotten eggs and

the way a clockmaker makes a clock, and having set its mechanism to operate according to certain laws, simply winds it up and lets it run."

<sup>11</sup> J. Wesley Bready, *England: Before and After Wesley* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1931) 41.

"Nowhere perhaps are the sorry effects of Deism more unmistakably or more accurately mirrored than in the [Anglican clergy] and succession of eighteenth century Archbishops of England, who as Primates of all England, directed the destiny of the national church."

<sup>12</sup> See Chapter Three for fuller discussion.

<sup>13</sup> Jonathan Edwards, "A Faithful Narrative," *A Jonathan Edwards Reader*, 59.

<sup>14</sup> C. Silvester Horne, *A Popular History of the Free Churches* (London: James Clarke & Co., 1903), 258.

every other missile were employed to break up the meetings and intimidate the evangelists.<sup>15</sup>

The rise of Evangelicalism had a profound effect upon eighteenth century English society on both sides of the Atlantic. Whereas John Wesley wrote in 1738:

We see on every side either men of no religion at all or men of a lifeless formal religion. We are grieved at the sight and should greatly rejoice if by any means we might convince some that there is a better religion to be attained: A religion of love, joy, and peace having its seat in the heart, in the inmost soul spreading virtue and happiness all around.<sup>16</sup>

He would later reflect in 1761 on the magnitude of the English Revival:

I preached in the evening at Nottingham and on Thursday afternoon reached London. From a deep sense of the amazing work which God has of late years wrought in England, I preached in the evening on those words, "He hath not dealt so with any nation" (Psalm 147:20); no, not even with Scotland or New England. In both these God has indeed made bare His arm; yet not in so astonishing a manner as among us. This must appear to all who impartially consider 1) the numbers of persons on whom God has wrought; 2) the swiftness of His work in many, both convinced and truly converted in a few days; 3) the depth of it in most of these, changing the heart as well as the whole conversation; 4) the clearness of it, enabling them boldly to say, 'Thou hast loved me; Thou hast given Thyself for me'; 5) the continuance of it.<sup>17</sup>

Wesley and the others integrally involved in the English Revival gave God the praise for His gracious work in England.

The survey of the history and definition of Evangelicalism has considered the conditions of the times in which this movement emerged. Still this is not the full picture or explanation of why this fledgling movement made such a significant impact upon their societies.

### **C. The Power of the Holy Spirit**

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 269.

<sup>16</sup> Stearns, *Pageant of Europe*, 370.

<sup>17</sup> Thomas Jackson, ed., *The Works of John Wesley*, Volume 4, 429.

One further aspect must be considered. The four men cited above, Edwards, Whitefield and the Wesley brothers, not only shared a common testimony of their spiritual conversion but also the conviction that they were mightily empowered by the Holy Spirit. They also believed that the signs of the Holy Spirit accompanied the Great Awakening and the English revivals.

Edwards wrote extensively on the history of redemption and he concluded that “from the fall of man to this day wherein we live the Work of Redemption in its effect has mainly been carried on by remarkable pourings out of the Spirit of God.”<sup>18</sup> He wrote in *Faithful Narrative* of the bodily movements of those who were “powerfully wrought upon” by the Holy Spirit during the first awakening. When Wesley read Edwards’ account it affected him deeply.<sup>19</sup>

In England, the young evangelical movement experienced unprecedented manifestations of the Holy Spirit during a week-long prayer meeting in early January, 1739. Whitefield recorded in the journal:

It was a Pentecost season indeed. Some times whole nights were spent in prayer. Often have we been filled as with new wine and often have I been overwhelmed with the Divine Presence and crying out, ‘Will God indeed dwell with men upon the earth! How dreadful is this place! This is no other than the house of God and the gate of heaven’.<sup>20</sup>

Mark Noll gives a fuller description of these prayer meetings that were held in those first days of 1739, a watershed year in the rise of early Evangelicalism:

Present were Charles and John Wesley, George Whitefield and about sixty others. John wrote, “About three in the morning, as we were continuing instant in prayer, the power of God came mightily upon us, insomuch that many cried out for exceeding joy and many fell to the ground. As soon as we were recovered a little

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<sup>18</sup> Noll, *The Rise of Evangelicalism*, 138.

<sup>19</sup> See Chapter Four, 87.

<sup>20</sup> William Wale, ed., *Journal of George Whitefield*, 196.

from that awe and amazement at the presence of his majesty, we broke out with one voice, ‘We praise thee, O God; we acknowledge thee to be the Lord’.”<sup>21</sup>

They had great sensitivity to the charge of being an enthusiast as that was the legacy from the days of Cromwell and the Puritans. However, as stated in the previous chapter,<sup>22</sup> the Holy Spirit was very much supposed to be involved in accomplishing theosis in the lives of believers. These leaders claimed the filling of the Spirit in their lives and ministry and this conviction definitely directed their theology and preaching.

The doctrine of theosis also greatly depends upon the ministry of the Holy Spirit. Deification and union with God is brought to completion through the Holy Spirit. In that process, “man does not receive a new soul but the Holy Spirit unites essentially with the whole man, body and soul.”<sup>23</sup> The Spirit’s contribution is essential as Irenaeus emphasized when he spoke about the “two hands of God”<sup>24</sup> meaning that both Son and Spirit bring salvation and divinization.

The early evangelical leaders that are being studied in this thesis all gave personal testimony to experiential knowledge of the Holy Spirit. Their reliance upon the empowerment of the Spirit is evident in their preaching, writing and journals.

This chapter has surveyed the definition, history and main characters in early evangelicalism. Now attention will be focused on how theosis influenced the theology of these key leaders.

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<sup>21</sup> Noll, *The Rise of Evangelicalism*, 99.

<sup>22</sup> See Chapter One, 21-23

<sup>23</sup> Rakestraw, “Becoming Like God: An Evangelical Doctrine of Theosis,” 261.

<sup>24</sup> Chapter One, 25

## CHAPTER THREE

### JONATHAN EDWARDS

#### A. Biography

Jonathan Edwards (1703 -1758) was “colonial America’s greatest theologian and philosopher.”<sup>1</sup> He was born the fifth of eleven children, but only son, to Rev. Timothy Edwards and Esther Stoddard Edwards. Esther was daughter of Rev. Solomon Stoddard, a well-known and highly influential clergyman among the Puritans. Jonathan’s parents “doted on him as the only male heir, and his five elder sisters, particularly Mary with her penchant for theology, shared their own growing knowledge with him as he prepared for what everyone expected, a career in the ministry.”<sup>2</sup> He was tutored by his father until the age of thirteen and then studied at Yale, earning his undergraduate degree in 1720 and his M.A. in 1722. Following short pastorates in New York and Bolton, Connecticut he returned to Yale in 1724 as a tutor. In 1726 he left for Northampton, Massachusetts to commence the ministry of pastor and scholar that would bring him to the attention of the world. His central role in the Great Awakening and through the influence of his sermons and books continues to challenge hearts and minds to this present day.<sup>3</sup>

Edwards came from a distinguished family of clergymen. His grandfather, Solomon Stoddard, and his father, Timothy Edwards, were well-known pastors and

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<sup>1</sup> John Smith, ed., *A Jonathan Edwards Reader*, page viii.

<sup>2</sup> Gura, *Jonathan Edwards, America’s Evangelical*, 17.

<sup>3</sup> Holifield, *Theology in America*, 102. “In many ways, Edwards was a typical New England theologian, a Calvinist concerned about piety in a local congregation. Yet no other theologian in America would equal him in intellectual depth or enduring influence on generations of successors. For a hundred years after his death, competing schools of theology either struggled for his mantle or to overcome his logic.”

religious leaders in the Massachusetts Bay colony. Under their guidance, and other family members, he began to consider spiritual matters at an early age. In “Personal Narrative”<sup>4</sup> he relates the timeline of his conversion. Beginning with “prayer five times a day as a child in secret” and long walks through the woods he “used to be from time to time much affected.” His great struggle was with the Calvinist doctrine of predestination. “From my childhood up, my mind had been wont to be full of objections against the doctrine of God’s sovereignty, in choosing whom he would to eternal life and rejecting those whom he pleased.” He does not mention precisely when it happened but “I remember the time very well when I seemed to be convinced, and fully satisfied, as to this sovereignty of God, and his justice, in eternally disposing of men according to his sovereign pleasure.” Shortly after coming to this position, he read I Timothy 1:17: “Now unto the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only wise God, be honor and glory forever and ever, Amen.” While thinking on this text, “There came into my soul, and was as if it were diffused through it, a sense of the glory of the Divine Being; a new sense, quite different from anything I ever experienced before.”

Edwards then described his new contemplation of Christ and his work of redemption. “My mind was greatly engaged, to spend time in reading and meditating on Christ; and the beauty and excellency of his person, and the lovely way of salvation, by free grace in him.” He shared these thoughts with his father and after their conversation he went for a solitary walk through the family farm “and as I was walking there, and looked up on the sky and clouds, there came into my mind a sweet sense of the glorious majesty and grace of God.” More can be quoted but it is clear that Edwards had a

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<sup>4</sup> John Smith, ed., “Personal Narrative”, *A Jonathan Edwards Reader*, 282-285.

personal conversion experience<sup>5</sup> that would shape his philosophy of preaching and writing on God's grace for the rest of his life.

## B. The Great Awakening

The spiritual condition of New England was of great concern to Edwards. The colonies “had been founded and were controlled for several generations by a theocratic group – by men who believed that the Word of God was sufficient for governance, that it was the law of the land and the clergy its sole interpreters.”<sup>6</sup> However, by the time Edwards had begun his ministry the first generation of Pilgrims and settlers had long passed off the scene and the children and grandchildren of these founders were now in the church. This subsequent generation's participation in church was more of a cultural habit than by biblical conviction.<sup>7</sup> In “Faithful Narrative of the Surprising Work of God” (1737) he wrote that the greater part of the residents of his community were “very insensible to the things of religion and engaged in other cares and pursuits. It seemed to be a time of extraordinary dullness in religion.”<sup>8</sup>

Coupled with this low state of religion, Edwards was also alarmed at the inroads that Arminianism was making in his area.<sup>9</sup> “Many who looked on themselves as in a Christless condition, seemed to be awakened by it, with fear that God was about to

<sup>5</sup> Gura, *Jonathan Edwards, America's Evangelical*, 35. “His description of this experience, justly among the most famous of his writings, reveals how deep reading in contemporary philosophy allowed him to redefine his understanding of religious life... [This happened] probably in late winter of early spring of 1721, the year after his graduation from Yale.”

<sup>6</sup> Clarence Faust and Thomas Johnson, *Jonathan Edwards*, xi.

<sup>7</sup> The “Halfway Covenant” of 1662 contributed to this decline. It allowed citizens of the colony to have their children baptized and become members of the church, even though they or their children had not been regenerated. When Edwards would later insist on regenerate church membership it would lead to him being dismissed from his church in 1750.

<sup>8</sup> John Smith, ed., “A Faithful Narrative”, *A Jonathan Edwards Reader*, 59.

<sup>9</sup> Gura, *Jonathan Edwards, America's Evangelical*, 74. “People began to hear a great noise about Arminianism [from Rev. Rand of nearby Sunderland] and their spirit is exasperated and religion wounded.”

withdraw from the land and that we should be given up to heterodoxy and corrupt principles and that their opportunity for salvation would be past.”<sup>10</sup>

To address this perceived decline in spirituality, Edwards preached a series of sermons on the subject of “Justification By Faith Alone.” The response was what he considered to be a tremendous outpouring of God’s power.

All seemed to be seized with a deep concern about their eternal salvation; all the talk in all companies was upon the things of religion and no other talk was anywhere relished; and scarcely a single person in the whole town was left unconcerned about the great things of the eternal world ... the highest families in the town, and the oldest persons in the town, and many little children were affected remarkably, no one family that I know of, and scarcely a person, has been exempt.<sup>11</sup>

This was the beginning of what was “subsequently known as the Little Awakening.”<sup>12</sup>

The revival spread to surrounding areas “in all about twenty five communities throughout western Massachusetts and central Connecticut experienced in some measure what Edwards witnessed personally in Northampton.”<sup>13</sup> One significant aspect of the revival was that the *Faithful Narrative* “more than any other single published statement, would define the standard expectations for evangelical conversion and evangelical revival.”<sup>14</sup>

Edwards’ description of the revival revealed his amazement of the events:

The work of conversion was carried on in a most astonishing manner and increased more and more; souls did as it were come by flocks to Jesus Christ. This work of God, as it was carried on, and the number of true saints multiplied, soon made a glorious alteration in the town; so that in the spring and summer following

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 61.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 62-63.

<sup>12</sup> Gura, *Jonathan Edwards, America’s Evangelical*, 71. The Great Awakening began a few years later when George Whitefield toured the America colonies in the 1740s.

<sup>13</sup> Noll, *The Rise of Evangelicalism*, 38.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 80.

1735, the town seemed to be full of the presence of God: it was never so full of love, nor so full of joy.<sup>15</sup>

The term Edwards repeatedly used for the conversion experience was “awakening.” The Puritans also used this word to describe the salvation experience. He wrote of “when awakenings first begin” and “very often under first awakenings,” and again in another place “in those in who awakenings seem to have a saving issue.”<sup>16</sup> As will be shown in subsequent chapters, George Whitefield used similar terminology and John Wesley also employed this idea of a process as he developed his doctrine on sanctification and perfection.

The significance of this discussion about the word “awakening” is that the doctrine of theosis teaches that divinization is a process. There is a definite beginning point and then it continues through life and beyond, as the soul is receptive to God’s grace. The teaching of synergy was shown in Chapter One to be the cooperation between God and humans. He gives grace and people respond to it with virtuous acts. By uniting humanity and God in His own person at the incarnation and by His victory over death at His resurrection, the path to union with God has been reopened. “The beginning of the

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<sup>15</sup> John Smith, ed., “A Faithful Narrative”, *A Jonathan Edwards Reader*, 63. Edwards gave a more complete description of the conversion experience on pages 67-76: “Persons are first awakened with a sense of their miserable condition by nature, the danger they are in of perishing eternally, and that it is of great importance to them that they speedily escape, and get into a better state. Some are more suddenly seized with convictions; it may be by the news of others’ conversion, or something they hear in public, or in private conference, that their consciences are suddenly smitten, as if pierced through with a dart. . . . These awakenings have had two effects: one was, they have brought them immediately to quit their sinful practices. When once the Spirit of God began to be so wonderfully poured out in a general way through the town, people had soon done with their old quarrels and the tavern was soon left empty. . . . The other effect was that it put them on earnest application to the means of salvation - reading, prayer, meditation, the ordinances of God’s house, and private conference; their cry was “What shall we do to be saved?” The place of resort was not altered; it was no longer the tavern but the minister’s house, that was thronged far more than ever the tavern had been wont to be. Very often under first awakenings, when they are brought to reflect on the sin of their past lives, and have something of a terrifying sense of God’s anger, they confess their sins. . . . To see that there is such an all-sufficiency in God, and such plentiful provision made in Christ exceedingly refreshes them; the view is joyful and gives them quite new and more delightful ideas of God and Christ.”

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 71-73.

spiritual life is conversion, an attitude of the will turning towards God and renouncing the world.”<sup>17</sup> Conversion then is characterized as a constant effort of the will turned towards God. “Unless man turns to God of his own free will and with all his longing, unless he cries to Him in prayer with complete faith, he cannot be cured.”<sup>18</sup> The influence of theosis is shown in this as Edwards and other early evangelicals used a term that spoke of a process of being united with Christ. His personal conversion experience, outlined above, was one of a gradual coming to know Christ and to see Him in His power, majesty and love. Today evangelicals seldom use the word “awakening” choosing rather to declare that a person has been saved, born again or converted.

The account of the religious revival that was happening in New England traveled across the Atlantic where it had a powerful effect on the life and ministry of the Wesleys and George Whitefield. In Chapter Five the discussion of Whitefield’s role in the Great Awakening will be explored further, but for now it will suffice to demonstrate the connection between Edwards and Whitefield.

The Great Awakening began in Edwards’ village of Northampton in 1734 and spread over the whole eastern seacoast from Maine to Georgia. For fifteen years, waves of religious enthusiasm deluged New England, one of the most notable of these storms coming in 1740 when George Whitefield visited the colonies.<sup>19</sup>

Not everyone in New England was impressed with the revival. Rev. Charles Chauncy of Boston “began to collect materials for what he and a network of ‘Old Lights’ considered antinomian and enthusiastic excesses. Chauncy and his allies denounced the movement as

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<sup>17</sup> Lossky, *The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church*, 199.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 206.

<sup>19</sup> Faust and Johnson, *Jonathan Edwards*, xvii.

a whole.”<sup>20</sup> One criticism they made of the revival was the manifestation of the Spirit.

Some unusual symptoms and excessive emotion accompanied it and in *Faithful*

*Narrative*, Edwards commented on the phenomenon.

Those who had been born again alternated between soaring high and devastating lows; sometimes they were quite broken and ‘sank into an abyss, under a sense of guilt’. At other times they would ‘break forth into laughter, tear often at the same issuing like a flood, and intermingling a loud weeping’. The revival was just burning itself out when George Whitefield toured the colonies and sparked a second wave. During his sermons, people fainted, wept and shrieked; the churches shook with the cries of those who imagined themselves saved and the groans of the unfortunate who were convinced they were damned.<sup>21</sup>

When the discussion moves to the subject of Participation in the Divine Nature it will be shown that Edwards viewed the role of the Holy Spirit as being vital in the process of redemption and divinization.<sup>22</sup> His view of the Spirit’s work resonates with Patristic Fathers such as Irenaeus and Gregory of Nyssa. They had taught, as noted above,<sup>23</sup> that God’s Spirit could not be relegated to secondary status in the plan of redemption. Edwards concurred and saw the manifestations of the Spirit as God authenticating conversions and the revival.

As historians themselves, the early evangelicals were deeply impressed with the role that extraordinary effusions of the Holy Spirit had played in the entire pilgrimage of the church. When Jonathan Edwards contemplated the way in which God worked in history, his conclusion was that ‘from the fall of man to this

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<sup>20</sup> Noll, *The Rise of Evangelicalism*, 129.

<sup>21</sup> Karen Armstrong, *The Battle For God* (New York: Ballantyne Books, 2000), 78.

<sup>22</sup> McClymond, *Jonathan Edwards, Philosophical Theologian*, 153. “Edwards taught a doctrine of divinization. The only thing missing is the word itself, although, Edwards employed a rich vocabulary of terms and phrases such as ‘emanation,’ ‘participation,’ ‘partaking’ and ‘uniting’ to describe the divine-human communion from either God’s side or the creature’s. Edwards referred to believers as ‘swallowed up’ in God, the Church as the ‘fullness’ or ‘completeness’ of Christ, and the world as God ‘himself diffused’ or the ‘remanation’ that reflects back God’s emanation in creating. Even more striking than these phrases are Edwards’ frequent citations of 2 Peter 1: 4 – ‘partakers of the divine nature’ - which is the biblical *locus classicus* for the Patristic teaching on divinization. Furthermore, Edwards insists that salvation implies a sharing or participation in the ‘nature’ but not the ‘essence’ of God.”

<sup>23</sup> For fuller discussion, see Chapter One, 22-23.

day wherein we live the Work of Redemption in its effect has mainly been carried on by remarkable pourings out of the Spirit of God'. Because of the importance of revival to evangelical consciousness, Edwards' assessment rapidly became standard.<sup>24</sup>

With this brief background look at Jonathan Edwards and the Great Awakening, consideration will now be given to discover the influences that shaped Edwards' theology.

### C. Edwards and Platonism

Edwards spent much of his time at Yale immersed in reading the theological and philosophical works of his day. It was here where he worked out the theological position that served him well in his ministry at Northampton as pastor and author.

Like all creative geniuses, Edwards borrowed from much of the best of his time without being beholden to any. Besides the Reformers and Puritans, Edwards read widely in the great luminaries of the age, including Descartes, Newton, Locke, Malebranche and Berkeley. From all these domains of knowledge he picked and borrowed, until at a remarkably early age, he fashioned his own synthesis: an "Edwardsean" worldview whose conceptual and metaphorical pillars upheld doctrines in compelling new ways.<sup>25</sup>

This "compelling new way" derived from his reading of Reformers, Puritans, and philosophers, also included concentrated study in Platonism. As Watts has noted, "Scholars have long agreed that the Christian Platonism of Jonathan Edwards manifests certain elements of Neoplatonism in general and of Cambridge Platonism specifically."<sup>26</sup>

The Cambridge Platonists were a group of philosophers at Cambridge University in England in the middle of the seventeenth century. They revived and promoted certain Platonic and Neoplatonic ideas. Chief among these was a mystical conception of the

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<sup>24</sup> Noll, *The Rise of Evangelicalism*, 138.

<sup>25</sup> John Smith, ed., *A Jonathan Edwards Reader*, viii.

<sup>26</sup> Watts, "The Neoplatonic Basis of Jonathan Edwards' True Virtue," 179.

soul's relation to God and the belief that moral ideas are innate in humanity. Although tending toward mysticism, the school also stressed the importance of reason, maintaining that faith and reason differ only in degree. The assertion of the founder of the school, Benjamin Whichcote, that "the spirit in man is the candle of the Lord" became the motto for the entire group<sup>27</sup> which included Ralph Cudworth, Nathaniel Culverwel, John Smith, Benjamin Whichcote and Henry More.

The Cambridge Platonists sought to harmonize reason and religion. They held an almost mystical understanding of reason, taken from Proverbs 20:27 "that the spirit of man is the candle of the Lord." For them, this verse proved that there was something divine connected with the human soul and therefore there was an imprint of God within all humans.<sup>28</sup> They believed that reason could lead beyond what the senses could receive, because it was semi-divine. They taught that God had given reason to humans and thus it was capable of bringing humanity closer to God.

The idea that Moses was not only the Hebrew Lawgiver but also a divinely inspired philosopher had been strongly supported by the Neo-Platonists. They believed that Moses and Plato were linked in that Plato learned his philosophy from the Hebrews.<sup>29</sup> The Cambridge Platonists took the same position. Henry More, who perhaps

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<sup>27</sup> Robert A. Greene, "Whichcote, the Candle of the Lord and Synderesis", *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 52, No. 4 (1991): 617. "This text from Proverbs has been associated with the rational theology of the Cambridge Platonists and specifically with Benjamin Whichcote's view of reason."

<sup>28</sup> McClymond, *Salvation as Divinization: Jonathan Edwards, Gregory of Palamas and the Theological Uses of Neoplatonism*, 142. "Edward's teaching on divinization should be understood against the backdrop of Neoplatonism, and specifically the seventeenth century Cambridge Platonists. The English thinkers, beginning with their founding figure, Benjamin Whichcote, used and the defended the term 'deification', and made the idea central in their reflections."

