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The greatest possible blessing: Calvin and deification

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Abstract

Many assume that the patristic notion of deification is absent from the mainstreams of post-patristic Western theology. Recent scholarship, however, identifies deification in Augustine, Aquinas, Luther, early Anglicanism, early Methodism and Jonathan Edwards – all fountainheads of Western theology. This article contends that deification is also present in Calvin's theology. It is not a prominent theme in its own right and some of the bolder patristic terminology is not employed. Nonetheless, the concept and imagery of deification regularly appear on stage while other doctrines are explicated. For Calvin, deification is the eschatological goal and blessing greater than which nothing can be imagined.

Introduction

To Western ears unaccustomed to its bold terminology *theōsis*, usually associated with patristic and Eastern Orthodox writers, can sound blasphemous. *Theōsis* is described under a number of theological rubrics. These include adoption to divine sonship, participation in God, sharing of divine life, impartation of immortality, restoration of the *imago dei*, glorification, and consummation of the marriage between Christ and the Church. Succinctly, *theōsis* is for believers to become by grace what the Son of God is by nature and to receive the blessings that are his by right as undeserved gifts. Most boldly, *theōsis* is described as a transforming union of the believer with God and Christ usually, if inadequately, translated as 'divinization' or 'deification'.[1]

[1] Throughout I will assume readers have a basic knowledge of the *theōsis* concept found in the patristic fathers and Eastern Orthodoxy. Those who do not should consult from the following selection. In general: 'Deification', *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church* (3rd edn; ed. F. L. Cross and E. A. Livingstone; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), p. 465, and Rowan Williams, 'Deification', *A Dictionary of Christian Spirituality* (ed. Gordon S. Wakefield; London: SCM, 1983), pp. 106–8. The patristic fathers: David Balás, 'Divinization', *Encyclopedia of Early Christianity* (2nd edn; ed. Everett Ferguson; New York: Garland, 1997), pp. 338–9; G. W. H. Lampe, 'Theology in the Patristic Period', *A History of Christian Doctrine* (ed. Hubert Cunliffe-Jones; Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1978), pp. 149–55; B. Studer, 'Divinization', *Encyclopedia of the Early Church* (ed. Angelo Di Berardina; 2 vols; New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), vol. 1, pp. 242–3. Eastern Orthodoxy (many with discussion of the patristic fathers): Daniel B. Clendenin, *Eastern Orthodox Christianity: A Western Perspective* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1994), pp. 117–37; Don Fairbairn, 'Salvation as *Theosis*: The Teaching of Eastern Orthodoxy',

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The goal of salvation is for the believer to be 'in-godded' and thereby made a 'god'.[2]

Until recently most scholars have assumed that after the patristic period deification is foreign to Western Christianity except in medieval mysticism and unorthodox sects. It has even been claimed that deification is antithetical to the contents and methods of Western theology. There are several reasons for these widespread assumptions. One is that it has been commonplace for Orthodox polemicists to assert that deification is absent in the West because of its alleged incompatibility with Augustinian theology and scholasticism. Another is the influence Adolph von Harnack has had upon several generations of scholars. Harnack viewed deification as a prime example of the corrupting influence of Greek philosophy upon Eastern Christianity.[3] He grudgingly admitted that Augustine had at one point

Themelios 23/3 (1999), pp. 42–54; Georges Florovsky, *Creation and Redemption* (vol. 3 of *The Collected Works of Georges Florovsky*; Belmont, MA: Nordland, 1976), pp. 74–8, 240; Vladimir Lossky, *In the Image and Likeness of God* (Crestwood, NY: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1974), pp. 97–110; John Meyendorff, 'Theosis in the Eastern Christian Tradition', in *Christian Spirituality: Post-Reformation and Modern* (ed. Louis Dupré and Don E. Saliers; New York: Crossroad, 1989), pp. 470–6; Robert G. Stephanopoulos, 'The Orthodox Doctrine of Theosis', *The New Man: An Orthodox and Reformed Dialogue* (ed. J. Meyendorff and Joseph McLelland; New Brunswick, NJ: Agora Books, 1973), pp. 149–61; Kenneth Paul Wesche, 'Eastern Orthodox Spirituality: Union with God in *Theosis*', *Theology Today* 56/1 (1999), pp. 29–43. For greater detail: Jules Gross, *La Divinisation du chrétien d'après les pères grecs* (Paris: J. Gabalda, 1938); Vladimir Lossky, *The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church* (trans. by the Fellowship of St Alban and St Sergius; Crestwood, NY: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1976); and Georgios I. Mantzaridis, *The Deification of Man: St Gregory Palamas and the Orthodox Tradition* (trans. Liadain Sherrard; Crestwood, NY: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1984).