<sup>29</sup> Brown, *Platonic Idealism in Modern Philosophy*, 211.

had the greatest impact on Edwards,<sup>30</sup> was convinced that there was a direct connection with Platonism, the Patristic Fathers and Christianity. He made no apology for his stand. “As for citing the heathen writers so frequently, you are to consider that they are the wisest and most virtuous of them, and as the Fathers say had their philosophy from Moses and the Prophets, as Pythagoras and Plato.”<sup>31</sup>

Direct evidence of Jonathan Edwards reading Gregory of Nyssa, the Patristic Father chosen to represent the doctrine of theosis in this thesis, has not been discovered. However if one includes the Cambridge Platonists the connection comes into view:

I hope it will be unnecessary to insist that Gregory of Nyssa’s systematic understanding of God’s relationship to creation profoundly influenced Edwards. As far as can be determined, Edwards did not read Gregory of Nyssa, learning his ideas through Puritan writers, his tutor at Yale and especially from the Cambridge Platonists who used Gregory as a substantial formative influence in their own work. Edwards has attempted to adapt Gregory’s system for his own use, which reflects his own Augustinian-Calvinist emphasis on predestination and human sinfulness, and the absolute triumph of God’s glory.<sup>32</sup>

Agreeing with the early Christian writers and the Cambridge Platonists he was reading, Edwards also came to believe that all philosophical truth contained some elements of

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<sup>30</sup> Watts, “The Neoplatonic Basis of Edwards’ True Virtue”, 179. “A later work by More, *Enchiridion Ethicum*, was undoubtedly also read by Edwards at about the same time he was reading *Immortality of the Soul* and seems to have served as the basis for his early investigations of ethics. It is certain that Edwards studied *Enchiridion Ethicum*, which was a textbook for juniors at Yale in the early eighteenth century. Like most Christians, Edwards had to turn to other sources than the Bible for basic ethical concepts and, like most Christians; he turned to a form of Platonism. . . . Like More, Edwards rejected the seventeenth century pleasure-pain principle as based purely on physical qualities; they both saw this system as one which totally negated the necessity of God. Edwards thus denied the system of philosophy which posited true pleasure as depending entirely upon sense perceptions, as was advocated by Thomas Hobbes. His was a lifelong struggle against materialism and mechanism – the philosophy which had originally galvanized the Cambridge Platonists.”

<sup>31</sup> Dockrill, *The Heritage of Patristic Platonism*, 55. Dockrill goes on to state, “The Platonism of the philosophically minded Fathers cannot be ignored nor can affinities between aspects of Christian dogma and certain Platonic doctrines be overlooked . . . The Platonists are to be rated above the rest of the philosophers because they coming to a knowledge of God have found the cause of the organized universe, the light by which truth is perceived, and the spring which offers the drink of felicity.”

<sup>32</sup> Wilson-Kastner, “God’s Infinity and His Relationship to Creation in the Theologies of Gregory of Nyssa and Jonathan Edwards,” 317-18.

divine revelation. Holifield explains that Edwards

Followed a tradition known as the *prisca theologia* (ancient theology) inaugurated by such fathers of the church as Clement of Alexandria, Origen and Eusebius, who employed it to prove that the wisdom of Greek philosophy came from revelation to the ancient Jews. Renaissance thinkers adopted and altered the tradition in the sixteenth century to prove the compatibility of Christian truth and Neoplatonic philosophy. Edwards read these thinkers (eg Ralph Cudworth of Cambridge) and they convinced him that non-Christian religions could contain fragments of truth about such Christian mysteries as redemption and the Trinity. For him, the chief implication in the idea of *prisca theologia* was that all seemingly natural religion – and natural theology – rested on the foundation of the original revelation to Adam and the ancient Jews.<sup>33</sup>

#### **D. The Four Tenets of Theosis**

With this brief survey of Edwards' life, education and influences complete, it is now time to look at the primary sources from the man himself. The basic tenets of theosis can be found in many of Edwards' works. Although he does not appear to use the term itself, his *Miscellanies*, *History of the Work of Redemption*, as well as the fifteenth sermon in the Charity series, *Heaven is a World of Love*, reveals he understood and embraced the concept. His most detailed expression of theosis can be found in his dissertation *Concerning the End for Which God Created the World*. Attention will now be directed to these documents in order to discover from Edwards' own words the influence of theosis on his theological and philosophical preaching and writing. It will be shown that the four main precepts of theosis can be identified in Edwards' writings: participation in the divine nature, recapitulation, union of the soul with God and the progress of the soul in eternity.

##### **1. Participation in the Divine Nature**

In 1733, Edwards preached a sermon entitled *A Divine and Supernatural Light*.

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<sup>33</sup> Holifield, *Theology in America: Christian Thought from the Age of the Puritans to the Civil War*, 106.

Edwards was both a philosophical and biblical theologian and these two sides of his thought are combined beautifully in this sermon. Knowing that this was preached during the early days of the Great Awakening<sup>34</sup> provides readers with a sense of the influence of theosis on his theology, and through him to early Evangelicalism.<sup>35</sup>

His text for *A Divine and Supernatural Light*<sup>36</sup> was Matthew 16:17 where Simon Peter makes his great confession of faith that Jesus is the Christ the Son of God. The Lord blesses Peter and then states that he did not come to this conclusion on his own but that God the Father revealed it to him. Edwards used this text to show how God imparts His light and nature into humans. He began by explaining that this Divine light is not “those convictions that natural men may have of their sin and misery,” nor does it “consist in any impression made upon the imagination.” Edwards was determined to show his congregation that deep spiritual knowledge was not understood apart from God’s Spirit illuminating the human heart. He closed his first point by making it plain that “this spiritual light is not the suggesting of any new truths or propositions not contained in the Word of God.”

Secondly, he expounded that Divine light brings “a true sense of the divine and superlative excellency of the things of religion.” God made the human mind with the capacity to reason and grasp speculative ideas but that biblical truths come from light that “is immediately given by God and not obtained by natural means.” Edwards used the

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<sup>34</sup> Gura, *Jonathan Edwards, America’s Evangelical*, 68. “*A Divine and Supernatural Light*, first delivered in Northampton in 1733, and published in Boston the next year, distilled a decade’s cogitation on the experiential dimension of grace into a sermon on the transforming power of divine knowledge. Through his new vocabulary he brought understanding of the doctrine to another dimension.”

<sup>35</sup> Holifield, *Theology in America*, 104. “His vision of divine “excellency” inspired a way of biblical thinking that shaped his views on rationality, ethics, metaphysics, biblical interpretation and the meaning of the practicality of theology.”

<sup>36</sup> John Smith, ed., “A Divine and Supernatural Light”, *A Jonathan Edwards Reader*, 105-123.

Transfiguration of Christ to illustrate that the light emanating out from His person “was so divine, having such an ineffable appearance and semblance of divine holiness, majesty, and grace, that it evidently denoted Him as a divine person.” If the majesty of the glorified Christ was seen by the apostles with him on the mountain then “it is rational to suppose that God would reserve that knowledge and wisdom, that is of such a divine and excellent nature, to be bestowed by himself, and that it should not be left in the power of second causes.” In other words, God himself will shine the divine light into the heart, mind and soul of believing humans.

It should be remembered at this point that in Patristic teaching, the Transfiguration of Christ is held up as the model for what every believer will experience. “The transfiguration of the person that occurs as a result of union with the Divine is variously called assimilation to God or deification.”<sup>37</sup> The Transfiguration is very significant because it proves that union between Christ’s divine and human nature is possible and subsequently is the expectation for every believer. The Transfiguration demonstrates the truth of 2 Peter 1:4: “Whereby there are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises, that through these you may be partaker of the divine nature.” The goal of humanity is union with God. The first Adam failed but the Second Adam, Jesus Christ, has victoriously accomplished what Adam was unable to do. Those who are in Him are now partakers of His divine nature.

As Edwards continued his sermon he connected the Divine light with the above teaching of participation in the Divine nature. If Christ showed his glory to his apostles personally then:

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<sup>37</sup> Alfeyev, *The Mystery of Faith*, 191.

‘Tis rational to suppose that this blessing should be immediately from God; for there is no gift or benefit that is in itself so nearly related to the divine nature, there is nothing the creature receives that is so much of God, of his nature, so much a participation of the Deity: ‘tis a kind of emanation of God’s beauty, and is related to God as the light is to the sun.<sup>38</sup>

As the Divine light is received it “changes the nature of the soul. It assimilates the nature to the divine nature and changes the soul into an image of the same glory that is beheld.”

This participation that begins on earth at conversion never ceases because divine life is never static.

Edwards makes it clear that the Divine light is the presence and power of the Holy Spirit since “he acts in the mind of a saint an indwelling vital principle.” The Holy Spirit deals with unregenerate persons in a different manner but with God’s people:

He unites himself with the mind of the saint, takes him for his temple, actuates and influences him as a new, supernatural principle of life and action. The Spirit of God, in acting in the soul of a godly man, exerts and communicates himself there in his own proper nature. Holiness is the proper nature of the Spirit of God. The Holy Spirit operates in the minds of the godly, by uniting himself to them, and living in them, and exerting his own nature in the exercise of their faculties.<sup>39</sup>

Edwards left no doubt for his hearer that participation in the divine nature is the work of the Spirit in the lives of those who have believed in Christ.

*A Divine and Supernatural Light* concludes with Edwards’ application that these truths “will bring the soul to a saving close with Christ... This light, as it reaches the bottom of the heart, and changes the nature, will effectually dispose to an universal obedience. It shows God’s worthiness to be obeyed and served.”<sup>40</sup>

This sermon was not the only time Edwards taught participation in the divine

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<sup>38</sup> John Smith, ed., “A Divine and Supernatural Light”, *A Jonathan Edwards Reader*, 121.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 109.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 124.

nature. He preached a fifteen sermon series on I Corinthians 13 entitled *Charity and its Fruits*. In the second sermon he used language very similar to *A Divine and Supernatural Light* in explaining how the Holy Spirit communicates himself to the human soul.<sup>41</sup>

It appears that Edwards wrote and taught on this enough to receive some criticism for his views on humanity's participation in the divine nature. An unidentified clergyman was under the impression that Edwards' *Religious Affections*<sup>42</sup> taught that God communicated his very essence to the saints. A fragment of a letter remains, published for the first time in 1989, in which Edwards defended his theological position on what was really the heart of theosis teaching: Redeemed souls partaking in the divine nature of God. Edwards wrote his unidentified correspondent that he thought he had carefully explained his meaning of His holiness.

As to my saying that the Spirit of God in his saving operation communicates himself to the soul in his own proper nature, implying, as you suppose, God's communicating his essence. After all that is said, the objection is only about the use of language and propriety of expressions. It can't be anything else, for I have particularly explained my meaning and expressly declared what I do not mean, that by his proper nature I don't mean his essence; and have also declared particularly what I do mean, viz. that by the Spirit of God's communicating himself in his proper nature, I mean communicating something of his holiness ... A diamond or crystal that is held forth in the sun's beams may properly be said to have some of the sun's brightness communicated to it; for though it hasn't the same individual brightness with that which is inherent in the sun, and be immensely less in degree,

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<sup>41</sup> Paul Ramsey, ed., *Works of Jonathan Edwards*, Volume 8. "Charity and its Fruits: More Excellent Than Extraordinary Gifts": "When the Spirit by His ordinary influences bestows saving grace, he therein imparts himself to the soul of his own holy nature... By producing this effect the Spirit becomes an indwelling vital principle to the soul and the subject becomes a spiritual being, denominated so from the Spirit of God which dwells in him and of whose nature he is partaker. [2 Peter 1:4] Yea, grace is as it were the holy nature of the Spirit of God imparted to the soul."

<sup>42</sup> John Smith, ed., *A Jonathan Edwards Reader*. "Edwards wrote in 'A Treatise Concerning Religious Affections': 'The Scriptures represent the Holy Spirit as dwelling in them as his temple ... so united to the faculties of the soul that he becomes there a principle or spring of new nature and life... The light of the Sun of Righteousness don't [sic] only shine upon them, but is so communicated to them that they shine also and become little images of that Sun which shines upon them.' Possibly this is what prompted the critical letter to Edwards from the unidentified clergyman."

yet it is something of the same nature.<sup>43</sup>

Later, the letter returns to this same theme and Edwards again plainly stated that “the saints are made partakers of His holiness, as the Scripture declares (Hebrews 12:10) and that without imparting to them His essence.”<sup>44</sup> To participate in the divine nature was to know and experience the purity of the Spirit, without making allowance for any ontological union between Creator and creation.

Clearly, Edwards grasped the implications of humanity’s participation in the divine nature and was not hesitant in proclaiming it, even in the face of criticism. In an article, partly describing the many attacks Edwards endured, H.N. Gardiner “contributes many valuable insights about Edwards’ attempt to avoid both pantheism and also an absolute discontinuity between God and creation.”<sup>45</sup>

To evangelicals and others with a Western frame of reference, theosis can appear to be a form of pantheism. It is not difficult to see how others in Edwards’ day could have concluded that he was introducing a false doctrine. However, this thesis holds that Edwards was only affirming the Patristic teaching on participation in the divine nature.

## 2. Recapitulation

Theosis sees the recapitulation of humanity in the incarnation of Christ and this conviction is expressed in the Patristic sentence “God became man so man could become God.”<sup>46</sup> The first Adam failed to bring humanity into union with God because of sin, but through Christ, the second Adam, humanity can experience union with God. When Christ

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<sup>43</sup> Paul Ramsey, ed., *Works of Jonathan Edwards*, Volume 8, 638.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 639.

<sup>45</sup> Wilson-Kastner, “God’s Infinity and His Relationship to Creation in the Theologies of Gregory of Nyssa and Jonathan Edwards,” 321.

<sup>46</sup> Chapter One, 12.

became human it meant that He will continue in His body throughout eternity. Now “we see through a glass darkly” but in heaven Christ will be seen in His glorified body which is the most excellent way of seeing God.

Edwards did not write at length about this aspect of theosis, referring to it only in a few of his *Miscellanies*. He does show his understanding of it by contrasting Adam’s original state with that of saved believers. For Edwards, Adam’s standing with God before the Fall does not equal the standing of those who have been redeemed from it. He wrote in *Misc* 158, “Those who are saved by the gospel are doubtless advanced to far greater happiness than Adam would have enjoyed.”<sup>47</sup> And again in *Misc* 894 he wrote, “It is probable that some Christians have had higher exercises of love to God, than ever our first parents had, and yet were exceedingly far from sinless perfection, which they had. The occasion which we have to love God now is infinitely greater than that which they had.”<sup>48</sup>

This new standing for believers was made possible only by Christ’s recapitulation of humanity. As Edwards explained in *Misc* 702,

The recovery of the world from confusion and ruin is by Christ, who is the wisdom of God and the brightness of his glory and the light of the world; and that the first thing that was done in order to the recovery of the ruined world, was the giving of Jesus Christ to be the light of the world to put an end to its darkness and confusion. As the light was the first thing come out of darkness and confusion (for it said, II Cor. 4:6, God caused “the light to shine out of darkness”), so Christ was in a sense the first that rose out of the dismal darkness, ruin and death that was occasioned by sin (Acts 26:23; Col. 1:18; I Cor. 15:20, 23; Rev. 1:5).<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> Paul Ramsey, ed., “Misc 158” in *Works of Jonathan Edwards*, Volume 8, 433.

<sup>48</sup> Amy Plantinga Pauw ed., in *Works of Jonathan Edwards*, Volume 20, (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2002), 522.

<sup>49</sup> Paul Ramsey, ed., “Misc 702” in *Works of Jonathan Edwards*, Volume 8, 435.

He also wrote in *Misc* 907, “God’s manner is, in almost everything, to suffer ‘em first to be undone, and then to build ‘em up again in a more glorious, in vastly greater, perfection than before they was undone.”<sup>50</sup> God was not defeated or stymied by the Fall since humanity has been redeemed to a more exalted state than they could have had to begin with. In *Misc* 809 Edwards wrote, “Hence we may learn how vastly higher and more glorious the happiness is that is purchased for the elect by Christ, than that which Adam would have obtained if he had stood.”<sup>51</sup>

From these few references in his *Miscellanies* it is clear that Edwards understood recapitulation as part of the larger doctrine of theosis. However he did not rely upon this aspect of theosis to the same degree as he did with the other three tenets.<sup>52</sup>

### 3. Union of the Soul with God

Edwards’ sermon series on I Corinthians 13, entitled *Charity and Its Fruits*, was fifteen messages in length. The last two in the series, *Divine Love Alone Lasts Eternally*<sup>53</sup> and *Heaven is a World of Love*, outlined his concept of union with God. Edwards went verse-by-verse, almost word-by-word, through the chapter and expounded on the various aspects of love. He began the fourteenth sermon by showing that the gifts of the Spirit will cease when the church is gathered in heaven “but charity remains in heaven. There the Spirit shall be poured forth in perfect love into every heart.”<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> Amy Plantinga Pauw, ed., in *Works of Jonathan Edwards*, Volume 20, 561.

<sup>51</sup> Ava Chamberlain, ed., in *Works of Jonathan Edwards*, Volume 18, 329.

<sup>52</sup> Holifield, *Theology in America*, 114. One writer has observed an aspect of Recapitulation in Edwards. He viewed the ministry of Christ in terms of “excellency, fitness and proportion. The second person of the Trinity became incarnate in Jesus because only a divine-human mediator, united to both alienated parties, could suffer a punishment proportional to the offense of sin against God’s infinite excellency. Both incarnation were fit and proper”.

<sup>53</sup> Paul Ramsey, ed., *Works of Jonathan Edwards*, Volume 8, 355-360.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, 357.

The miraculous gifts of the Spirit were but temporary and have not continued in heaven. However, divine love is that great fruit of the Spirit which never fails and in which his continued and everlasting influence in his church is revealed. This love of God for his church is true for individual members, whether on earth and in the midst of trials,<sup>55</sup> as well as being true for the collective body of the church, whether on earth or in heaven. “At the end of the world ... divine love shall not fail but be brought to its most glorious perfection in every individual member of the whole elect church and every holy soul shall be as it were a flame of divine love through all eternity.” The miraculous sign gifts of Spirit in the early church were only to “promote the setting up and building up of Christ’s kingdom in men’s hearts ... but divine love shall remain forever.”

Edwards’ expression of the wonderful reality of God’s love for his people reached its conclusion in Sermon Fifteen: *Heaven is a World of Love*.<sup>56</sup> Building upon his previous sermon that divine love shall remain forever, Edwards showed how the perfect, heavenly state of the church was distinguished from its imperfect, present state. First, heaven is where the great fountain of love dwells. “The apostle tells us that God is love, I John 4:8. And seeing he is an infinite Being, it follows that he is an infinite fountain of love... from whom every stream of holy love, yea, every drop that is or ever was proceeds.” In moving language<sup>57</sup> Edwards went on to describe how God the Father, Son

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<sup>55</sup> Edwards quotes Romans 8:35-37: “Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril or sword? As it is written for thy sake we are killed all the day long; we are accounted as sheep for the slaughter. Nay in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us.”

<sup>56</sup> Paul Ramsey, ed., *Works of Jonathan Edwards*, Volume 8, 366-397.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid*, 369-70. “There dwells God the Father, and so the Son, who are united in infinitely dear and incomprehensible mutual love. There dwells God the Father who so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son ... There dwells Jesus Christ who so loved the world that he shed his blood and poured out His soul unto death for it. There Christ dwells in both his natures, human and divine, sitting with the Father in the same throne. There is the Holy Spirit, the spirit of divine love, in whom is every essence of God and

and Holy Spirit “shines forth in full glory, in beams of love; there the fountain overflows is streams and rivers of love and delight, enough for all to drink at, to swim in, yea as to overflow the world as it were with a deluge of love.”

The second point of the sermon dealt with who were the objects of this divine love. Edwards stated “there are none but lovely objects in heaven. There is nothing wicked and unholy.”<sup>58</sup> These objects, or people, are now perfectly lovely. In heaven there shall be no “pollution or deformity of any kind seen in any one person or thing. That world is perfectly bright without darkness and there shall be none appearing with any defects, either natural or moral.” Freed from mortal constraints the church can now love and dwell with the Father and Son “they loved and longed for and with which by faith they were conversant even while they dwelt of earth.”

Edwards then came to his main point, which was explaining the nature of this love. Since God is its fountain, love will reign in every heart in heaven. “Love is in God as light is in the sun. Love flows out from him towards all the inhabitants of heaven.” The first object of God’s love is to His Son, which is “poured forth without measure. Infinite love is infinitely exercised towards him.” The Son in turn also loves the Father with an infinite love. This expression of the infinite, essential love of God is a pure and holy act “whereby the Deity becomes nothing but an infinite and unchangeable act of love.”

The second object of this love from God is towards the saints and angels. Here we can discern the similarity with Gregory as Edwards explains that love to saints and angels is not “as light is in the sun which shines by its own light, but as it is in the planets which

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by whose immediate influence all holy love is shed abroad in the hearts of the church. There in heaven this fountain of love, this eternal three in one, is set open without any obstacle to hinder access to it.”

<sup>58</sup> He quotes Revelation 21:27 to back up his point: “And there shall in no wise enter into it anything that defiles, neither whatsoever works abomination, nor makes a lie.”

shine by reflecting the light of the sun. As God has given the saints and angels love, so their love is chiefly exercised towards God, the fountain of it.”

This is the true union of the soul with God since “all love God with a supreme love. There is no enemy of God in heaven but all love him as his children. They are all united with one mind to breathe forth their whole souls in love to their eternal Father.” As with the Father, so love goes out to the Son. “Every heart is wedded to this spiritual husband, all rejoice in him, the angels concurring; and the angels and saints all love one another. All that glorious society are sincerely united. Everyone there loves every other inhabitant of heaven.”

This love is holy, divine and perfect and those “which only had a little spark of divine love in it in this world shall be, as it were, wholly turned into love; and be like the sun, not having a spot in it but being wholly a bright, ardent flame.” Also, since love in heaven is free from envy or pride, those saints who are higher in glory are those who are “most beloved by all the saints.” Union with God will be enjoyed forever with “no fear of any end of this happiness or danger of any abatement. All things shall flourish there in an eternal youth.”

Edwards’ final emphasis in *Heaven is a World of Love* is that “the Son of God is not only the infinite object of the Father’s love but He is also an infinite subject of it.” This love of God “flows out in innumerable streams towards all the created inhabitants of heaven.” God’s elect will eternally discover “the great things God has done for them in this world, and is now fully manifested to them in heaven.”

The saints will “enjoy God as partaking with Christ of His enjoyment of God, for they are united to Him. Herein they shall enjoy God in a more exalted and excellent

manner than man would have done if he had never fallen.”<sup>59</sup> When people love one another it is natural to want to be united with them and this is true of our relationship with God.

In *Misc 777*, Edwards states his belief that the saints will see God in heaven in the person of Jesus Christ. This “Beatifical Vision” has the Church eternally learning about and viewing God’s display of the plan of redemption. The saints will contemplate the awesome work of God: “Seeing God consists in immediately seeing Christ. To love God and enjoy Him forever consists in union with Christ’ union with the Father. No more and no less.”<sup>60</sup>

For Edwards, heaven is the fulfillment of Christ’s High Priestly prayer in John 17. Jesus describes the perfect union within the Trinity and prays that the saints will also experience this with their God. “Their union with God involves an increasing perfect identification of ends with God so that they become more and more centered on God rather than themselves.”<sup>61</sup>

#### **4. Progress of the Soul in Eternity**

Edwards’ dissertation on the *End for which God Created the World* can be best understood through the lens of theosis. Participation in the divine nature “which is the key to understanding *End of Creation* is Edwards’ account of the beatifical vision specified as participation in the innertrinitarian life of God, to partake with Christ in his sight of God.”<sup>62</sup> Did God create the world for His own glory or that His creation might enjoy His world? Our ultimate happiness is not found within ourselves but only in the

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<sup>59</sup> Paul Ramsey, ed., *Works of Jonathan Edwards*, Volume 8, 725.

<sup>60</sup> Paul Ramsey, ed., *Works of Jonathan Edwards*, Volume 8, 726.

<sup>61</sup> Wilson-Kastner, “God’s Infinity and His Relationship to Creation in the Theologies of Gregory of Nyssa and Jonathan Edwards”, 313.

pursuit of God. To Edwards this meant that finding and knowing God was the “noble business of intelligent beings” and should be humanity’s highest priority.

In his *Miscellanies*, Edwards wrote several reflections on the advances believers will make in sinless perfection after they enter heaven. “As early as 1730, Edwards had written of the Church in heaven that ‘much of their happiness has consisted in seeing the progressive wonderful doings of God with respect to his church here in this world.’”<sup>63</sup> Because redemptive history progresses here on earth, Edwards reasoned that the Church in heaven must also progress as well, by means of a kind of ‘beatific vision’ of divine providence on earth. All creatures are changeable by nature, and while heaven “is subject to no evil changes, yet ‘tis subject to great changes and revolutions of a contrary nature ... ‘Tis only God that is unchangeable. The whole universe consisting in upper and lower worlds is in a changing state.’”<sup>64</sup>

Happiness in heaven must be progressive, said Edwards, because of what passages such as Luke 15:7 teach. If there is joy in heaven when a sinner is converted, then each time someone is saved heaven’s happiness must increase. In other words, eternal happiness will be a progressive state, filled with new and glorious chapters, as believers behold the manifestations that God makes of Himself in redemption. God’s will was to provide a spouse for His Son on who He might shower His love. Heaven will be an everlasting wedding day and its glory never ending. Progress for the eternal duration begins at the Marriage of the Lamb where the saints see God and begin to enjoy Him through the ages to come.

<sup>62</sup> Paul Ramsey, ed., *Works of Jonathan Edwards*, Volume 8, 726.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, 733.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, 429.

Edwards incorporates the doctrine of theosis into this dissertation. After first discussing the distinctions between chief, subordinate and ultimate ends, beginning in Section II, Edwards develops his thesis on the end for which God created the world.

First, he stated that God's attributes<sup>65</sup> would never have been used if he had not created the world. Since God possesses and delights in these attributes it is only right that he employs them in a manner consistent with his glorious perfection so that "God's glory should be known by a glorious society of created beings."<sup>66</sup>

It is fitting that God's glory be shown in creation and that it should be valued for its perfection and dignity. God loves his perfect, excellent creation; therefore the beings he created should love, esteem and value him for the moral beauty he has displayed by creating the world.

Progress of the soul is readily seen in Edwards' next statement. Speaking of these created beings he says "that there should be in them an increasing knowledge of God to all eternity is an existence, a reality infinitely worthy to be, and worthy to be valued and regarded by him, to whom it belongs in order that it be, which, of all things possible, is fittest and best."<sup>67</sup>

He then employs imagery from Platonism when he described God's goodness as a fountain that sends forth both infinite water and light, producing infinite happiness in creation. These emanations from God communicate not only his infinite good but his infinite fullness as well. Edwards states that God's fullness is the perfection of his nature

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<sup>65</sup> Ibid., 428-429 "The glorious attributes of God ... the infinite power, wisdom, righteousness, goodness ... might never have been exercised if the world had not been created. The power of God, which is a sufficiency in him to produce great effects, must forever have been dormant and useless as to any effect. The divine wisdom and prudence would have had no exercise ... The same might be observed of God's justice, goodness and truth."

<sup>66</sup> Ibid., 431.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid., 432.

and this is what prompted him to create the world. “We may suppose that a disposition in God, to an emanation of his own infinite fullness, was what excited him to create the world; and so that emanation itself was aimed at by him as a last end of creation.”<sup>68</sup>

Heaven will be a “progressive perfection” as each one’s capacity will be enlarged to know, love and joy in God. The soul will be always learning but never be dissatisfied or impatient with the rate of progress. This happiness is characterized as perfect contentment or sanctified hope. No one will ever reach the point where they cease receiving more of the divine life into their soul.

Not only is happiness increasing but perfection of the saints also progresses. *End of Creation* asserts that all “creation will return to God in a process that Edwards called re-emanation. His design is for constant progression through all eternity of the creature in an infinitely strict union with God.”<sup>69</sup> The redeemed will not be seated in some heavenly grandstand but are actively participating in loving God. The sight of God shall content the soul with such joy that they will desire nothing sweeter or purer than to be in God’s presence, beholding the beauty of the Lord.

In this the influence of theosis is discerned. Gregory of Nyssa, whose writings we examined in Chapter One, taught that “the soul grows by constant participation in the divine, which is without form or limit, and is therefore inexhaustible.”<sup>70</sup> He believed that humans were created to partake of all good things from God. After death the soul will continue to increase in perfection and that the “ultimate goal of the whole human being,

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<sup>68</sup> Ibid., 435.

<sup>69</sup> Wilson-Kastner, “God’s Infinity and His Relationship to Creation in the Theologies of Gregory of Nyssa and Jonathan Edwards”, *Foundations*, 312.

<sup>70</sup> Paul Ramsey, ed., *Works of Jonathan Edwards*, Volume 8, 727.

both body and soul, is to increase unendingly in participation of the divine good.”<sup>71</sup> It would seem that Edwards relied upon another plank from theosis as he built his theology of progression in heaven.

### E. Conclusion

The focus of this chapter has been to examine the writings and theology of Jonathan Edwards for the influence of theosis. The primary source for developing his position on divinization was the philosophers from Cambridge, especially Henry More. However, he differed with More on some key issues.

Edward’s system was by no means totally derivative from More’s. They differ concerning the source of man’s inclinations for love of benevolence. For More, it is man’s free will or choice. For Edwards, this source must lie in God’s course of the universe, in his predestination of all beings and things. Another major difference is Edwards’ ultimate emphasis upon the importance of sensibility as opposed to More’s traditionally platonic emphasis upon the mind.<sup>72</sup>

As has been shown, he definitely incorporated the four major tenets of theosis into his theology. Participation in the divine nature, recapitulation, union of the soul with God and progress of the soul in eternity can be identified in his sermons such as *A Divine and Supernatural Light* and the *Charity* series; his letter to a clergyman who was critical of his stand of participation; and in writings such as his *Dissertation on the End for Which God Created the World*.

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<sup>71</sup> Wilson-Kastner, “God’s Infinity and His Relationship to Creation in the Theologies of Gregory of Nyssa and Jonathan Edwards”, *Foundations*, 308.

<sup>72</sup> Watts, “The Neoplatonic Basis of Jonathan Edwards’ ‘True Virtue’”, *Early American Literature*, 10, 188.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### JOHN AND CHARLES WESLEY

#### A. Biography

John Wesley (1703-1791) and Charles Wesley (1707-1788) were extraordinary men. They were Anglican priests who, along with George Whitefield, brought remarkable spiritual renewal to England. Their ministry was blessed with thousands of conversions and they were among the founders of Methodism. However, it is their theology that is the focus of this paper and in particular, how theosis influenced the formulation of their doctrinal position.

Steve McCormick notes the church historians who have difficulty in categorizing Wesley's doctrine. He quotes George Cell, Cohn Williams, John L. Peters and William R. Cannon as they debate where this "Anglican in Earnest" fits on the theological spectrum. McCormick's contention is that they all miss the essential Wesley because they are looking at him through the Western bias of justification being God's primary purpose.

Wesley is remarkable among western Christian thinkers (and hence quite unwestern) in understanding that the goal of the Christian life is inseparably linked to the way of faith filled with the energy of love, divine-human participation, or theosis.<sup>1</sup>

In order to understand fully how the Wesley brothers became aware of theosis it is necessary to know what shaped their thinking. A brief look at their home life, formal education in Anglicanism and the impact of their friendships within the "Holy Club" at Oxford is necessary. That will then lead to a fuller discussion of the Patristic Fathers and

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<sup>1</sup> Steve McCormick, "Theosis in Chrysostom and Wesley: An Eastern Paradigm of Faith and Love," *Wesleyan Theological Journal*, 26 (1991): 26.

Gregory of Nyssa in particular.

## **B. Influence of Their Parents**

Their father, Samuel, was an Anglican clergyman and under his influence, and that of their godly mother, Susanna, the brothers prepared for the ministry in the Church of England. Both of their parents had Dissenting church backgrounds. The seventeenth century in England had seen great social upheaval and civil war resulting in the execution of King Charles I and the short rule of Oliver Cromwell. Under Cromwell the Puritans prospered but when the Stuart monarchy was reinstated and the Anglican Church regained supremacy it went badly for those who were not ordained by the Church of England. John and Charles Wesley's grandfather and great-grandfather were ejected from their livings on St. Bartholomew's Day in 1662 for preaching without a license.<sup>2</sup>

It was Samuel Wesley who introduced his sons to the importance of the Patristic authors such as Chrysostom.<sup>3</sup> In 1725, Samuel wrote to John as he was preparing for the ministry at Oxford. He suggested that he should " 'Master St. Chrysostom, our Articles and the form of Ordination' . Samuel's insistence that John fully master Chrysostom simply affirms an early and deep Patristic eastern strain that would become a permanent feature in John Wesley's formulation of the Christian life."<sup>4</sup>

His mother also urged John to read in the same vein. Both parents had suggested he read Anglican Bishop Beveridge. "Wesley probably came to understand the significance of Chrysostom thanks to Beveridge. Susanna pushed John in Beveridge's

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<sup>2</sup> Horne, *A Popular History of the Free Churches*, 261.

<sup>3</sup> Michael Christensen, "Theosis and Sanctification: John Wesley's Reformulation of a Patristic Doctrine," *Wesleyan Theological Journal*, 31, No. 2, (1996): 74. "Wesley learned from the book his father had written, *Advice to a Young Clergyman*, to appreciate the ancient pastoral theologians: Chrysostom, Basil, Athanasius and Cyprian."

<sup>4</sup> McCormick, "Theosis in Chrysostom and Wesley: An Eastern Paradigm of Faith and Love," 28.

direction as he moved through his personal struggles with the meaning of faith.”<sup>5</sup> Her insistence on method in the regulation of life was the origin of the religious habits her sons later used at Oxford. So John and Charles’ appreciation for the Patristic fathers and the Anglican divines who followed their teachings began in their childhood home.

Towards the end of his life Wesley wrote of the strong Patristic influences under which he grew up and that influenced him throughout his life.

From a child, I was taught to love and reverence the Scriptures, the oracles of God; and, next to these, to esteem the primitive Fathers, the writers of the first three centuries. Next after the primitive church, I esteemed our own, the Church of England, as the most scriptural national Church in the world.<sup>6</sup>

### C. Influence of Early Anglicans

The Wesleys were trained at Oxford as Anglican priests, as was George Whitefield. The High Church clergymen were educated to believe that the Anglican Church was the renewal of, and only true successor to, the apostolic church of the New Testament. One of their theologians, Simon Patrick, stated emphatically “the Church of England is the true Primitive Christianity with nothing new.... And who dare say that this is a new religion, which is as old as Christ and His Apostles?”<sup>7</sup> The Anglicans viewed the Eastern branch of Christianity as a vital part of the English church.<sup>8</sup> This shared history

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 30.

<sup>6</sup> Thomas Jackson, ed., *Works of John Wesley*, Vol. 13, 272.

<sup>7</sup> William H. Shontz, “Anglican Influence on John Wesley’s Soteriology,” *Wesleyan Theological Journal*, 32, No. 1 (1997): 35.

<sup>8</sup> Archbishop Germanos, “Progress Towards the Re-Union of the Orthodox and Anglican Churches,” *The Christian East*, (Spring, 1929): 21. “What interests us principally is the aspect which the relations between the two churches have assumed during the last years. Nevertheless, it must not be supposed that the relations between the two Churches began only yesterday. His Grace the Archbishop of Wales, in his address some time ago to the two Patriarchs of the East, Alexandria and Jerusalem, reminded them of the relations already existing between the Church of Wales and the Eastern Churches. He also emphasized the point that from the East came the first missionaries, who founded the Church of Wales, and in support of this mentioned the fact that even after the establishment of the Archbishopric of Canterbury by Saint Augustine (who came from Rome in A.D. 596) the Church in Wales continued to be independent, and that many years passed before the complete assimilation between the two parts of the Anglican Church took

gave them a natural affinity for their theology, including theosis. The English Puritans of the previous century had favored Calvinism, as seen in their great writers such as Richard Baxter. However, Anglicans felt a deeper bond with the Patristic model of the early church rather than looking to Calvin. As the result of his training at Oxford, “Wesley understood true Christianity to lie principally in isolated pockets of eastern Christendom, particularly among the ascetics, of which Ephrem and Pseudo-Macarius of Syria are prime examples.”<sup>9</sup>

John Wesley followed the example of the High Church tradition, learned from his father but also inculcated at Oxford. His familiarity with Bishop Beveridge was noted above and his admiration for him is seen in the following statement from 1738. He was reacting to what he had read by Calvinists and Lutherans when we wrote:

The English writers, such as Bishop Beveridge, Bishop Taylor, and Mr. Nelson, a little relieved me from these well-meaning, wrong-headed Germans. Their accounts of Christianity I could easily see to be, in the main, consistent both with reason and Scripture.<sup>10</sup>

The Anglicans he praised had written much on the aspect of salvation being mainly transformation or partakers of the divine nature. What did Beveridge and Taylor write that so influenced Wesley? Beveridge wrote:

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place. And what is true of the Church of Wales is true also of the Church of Ireland, in which the first to preach the Gospel were Greeks from Asia -Minor. Although it cannot be proved whether these missionaries came from Lyons, where the two disciples of Polycarp of Smyrna, Pothinos and Irenaeus, worked, or from Marseilles, which had close commercial ties with Britain. Moreover, the Greek Archbishop of Canterbury, Theodore of Tarsus (A.D. 669), never ceased to belong, both by descent and culture, to the East. It is, therefore, only right that we should accept the fact that while organizing the Church of England, he followed both the principles and traditions which he had learnt in the East. “The Church of England,” says the historian Green, “as we know it to-day is the work of a Greek monk”; and Trevelyan says, “The Archbishop Theodore stands out as perhaps the greatest Prince of the Church in all English history.”

<sup>9</sup> Michael J. Christensen, “Theosis and Sanctification: John Wesley’s Reformulation of a Patristic Doctrine,” 75-76.

<sup>10</sup> Shontz, “Anglican Influence on John Wesley’s Soteriology,” 36.

For the nature of God being purity itself, they who are pure in heart are ‘partakers of the Divine Nature,’ as St. Peter speaks: and, therefore, if they do but look into their own hearts, so much as they see of purity, so much they see of God Himself there, Whose image and likeness it is. Thus by the infusion of Deity into the human soul, the human soul is so permeated with the Divine influences that it takes on the characteristics of Deity.”<sup>11</sup>

Taylor’s contribution to Wesley’s theology will be seen later in this chapter when the discussion reaches the subject of perfection.

Two other Church of England bishops, Lancelot Andrewes and Richard Hooker, also wrote and preached with participation language and had much to contribute on the subject of theosis in Anglican theology. Their works were studied by ministerial students at Oxford and it bears repeating that both Wesleys and Whitefield would have been familiar with their writings.

Lancelot Andrewes, (1555-1626) a key contributor to the translation of the King James Version<sup>12</sup> was also a great student of the Patristic Fathers. He incorporated theosis into his theology. In a sermon at court he contrasted the work of Christ and the Spirit, asking which is greater of the two: “But we will not compare them, they are both above all comparison. He clothed with our flesh and we invested by His Spirit that should ‘partake his divine nature’ are accomplished.”<sup>13</sup> In another sermon he said, “We [are] made the sons of God, as He the Son of Man; we [are] made partakers of his divine, as He of our human nature. [God] cannot, we may be sure, account evil of that nature, that is

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 41. “Beveridge succinctly declared his theology of *theosis* thus: “And this certainly is the only way whereby it is possible for our hearts ever to be made pure; for though our human nature in general was purified by being united to the Divine Person, our human persons in particular can never be purified but by partaking of the Divine Nature; which we can never do any other way, but only by believing and trusting in that Divine Person to Which our nature is united, even Jesus Christ. But if we do that as we ought, He will make us ‘partakers of the Divine Nature’, by giving us that Divine Spirit Which proceeds from Him, and is of the same Divine Nature with Himself, and therefore is able to make us so too.”

<sup>12</sup> Gustavus Paine, *The Men Behind the King James Version* (Grand Rapids, Baker, 1989), 16.

<sup>13</sup> Allchin, *Participation in God: A Forgotten Strand in Anglican Tradition*, 99.

now become the nature of His own Son-His now no less than our own.”<sup>14</sup>

Richard Hooker (d. 1600) was an ordained Anglican priest and Master of the Temple (Dean of the Law School) at Oxford from 1585-1591. Hooker’s greatest literary work was eight volumes called *Of the Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity*. The following quote shows how he used very strong language in regards to recapitulation:

But may it rightly be said concerning the incarnation of Jesus Christ, that as our nature hath in no respect changed his, so from his to ours as little alteration hath ensued? The very cause of his taking upon him our nature was to change it, to better the quality, and to advance the condition thereof, although in no sort to abolish the substance which he took, or to infuse into it the natural forces and properties of his Deity.<sup>15</sup>

Theosis was integral to the theology of these early Anglican bishops and their teaching established the model of study for subsequent generations of Anglican priests.

One more influence from their formal education that molded Wesley and Whitefield must be noted. This was not exclusive to Oxford but was one that all the universities of England in the eighteenth century shared. Platonism also was an influence among English academics. The Cambridge Platonists “still predominated in area like philosophical theology and so formed an important part of the training of Anglican clergy at Oxford and elsewhere.”<sup>16</sup> Since Platonism was dealt with in Chapter One and Three it will not be necessary to take it up again in detail except to note “that on most of Wesley’s reading lists the names of such Christian Platonists as Malebranche and John Norris turn up, he had read Berkeley at Oxford.”<sup>17</sup>

A final note on Anglicanism should be made. Although the Wesley brothers are

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 19.

<sup>15</sup> Shontz, “Anglican Influence on John Wesley’s Soteriology,” 39.

<sup>16</sup> Brown, “Platonic Idealism in Modern Philosophy,” 198.

<sup>17</sup> Outler, *John Wesley*, 210.

credited as being founders of what today is the Methodist Church, it was never their intention to start a new denomination. When his evangelical preaching resulted in Anglican churches being closed to him John reluctantly began to preach in the open air.<sup>18</sup> He eventually gave permission for a chapel to be built in 1739 but forbade meetings to be held at the same time public worship services were being observed in the Anglican church. All Methodists were counseled to take the sacrament from the parish clergyman. Wesley was determined to keep his Methodist societies within the establishment of the Church of England.<sup>19</sup>

It is evident that the Anglican instruction the Wesleys, as well as George Whitefield, received at Oxford was based on the patristic model of theosis. Their theology should then not be viewed as new or radical but rather as the zealous application of the history and tradition already firmly embedded within the Church of England.

#### **D. Influence of the Holy Club**

In 1729 the Wesley brothers were key members of the “Holy Club,” a group of deeply spiritual Oxford students “that had developed a keen interest in the ancient liturgies and the monastic piety of the fourth century ‘desert fathers.’”<sup>20</sup> This group

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<sup>18</sup> Thomas Jackson, ed., *Works of John Wesley*, Volume 2, 156-57. “March, 1739. I had no thought of leaving London, when I received a letter from Mr. Whitefield entreating me, in the most pressing manner, to come to Bristol without delay. This I was not at all forward to do. ... My journey was proposed to our society in Fetter Lane but my brother Charles would scarcely bear the mention of it. But with our other brethren, we at length all agreed that I should go... I reached Bristol and met Mr. Whitefield there. I could scarcely reconcile myself at first to this strange way of preaching in the fields, of which he set me an example on Sunday; I had been all my life (till very lately) so tenacious of every point relating to decency and order that I should have thought the saving of souls almost a sin if it had not been done in a church.”

<sup>19</sup> Allchin, *Participation in God*, 25. “As far as the actual situation of the Methodist societies in the Church of England during the eighteenth century is concerned, it is well known that in England during the lifetime of the Wesleys there was no formal split. Both John and Charles Wesley died as they had lived, priests of the Church of England.”

<sup>20</sup> Outler, *John Wesley*, 8.

became known as the Methodists. John Wesley comments on how the nickname was earned:

The exact regularity of their lives as well as their studies, occasioned a young gentleman of Christ-Church to say, 'Here is a new set of Methodists sprung up' alluding to some ancient physicians who were so-called. The name was new and quaint; so it took immediately, and Methodists were known all over the university.<sup>21</sup>

It was a fellow "Holy Club" member, John Clayton, who encouraged John Wesley to continue in a deeper study of the Eastern Fathers.

Through the formative influence of John Clayton from Manchester and a Patristic scholar, Wesley was drawn to the ancient traditions as preserved in the *Apostolic Constitutions* and *Apostolic Canons*: "Fit books for you and every Christian priest," Clayton wrote to Wesley, "are all the Fathers of the first three centuries, whereby you may be enabled both to know and profess the faith once delivered to the saints, and to steer your course in the due medium between the monkish mysticism of the fourth century and the lukewarm indifference of the present age."<sup>22</sup>

The influence of the Holy Club would play a major role in the formation of Wesley's theology.

### **E. Influence of Patristic Fathers**

It is clear that both Wesleys had been raised and educated in Patristic thought and theology. Their father had recommended Chrysostom to them and their colleague John Clayton had urged them to study other Greek fathers from the fourth century. This they proceeded to do.

Wesley's primary sourcebook for Patristic spirituality was William Cave's *Primitive Christianity* - a copy of which he took to Georgia. R. Flew notes the particular influence of the Christian Platonists (including Clement, Origen, Evagrius, and Nyssa) on Wesley. It was probably in Cave's anthologies that

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<sup>21</sup> Stearns, *Pageant of Europe*, 370.

<sup>22</sup> Christensen, "Theosis and Sanctification: John Wesley's Reformulation of a Patristic Doctrine," 75.

Wesley also discovered some of the ascetic writings of Syrian Christianity - particularly "Macarius the Egyptian" and "Ephraem Syrus."<sup>23</sup>

John Wesley's competency with explaining and defending patristic thought was shown when he refuted Conyers Middleton's *Free Inquiry* in 1749. This essay was an attack on the authenticity of post-apostolic Christianity. Wesley wrote in his journal that since he was "pressed to answer Dr. Middleton's book against the Fathers, I postponed my voyage and spent almost twenty days in that unpleasing employment."<sup>24</sup>

The title of his defense, *A Plain Account of Genuine Christianity*, was a detailed counterargument that involved deep analysis of patristic texts. Wesley was determined to prove that "actual Christian faith and life, not only apostolic or patristic, but also still in modern in times, reflects the supernatural power of God and the miraculous presence of the Holy Spirit."<sup>25</sup> He named Clemens, Ignatius, Polycarp, Justin Martyr, Origen, Cyprian, Macarius and Ephraim Syrus and then said of them:

I allow that some of these had not strong natural sense, that few of them had much learning, and none the assistances which our age enjoys in some respects above all that went before. ... And yet I exceedingly reverence them and esteem them very highly in love. I reverence their writings, because they describe true, genuine Christianity and direct us to the strongest evidence of the Christian doctrine. ... I reverence these ancient Christians (with all their failings) the more, because I see so few Christians now; because I read so little in the writings of later times, and hear so little, of genuine Christianity.<sup>26</sup>

These early church leaders so shaped Wesley's thinking that in his *Address to Clergy* in 1756, he urged all Methodist preachers to read the Church Fathers.

Can any be excused if they do not read the Fathers? They are the most authentic commentators on Scripture, as being both nearest the fountain, eminently endued with that Spirit by whom all Scripture was given. It will be easily perceived, I

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<sup>23</sup> McCormick, "Theosis in Chrysostom and Wesley: An Eastern Paradigm of Faith and Love," 91.

<sup>24</sup> Thomas Jackson, ed., *Works of John Wesley*, Volume 3, 390.

<sup>25</sup> Outler, *John Wesley*, 182.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 195.

speaking chiefly of those who wrote before the council of Nicea. But who could not likewise desire to have some acquaintance with those that followed them? with St. Chrysostom, Basil, and above all, the man of a broken heart, Ephraim Syrus?<sup>27</sup>

These Eastern Fathers all embraced and taught theosis. Wesley was influenced by “his own sustained immersion in the piety and wisdom of the early Christian fathers: Ignatius, Clement, Macarius, Ephraem Syrus and others.”<sup>28</sup> John continued to read them all widely, but the homilies of “Macarius the Egyptian,” as shall be shown, deeply influenced his thinking. Recent scholarship has allowed Methodist historian, Albert Outler, to assert that Macarius was not, as Wesley believed, a “desert father but rather a fifth-century Syrian monk, whose conception of Christian spirituality was derived almost exclusively from Gregory of Nyssa. Thus, in his early days, he drank deep of this Byzantine tradition of spirituality at its source and assimilated its conceptions of devotion.”<sup>29</sup> This means that Wesley was influenced by one of the greatest of all Eastern Fathers on the subject of the quest for perfection and holiness. In his sermon *The Scripture Way of Salvation*, Wesley showed his admiration of Macarius when he asked, “How exactly did Macarius, fourteen hundred years ago, describe the present experience of the children of God?”<sup>30</sup> His comment on the *Fifty Spiritual Homilies* he thought were written by Macarius not only show his high regard for the material but his understanding

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<sup>27</sup> Thomas Jackson, ed., *Works of John Wesley*, Volume 10, 484. Wesley went on to say, “Am I acquainted with the Fathers; at least with those venerable men who lived in the earliest ages of the Church? Have I read over and over the golden remains of Clemens Romanus, of Ignatius and Polycarp; and have I given one reading, at least, to the works of Justin Martyr, Tertullian, Origen, Clemens Alexandrinus, and Cyprian?”

<sup>28</sup> Outler, *John Wesley*, v. “Ephrem, a fourth-century Syrian hermit, biblical exegete, and spiritual poet, consistently made Wesley's essential reading list. According to Outler, Wesley regarded Ephrem as ‘the most awakened writer, I think, of all the ancients.’”

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 9.

<sup>30</sup> Howard Sugden, ed., *Standard Sermons of John Wesley*, Volume 2, (London, The Epworth Press, 1956), 447.

that theosis was being advocated by Macarius.<sup>31</sup>

In reading the *Fifty Spiritual Homilies* it is not difficult to find theosis woven throughout the entire work. Here are samples from three homilies to consider: *One* uses participation language, *Fourteen* deals with recapitulation and *Nineteen* emphasizes union with God:

HOMILY 1 - For as the body is not supplied from its own nature with meat, drink, and clothing, but has the universal supply of life from without, being quite naked of itself; so the soul cannot attain to everlasting life, from its own nature, but from the Divine nature; from his Spirit, from his light it is maintained in spiritual meat and drink, and the heavenly clothing, which are the life of the soul. For the Divine nature contains in it the very bread of life, and the living water, and the wine which cheereth the heart of man, and the oil of gladness.<sup>32</sup>

HOMILY 14 – The immortal soul is a vessel of great price. Observe how great the heaven is and the earth, and yet God took not any great complacency in them; but in thee only. Behold thy own worth and high descent, that the Lord should come on an embassy, and that not by angels, but in his own person, on purpose to recall thee that hadst been lost; and to restore to thee the original formation of Adam in his purity. For man was Lord of all, from heaven above to the depths beneath, pure from sin, made in the image and likeness of God. But through the transgression he is fallen, and wounded, and dead. Sin is rooted out, and man receives the original formation of Adam in his purity. Through the power of the Spirit, he comes up to the first Adam; yea, is made greater than him.<sup>33</sup>

HOMILY 19 - For our Lord Jesus Christ came for this very reason, that he might change, and renew, and create afresh this soul that had been perverted by vile affections, tempering it with his own Divine Spirit. He came to work a new mind, and a new soul, and new eyes, new ears, a new spiritual tongue; yea, to make them that believe in him new men, that he might pour into them the new wine, which is his Spirit... It behooves therefore the soul that truly believeth in Christ, to be changed from her present nature into another nature, which is Divine, and to be wrought new herself through the power of the Holy Spirit. And to obtain this,

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<sup>31</sup> Thomas Jackson, ed., *Works of John Wesley*, Volume 1. "There is visibly to be distinguished in our author, a rich, sublime, and noble vein of piety. Whatever he insists upon is essential, durable and necessary. What he continually labors to cultivate in himself and others is, the real life of God in the heart and soul. He is ever quickening and stirring up his audience, endeavoring to kindle in them an earnest desire to recover that Divine image we were made in; to be made conformable to Christ our Head; to be daily sensible more and more of our living union with him as such."

<sup>32</sup> [http://wesley.nnu.edu/john\\_wesley/christian\\_library/vol1/CL1Part2.html](http://wesley.nnu.edu/john_wesley/christian_library/vol1/CL1Part2.html). (Accessed March 16, 2005)

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

will be allowed to us who believe and love him in truth, and walk in all his holy commandments. Unless the soul receives the sanctification of the Spirit and be made partaker of the Divine nature, it is unfit for the kingdom of heaven.<sup>34</sup>

That is not to say that Wesley did not have differences with Macarius. As discussed in Chapter One, theosis recognizes a synergy between God and humans which allowed for grace to be imparted through good works. Macarius advocated water baptism, faithful observance of the Eucharist and continual fillings of the Holy Spirit<sup>35</sup> as steps in the process of theosis. Wesley preached a gospel of grace apart from works. In spite of this difference, Macarius was recommended to Methodist readers by Wesley with this remark in the preface of the Homilies: “Whatever he insists upon is essential, is durable, is necessary.”<sup>36</sup>

The influence of the Patristic Fathers like Macarius and Gregory of Nyssa on John Wesley is unmistakable. He had learned about the goal of the Christian life from his study of the Patristic Fathers. Yet he was eclectic as he read them, taking what he agreed with<sup>37</sup> and incorporating only those principles into his theology.<sup>38</sup> This has raised some issues among Methodist historians such as Michael Christensen:

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<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

<sup>36</sup> Outler, *John Wesley*, 9.

<sup>37</sup> This is true not only of the Patristics but with contemporary writers as well. For example, he knew of the revival in New England under Jonathan Edwards and it stirred him powerfully. His journal records that he read *Faithful Narrative* “while walking from London to Oxford I began to read the truly surprising narrative of conversions lately wrought in and about the town of Northampton in New England.” At the Third Annual Conference of Methodists in 1746 he had Edwards’ volume read into the minutes so that subsequent generations of Methodist preachers would know of the Great Awakening. However, he did not support Edwards’ Calvinism. Wesley edited Edwards’ *Freedom of the Will* but added this caveat, “Out of this dangerous heap, wherein much wholesome food is mixed with much deadly poison, I have selected many remarks and admonitions which may be of great use to the children of God.” *Works of John Wesley*, Volume 3, 179.

<sup>38</sup> He synthesized what he wanted from various sources as seen from these entries in his journal in October, 1750, Journal, Volume 3, 499. “Wednesday - I revised, for the use of the children, Archbishop Potter’s *Grecian Antiquities*, a dry, dull, heavy book. Thursday. I revised Mr. Lewis’s *Hebrew Antiquities*, something more entertaining than the other and abundantly more instructive. Saturday - I nearly finished

By whose authority, and by what criterion, did Wesley amend his sources, and reformulate Patristic conceptions of theosis? It is clear that he both learned from his sources and altered his sources on points he believed did not conform to the teachings of Scripture. Wesley, in appropriating the idea of theosis and constructing his doctrine of Christian perfection, found that the Church Fathers required editing... Wesley remained in dialogue with these early mentors, edited and “corrected” them, and recommended them throughout his life.<sup>39</sup>

Another Wesleyan scholar has claimed that “Wesley’s use of Patristic sources was ‘programmatically.’”<sup>40</sup> His meaning is that it was a pastor’s heart that led Wesley to modify and edit the fourth century Greek writings for use in the Methodist societies of eighteenth century England.

#### **F. Four Tenets of Theosis**

The various factors that impacted the Wesley’s theological formation in theosis have been noted. Now the primary sources - the writings, sermons and hymns of John and Charles Wesley - must be examined to determine the extent theosis was woven into their theology.

As was identified in Chapter One, theosis has four primary tenets: participation in the divine nature, recapitulation, union of the soul with God, and progress of the soul in eternity. There are not always clear lines between the four so some overlap is inevitable. Using this template will provide guidance as the rich collection of written works by the Wesleys are scrutinized.

the abridgement of Dr. Cave’s *Primitive Christianity*, a book written with as much learning and as little judgment as any I remember to have read in my whole life; serving the ancient Christians just as Xenophon did Socrates; relating every weak thing they ever said or did. Thursday - I prepared a short History of England for the use of the children; and on Friday and Saturday a short Roman History, as an ‘introduction to the Latin historians. Monday, 15 - I read over Mr. Holmes’s Latin Grammar and extracted from it what was needful to perfect our own.”

<sup>39</sup> Outler, *John Wesley*, 31.

<sup>40</sup> Ted A. Campbell, *John Wesley and Christian Antiquity: Religious Vision and Cultural Change* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1991), 110.

## 1. Participation in the Divine Nature

John Wesley's conversion can be traced to his "Aldersgate experience" where he felt his heart "strangely warmed" while listening to someone read from Luther's commentary on Romans. His journal entry for earlier that day, 24 May 1738, reveals that he had been meditating on 2 Peter 1:4.<sup>41</sup> He wrote, "I continued thus to seek it (justifying faith) till Wednesday, May 24. I think it was about five this morning that I opened my Testament on those words, 'that ye should be partakers of the divine nature.'" As previously noted, this text is one of the key texts for theosis cited by many Patristic Fathers like Gregory of Nyssa.

The evening at Aldersgate was the culmination of many years of Wesley striving to find personal salvation through intense study of patristic texts, legalistic methods of the Holy Club and mystic spirituality. Now he saw that justification was by faith alone. As his theology developed, Wesley came to believe that perfection could be achieved in the life of a Christian. This teaching was deeply influenced by his study of the early church fathers. "If Wesley's writings on perfection are to be read with understanding, his notion of holiness becomes intelligible only in the light of its indirect sources in early and Eastern spirituality."<sup>42</sup>

Participation in the divine nature can be identified in Wesley's sermons. He wrote

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<sup>41</sup> Thomas Jackson, ed., *Works of John Wesley*, Volume One, 475-76. "In the evening I went very unwillingly to a society in Aldersgate Street, where one was reading Luther's preface to the Epistle to the Romans. About a quarter before nine, while he was describing the change which God works in the heart through faith in Christ, I felt my heart strangely warmed. I felt I did trust in Christ, Christ alone, for salvation; and an assurance was given me that He had taken away my sins, even mine, and saved me from the law of sin and death."

<sup>42</sup> Outler, *John Wesley*, 252.

to John Newton that he preached 800 times a year but that he relied on a few select messages.<sup>43</sup> One of Wesley's favorite texts<sup>44</sup> to preach on was 1 Corinthians 1:30: "But of Him are you in Christ Jesus, who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption." He records in his journal that the first time he spoke from this passage was in 1739<sup>45</sup> and he wrote in 1760 that he was still preaching the same sermon.<sup>46</sup> The significance of this is that from the beginning of the Methodist movement in England one of Wesley's key sermons incorporated some basic elements of theosis.

Consider this quote from a sermon where he used this text:

Man not only was deprived of the favour of God, but also of this image, of all virtue, righteousness, and true holiness; and sunk, partly into the image of the devil, - in pride, malice, and all other diabolical tempers; partly into the image of the brute, being fallen under the dominion of brutal passions and groveling appetites. ... First, mankind in general have gained, by the fall of Adam, a capacity of attaining more holiness and happiness on earth than it would have been possible for them to attain if Adam had not fallen. For if Adam had not fallen, Christ had not died. Nothing can be more clear than this; nothing more undeniable: The more thoroughly we consider the point the more deeply shall we be convinced of it. Unless all the partakers of human nature had received that deadly wound in Adam, it would not have been needful for the Son of God to take our nature upon him. Do you not see that this was the very ground of his coming into the world? 'By one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin: And thus death passed upon all,' through him in whom all men sinned. (Rom. 5:12.) We could not have loved the Holy Ghost, as revealing to us the Father and the Son; as opening the eyes of our understanding; bringing us out of darkness into his marvellous light; renewing the image of God in our soul, and sealing us unto the day of redemption. So that, in truth, 'Jesus Christ is of God made unto us

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<sup>43</sup> Ibid., 1.

<sup>44</sup> Thomas Jackson, ed., *Works of John Wesley*, Volume 2, 220. "I went with Mr. Whitefield to Blackheath, where were, I believe, twelve or fourteen thousand people. He a little surprised me by desiring me to preach in his stead; which I did (though nature recoiled) on my favorite subject, "Jesus Christ, who of God is made unto us wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption."

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., Volume 2, 193. "I went and on Priestdown, about half a mile from Pensford, preached Christ our "wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption."

<sup>46</sup> Ibid., Volume 2, 266. "But the voice of the Lord was mightier, and in a few minutes the whole multitude was still and seriously attended while I proclaimed 'Jesus Christ, made of God unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption.'"

wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification and redemption.’<sup>47</sup>

Wesley had opportunity later in life to reflect on his sermons and he recorded in his journal that, to his mind, the doctrine and emphasis of his preaching had not changed over the course of his ministry.

Nay, I know not that I can write a better on the Circumcision of the Heart than I did five-and-forty years ago. Perhaps, indeed, I may have read five or six hundred books more than I had then, and may know a little more history, or natural philosophy, than I did; but I am not sensible that this has made any essential addition to my knowledge in divinity. Forty years ago I knew and preached every Christian doctrine which I preach now.<sup>48</sup>

The sermon he references in the above quote, *Circumcision of the Heart*, teaches that the heart is where true spirituality must be developed and that only a heart infused by God’s Spirit can experience the changes that His grace makes possible:

That “circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit, and not in the letter;” - that is the distinguishing mark of a true follower of Christ, of one who is in a state of acceptance with God. It is not either outward circumcision, or baptism, or any other outward form, but a right state of soul, a mind and spirit renewed after the image of Him that created it.<sup>49</sup>

The Patristic Fathers taught that theosis comes through the mysterious cooperation between divine energy and human freedom, which is what Wesley saw in the text from Galatians 5:7, “faith which works by love.”<sup>50</sup> His sermon from 1771, *A Catholic Spirit*, employs this text to show the synergy between God and humans:

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<sup>47</sup> Ibid., Volume 6, 233-34.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid, Volume 6, 209, “I went to Tiverton [at age 75]. I was musing here on what I heard a good man say long since –“Once in seven years I burn all my sermons; for it is a shame if I cannot write better sermons now than I could seven years ago.” Whatever others can do, I really cannot. I cannot write a better sermon on the Good Steward than I did seven years ago; I cannot write a better on the Great Assize than I did twenty years ago; I cannot write a better on the Use of Money, than I did nearly thirty years ago; nay, I know not that I can write a better on the Circumcision of the Heart than I did five-and-forty years ago.”

<sup>49</sup> *Standard Sermons*, Volume 1, “On the Circumcision of the Heart”, 267.

<sup>50</sup> Shontz, “Anglican Influence of John Wesley’s Soteriology”, 50. “It is just such an understanding of *theosis* which Wesley seems to employ as the organizing principle of his *ordo salutis*. And, as Wesley

Is your faith filled with the energy of love? Dost thou love God “with all thy heart, and with all thy mind, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength?” Dost thou seek all thy happiness in him alone? And dost thou find what thou seekest? Does thy soul continually “magnify the Lord, and thy spirit rejoice in God thy Saviour?” Is God the centre of thy soul, the sum of all thy desires? hath the love of God cast the love of the world out of thy soul? Then thou art “crucified to the world;” thou art dead to all below; and thy “life is hid with Christ in God.”<sup>51</sup>

This transforming union with God, or restoration of the *imago dei*, is not a process that is performed upon humans but rather it transpires when there is free cooperation between the Holy Spirit and a person’s spirit. The sermon goes on to explain Wesley’s order in salvation and how humans can participate in the divine nature. As will be demonstrated throughout this chapter, Wesley saw a way to combine the Eastern tradition of theosis with his own Anglican tradition to explain the order in which salvation, perfection and sanctification is accomplished in the life of one who has been born again. This text was frequently cited by Wesley to prove that faith and love needs a synergy between them to accomplish full salvation.<sup>52</sup>

The sum of all that has been observed is this: Whatever I speak, whatever I know, whatever I believe, whatever I do, whatever I suffer; if I have not the faith that worketh by love, that produces love to God and all mankind, I am not in the narrow way which leadeth to life, but in the broad road that leadeth to destruction.<sup>53</sup>

From his sermon, *On God’s Vineyard*, Wesley further developed the idea of the *ordo salutis*. He taught that just as in natural birth, a person is born at once and then grows stronger by degrees, so in the spiritual birth, the Christian is born at once and then gradually increases in spiritual stature. Yet this was not the sanctification advocated by

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wrote his *ordo salutis* to the tune of *theosis*, it is probably better to understand it as a *via salutis*: that is to say, we are *becoming* “like” God by the energy of love, coinciding with our freedom.”

<sup>51</sup> *Standard Sermons*, Volume 2, “A Catholic Spirit”, 137.

<sup>52</sup> *Works of John Wesley*, Volume 2, 33. References in his diary, minutes of 2<sup>nd</sup> Annual conference in 1745.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, Volume 7, 56.

other Protestants. “The new birth, therefore, is the first point of sanctification which may increase more and more unto the perfect day. Those born of the Spirit are inwardly changed from the image of the devil to the image of God wherein he was created.”<sup>54</sup>

Participation teaching does not only appear in the sermons by John Wesley but in his writing as well. One such document, *A Farther Appeal to Men of Reason and Religion*, was written to defend Methodists from the accusation that their theology had strayed from Anglicanism. John Wesley strongly affirmed that the doctrines of the Methodists were the doctrines of the Church of England. Note the clear language on participation in the divine nature and recapitulation in the quote below.

By salvation I mean, not barely, according to the vulgar notion, deliverance from hell, or going to heaven: but a present deliverance from sin, a restoration of the soul to its primitive health, its original purity; a recovery of the Divine nature; the renewal of our souls after the image of God, in righteousness and true holiness, in justice, mercy, and truth. This implies all holy and heavenly tempers, and by consequence all holiness of conversation.<sup>55</sup>

The minutes of the First Annual Conference of Methodists in 1744 reveals that the leadership dealt with the questions of “what to teach, how to teach and how to regulate our doctrine, discipline and practice.”<sup>56</sup> The sixteenth point in their deliberations shows the influence of theosis: “Through the obedience and death of Christ the bodies of all men become immortal after the resurrection; their souls recover a capacity of spiritual life and are re-united to God and made partakers of the divine nature.”<sup>57</sup>

Charles Wesley was also a key participant in the English revival. He did not have the same passion for itinerant work as his older brother John but he served as a faithful

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<sup>54</sup> Ibid., Volume 7, 205.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid., Volume 8, 47.

<sup>56</sup> Outler, *John Wesley*, 136.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid., 139.

pastor in an Anglican church.<sup>58</sup> His best-known contribution to Methodism was as hymn writer who composed over six thousand pieces. Many can still be found in modern hymnbooks including: *O For A Thousand Tongues To Sing*, *Jesus, Lover of My Soul*, *Come Thou Long Expected Jesus*, *And Can It Be?* and *Christ the Lord is Risen Today*. Theosis can be readily observed in the lyrics of many of his hymns. Consider this verse that shows Charles' grasp of the soul's participation in the divine nature:

Heavenly Adam, life divine, change my nature into Thine;  
 Move and spread throughout my soul, actuate and fill the whole  
 Be it no longer now living in the flesh, but Thou,  
 Holy Ghost, no more delay, Come, and in my temple stay  
 Now thine inward witness bear, strong, permanent and clear;  
 Spring of life, thyself impart, rise eternal in my heart.<sup>59</sup>

Charles' poignant yet biblically sound hymns and poems earned him the nickname as "the sweet psalmist of Methodism."<sup>60</sup>

Other examples from primary sources could be cited to show participation in the divine nature in the Wesley's sermons, writings and hymns. It is appropriate to close this section with some thoughts from a close friend and fellow Methodist, Alexander Knox. He contended that Wesley had found a unique way to connect western Augustinian theology with the eastern emphases of a Patristic Father like Chrysostom and that this was Wesley's understanding of the nature of the Christian life.<sup>61</sup> Knox concluded his essay on Wesley with this question:

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<sup>58</sup> Charles Wesley came to faith a few days before John and, unlike John, had a happy marriage. His wife accompanied him on his itinerant ministry until 1756, when he devoted himself to the care of the Methodist Societies. Bristol was his headquarters until 1771, when he moved with his family to London, and, besides overseeing the Societies, devoted himself much to the spiritual care of prisoners in Newgate.

<sup>59</sup> Thomas Jackson, ed., *Works of John Wesley*, Volume 7, 552.

<sup>60</sup> This is referred to in numerous articles but also is on a plaque commemorating his pulpit ministry in the Old North Church, Boston.

<sup>61</sup> Alexander Knox, *Remains of Alexander Knox, Esq* (London: Duncan and Malcolm, 1844) Volume 3:152-153. "I observe in Wesley a Christianity far more elevated than even the worthy pietists appear to

But what has John Wesley done? In my mind, in a manner unprecedented, he has not overlooked the forgiveness of sins, but he has, indeed, looked much above it, and beyond it. No Platonic, or mystic Christian, ever inculcated a more inward and spiritual salvation; and, all he says of the operation of Divine grace on the heart, from first to last, is but an expansion of that single position of St. Peter, "Whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises that by them we might become partakers of the Divine nature."<sup>62</sup>

Both Wesleys show their clear appreciation and incorporation of participation in the divine nature.

## 2. Recapitulation

John Wesley's sermons and writings are especially strong in this aspect of theosis. For the Wesleys, salvation was not only to be justified by Christ but also involved the gracious renewal of the human heart by faith into the image of God. The resulting new relationship with God is superior to what the first man and woman enjoyed. In his sermon, *On Original Sin*, Wesley taught that Adam's real loss in the Garden was the loss of the *imago dei*, "image of God."

Ye know that the great end of religion is, to renew our hearts in the image of God, to repair that total loss of righteousness and true holiness which we sustained by the sin of our first parent. Ye know that all religion which does not answer this end, all that stops short of this, the renewal of our soul in the image of God, after the likeness of Him that created it, is no other than a poor farce, and a mere mockery of God. O beware of all those teachers of lies, who would palm this upon you for Christianity! Know your disease! Know your cure! Ye were born in sin: Therefore, "ye must be born again," born of God. By nature ye are wholly corrupted. By grace ye shall be wholly renewed... The Scripture avers, that "by one man's disobedience all men were constituted sinners;" that "in Adam all

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have had. I see the necessity of converting grace insisted on with as much zeal as ever was shown by St. Augustine himself; and in addition to this, a subsequent progress and perfection of holiness maintained and urged in the very spirit of St. Chrysostom. What is more gratifying, I find this unprecedented union of the doctrines of grace, and holiness. He talks often and earnestly to be sure of justification as well as of sanctification but his justification, is much rather a transaction which takes place in the soul itself, being nothing else than initiation into the inward mystery of godliness. ... it is a very different thing from the justification spoken of by Calvinists: theirs is a transaction done in heaven, from which the soul derives consolation by a kind of strong affiance or confidence; his justification, whether rightly or erroneously conceived by him, is much rather a transaction done in heaven which takes place in the soul."

<sup>62</sup> Ibid., 153.

died,” spiritually died, lost the life and the image of God; that fallen, sinful Adam then “begat a son in his own likeness;” and that “there is no difference,” in that “all have sinned and come short of the glory of God,” of that glorious image of God wherein man was originally created... Hereby the great Physician of souls applies medicines to heal this sickness; to restore human nature, totally corrupted in all its faculties. God heals all our Atheism by the knowledge of Himself, and of Jesus Christ whom he hath sent; In Adam ye all died: In the second Adam, in Christ, ye all are made alive.<sup>63</sup>

Other sermons with strong recapitulation themes are quoted at length in the footnotes

below: *The Great Privilege of those that are Born of God*,<sup>64</sup> *On the Fall of Man*,<sup>65</sup> *The*

*Heavenly Treasure in Earthen Vessels*<sup>66</sup> and *What Is Man?*<sup>67</sup> These are powerful

examples of his teaching on this tenet of theosis.

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<sup>63</sup> *Standard Sermon of John Wesley*, Volume 2, 225.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, Volume 1, 299ff. “Justification and the new birth are in point of time, inseparable from each other, yet are they easily distinguished, as being not the same, but things of a widely different nature. Justification implies only a relative, the new birth a real, change. God in justifying us does something *for* us; in begetting us again, he does the work *in* us. The former changes our outward relation to God, so that of enemies we become children; by the latter our inmost souls are changed, so that of sinners we become saints. The one restores us to the favour, the other to the image, of God. The one is the taking away the guilt, the other the taking away the power, of sin: So that, although they are joined together in point of time, yet are they of wholly distinct natures. ... Secondly, what the life of God in the soul of a believer is; wherein it properly consists; and what is immediately and necessarily implied therein. It immediately and necessarily implies the continual inspiration of God’s Holy Spirit; God’s breathing into the soul, and the soul’s breathing back what it first receives from God; a continual action of God upon the soul, and a reaction of the soul upon God; an unceasing presence of God, the loving, pardoning God, manifested to the heart, and perceived by faith.”

<sup>65</sup> Thomas Jackson, ed., *Works of John Wesley*, Volume 6, 223. “And here is a remedy for all our disease, all the corruption of our nature. For God hath also, through the intercession of his Son, given us his Holy Spirit, to renew us both “in knowledge,” in his natural image; - opening the eyes of our understanding, and enlightening us with all such knowledge as is requisite to our pleasing God; - and also in his moral image, namely, “righteousness and true holiness.”

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, Volume 7, 344. “When it pleased God to give an account of the origin of things, and of man in particular, all the darkness vanished away, and the clear light shone. ‘God said, Let us make man in our own image.’ It was done. In the image of God man was made. Hence we are enabled to give a clear, satisfactory account of the greatness, the excellency, the dignity of man. But “man, being in honour” did not continue therein, but rebelled against his sovereign Lord. Hereby he totally lost, not only the favour, but likewise the image of God. And “in Adam all died.” For fallen “Adam begat a son in his own likeness...” This, then, is the treasure which they have received; -- a faith of the operation of God; a peace which sets them above the fear of death, and enables them in everything to be content; an hope full of immortality, whereby they already “taste of the powers of the world to come;” the love of God shed abroad in their hearts with love to every child of man, and a renewal in the whole image of God, in all righteousness and true holiness.”

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, Volume 7, 170. “Man became lower than even the beasts that perish. He willfully and openly rebelled against God, and cast off his allegiance to the Majesty of heaven. Hereby he instantly lost both the favour and the image of God wherein he was created... For the plain tenor of it is, ‘Believe in the Lord

Charles Wesley uses the language of recapitulation in several of his hymns.

Consider this verse from his well-known Christmas hymn:

Come desire of nations come! Fix in us Thy humble home;  
Rise, the woman's conquering seed, bruise in us the serpent's head.  
Adam's likeness now efface, stamp Thine image in its place:  
Second Adam from above, reinstate us in Thy love.  
Hark! The herald angels sing, "Glory to the newborn King!"

A lesser known lyric penned by Charles for the Christmas season is also instructive:

He deigns in flesh to appear, widest extremes to join,  
To bring our vileness near, and make us all divine  
And we the life of God shall know, for God is manifest below,  
Made perfect first in love, and sanctified by grace,  
We shall from earth remove and see His glorious face  
His love shall then be fully showed and man shall all be lost in God.<sup>68</sup>

Growing up with the same parental and educational influences as his older brother,

Charles embraced theosis. The above hymn has the doctrines of incarnation,

sanctification, glorification, and deification all brought together in one lyric of praise.<sup>69</sup>

Recovering the image of God was a central theme for the Wesleys. The minutes of the First Annual Conference of Methodists in 1744 referenced above also include this statement: "What is it to be sanctified? It is to be renewed in the image of God."<sup>70</sup> When John wrote his *Plain Account of Genuine Christianity* to refute Middleton<sup>71</sup> he said,

Jesus Christ, whom God hath given to be the propitiation for thy sins, and thou shalt be saved; first, from the guilt of sin, having redemption through his blood; then from the power, which shall have no more dominion over thee; and then from the root of it, into the whole image of God. And being restored both to the favour and image of God, thou shalt know, love, and serve him to all eternity."

<sup>68</sup> Allchin, *Participation in God*, 22.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid*, 25ff. According to Allchin, Charles Wesley was committed to a slightly different model of Patristic theosis. However, says Allchin, Charles Wesley's intention "is to simply point in song to what cannot be categorized in discursive doctrine." Charles was almost mystic in speaking of a mystical union in which the soul of the Christian becomes "lost in God." Not all of Charles' theosis hymns made it into John's published collections as John edited or revised Charles' hymns according to his own standards for Methodists. This revealed the differences between the two brothers on the nature of perfection in this life... John expected to go on to perfection in this life, Charles would settle for nothing less than sinless perfection, the full recovery of the *imago dei*.

<sup>70</sup> Thomas Jackson, *Works of John Wesley*, Volume 8, 279.

<sup>71</sup> See page 81-82 above.

“This powerful, all-wise, all-gracious Being, this Governor of all, loves me. And I love him and he has given me to resemble himself, he has stamped his image on my heart.”<sup>72</sup>

Later on in the same paper he declares “Christianity, considered as an inward principle, is holiness and happiness, the image of God impressed on a created spirit, a fountain of peace and love springing up into everlasting life.”<sup>73</sup>

Wesley’s tract entitled *Justification By Faith* thoroughly depicts his understanding of recapitulation. He begins by relating the events surrounding the fall of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden and its effects on the rest of humanity. Then Wesley wrote:

In this state we were, even all mankind, when ‘God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son’. In the fullness of time he was made man, another common head of mankind, a second general parent and representative of the whole human race. By the sin of the first Adam, who was not only the father but likewise the representative of us all, we all fell short of the favor of God. Even so, by the sacrifice for sin made by the second Adam, as the representative of us all, God is reconciled to the world and hath given them a new covenant.<sup>74</sup>

Wesley taught that to preach Christ accurately is to present him not only as the believer’s “Great High Priest who reconciles us to God and ever lives to make intercession for us, but likewise as the Prophet of the Lord who by his word and his Spirit is restoring those to the image of God whom he had first reinstated in his favor.”<sup>75</sup> By Christ’s Incarnation, sinful human nature itself became sanctified, acceptable to God and worthy of being a vessel of God’s Spirit again when redeemed by a holy God.

In *Thoughts on Christian Perfection* he affirmed that scriptural perfection was “pure love filling and governing all words and actions ... reigning alone in our heart and

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<sup>72</sup> Thomas Jackson, *Works of John Wesley*, Volume 5, 485.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, 488.

<sup>74</sup> Outler, *John Wesley*, 200.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, 225.

life.”<sup>76</sup> How can one determine if they have attained this level of perfection? Three times in the next paragraph Wesley spoke of “an entire renewal in the love and image of God which is the product of growing in grace and in the knowledge of Christ in the love and image of God, and will do so not only till death but to all eternity.”<sup>77</sup>

The Wesleyan teaching on perfection has been perhaps the most debated aspect of their theology. However, when considered alongside the next two points of the outline, it becomes clear that when perfection is viewed through the lens of theosis the teaching on perfection is entirely consistent.

### **3. Union of the Soul with God**

The concept the Spirit’s work in salvation and perfection for the believer was of great interest to John Wesley. Although, like Jonathan Edwards and George Whitefield, it appears that he did not refer to theosis by name, he incorporated the concept into his theology of “perfection”. It was from the Eastern Fathers like Gregory of Nyssa that Wesley learned to conceive of salvation as a process and his desire was for Anglicanism to return to the best use of the Patristic Fathers’ theology.

What did Wesley mean by “perfection”? He faced this question many times through his ministry and in his sermon, *A Plain Account of Christian Perfection*, he related one such instance: “In 1740 I had a conversation with Dr. Gibson, then Bishop of London. He asked me what I meant by perfection. I told him without any disguise or reserve. When I ceased speaking, he said, ‘Mr. Wesley, if this be all you mean, publish it to the world.’”<sup>78</sup>

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<sup>76</sup> Ibid., 293-94.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid., 296.

<sup>78</sup> Thomas Jackson, ed., *Works of John Wesley*, Volume 11, 374.

The sermon first explained that perfection “does not imply, as some men seem to have imagined, an exemption from ignorance, mistake, infirmities or temptations. Indeed it is only another term for ‘holiness’. They are two names for the same thing.”<sup>79</sup> As he continued he contended that since Christ has commanded humanity to love God with all its heart, soul body and mind,<sup>80</sup> it must be possible to achieve that state in this life;<sup>81</sup> otherwise God has given a command that is unattainable. This command, to Wesley’s mind, showed how perfection is best defined: “By perfection I mean the humble, gentle, patient love of God and our neighbor, ruling our tempers, words and actions. This is not a state but a dynamic process: saving faith is its beginning; sanctification is its proper climax.”<sup>82</sup>

Wesley reached this position after study of the Patristic Fathers and earlier Church of England theologians. When he exclaimed in *A Plain Account of Christian Perfection*, “O grant that nothing in my soul may dwell, but Thy pure love alone!” he was following the path marked out by previous Anglicans.<sup>83</sup> A quote from the other bishop Wesley

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<sup>79</sup> Ibid., 377.

<sup>80</sup> Mark 12:30

<sup>81</sup> Thomas Jackson, ed., *Works of John Wesley*, Volume 5, 324-25. [From a letter “to a pious and sensible woman”] “By Christian perfection, I mean: 1) loving God with all our heart. Do you object to this? 2) a heart and life all devoted to God. Do you desire less? 3) regaining the whole image of God. What objection to this? 4) having all the mind that was in Christ. Is this going too far? 5) walking uniformly as Christ walked. And this surely no Christian will object to. If anyone means anything more or anything else by perfection, I have no concern with it.”

<sup>82</sup> Ibid., Volume 11, 446.

<sup>83</sup> Shontz, “Anglican Influence of John Wesley’s Soteriology,” 37-38. “In his *Pattern of Catechetical Doctrine*, Lancelot Andrewes declared: ‘And so this we must labor to attain unto, to love Him with all our heart and all our soul’. For the Anglicans, the perfection they espoused was not absolute, but qualified. Just as Wesley presented his teaching in such a way that the attainment of perfection did not exclude further growth in grace, the Anglican theologians attempted to express a doctrine of perfection that was not static but dynamic; one that was complete while still in process. So Bishop Andrewes pronounced: ‘Why, is there any perfection in this life? There is the perfection of travelers, of wayfaring men; the farther onward on their journey, the nearer their journey’s end, the more perfect; which is the perfection of this life, for this life is a journey’. In a similar vein, Wesley would write: “Yet we may, lastly, observe that neither in this respect is there any absolute perfection on earth...none which does not admit of a continual increase”. In

referenced in his letter above<sup>84</sup> also shows the correlation between the biblical notions of perfection, sanctification, and love. According to Bishop Taylor: “Perfection cannot be less than an entire piety, a holiness perfect in its parts, wanting nothing material, allowing no vicious habit, permitting no vile action, but contending towards the greatest Excellency, a charitable heart, pure and pleasing to God in Jesus Christ.”<sup>85</sup> Christian perfection produces a Christlike character in the human soul. “Be ye therefore perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect,”<sup>86</sup> calls believers to strive for the goal of holy living for the glory of God. John struggled to see how the perfection described by the Patristic Fathers could ever be his personal experience, as revealed in this quote: “These considerations insensibly stole upon me as I grew acquainted with the mystic writers whose noble descriptions of union with God and internal religion made everything else appear mean, flat and insipid.”<sup>87</sup> Yet he insisted that the pursuit of perfection and union should be the goal of every believer. “Scriptural perfection is pure love filling the heart and governing all words and actions... pure love reigning alone in our heart and life is the whole of scriptural perfection [producing] an entire renewal in the love and image of God.”<sup>88</sup>

As previously noted, Charles and John had some disagreement between them over the nature and extent of perfection in this life. “John expected to go on to perfection in this life, Charles at the threshold of death or in the next life.”<sup>89</sup> This divergence in views

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spite of the obstacles the word "perfection" would create, Mr. Wesley was determined to pursue a *biblical* perfection, in keeping with his theological forebears.”

<sup>84</sup> See footnote #10 in this chapter.

<sup>85</sup> Shontz, “Anglican Influence of John Wesley’s Soteriology”, 32, No. 1, 51.

<sup>86</sup> Matthew 5:48

<sup>87</sup> Outler, *John Wesley*, 46-47.

<sup>88</sup> Thomas Jackson, ed., *Works of John Wesley*, Volume 11, 444.

<sup>89</sup> Christensen, “Theosis and Sanctification: John Wesley’s Reformulation of a Patristic Doctrine”, 88.

is revealed in two letters that John wrote Charles.<sup>90</sup> The brothers did not ever fully come to agreement in this area but the differences between them never led to a breach of friendship.

Charles Wesley beautifully expressed his view of perfection with the eastern teaching of union of the soul with God in the words of this hymn:

O for a heart to praise my God, a heart from sin set free  
 A heart that always feels Thy blood so freely shed for me.  
 A heart in every thought renewed and full of love divine.  
 Perfect and right and pure and good, a copy, Lord, of Thine!  
 Thy nature, gracious Lord, impart; come quickly from above  
 Write Thy new name upon my heart, Thy new best name of Love.<sup>91</sup>

The union of God with humanity, so central to the Patristic model of theosis, is also seen in the Wesley's theology of perfection. This is elaborated further as we consider the next tenet of theosis.

#### 4. Progress of the Soul in Eternity

Entire sanctification for the Wesleys was the perfection in love that completely heals the wound of Adam. This sanctification does not have a level where it ceases to increase but progresses toward the glory of God through eternity. Michael Christensen sees the connection here with theosis:

Orthodox theologian Charles Ashanin has pointed out that the classical Methodist doctrine of sanctification “is probably Wesley’s adaptation of the Patristic doctrine of Theosis” and Wesleyan theologian Randy Maddox agrees.

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<sup>90</sup> Thomas Jackson, ed., *Works of John Wesley*, Volume 12, 322. *February 12, 1767*. The whole comes to one point: Is there, or is there not, any instantaneous sanctification between justification and death? I say, Yes. You (often seem to) say, No. What arguments brought you to think so? Perhaps they may convince me too. *June 14, 1768*. I think it is high time that you and I, at least, should come to a point. Shall we go on asserting perfection against all the world? Or shall we quietly let it drop? We really must do one or the other.... What shall we jointly and explicitly maintain, (and recommend to all our Preachers) concerning the nature, the time, (now or by and by?), and the manner of it? instantaneous, or not? I am weary of intestine war; of Preachers quoting one of us against the other. At length, let us fix something for good and all....”

<sup>91</sup> Hymn “O For a Heart to Praise My God,” *Great Hymns of the Faith* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1968), 327.

Understanding the doctrine of sanctification in its therapeutic, soteriological context, he says, “has significant parallels with the Eastern Orthodox theme of deification (theosis).”<sup>92</sup>

It seems clear that what Wesley termed “entire sanctification” could also be linked to the part of theosis that speaks of the soul’s progress in eternity. He did not write much on this aspect<sup>93</sup> so it is from his sermons that one must glean his teaching on the progress of the soul in heaven. A good example is this quote from *On Eternity*:

See the spirits of the righteous that are already praising God in a happy eternity! We are ready to say, ‘How short will it appear to those who drink of the rivers of pleasure at God’s right hand!’ But this is only speaking after the manner of men: For the measures of long and short are only applicable to time which admits of bound, and not to unbounded duration. For the inhabitants of heaven “rest not day and night,” but continually cry, “Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord, the God, the Almighty, who was, and who is, and who is to come!” And when millions of millions of ages are elapsed, their eternity is but just begun.<sup>94</sup>

Wesley’s sermon on *The New Creation* develops the theme even further:

But the most glorious of all will be the change which then will take place on the poor, sinful, miserable children of men. These had fallen in many respects, as from a greater height, so into a lower depth, than any other part of the creation. Hence will arise an unmixed state of holiness and happiness far superior to that which Adam enjoyed in Paradise. In how beautiful a manner is this described by the Apostle: “God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: For the former things are done away!” As there will be no more death, and no more pain or sickness preparatory thereto; as there will be no more grieving for, or parting with, friends; so there will be no more sorrow or crying. Nay, but there will be a greater deliverance than all this; for there will be no more sin. And, to crown all, there will be a deep, an intimate, an uninterrupted union with God; a constant communion with the Father and his Son Jesus Christ, through the Spirit; a continual enjoyment of the Three-One God, and of all the creatures in him!<sup>95</sup>

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<sup>92</sup> Christensen, “Theosis and Sanctification: John Wesley’s Reformulation of a Patristic Doctrine,” 73.

<sup>93</sup> Outler, *John Wesley*, 149. In the minutes of the Second Annual Conference of Methodists in 1745 it is recorded that Wesley said “we allow there may be infinite degrees in seeing God” as part of a larger teaching on eternity.

<sup>94</sup> Thomas Jackson, ed., *Works of John Wesley*, Volume 6, 193-94.

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*, 295-96.

One more primary source from Wesley should be referenced and this from his great sermon *On the Fall of Man*. In this quote he is reaching the conclusion of the sermon and is looking ahead to the eternal state:

We may gain infinitely more than we have lost. We may now attain both higher degrees of holiness, and higher degrees of glory, than it would have been possible for us to attain. If Adam had not sinned, the Son of God had not died: Consequently that amazing instance of the love of God to man had never existed, which has, in all ages, excited the highest joy, and love, and gratitude from his children. We might have loved God the Creator, God the Preserver, God the Governor; but there would have been no place for love to God the Redeemer.<sup>96</sup>

Charles Wesley described the soul's continual progress in eternity in this verse from one of his well-known hymns:

Finish then Thy new creation, pure and spotless let us be;  
Let us see Thy great salvation, perfectly restored in Thee:  
Changed from glory into glory, till in heaven we take our place,  
Till we cast our crowns before Thee, lost in wonder, love and grace.<sup>97</sup>

While the Wesley brothers did not delve as deeply into this aspect of theosis as did Jonathan Edwards, they demonstrated their clear understanding of it in their preaching and writing.

## G. Conclusion

From what has been noted above, it is clear that John and Charles Wesley clearly embraced the central tenets of theosis: participation in the divine nature, salvation as recapitulation of humanity, union with God and progress of the soul in eternity. He edited what he read in the Patristics (i.e. Macarius) and reformulated their teachings so that what he presented as Christian perfection or entire sanctification was based on his selective use of what his sources taught about theosis.

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<sup>96</sup> Ibid., 224.

<sup>97</sup> Hymn "Love Divine, All Loves Excelling", *The Celebration Hymnal*, (USA: Word Music/Integrity Music, 1997) 648.

This brief study of the theology of the Wesleys has shown that theosis is evident in their preaching, writing and hymns. From the influence of their parents, colleagues in the Holy Club, Anglican history and teaching at Oxford and their own immersion in Patristic texts they formulated a doctrinal approach<sup>98</sup> that brought renewal to the religious scene in eighteenth century England.

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<sup>98</sup> Outler, *John Wesley*, 10. "Thus it was that the ancient and Eastern tradition of holiness as disciplined love became fused in Wesley's mind with his own Anglican tradition of holiness as aspiring love, and thereafter was developed in what he regarded to the end as his own most distinctive doctrinal contribution."

## CHAPTER FIVE

### GEORGE WHITEFIELD

A study of Whitefield's life and theology is one of the most compelling character studies in early Evangelicalism. George Whitefield (1714-1770) was the leading figure in the English Revival and the Great Awakening in the New England colonies. He was educated at Oxford and ordained as an Anglican priest but did not limit his ministry to working only within that tradition. As a result of his freedom to fellowship with any and all who held to evangelical theology, his influence transcended denominational boundaries.

Identifying theosis in Whitefield presents a different challenge from that of Edwards and the Wesleys. Those men left copious amounts of documents, books, journals, letters and sermons for scholars to study and from which it can be readily discerned that there are tenets of theosis in his views. However, Whitefield authored no books and his published journal only records the events of his life up to the age of twenty-five. There is also an unpublished journal that records his third visit to America when he was twenty-nine. It is mainly from his sermons that one must glean any influence of theosis and here again there are few to choose from. Whitefield preached more than eighteen thousand sermons in his lifetime,<sup>1</sup> an average of five hundred a year, or ten a week. Many of them were repeated over and over again. Fewer than ninety of them have survived in any form.<sup>2</sup> There are also some letters, a diary and several biographies to peruse. Yet in spite of this scarcity of primary sources to work from it is

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<sup>1</sup> Billingsley, *Life of the Great Preacher, George Whitefield*, 377.

<sup>2</sup> *The Anglican Library*, 2001, [www.anglicanlibrary.org/whitefield](http://www.anglicanlibrary.org/whitefield)

evident that theosis had a great influence in Whitefield's conversion and preaching ministry.

One further impediment to discovering theosis in Whitefield is that there is a scarcity of scholarship on this aspect of his life. Several excellent biographies have been written, as well as articles in various theological and church history magazines, yet the emphasis of these was more on his life and the great effect he had on converting multitudes to Christ. The few articles found are referenced in this thesis but when compared to what is written on this topic about Edwards and Wesley there is a need for further scholarship in this area. This thesis will bring some attention to this overlooked aspect of Whitefield's theology.

Whitefield did not write books, found schools or societies. He chose to focus on itinerant evangelism. He saw later in life that Wesley's organization made for a lasting impact because the believers were integrated in Methodist societies. In England, where churches were often closed to his preaching, he did establish a small "connexion of societies" through the support of the Countess of Huntingdon. But administration was not Whitefield's gift. In fact, he said "My brother Wesley acted wisely. The souls that were awakened under his ministry he joined in class and thus preserved the fruits of his labors. This I neglected and my people are a rope of sand."<sup>3</sup> After his death, many of his converts, particularly those in the American colonies, joined Dissenting churches.<sup>4</sup> The following comment speaks directly to this point:

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<sup>3</sup> *Works of George Whitefield, Volume 3*, 20.

<sup>4</sup> E. Wayne Thompson and David L. Cummins, *This Day in Baptist History* (Greenville, SC: Bob Jones University Press, 1993), 37. In England, his converts generally remained Anglicans or within the Methodist societies attached to the Anglican Church. However, the American converts seemed to seek fellowship in other congregation as is borne out from the research in this book. The following two quotes

All contemporary records indicated that, of the two, Whitefield was the more powerful evangelist. But strange as it seems, it is Wesley's work that have survived and thrived through the years in the worldwide Methodist movement, whereas the Calvinistic Methodist Church linked with Whitefield is today a small denomination restricted largely to Britain. Yet the reason is not hard to find. It lies in the genius of Wesley's pastoral structures. All his converts were channeled into "classes" of about ten to twelve each. Here each member was nurtured to maturity and usefulness in ministry. More mature ones were channeled into "bands" where standards were even more demanding. And out of the class and band leaders came the lay preachers of early Methodism who went on to become the leaders of the next generation. From these emerged the worldwide Methodist movement.<sup>5</sup>

It seems that Whitefield did not excel in administration; however, there is no doubt as to his leading role in the Great Awakening and the rise of the evangelical movement.

### A. Biography

George Whitefield was born in Gloucester, England, the youngest of seven children. Unlike Edwards and the Wesley brothers, Whitefield was not born into the home of a clergyman. His great grandfather and his grandfather's brother had been Anglican priests<sup>6</sup> but that is where the line of clergy ended. George's father was a middle class proprietor of the Bell Inn in Gloucester who died when George was only two years old, leaving his mother to take over the management of the tavern and inn.<sup>7</sup> When George was ten she remarried but it "proved to be what the world would call an unhappy match"<sup>8</sup> and it had an adverse effect on George. The inn suffered under the new family arrangement to the degree that when he turned fifteen he told his mother that "since her

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are instructive: "There is no doubt that Baptists in America owe a great debt to the evangelism of George Whitefield and his preaching tours. Everywhere he preached souls were saved and often his converts, driven to the Bible as they were, became ardent Baptists". *This Day in Baptist History*, Page 483.

"Whitefield took pains to declaim against what he considered rebaptism of adults and argued for infant baptism. In order to make it plain that the Baptists did not belong to his flock, he stated that many of his 'chickens had become ducks.'"

<sup>5</sup> *Asian Journal of Pentecostal Studies*, 2004, 66. [www.ajps.edu/ajps](http://www.ajps.edu/ajps)

<sup>6</sup> Dallimore, *George Whitefield*, 39.

<sup>7</sup> William Wale, ed., *George Whitefield's Journals*, 37.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 39.

circumstances would not permit her to give me an university education” he would quit school. He began to work with her in the Bell Inn “till at length I put on my blue apron, and my snuffers, washed mops, cleaned rooms and in one word, became professed and common drawer for nigh a year and a half.”<sup>9</sup>

Just when it seemed that a university education was out of the question “a youth who had spent a term at Oxford happened to mention to him and his mother that he had been able to defray his university costs by working as a servitor.”<sup>10</sup> With that information he diligently resumed his studies. He then applied to Oxford and entered Pembroke College in 1732.

Oxford allowed a certain number of students to come to the university in the role of a servitor. In exchange for free tuition the servitor waited on three or four higher ranked students. “He might be required to waken them in the morning, black their shoes, run their errands or tidy their room. He received what money and discarded clothing and books they chose to give. His inferior position was marked by a special garb that he wore.”<sup>11</sup> Tradition did not permit those students of a higher rank to discuss philosophy, attend church or even to talk with a servitor.

Whitefield excelled in this role and “found that my having been used to a public-house was now of service to me.”<sup>12</sup> It was in this position as servitor that he was soon to meet with some men who would shortly have a profound effect upon the religious climate of England and the colonies in America.

## **B. Conversion**

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<sup>9</sup> William Wale, ed., *George Whitefield's Journals*, 40.

<sup>10</sup> Dallimore, *George Whitefield*, 56.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 61.

<sup>12</sup> William Wale, ed., *George Whitefield's Journals*, 45.

Upon entering Oxford, Whitefield began to pay greater attention to spiritual matters. His *Journal* records that as a child he “had some early convictions of sin” and that he was “always fond of being a clergyman and used to frequently imitate the ministers reading prayers.”<sup>13</sup> Now as he contemplated a career in the ministry he became more serious about Christianity and began to pray, sing psalms, fast and receive communion regularly. He was attracted to the group of students called “Methodists” and longed to meet with them but his position as servitor made it improper for him to introduce himself to them. This was solved when Charles Wesley, having been made aware of Whitefield’s good deeds and spirituality, invited him to breakfast one day. Whitefield’s friend of thirty years and his first biographer, John Gilles, wrote of this meeting: “Happy was it for Mr. Whitefield that he became acquainted with the Rev. Mr. Charles Wesley, by whom he was treated with particular kindness. Such benefit did he receive under his ministry that he always accounted him his spiritual father.”<sup>14</sup>

In Whitefield’s journal he writes of this meeting and how Charles gave him a book, *The Life of God in the Soul of Man*. Henry Scougal, a Puritan professor of religion at the University of Aberdeen, had written it in the previous century. As Whitefield opened the book he was stunned to read that true religion was not going to church or doing good works. He relates the conflict this volume created within him in his sermon, *All Men’s Place*:

God showed me that I must be born again or be damned. I learned that a man may go to church, say his prayers, receive the sacrament, and yet not be a Christian. How did my heart shudder, like a poor man afraid to look into his account books, lest he should find himself bankrupt. “Shall I burn this book? Shall I throw it

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 38.

<sup>14</sup> Gilles, *Memoirs of the Life of the Reverend George Whitefield*, 6.

down? Or shall I search it?" I did search it and God soon showed me that true religion is a union of the soul with God.<sup>15</sup>

Here is the quote from Scougal's book that so affected Whitefield:

But certainly religion is quite another thing, and they who are acquainted with it will disdain all false imitations of it. They know by experience that true religion is a union of the soul with God, a real participation of the divine nature, the very image of God drawn upon the soul, or, in the apostle's phrase, "It is Christ formed within us." Briefly, I know not how the nature of religion can be more fully expressed, than by calling it a *Divine Life*: and under these terms I shall discourse of it, showing first, how it is called a life; and then, how it is termed divine.<sup>16</sup>

As was learned in Chapter One, a key text in support of theosis is 2 Peter 1:4 which states that redeemed persons are "partakers of the divine nature." Scougal alludes to this above when talking about "participation in the divine nature." He goes on to explain that the divine life is the real basis of true religion:

I come next to give an account why I designed it by the name of Divine Life: and so it may be called, not only in regard of its fountain and original, having God for its author, and being wrought in the souls of men by the power of his Holy Spirit; but also in regard of its nature, religion being a resemblance of the divine perfections, the image of the Almighty shining in the soul of man: nay, it is a real participation of his nature, it is a beam of the eternal light, a drop of that infinite ocean of goodness; and they who are endowed with it may be said to have "God dwelling in their souls, and Christ formed within them."<sup>17</sup>

Scougal declared that love, purity and humility are the highest goals that either men or angels are capable of but these alone do not bring assurance of faith: "I had rather see the real impressions of a God-like nature upon my own soul, than have a vision from heaven, or an angel sent to tell me that my name was enrolled in the book of life." To Scougal, the secret of the new nature and divine life could not ever be adequately expressed in

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<sup>15</sup> Dallimore, *George Whitefield*, 73.

<sup>16</sup> Henry Scougal, *The Life of God in the Soul of Man* (Harrisonburg, VA: Sprinkle Publications, 1986), 39.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 43.

words but only appropriated through the Spirit. “There is a spirit in man; and the inspiration of the Almighty giveth this understanding.”<sup>18</sup>

Upon reading this book Whitefield wrote in his journal: “Though I had fasted, watched and prayed and received the Sacrament so long, yet I never knew what true religion was, till God sent me that excellent treatise by the hands of my never-to-be-forgotten friend.”<sup>19</sup> That friend, Charles Wesley, and Whitefield would remain close through their lives and ministries together in the rise of Methodism.

However, receiving the assurance of the divine life and salvation did not come immediately. He embraced the rules of the Holy Club<sup>20</sup> and tried all outward forms of religious observance including lying prostrate on the earth for hours in prayer from dusk to dawn. He neglected his health with lengthy fasts and was forced to leave Oxford for several months to recover. At last salvation came as he meditated on Christ’s saying from the cross, “I thirst.” He realized that this was uttered near the end of the Lord’s sufferings on the cross and his own faith began to increase. “I cast myself down on the bed, crying out, ‘I thirst! I thirst!’ Soon after this, I found and felt in myself that I was delivered from the burden that had so heavily oppressed me.”<sup>21</sup>

The year was 1735, which means that his conversion preceded John and Charles Wesley’s by two years. He did not immediately share this news with the other members of the Holy Club. It may seem strange to readers today that he did not until one remembers the age difference between them – Whitefield was thirteen years younger than John and nine years younger than Charles Wesley - and that the role of servitor probably

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid, 51.

<sup>19</sup> William Wale, ed., *George Whitefield's Journal*, 46.

<sup>20</sup> See Chapter Four.

<sup>21</sup> William Wale, ed., *George Whitefield's Journal*, 58.

continued to keep them apart. It was not until Whitefield had great success in evangelism that their relationship became more one of peers and colleagues.

### C. Influence of an Oxford Education

Whitefield graduated from Oxford and received an education similar to that of the Wesleys. His sermons reveal his knowledge of church history and an understanding of the Neoplatonism<sup>22</sup> that was so influential in the formation of theosis by the Patristic Fathers. He also read and studied the same Anglican worthies as the Wesleys. He became familiar enough with Bishop Beveridge's works to quote him in three of his sermons.<sup>23</sup> This is the same Beveridge who, as observed in the previous chapter, had been so influential in the spiritual formation of John and Charles Wesley.

When the Wesley brothers left for the mission to Georgia, Whitefield was asked to lead the Holy Club at Oxford. Dallimore writes of this time in his life:

Whitefield probably conducted the Holy Club meetings after the fashion established by Wesley. His diary shows that he made use of the following books at this time: Horneck's *Primitive Christianity*, Archbishop Wake on *The Catechism*, Wright on *Regeneration*, an unnamed work by Bishop Sherlock and another by Bishop Beveridge, and Bishop Burnett's *Pastoral Care*.<sup>24</sup>

All of these writers were Anglican clergymen and most of the above works dealt with pastoral issues. However, for this study it is helpful to know that Whitefield read

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<sup>22</sup> *Works of George Whitefield*, Volume 5, 211. "Surely never was so much expressed in so few words; which hath often made me wonder how that great critic [neoplatonist orator of the third century] Longinus, who so justly admires the dignity and grandeur of Moses's account of the creation, and 'God said, Let there be light, and there was light;' I say I have often wondered why he did not read a little further, and bestow as just an encomium upon this short, but withal inexpressibly august and comprehensive description of the formation of man, 'so God created man in his own image.'"

<sup>23</sup> *Works of George Whitefield*, Volume 6, 114. "Jesus loved Martha and her sister, and Lazarus. Oh happy family! beloved of Jesus, with a peculiar, everlasting love. Very often it so happens, (to use the words of the pious Bishop Beveridge) that there 'is but one in a city, and two in a country of this stamp.' In these two sermons, *Walking With God* and *Blind Bartimaeus*, there is the same quote: "There is a heaven at the end of this walk. For, to use the words of pious Bishop Beveridge, 'Though the way be narrow, yet it is not long: and though the gate be strait, yet it opens into everlasting life'."

<sup>24</sup> Dallimore, *George Whitefield*, 89.

Horneck. Dr. Anthony Horneck was a seventeenth-century Church of England minister in London. To combat the inroads of Deism and the decline of Christianity he organized small groups of men to study the Bible, religious books and to pray.<sup>25</sup> These groups became known as Societies and by the time Whitefield was in Oxford there were nearly one hundred of these in England, meeting under the auspices of the Anglican Church.<sup>26</sup> For Whitefield to have been appointed to lead the members of the Holy Club in their discussion he would have had to been familiar with the theology of Beveridge and Horneck and their high regard for the Patristic Fathers.

One last author that influenced Whitefield must be noted. His diary records that he read the Cambridge fellow and ordained minister, William Law.<sup>27</sup> *A Serious Call to a Devout and Holy Life* and its predecessor *A Treatise of Christian Perfection* are two of Law's best know works. Both of these works were also read by the Wesley brothers. They are filled with Patristic references and the participation language of theosis.

Consider this quote from Chapter Eleven in *A Serious Call*:

That as there is no foundation for comfort in the enjoyments of this life, but in the assurance that a wise and good God governeth the world, so the more we find out God in everything, the more we apply to Him in every place, the more we look up to Him in all our actions, the more we conform to His will, the more we act according to His wisdom, and imitate His goodness, by so much the more do we enjoy God, partake of the Divine nature, and heighten and increase all that is happy and comfortable in human life.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Gilles, *Memoirs of the Life of the Reverend George Whitefield*, 29.

<sup>26</sup> Kelly D. Carter, "The High Church Roots of John Wesley's Appeal to Primitive Christianity," *Restoration Quarterly*, Volume 37, Number 2, [www.restorationquarterly.org/Volume\\_03](http://www.restorationquarterly.org/Volume_03), "It was Anthony Horneck, minister at Savoy, who first began advocating the society concept as a means of regulating and modeling the church's adherence to the primitive faith. Horneck was, himself, an adamant proclaimer of the virtues of restoring the ethos of early Christianity, as seen in both his *The Happy Ascetik* and *The Sirenes*. Horneck believed that the lives of the primitive Christians were a model for the Christian life; in the Patristics he found the encouragement to revive the strictness of the Primitive Church. The societies were his desire to reinstate early Christianity within High Church Anglicanism."

<sup>27</sup> Dallimore, *George Whitfield*, 89.

<sup>28</sup> William Law, *A Serious Call to a Devout and Holy Life*, Chapter 11, ccel.org.

It is certain that Whitefield's personal reading, education at Oxford and the fellowship within the Holy Club brought him into direct contact with Patristic teaching. His growing spiritual maturity did not go unnoticed. As his good works became known the Bishop of Gloucester, Dr. Benson, took an interest in Whitefield. He had observed him in church and the community and was impressed with his character and behaviour. Although he had declared he "would not ordain anyone under three-and-twenty, yet I think it my duty to ordain you whenever you come for Holy Orders."<sup>29</sup> So George Whitefield was ordained as a deacon in the Church of England in 1736 at the age of twenty-one. After his first mission to Georgia, he returned to England to receive ordination as a priest in 1739.<sup>30</sup>

#### **D. The Influence of Whitefield on Early Evangelicalism**

Since there are so few of his writings to research it may be asked whether it is even important enough to include him in this study to begin with. The answer is that Whitefield had a tremendous effect on the rise of Evangelicalism. He experienced conversion before the Wesley brothers. He was first to preach in the fields<sup>31</sup> when the churches were closed to him. His tour of the American colonies was catalyst for the Great Awakening and revivals in England, Scotland and Wales. He was able to remain loyal to the Church of England and its doctrines, but was also able to preach in a way that

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<sup>29</sup> William Wale, ed., *George Whitefield's Journal*, 67.

<sup>30</sup> Dallimore, *George Whitefield*, 223, Dr Benson ordained Whitefield but later "told Lady Huntingdon he was sorry he had ever ordained him. 'My Lord!' (said the countess), 'mark my words: when you are on your dying bed that will be one of the few ordinations you will reflect upon with complacence.'"

<sup>31</sup> Gilles, *Memoirs of the Life of the Reverend George Whitefield*, 38. "After much prayer and many struggles within himself, he one day went to Hannam Mount and standing upon a hill, began to preach to about one hundred colliers. The numbers greatly increased till the congregation amounted to near twenty thousand. But with what gladness and eagerness, many of these despised outcasts, who had never been in a church in their lives, received the word. "Having no righteousness of their own to renounce they were glad to hear of a Jesus who was a friend to publicans and came not to call the righteous but sinners to repentance. The first discovery of their begin affected was to see the white gutters made by their tears, which plentifully fell down their black cheeks as they came out of their coal pits."

attracted adherents from other denominations on both sides of the Atlantic. This is exemplified in a sermon delivered from a balcony in Philadelphia. He looked up to heaven and acted out a conversation between Abraham and himself:

Father Abraham, whom have you in heaven? Any Episcopalians? No! Any Presbyterians? No! Any Independents or Methodists? No, No, No! Whom have you there? 'We don't know those names here. All who are here are Christians. . . .' Oh, is this the case? Then God help us to forget party names and to become Christians in deed and truth.<sup>32</sup>

When he died suddenly of an asthma attack in Newbury, Massachusetts, the news of his passing evoked an immediate response:

Many ministers of all persuasions came to the house where several gave a very particular account of their first awakenings under his ministry and also of many in their congregations who owed their conversion wholly to his coming among them, often repeating the blessed seasons they had enjoyed under his preaching and all said that this last visit was attended with more power than any other. Then one and another of them would pity and pray and it was truly affecting to hear them mourn America and England's loss.<sup>33</sup>

Mark Noll records that in the years that followed his death, when Evangelicalism had begun to organize itself into more formal denominations, the two common denominators of the movement were "the leaders of these movements almost always had experienced a life-directing experience of conversion and a surprisingly large number of them had been touched by the ministry of George Whitefield."<sup>34</sup>

The testimonies to Whitefield's influence and stature abound in the words of other well-known evangelicals:

"Often as I have read his life", wrote C. H. Spurgeon, "I am conscious of distinct quickening whenever I turn to it. He lived. Other men seemed to be only half-alive; but Whitefield was all life, fire, wing, force. My own model, if I may have such a thing in due subordination to my Lord, is George Whitefield; but with

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<sup>32</sup> Winthrop S. Hudson, *American Protestantism*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1961), 45.

<sup>33</sup> Gillies, *Memoirs of the Life of the Reverend George Whitefield*, 274-75.

<sup>34</sup> Noll, *The Rise of Evangelicalism*, 243.

unequal footsteps must I follow in his glorious track.” John Newton, composer of *Amazing Grace* wrote: “As a preacher, if any man were to ask me who was second-best I had ever heard, I should be at some loss; but in regard to the first, Mr. Whitefield so far exceeds every other man of my time that I should be at no loss to say.” Murray McCheyne wrote in his diary, “Oh, for one of Whitefield's weeks in London.”<sup>35</sup>

Even his fellow Holy Club member, John Wesley, with whom he had a well publicized falling out over the doctrine of predestination in 1741, wrote in his journal nine years later:

I read prayers (in London), and Mr. Whitefield preached. How wise is God in giving different talents to different preachers! Even the little improprieties both of his language and manner were a means of profiting many, who would not have been touched by a more correct discourse, or a more calm and regular manner of speaking. Have we read or heard of any person who called so many thousands, so many myriads of sinners to repentance.<sup>36</sup>

Though they did not ever come to full agreement on the doctrinal question that had separated them, they remained friends evidenced by that fact that Whitefield had given direction that Wesley should preach his funeral.<sup>37</sup>

It is not that Whitefield was not a scholar for his sermons reveal a wealth of understanding about science, politics, the natural world and theology. He read widely and often quoted from the writings and sermons of others.<sup>38</sup> What set him apart and made him so influential among early evangelicals was his strong emphasis on personal

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<sup>35</sup> *The Essential George Whitefield*, [www.geocities.com/Athens/Forum/3505/whitefield](http://www.geocities.com/Athens/Forum/3505/whitefield)

<sup>36</sup> Thomas Jackson, ed., *Works of John Wesley*, January 28, 1750.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, November 10, 1770. “I returned to London, and had the melancholy news of Mr. Whitefield’s death confirmed by his executors, who desired me to preach his funeral sermon on Sunday the 18th. This was his own wish. ‘If you should die abroad,’ said Mr. Keen, ‘whom shall we get to preach your funeral sermon? Must it be your old friend, the Rev. Mr. John Wesley?’ This question was often put, and as often Whitefield answered, ‘He is the man.’”

<sup>38</sup> *Works of George Whitefield*, Volume 5. An example of this can be seen in his quotations of Solomon Stoddard, grandfather of Jonathan Edwards: “The great Stoddard or Northampton in New England, has well entitled a book which he wrote and which I would take this opportunity to recommend, ‘The Safety of appearing in the Righteousness of Christ.’ For why should I lean upon a broken reed, when I can have the rock of ages to stand upon, that never can be moved?”

participation in the divine nature by being born again<sup>39</sup> and the union with God through the ministry of the Holy Spirit.<sup>40</sup>

### **E. Four Tenets of Theosis**

With this short survey of Whitefield's life, education and theological formation complete, it is time to examine the primary sources to discover the influence of theosis on his ministry. We shall use the same rubric as above and seek to find the four main tenets of theosis: participation in the divine nature, recapitulation, union of the soul with God and progress of the soul in heaven in the sermons, journal, diary and letters of Whitefield.

#### **1. Participation in the Divine Nature**

The first sermon chosen to illustrate Whitefield's use of participation language is

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<sup>39</sup> Ibid, Volume 6, 138. *The Holy Spirit Convincing of Sin, Righteousness and Judgement*. "Perhaps you may think you believe, because you repeat the Creed, or subscribe to a Confession of Faith; because you go to church or meeting, receive the sacrament, and are taken into full communion. These are blessed privileges; but all this may be done, without our being true believers. And I know not how to detect your false hypocritical faith better, than by putting to you this question: How long have you believed? Would not most of you say, as long as we can remember; we never did disbelieve? Then this is a certain sign that you have no true faith at all; no, not so much as a grain of mustard-seed: for, if you believe now, unless you were sanctified from your infancy, you must know that there was a time in which you did not believe on the Lord Jesus Christ; and the Holy Ghost, if ever you received it, convinced you of this. You are perhaps so devout (you may imagine) as to get a catalogue of sins; which you look over, and confess in a formal manner, as often as you go to the holy sacrament: but among all your sins, did you ever once confess and bewail that damning sin of unbelief? Were you ever made to cry out, "Lord, give me faith; Lord, give me to believe on thee; O that I had faith! O that I could believe!" If you never were thus distressed, at least, if you never saw and felt that you had no faith, it is a certain sign that the Holy Ghost, the Comforter, never came into and worked savingly upon your souls."

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., Volume 5, 217-218. "And therefore, that I may keep you no longer in suspense, I inform you that this heavenly potter, this blessed agent, is the Almighty Spirit of God, the Holy Ghost, the third person in the most adorable Trinity, coessential with the Father and the Son. This is that Spirit, which at the beginning of time moved on the face of the waters, when nature lay in one universal chaos. This was the Spirit that overshadowed the Holy Virgin, before that holy thing was born of her: and this same Spirit must come, and move upon the chaos of our souls, before we can properly be called the sons of God. This is what John the Baptist calls "being baptized with the Holy Ghost," without which, his and all other baptisms, whether infant or adult, avail nothing. This is that fire, which our Lord came to send into our earthly hearts, and which I pray the Lord of all lords to kindle in every unrenewed one this day. I have told you often, and now tell you again, that you are by nature a motley mixture of the beast and devil, and we cannot recover ourselves from the state wherein we have fallen, therefore must be renewed by the Holy Ghost. By the Holy Ghost, I mean, the third Person of the ever blessed Trinity, co-equal, co-essential, co-eternal, and consubstantial with the Father and the Son; and therefore, when we are baptized, it is into the nature of the Father, into the nature of the Son, and into the nature of the Holy Ghost: and we are not true Christians till we are sanctified by the Spirit of God."

*Christ, the Believer's Wisdom, Righteousness, Sanctification and Redemption.*<sup>41</sup> This is taken from I Corinthians 1:30 and Whitefield expounds on the benefit of Christ to every believer from each word. When he reaches *Sanctification* he reminds them that this is not “a hypocritical outward reformation, a few transient convictions, or a little legal sorrow.” No, sanctification is the “total renovation of the whole man - spirit, soul, and body.” Believers will experience great changes in their understanding, affections, conscience and heart:

Old things are passed away, all things are become new, in their hearts: sin has now no longer dominion over them; they are freed from the power, though not the indwelling of being, of it; they are holy both in heart and life, in all manner of conversation: they are made partakers of a divine nature, and from Jesus Christ, they receive grace; and every grace that is in Christ, is copied and transcribed into their souls; they are transformed into his likeness; he is formed within them; they dwell in him, and he in them; they are led by the Spirit, and bring forth the fruits thereof; they know that Christ is their Emmanuel, God with and in them; they are living temples of the Holy Ghost. And therefore, being a holy habitation unto the Lord, the whole Trinity dwells and walks in them; even here, they sit together with Christ in heavenly places, and are vitally united to him, their Head, by a living faith; their Redeemer, their Maker, is their husband; they are flesh of his flesh, bone of his bone; they talk, they walk with him, as a man talketh and walketh with his friend; in short, they are one with Christ, even as Jesus Christ and the Father are one.<sup>42</sup>

As can be seen above, this sermon incorporates another aspect of theosis as well – union of the soul with God. But Whitefield was not finished:

Thus is Christ made to believers sanctification. And O what a privilege is this! to be changed from beasts into saints, and from a devilish, to be made partakers of a divine nature; to be translated from the kingdom of Satan, into the kingdom of God's dear Son! To put off the old man, which is corrupt, and to put on the new man, which is created after God, in righteousness and true holiness! For the kingdom of God is in them; they are changed from glory to glory, even by the Spirit of the Lord: well may this be a mystery to the natural, for it is a mystery even to the spiritual man himself, a mystery which he cannot fathom. Does it not often dazzle your eyes, O ye children of God, to look at your own brightness, when the candle of the Lord shines out, and your redeemer lifts up the light of his blessed countenance upon your souls?

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<sup>41</sup> *Works of George Whitefield, Volume 6*, 198.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 205.

Are not you astonished, when you feel the love of God shed abroad in your hearts by the Holy Ghost, and God holds out the golden scepter of his mercy, and bids you ask what you will, and it shall be given you? Does not that peace of God, which keeps and rules your hearts, surpass the utmost limits of your understandings? And is not the joy you feel unspeakable? Is it not full of glory? I am persuaded it is; and in your secret communion, when the Lord's love flows in upon your souls, you are as it were swallowed up in, or, to use the apostle's phrase, 'filled with all the fullness of God.'<sup>43</sup>

With moving words and great oratorical skill Whitefield preached an evangelical message that made use of participation language. Several other specimens of his preaching shall now be examined. In *Seed of the Woman, Seed of the Serpent*, he taught about creation, the fall and that Adam and Eve's state in the Garden of Eden could be defined as being a partaker of the divine nature:

A council of the Trinity was called concerning the formation of this lovely creature. The result of that council was, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him."... But man so soon fell, and became like the beasts that perish, nay, like the devil himself. And what are the consequences of their disobedience? Are their eyes opened? Yes, but, alas! It is only to see their own nakedness: Naked of God, naked of every thing that was holy and good, and destitute of the divine image, which they before enjoyed. They might rightly now be termed Ichabod; for the glory of the Lord departed from them. O how low did they fall! Out of God, into themselves; from being partakers of the divine nature, into the nature of the devil and the beast.<sup>44</sup>

In *The Potter and the Clay*, Whitefield explained that participation in the divine life is the essence of the salvation experience:

To make us meet to be blissful partakers of such heavenly company, this "marred clay," I mean, these depraved natures of ours, must necessarily undergo a universal moral change. ... This moral change is what some call, repentance, some, conversion, some, regeneration; choose what name you please, I only pray God, that we all may have the thing. The Lord calls it a being born again, or born from above." These are not figurative expressions, or the flights of eastern

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<sup>43</sup> Ibid., 210.

<sup>44</sup> *Works of George Whitefield*, Volume 5, 11.

language; but they denote a real, moral change of heart and life, a real participation of the divine life in the soul of man.<sup>45</sup>

In *The Folly and Danger of Being Not Righteous Enough*, he warned that worldly pleasure can distract the soul from coming to salvation, which is to be a partaker of the divine nature:

What shall I say, my brethren, unto you? My heart is full, it is quite full, and I must speak, or I shall burst. What, do you think your souls of no value? Had you rather regard the diversions of this life, than the salvation of your souls? If so, you will never be partakers of the divine nature with him in glory; but if you come unto him, he will give you a new nature, supply you with his grace here, and bring you to glory hereafter; and there you may sing praises and hallelujahs to the Lamb forever.<sup>46</sup>

The next three sermons quoted see Whitefield using a slightly different variation on participation in the divine nature. He refers to the image of God being stamped on the soul that echoes what was learned from the teaching by Gregory of Nyssa in Chapter One.<sup>47</sup> Consider how he employed the concept in *The Wise and Foolish Virgins*:

It is as though Christ has said, “You call me, Lord, Lord, but you have not done the things that I have said; you desire me to open the door, but how can you come in hither not having on a wedding garment? Alas, you are naked! Where is my outward righteousness imputed to you? Where is my divine image stamped upon your souls? How dare you call me Lord, Lord, when you have not received the Holy Ghost, whereby I seal all that are truly mine? Verily, I know you not; depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels.”<sup>48</sup>

In *The Pharisee and the Publican* he taught how this concept influences one’s prayer life:

God knows the language of the heart, and the mind of the spirit; and that we make use of words, not to inform God, but to affect ourselves. Whenever therefore any of you find yourselves in such a frame, be not discouraged: offer yourselves up in silence before God, as clay in the hands of the potter, for him to write and stamp

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<sup>45</sup> *Works of George Whitefield*, Volume 5, 212.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, Volume 5, 136.

<sup>47</sup> Chapter One.

<sup>48</sup> *Works of George Whitefield*, Volume 5, 390.

his own divine image upon your souls.<sup>49</sup>

Finally, *On Regeneration* emphasizes that salvation is the holiness of God that must be stamped within us to remake humans in the image of God:

It is, doubtless, for this reason, that the apostle declares it to be the irrevocable decree of the Almighty, that “without holiness, (without being made pure by regeneration, and having the image of God thereby reinstamped upon the soul) no man shall see the Lord.”<sup>50</sup>

Use of participation language can be discerned from his sermons but another source is helpful as well. As was referenced above, Whitefield’s journals only cover a brief period of his ministry. The reason for that is that a printer in England got hold of them and published them in 1738. “It was an underhanded action which Charles Wesley tried to prevent but (the printer) would not be denied so profitable a stroke of business and his edition went forth to the public.”<sup>51</sup> The journals had been intended for his friends and supporters. They were sprinkled with youthful, exuberant language, a few unguarded remarks about various clergy and some numerical inaccuracies.<sup>52</sup> The journal provided fodder for Whitefield’s opponents and when he returned to England in 1739 he was summoned to a private session with the Archbishop of Canterbury and the Bishop of London. They asked whether his journals did not reveal that he had a tendency towards enthusiasm. This significance of that term was discussed in Chapter Two and it had to do with the perceived religious excesses of the Cromwell era from the previous century. Whitefield responded to the Bishops with a lengthy letter but from his defense it is

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<sup>49</sup> Ibid., Volume Six, 45.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid., Volume 6, 262.

<sup>51</sup> Dallimore, *George Whitefield*, 169.

<sup>52</sup> Gillies, *Memoirs of the Life of the Reverend George Whitefield*, 41. “It was certainly wrong to publish them without his consent and it is a great pity that he did not continue them. They would have been the best possible memoirs of his life. He later produced a new edition of his journal in 1756 but it only dealt with those early years in ministry.”

discovered that his view of an active Christian life included the enthusiastic participation in the divine nature:

I come now to your Lordship's caution against *enthusiasm*. For that, I suppose, your Lordship intended more particularly against me. And here, my Lord, I beg leave to observe, that, in my opinion, your Lordship has by no means been clear enough in your definition of the word enthusiasm. According to the fair rules of writing, was it not first incumbent on your Lordship to show, that the word *enthusiasm* had a good as well as a bad meaning: that it signifies no more than *a person in God*, and consequently every Christian, in the proper sense of the word, is an enthusiast? For St Peter writes, "That to us are given exceeding great and precious promises, that by these we might be partakers of the divine nature."<sup>53</sup>

It is clear that Whitefield held to this first aspect of theosis but attention must now be directed towards other sermons of his that show his understanding of the remaining tenets of theosis.

## 2. Recapitulation

The Patristic Fathers held that Jesus Christ made a representative journey of obedience to redeem humanity. The first Adam fell by grasping after divinization but through the Incarnation of Christ humanity can be elevated to participation in the divine nature. Let us investigate several samples of Whitefield's preaching to determine his use of recapitulation. Admittedly this is a concept more suited to quiet, concentrated study rather than hearing it explained in an evangelistic sermon preached in the open fields. But Whitefield used it nonetheless. In the first sermon, *The LORD our Righteousness*, he developed the need for Christ's righteousness to be imputed to the lost human condition:

Here then opens the amazing scene of Divine Philanthropy, I mean, God's love to man. For behold, what man could not do, Jesus Christ, the son of his Father's love, undertakes to do for him. And that God might be just in justifying the ungodly, though "he was in the form of God, and therefore thought it no robbery to be equal with God; yet he took upon him the form of a servant," even human nature. In that nature he obeyed, and thereby fulfilled the whole moral law in our

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<sup>53</sup> *Works of George Whitefield*, Volume 4, 16.

stead; and also died a painful death upon the cross, and thereby became a curse for, or instead of, those whom the Father had given to him. As God, he satisfied, at the same time that he obeyed and suffered as man; and, being God and man in one person, he wrought a full, perfect, and sufficient righteousness for all to whom it was to be imputed.<sup>54</sup>

In his sermon on *The Temptation of Christ*, Whitefield reminded his listeners of Adam's fall and how Christ made the representative journey to defeat Satan in the body of a human:

The first Adam was attacked but once, and was conquered; but the second Adam, though thus repeatedly assaulted, comes off without the least sin, not only conqueror, but more than conqueror. Think you not, that there was joy, joy unspeakable in heaven, upon this glorious occasion? Think you not that the angels who shouted so loud at our Lord's birth, did not repeat, "Glory be to God in the highest." For a while they were only spectators but now the restraint is removed: Satan departs, and "behold, angels came and ministered unto him;" they came to administer to his bodily necessities, and to congratulate him upon the glorious and complete victory which he had gained: some of them, it may be, had done this kind office for Elijah long ago; and with unspeakably greater joy, they repeat it to the Lord of Elijah now.<sup>55</sup>

In *What Think Ye of Christ?* Whitefield summarized the purpose and power of the Incarnation:

The reason why the Son of God took upon him our nature, was, the fall of our first parents. I hope there is no one present so atheistical, as to think that man made himself; no, it was God that made us, and not we ourselves. And I would willingly think, that no one is so blasphemous as to suppose, that if God did make us, he made us such creatures as we now find ourselves to be. . . . But here begins that mystery of godliness, God manifested in the flesh. For (sing, O heavens, and rejoice, O earth!) the eternal Father, foreseeing how Satan would bruise the heel of man, had in his eternal counsel provided a means whereby he might bruise that accursed Serpent's head. Man is permitted to fall, and become subject to death; but Jesus, the only begotten Son of God, begotten of the Father before all worlds, Light of light, very God of very God, offers to die to make an atonement for his transgression, and to fulfill all righteousness in his stead. And because it was impossible for him to do this as he was God, and yet since man had offended, it was necessary it should be done in the person of man; rather than we should perish, this everlasting God, this Prince of Peace, this Ancient of Days, in the

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<sup>54</sup> Ibid., Volume 5, 230.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid., Volume 5, 276.

fullness of time, had a body prepared for him by the Holy Ghost, and became an infant. In this body he performed a complete obedience to the law of God; whereby he, in our stead, fulfilled the covenant of works, and at last became subject to death, even death upon the cross; that as God he might satisfy, as man he might obey and suffer; and being God and man in one person, might once more procure a union between God and our souls.<sup>56</sup>

If there was a shortage of good material on recapitulation it is more than made up for as the discussion moves to the next aspect of theosis.

### 3. Union of the Soul with God

The Patristic Fathers were very insistent that redeemed persons must achieve union with God. This union begins on earth but will continue uninterrupted through eternity. The Holy Spirit produces this union<sup>57</sup> by taking possession of Christians and bringing them into full participation with the divine nature. This truth gripped Whitefield and his sermons are replete with references to this doctrine. Using *The Indwelling of the Spirit, the Common Privilege of all Believers* for a template it will be possible to follow Whitefield as he developed this teaching for his hearers.

The text for the sermon is John 7:37-39 and he began by stating that Jesus Christ promised the indwelling of the Holy Spirit for all who will believe. The same night in prayer Christ also

Demanded the most excellent gift for his disciples, “That they all may be one, as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee; that they also may be one in us, I in them, and thou in me; that they may be made perfect in one;” that is, that all his true followers might be united to him by his holy Spirit, by as real, vital, and mystical an union, as there was between Jesus Christ and the Father.<sup>58</sup>

Whitefield hastened to add that this mystical union with the Trinity was not just for the disciples of Christ:

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<sup>56</sup> Ibid., Volume 5, 370.

<sup>57</sup> Chapter One.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid., Volume 6, 102.

It is evident, from our Lord's own words, that he had us, and all believers, in view, when he put up this prayer; "Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on me through their word;" so that all who believe in Jesus Christ, through the word, or ministration of his servants, are to be joined to Jesus Christ, by being made partakers of the Holy Spirit.<sup>59</sup>

The means of achieving this union is by the ministry of the Holy Spirit within the soul of the believer. After a brief complaint against "our letter-learned preachers who deny this doctrine" by teaching that it is possible to "have God's Spirit without feeling it" he defended himself with the same logic he used above when he answered the Bishop of London's charge that he was an enthusiast. He could not understand those who taught that being united to God would not create a joyful, exuberant relationship between the believer and the Godhead.

A great noise hath been made of late, about the word enthusiast, and it has been cast upon the preachers of the gospel, as a term of reproach; but every Christian, in the proper sense of the word, must be an enthusiast; that is, must have God by his Spirit in him. St. Peter tells us, "we have many great and precious promises, that we may be made partakers of the divine nature;" our Lord prays, "that we may be one, as the Father and he are one;" and our own church, in conformity to these texts of Scripture, tells us that we "dwell in Christ, and are one with Christ." And yet ministers must be looked upon as deceivers of the people, for affirming, that we must be really united to God, by receiving the Holy Ghost. Be astonished, O heavens, at this!<sup>60</sup>

It is certain that Whitefield regarded the Spirit's role as bringing believers into fellowship and union with the Trinity. Observe how he incorporates participation in the divine nature and union with God to make a solid evangelical appeal:

It is true then that since the fall, we all must receive the Holy Ghost, ere we can dwell with and enjoy God. When Adam had eaten the forbidden fruit, he fled and hid himself from God; why? Because he was naked; he was alienated from the life of God, the due punishment of his disobedience. Now, we are all by nature naked and void of God, as he was at that time, and consequently, until we are changed, renewed, and clothed with a divine nature again, we must fly from God also. ...

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<sup>59</sup> Ibid., 106.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid., 108.

From this plain reason then appears the necessity why we must receive the Spirit of God.<sup>61</sup>

The sermon concludes with Whitefield reminding his listeners that “the great work of sanctification, or making us holy, is particularly reserved to the Holy Ghost.” This process begins when one is born again by the Spirit of God. Through this earthly life “Christ shall be to you wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption” and then in eternity “your bodies shall be fashioned like unto his glorious body, and your souls be partakers of all the fullness of God.” The Spirit of God regenerates the soul, brings about the participation in the divine nature and eternal union of the soul with God.

The doctrine of the indwelling Spirit was a precious truth for Whitefield. As noted above, all the leaders of early Evangelicalism had dramatic personal experiences with the Holy Spirit. Although there were many critics among the clergy, cruel mockers<sup>62</sup> and at times hostile crowds that physically attacked Whitefield,<sup>63</sup> the union with God he felt in his spirit sustained him in the early days of his ministry. For Whitefield, the joy of union with God was like an artesian well bubbling up from within the soul. The Patristic Fathers taught that the union of the soul with God is realized by synergy<sup>64</sup> between God and humans. God is constantly willing to draw closer to humanity, it is humans who have

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<sup>61</sup> Ibid., 113.

<sup>62</sup> Dallimore, *George Whitefield*, 45-46. “Whitefield had a defect in his appearance that gave ammunition to his enemies. “Due to neglect on the part of his nurse at a time when he had the measles, he contracted a permanent misfocus of his eyes. This does not seem to have been serious enough to be termed cross-eyes. But during the days of his ministry it afforded his detractors a point of ridicule, and he was long referred to among the riff-raff of London as ‘Doctor Squintum.’”

<sup>63</sup> Billingsley, *The Life of the Great Preacher, Reverend George Whitefield*, 298-99. “Whitefield encountered a violent ‘popish mob’ at Oxmantown Green in Dublin, Ireland. Billingsley’s biography of Whitefield relates his story: Volleys of hard stones came from all quarters, and every step I took a fresh stone struck, and made me reel backwards and forwards till I was almost breathless, and all over a gore of blood. I received many blows and wounds; one was particularly large and near my temple. They almost killed me. I thought of Stephen, and as I believed that I received more blows, I was in great hopes that like him I should be dispatched, and go off in this bloody triumph to the immediate presence of my Master.”

<sup>64</sup> See Chapter One.

misused their freedom and will not draw near to Him. This is emphasized in Whitefield's sermon *The Marriage at Cana*. Notice the application he makes of keeping the best wine until the last as an analogy of the ever-deepening union of the soul with God:

Our Lord's turning the water, which was poured out so plentifully, into wine, is a sign of the plentiful pouring out of his Spirit into the hearts of believers. The Holy Spirit is in scripture compared unto wine; which fills and gladdens the soul as it were with new wine. The apostle alludes to this, when he bids the Ephesians "not to be drunk with wine, wherein is excess, but be filled with the Spirit". To you who are justified by faith, and feel the blessed Spirit of Jesus Christ working upon your hearts, you can judge of what I say; you have already (I am persuaded) been as it were filled with new wine by the inspiration of his Holy Spirit. But alas! you have not yet had half your portion; these are only shadows of good things to come; our Lord keeps his best wine for you till the last; and though you have drank deep of it already, yet he intends to give you more: He will not leave you, till he has filled you to the brim, till you are ready to cry out, Lord, stay thine hand, thy poor creatures can hold no more! Open your hearts as wide as ever you will, the Spirit of the Lord shall fill them... The love of God through Christ, shall be continually pouring in; for believers are to be filled with all the fullness of God.<sup>65</sup>

In *The Folly and Danger of Being Not Righteous Enough* Whitefield continued with this analogy of the water pots picturing the unregenerate human soul. He used language very similar to that of Gregory of Nyssa. Gregory had taught that union with God caused the soul to expand so that more water (grace) could fill the receptacle (the soul). Whitefield took the same story and made application of each part to show some aspect of union with God:

But we have an excellent lesson to learn from this miracle: by the water-pots being empty, we may understand, the heart of man being by nature destitute of his grace, that when Christ speaks, the heart that was empty of grace before, shall be filled; and the water pots being filled to the brim, shows that Christ will fill believers hearts brim full of the Holy Ghost: and from the Governor's observing, that the last wine was the best, learn, that a believer's best comforts, shall be the last and greatest, for they shall come with the greatest power upon the soul, and

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<sup>65</sup> *Works of George Whitefield*, Volume 6, 74.

continue longest there: this, this my dear brethren, is the lesson we may learn from this miracle.<sup>66</sup>

In *Saul's Conversion*, Whitefield draws out the principle that hard circumstances in life have the potential to discipline and lead us into an unending union with God:

But God often at our first awakenings visits us with sore trials, especially those who are, like Saul, to shine in the church, and to be used as instruments in bringing many sons to glory. I have generally observed, that those who have had the deepest convictions have afterwards been favored with the most precious communications, and enjoyed most of the divine presence in their souls. This was afterwards remarkably exemplified in Saul, who was three days without sight, and neither did eat nor drink. Verse 18 says, "Immediately there fell from his eyes as it had been scales, and he received sight forthwith;" not only bodily, but spiritual sight: he felt a union of soul with God; he could now, with a full assurance of faith, cry, "Abba, Father." Now was he filled with the Holy Ghost; and had the love of God shed abroad in his heart; now was Christ formed in his soul.<sup>67</sup>

Most of the fifty-nine extant sermons of Whitefield contain some reference to the union of the soul with God and reveal the depth of his understanding of this aspect of theosis.

His sermons and experiences with the Holy Spirit show that his knowledge was both theological and personal. There remains one more aspect of theosis to investigate.

#### **4. Progress of the Soul in Eternity**

The Patristic Fathers taught that divinization begins on earth and carries on into eternity. Whitefield did not develop this aspect of theosis with the same fullness or passion as did Jonathan Edwards, but he was very eloquent when it came to discussing the eternal state of the believer. Many of his sermons concluded with an appeal to live faithfully for Christ now in this life in view of the joy awaiting them in heaven that will grow through all eternity. *The Extent and Reasonableness of Self Denial* is a good example of his approach:

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<sup>66</sup> Ibid., Volume 5, 136.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid., Volume 6, 154.

Lastly, therefore, often meditate on the joys of heaven: think, think with what unspeakable glory those happy souls are now encircled, who when on earth were called to deny themselves as well as we, and were not disobedient to that call: Lift up your hearts frequently towards the mansions of eternal bliss, and with an eye of faith, like Stephen, see the heavens opened, and the Son of man with his glorious retinue of departed saints, sitting and solacing themselves in eternal joys. Hark! Methinks I hear them chanting forth their everlasting Hallelujahs, and echoing triumphant songs of joy. And do you not long, my brethren, to join this heavenly choir? Behold then a heavenly ladder reached down to you, by which you may climb to this holy hill. Let us believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and deny ourselves! By this alone, every saint that ever lived ascended into the joy of their Lord. And then, we, even we also shall ere long be lifted up into the same most blissful regions, there to enjoy an eternal rest with the people of God, and join with them in singing doxologies and songs of praise, to the everlasting, blessed, all-glorious, most adorable Trinity, for ever and ever.<sup>68</sup>

Leaving aside his pulpit oratory it is still possible to see his communication of this precept of theosis. The *Marriage at Cana* is another good example:

This shows us the happiness of that blessed state, when we shall all sit together at the marriage supper of the Lamb, and drink of the new wine in his eternal and glorious kingdom! But, my brethren, all the manifestations of God that we can possibly be favored with here, when compared with the glory that is to be revealed in us, are no more than a drop of water when compared with an unbounded ocean. Though Christ frequently fills his saints even to the brim, yet their corruptible bodies weigh down their souls, and cause them to cry, “Who shall deliver us from these bodies of death?” These earthly tabernacles can hold no more: But, blessed be God, these earthly tabernacles are to be dissolved; this corruptible is to put on incorruption; this mortal is to put on immortality: and when God shall cause all his glory to pass before us, then shall we cry out, Lord, thou hast kept thy good wine until now. We have drank deeply of thy spirit; we have heard glorious things spoken of this thy city, O God! but we now find, that not the half, not the thousandth part hath been told us. O the invisible realities of the world of faith! Eye hath not seen, ear hath not heard, neither hath it entered into the heart of the greatest saint to conceive how Christ will show forth his glory there!<sup>69</sup>

In *Marks of Having Received the Spirit* Whitefield traces the growth of the Christian from the point of conversion to the glories of the eternal state. He echoes the Patristics who taught that divinization begins on earth when he says, “Hail, happy saints! For your

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<sup>68</sup> Ibid., Volume 5, 447.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid., Volume 6, 80.

heaven is begun on earth: you have already received the first fruits of the Spirit, and are patiently waiting till that blessed change come, when your harvest shall be complete.”<sup>70</sup>

As Christians journey through this life they are confident in their divine relationship knowing that their life “is hid with Christ in God. You have comforts which a sinful, carnal, ridiculing world knows nothing of.”<sup>71</sup> The best is yet to come as heaven will only increase the joys of fellowship with God:

You have passed through the pangs of the new birth, and now rejoice that Christ Jesus is spiritually formed in your hearts. You know what it is to dwell in Christ, and Christ in you. Like Jacob's ladder, although your bodies are on earth, yet your souls and hearts are in heaven: I need not exhort you to press forward, for you know that in walking in the Spirit there is a great reward. Rather will I exhort you, in patience to possess your souls yet a little while, and Jesus Christ will deliver you from the burden of the flesh, and an abundant entrance shall be administered to you, into the eternal joy and uninterrupted felicity of his heavenly kingdom.<sup>72</sup>

Perhaps the most philosophical treatment of heaven by Whitefield was in *The Potter and the Clay*. He began as usual by declaring that only those who have been born again are fit for entrance into heaven:

I suppose, I may take it for granted, that all of you hope after death to go to a place which we call Heaven. And my heart's desire and prayer to God for you is that you all may have mansions prepared for you there. But give me leave to tell you, were you now to see these heavens opened, and hear the angel of the everlasting covenant, proclaiming “time shall be no more,” and giving you all an invitation immediately to come to heaven; heaven would be no heaven to you, nay it would be a hell to your souls, unless you were first prepared for a proper enjoyment of it here on earth. “For what communion hath light with darkness?” Or what fellowship could unrenewed sons of Belial possibly keep up with the pure and immaculate Jesus?<sup>73</sup>

The sermon continued with Whitefield asserting that the biblical view of heaven must be upheld because “people form strange ideas of heaven.” The scriptures describe heaven

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<sup>70</sup> Ibid., Volume 6, 172.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid., 174.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid., 177.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid., Volume 5, 214.

with an earthly frame of reference and some then only see it as some form of “a kind of Mahomitan paradise.” As the sermon reaches its conclusion, he fully developed his position on the reality heaven:

But permit me to tell you, and God grant it may sink deep into your hearts! Heaven is rather a state than a place; and consequently, unless you are previously disposed by a suitable state of mind, you could not be happy even in heaven itself. This consideration made a pious author say, that “holiness, happiness, and heaven, were only three different words for one and the self-same thing.” And this made the great Preston, when he was about to die, turn to his friends, saying, “I am changing my place, but not my company.” He had conversed with God and good men on earth; he was going to keep up the same, and infinitely more refined communion with God, his holy angels, and the spirits of just men made perfect, in heaven.<sup>74</sup>

The survey of Whitefield’s sermons to discover theosis has proved to be profitable. Of the four main tenets of theosis two have been identified as strong themes in his theology and preaching – participation and union of the soul with God (perichoresis). He also taught recapitulation and progress of the soul in eternity but not to the same extent as the other two aspects of theosis. As was discussed above, his ministry was itinerant evangelism and much of his preaching was done in fields or outdoor meetings. Whereas Jonathan Edwards had a long pastorate in which to present these deep concepts in the structured setting of congregational ministry, Whitefield rarely remained in a community more than a few days at a time. Participation and union of the soul with God were the two tenets of theosis most applicable to his calling and ministry.

## **F. Conclusion**

From what has been discussed in this chapter it is evident that George Whitefield embraced the central tenets of theosis: participation in the divine nature, salvation as recapitulation of humanity, union with God and progress of the soul in eternity. He

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<sup>74</sup> Ibid., 227.

attended Oxford and studied Anglican theology and history, he was acquainted with Neo-Platonist philosophers, Patristic fathers and was converted to Christ while reading about participation in the divine nature. His sermons, letters and journals show he not only understood the teaching of divinization but that he also wove it into his daily life and ministry. Along with his fellow evangelicals they formulated a doctrinal approach that brought renewal to the religious scene in eighteenth century England and the American colonies.

## CONCLUSION

This thesis argues that the patristic teaching of theosis has had a significant influence on the theology and ministry of Jonathan Edwards, John and Charles Wesley and George Whitefield. These four ordained clergymen were the acknowledged leaders of the eighteenth-century revivals and Great Awakening that came to be known as Evangelicalism.

In Chapter One the main aspects of theosis were identified and then grouped into four main tenets: participation in the divine nature, recapitulation, union of the soul with God and progress of the soul in eternity. Theosis is a vast doctrine with many facets but it was appropriate to make these four groupings for the purposes of this research.<sup>1</sup> As Bartos writes, “Deification is expressed through a number of different images” and it would be very cumbersome to attempt to deal with each separate strand.<sup>2</sup>

Participation in the divine nature was the first tenet examined and is at the center of theosis teaching. The key biblical text to support this is 2 Peter 1:4 “Whereby there are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises, that through these you may be partakers of the divine nature.” This text teaches that the very nature of God Himself indwells the body of believers so that, through grace, the body is now being joined in union with God. The divine nature is given to believers within themselves and the

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<sup>1</sup> Finlan and Kharlamov, eds., *Theosis: Deification in Christian Theology*, 5. “The first theological definition of theosis was given in the sixth century by Pseudo-Dionysius, but it is general and inexact: ‘Divinization consists of being as much as possible like and in union with God.’ The meaning of theosis varies throughout Patristic theology, sometimes even within the same author.”

<sup>2</sup> Bartos, *Deification in Eastern Orthodox Theology*, 10. “Deification is expressed through a number of different images: it is the attaining of likeness to God, it is the ascent of the soul to God; it is the participation of the soul in the divine attributes of immortality and incorruption; it is the transformation of human nature by divine action; it is the eschatological glorification of both soul and body; it is the union with God through participation in the divine energies.”

relationship between the divine and human natures through which they join together is what is meant by participation.

The Patristic Fathers, represented in this thesis primarily through the writings of Gregory of Nyssa, were careful to teach the distinction between the Creator and His creation. They describe only what humans can become through grace and faith, which is, a participant in the divine nature. “There is no absorption of the person in God. It is a personal union in which the distinction between Creator and creature is maintained. This is personal union, not an ontological union.”<sup>3</sup> Participation in the divine nature is the privilege of every believer.

The Holy Spirit accomplishes this new reality of theosis through His indwelling presence. In that process “man does not receive a new soul but the Holy Spirit unites essentially with the whole man, body and soul.”<sup>4</sup> He empowers and enables believers to realize union with God through participation in the divine nature.

Recapitulation was the next tenet of theosis to be considered. The goal of humanity is union with God. The first Adam sinned but the Second Adam, Jesus Christ, has done what Adam failed to do. Why did God have to become human? The Incarnation was more than Christ taking on human flesh that He might die for humanity’s sins on the cross. The teaching of theosis is grounded in the Incarnation.<sup>5</sup> In the person of Christ deified humanity will be recreated and achieve the union God intended when He placed Adam in the Garden of Eden.

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<sup>3</sup> Pinnock, *Flame of Love*, 154.

<sup>4</sup> Rakestraw, *Becoming Like God: An Evangelical Doctrine of Theosis*, 261.

<sup>5</sup> Finlan and Kharlamov, eds., *Theosis, Deification in Christian Theology*, 4, “All of this depends upon, and revolves around, Christianity’s central and unique idea: the Incarnation – in Christ, God lived a human life. Without the Incarnation there would be no theosis.”

In His Incarnation Jesus Christ assumed our common human nature in a “perfect hypostatic union of the divine and human natures thus making Christ’s humanity the point of contact for the salvation and theosis of men.”<sup>6</sup> In the glorified person of Jesus one sees what truly deified humanity will be. It is not just being restored to Adam’s state prior to the Fall but it is humanity recreated and fulfilling its purpose of creation. “He came down from heaven to redeem the earth, to unite man with God forever.”<sup>7</sup> The purpose of humanity’s existence is revealed in the Incarnation of Christ.

This leads to the third tenet of theosis which is the union of the soul with God, also known as “perichoresis.”<sup>8</sup> Christ’s birth, death and resurrection made the way for humans marred by sin to be reunited with God. Theosis requires cooperation between God and the believer. This is understood from passages such as I Corinthians 3:9, “We are fellow workers with God,” where the word ‘synergia’ is used. If humans are to achieve full union with God, both must make a contribution to the process, although what God does is of immeasurably greater importance than what humans do. As Mantzaridis notes, “The incorporation of man into Christ and his union with God require the cooperation of two unequal but equally necessary forces: divine grace and human will.”<sup>9</sup> This process of transformation of the entire person comes as one actively cooperates (synergy) by faith with the grace of the God. Scriptures such as John 17:23 speak directly to this point: “I in them and You in Me, that they may be perfect in one.” The Lord was praying about the glorious union with God that each believer will realize in eternity. “There is union but not fusion or confusion. Man still remains man, he is not swallowed

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<sup>6</sup> Stephanopoulos, *The New Man*, 155.

<sup>7</sup> Florovsky, *Creation and Redemption, Volume Three*, 95.

<sup>8</sup> Karkkainen, *Pneumatology*, 86.

<sup>9</sup> Georgios I. Mantzaridis, *The Deification of Man*. (New York: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1984), 23.

up or annihilated but between him and God there continues to exist an 'I-Thou' relationship."<sup>10</sup>

The final tenet of theosis is progress of the soul in eternity. Glorification of believers is progressive and will be ultimately realized only in eternity. As Lossky noted, "Deification will only be realized in the age to come, after the resurrection of the dead. This deifying union has to be fulfilled more and more in this present life, through the transformation of our corruptible nature by adapting to eternal life."<sup>11</sup> Humanity's full deification is a future event that will fully develop in the Kingdom of Heaven.

The first chapter also included a brief review of Plato's philosophical framework.<sup>12</sup> His writings on divinization had deeply embedded the concept within his culture. "Greek mythology taught that some of their 'gods' were of human origin. Platonists, Stoics, and Cynics all spoke of something divine within humans."<sup>13</sup> In the third century A.D., Plotinus led a Neo-Platonist revival of Plato's teaching that had a substantial influence on early Christian leaders.

Many of the Patristic Fathers borrowed language and images from Plato but also reached conclusions that were much different from his cosmology or anthropology. They built upon the basic premise of Plato's philosophy because they observed fragments of Christian truth in his works; but they did find substantial disagreements with Plato as

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<sup>10</sup> Ware, *The Orthodox Way*, 88.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 196.

<sup>12</sup> Dockrill, *The Heritage of Patristic Platonism*, 55, "The Platonism of the philosophically minded Fathers cannot be ignored nor can affinities between aspects of Christian dogma and certain Platonic doctrines be overlooked. 'Some of those who are united in fellowship with us in the grace of Christ', Augustine writes, 'are amazed when they hear or read that Plato had a conception of God, which they recognize as agreeing in many respects with the truth of our religion.'"

<sup>13</sup> Harnack, *History of Dogma*, 337.

well.<sup>14</sup> According to him and his Neo-Platonist successors, the soul is enlightened by gnosis and intellectual contemplation. It does not need renewal or to overcome sin; whereas Christianity teaches that the restoration of the soul depends on divine grace.

For the Patristic Fathers, the decision about how to use Plato in teaching Christian truth was whether or not it conformed to the scriptures and Christian spiritual experience. They built their theology upon the foundation of the scriptures and, wherever there was agreement, incorporated Platonism's teaching regarding form, the soul and eternity. They differed with Plato regarding divinization by asserting that only Christians could be partakers of the divine nature. The Son of God has united himself with humanity, making divinization possible, but it is also necessary for individuals to unite themselves with the Son of God to complete the spiritual union

This paper then devoted a chapter to Jonathan Edwards, John and Charles Wesley and George Whitefield to determine how their theology was influenced by theosis. Careful research of their writings, journals and sermons has revealed that the four main aspects of theosis: participation in the divine nature, recapitulation, union of the soul with God and progress of the soul in heaven can be clearly identified in their works.

However, just as the Patristic Fathers were careful in their usage of Neo-Platonism teaching on divinization, so also the early evangelical leaders were selective in their use of Patristic sources to formulate their theology.

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<sup>14</sup> The teachings of Gregory of Nyssa and his areas of disagreement with Plato and Neo-Platonism will be examined below. Gregory of Nyssa, "On the Soul and Resurrection," *Christian Classic Ethereal Library*, [www.ccel.org/ccel/schaff/npnf2-05/](http://www.ccel.org/ccel/schaff/npnf2-05/) (accessed January 5, 2006). Gregory showed his use of Platonism as a framework but then appealed to scripture as highest authority: "We must therefore neglect the Platonic chariot and the pair of horses of dissimilar forces yoked to it, and their driver, whereby the philosopher allegorizes these facts about the soul; we must neglect also all that is said by the philosopher who succeeded him. (Plotinus) We must neglect all before and since their time, whether they philosophized in prose or in verse, and we will adopt, as the guide of our reasoning, the Scripture, which lays it down as an axiom that there is no excellence in the soul which is not a property as well of the Divine nature." He summarized Greek philosophy as "always in labor but never giving birth."

The Patristic Fathers had taught that theosis is a process that combined divine grace and human effort. They advocated water baptism, faithful observance of the Eucharist, ascetic practices, veneration of the Virgin Mary and the saints and continual fillings of the Holy Spirit as steps in the process of theosis. However, the evangelicals studied in this thesis preached a gospel of grace apart from works. Their reliance upon Patristic teaching was modified by what they believed to be scriptural. They edited or rejected any other Patristic teaching that was contrary to the Evangelicalism discussed in Chapter Two.<sup>15</sup>

For example, Jonathan Edwards read widely in theology and philosophy and from his studies, fashioned his own world view. “Like all creative geniuses, Edwards borrowed from much of the best of his time without being beholden to any. Besides the Reformers and Puritans, Edwards read widely in the great luminaries of the age.”<sup>16</sup> This was true of his teaching on theosis. “Edwards taught a doctrine of divinization. The only thing missing is the word itself, although, Edwards employed phrases such as ‘emanation,’ ‘participation,’ ‘partaking’ and ‘uniting’ to describe the divine-human communion.”<sup>17</sup> His understanding of divinization came through his reading of the Cambridge Platonists.

The influence of the Patristic Fathers on John Wesley is unmistakable. Yet he also was eclectic as he read them, taking what he agreed with and incorporating only those

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<sup>15</sup> Timothy L. Smith, “George Whitefield and Wesleyan Perfectionism,” *Wesleyan Theological Journal*, 19 (1984): 54-55. “All ‘evangelicals’ affirmed the moral authority of the Bible, declaring that it called human beings to a righteousness that is not only imputed to them in Christ’s name but actually imparted to them by His grace. All stressed the work of the Holy Spirit in bringing sinners to repentance and faith in Christ, assuring them of forgiveness, and by His presence thereafter in their hearts nurturing in them the love and holiness that please God. And they declared it the duty of all who had discovered these truths and experienced this grace to proclaim the good news of salvation everywhere, at home and abroad. From that day until this, these three convictions have marked the boundaries of evangelical Protestantism. The Bible is its authority, the new birth its hallmark, and evangelism its mission.”

<sup>16</sup> John Smith, ed., *A Jonathan Edwards Reader*, viii.

<sup>17</sup> McClymond, *Jonathan Edwards, Philosophical Theologian*, 153.

principles into his theology. This is borne out by Michael Christensen, Methodist historian, who wrote that Wesley “both learned from his sources and altered his sources on points he believed did not conform to the teachings of Scripture. In appropriating the idea of theosis he found that the Church Fathers required editing and ‘corrected’ them.”<sup>18</sup> George Whitefield did much the same in his use of Patristic sources. From his sermons we learned of his familiarity with ancient and contemporary writers whom he quotes but does not use without making some revisions.

These extraordinary leaders came from different parts of the theological spectrum. Edwards and Whitefield were both Calvinists while the Wesleys were Arminians. This doctrinal difference led to many letters and pamphlets being written back and forth which, while causing some tension, did not irreparably harm the evangelical movement. John Gertsner, who called Whitefield the greatest Calvinist evangelist of the eighteenth century, states that “Whitefield was much more amiable to negotiating the decrees of God than Jonathan Edwards”<sup>19</sup> and that Whitefield did not preach in favor of election for fear of dividing the evangelical revival.

Yet in spite of their differences over election and predestination, these early evangelicals were able to incorporate the tenets of theosis into their theologies. Each of them often quoted the key text for theosis, 2 Peter 1:4, and its emphasis on being a partaker in the divine nature, in many of their sermons and writings. McClymond refers to “Edwards’ frequent citations of 2 Peter 1: 4 – ‘partakers of the divine nature’ - which is the biblical *locus classicus* for the Patristic teaching on divinization.”<sup>20</sup> John Wesley came to assurance of faith the day he meditated on this text and he referenced the passage

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<sup>18</sup> Outler, *John Wesley*, 31.

<sup>19</sup> John Gerstner, *Jonathan Edwards Evangelist* (Orlando, FL: Soli Deo Gloria Ministries, 1997), 90.

<sup>20</sup> McClymond, *Jonathan Edwards, Philosophical Theologian*, 153.

in many of his sermons. Whitefield was converted after reading in Scougal's book "that true religion is a union of the soul with God, a real participation of the divine nature, the very image of God drawn upon the soul."<sup>21</sup> This thesis has highlighted participation language in numerous places from their writings and sermons.

The four men came from different views on the issue of election, predestination and human freewill. It is evident that they believed that whatever was prior to one being converted – whether it transpired through divine sovereignty or human initiative – the soul is redeemed as a result of participation in the divine nature. When they came to the matter of describing the experience of salvation they all used the language of theosis. Participation in the divine nature was a key component in their explanation of how one can be born into God's family.

The influence of theosis on the early evangelical leaders who were the subject of this thesis has been shown. Previous scholarship on the evidence of theosis in Jonathan Edwards or John and Charles Wesley had already revealed their knowledge and incorporation of it in their respective theologies. However, this thesis has conclusively shown that in George Whitefield, the other key leader in early evangelicalism, the influence of theosis can be clearly identified in his theology and ministry.

Many have argued that deification is the unconscious desire in the heart of every person. "Theosis is the source of what C.S. Lewis calls the inconsolable longing in us. Ecstasy awaits us. We are not just being pardoned but are being transformed and divinized."<sup>22</sup> For this reason the teaching of theosis is needed again in Evangelicalism. It explains the purpose of God in salvation and honors the roles of both the Son and the

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<sup>21</sup> Henry Scougal, *The Life of God in the Soul of Man*, 39.

<sup>22</sup> Pinnock, *Flame of Love*, 151.

Holy Spirit. It may also contribute to a reinvigorated Evangelicalism for the twenty-first century. God grant that each reader may experientially know the power of His precious promise that we are “partakers of the divine nature”. (2 Peter 1:4)

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