[2] In the ancient world generally, and the Greco-Roman world especially, the word 'god' was used more plastically than by most moderns. The patristic writers did not intend to teach that believers become the sort of being that the one true God is. Rather, their view was that believers, through union with the one true God, come to possess certain attributes that are natural only to deity, not humanity. Primary among these are immortality and incorruptibility. There are, however, limits. Creatures can never become the kind of being the uncreated Creator is, no matter how many divine qualities they are allowed to partake of. See further the comments of George M. Schurr, 'On the Logic of Ante-Nicene Affirmations of the ''Deification'' of the Christian', *Anglican Theological Review* 51/2 (April 1969), pp. 99, 103–5, and Michael Frede, 'Monotheism and Pagan Antiquity', *Pagan Monotheism in Late Antiquity* (ed. Polymnia Athanassiadi and Michael Frede; Oxford: Clarendon, 1999), pp. 58–62.

[3] E.g. *What is Christianity?* (trans. Thomas Bailey Saunders; London: Williams & Norgate, 1904), pp. 238–9. In basic agreement is Ben Drewery, 'Deification', *Christian Spirituality: Essays in Honour of Gordon Rupp* (ed. Peter Brooks; London: SCM, 1975), pp. 35–62. For contrast see the detailed evaluation of Harnack's thesis by Martin George, 'Vergöttlichung des Menschen. Von der platonischen Philosophie zur Soteriologie der

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taught deification. But he also claimed that it was Augustine who brought the doctrine 'to an edifying end' in the West.[4]

Yet as far as I am aware, no major Western theologian has ever repudiated the patristic concept of deification. More significantly, a fact increasingly recognized by recent scholarship is that Augustine did not bring deification to an end in the West. It is now clear that deification played an important role in Augustine's theology, including his mature theology.[5] It is also found in Aquinas, the paradigmatic scholastic theologian.[6] Finnish Lutherans have made the most startling discovery of deification in the West, at least to Harnack's theological heirs. The Finns have discovered deification in Luther. They have proposed some controversial reinterpretations of Luther's theology. But controversy aside, the Finns have brought to our attention unambiguous statements making it incontrovertible that Luther affirmed deification.[7] Deification is also found in

griechischen Kirchenväter', *Die Weltlichkeit des Glaubens in der Alter Kirche* (ed. Dietmar Wyrwa; Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1997), pp. 115–55.

[4] Adolph von Harnack, *History of Dogma* (trans. James Millar; 7 vols; London: Williams & Norgate, 1897), vol. 3, p. 165.

[5] Balás, 'Divinization', vol. 1, p. 339; Gerald Bonner, 'Augustine's Conception of Deification', *Journal of Theological Studies* NS 37/2 (1986), pp. 369–86; idem, 'Deificare', *Augustinus-Lexikon* (ed. Cornelius Mayer; Basel: Schwabe & Co., 1996), vol. 2, pp. 265–7; idem, 'Deification, Divinization', *Augustine Through the Ages: An Encyclopedia* (ed. Allan D. Fitzgerald; Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1999), pp. 265–6; Henry Chadwick, *Augustine* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), p. 54; John M. Rist, *Augustine: Ancient Thought Baptized* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), pp. 259–60.

[6] A. N. Williams, *The Ground of Union: Deification in Aquinas and Palamas* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999).

[7] For discussions of the thesis in English as well as quotations of some of the relevant Luther texts, see the essays in Carl E. Braaten and Robert W. Jenson, eds, *Union With Christ: The New Finnish Interpretation of Luther* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1998), and Tuomo Mannermaa, 'Theosis as a Subject of Finnish Luther Research', *Pro Ecclesia* 4 (1995), pp. 37–47. Two works central to the controversy about reinterpreting Luther's thought are Tuomo Mannermaa, *Der im Glauben gegenwärtige Christus: Rechtfertigung und Vergottung. Zum ökumenischen Dialog* (Hannover: Lutherisches Verlaghaus, 1989), and Simo Peura, *Mehr als ein Mensch?* (Mainz: Philipp von Zabern, 1994). A helpful summary of the main claims the Finns make is Dennis Bielfeldt, 'The Ontology of Deification', *Caritas Dei* (ed. Oswald Bayer, Robert W. Jenson and Simo Knuuttila; Helsinki: Luther-Agricola-Gesellschaft, 1997), pp. 92–4. Elsewhere Bielfeldt criticizes the Finns for overstating how prominent deification is in Luther but agrees that it is to be found. See his 'Deification as a Motif in Luther's *Dictata super Psalterium*', *Sixteenth Century Journal* 28 (1997), pp. 401–20, and idem, review of *Mehr als ein Mensch?* in *Sixteenth Century Journal* 26 (1995), pp. 413–15. Reinhard Flogaus, *Theosis bei Palamas und Luther* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1997) acknowledges the presence of deification in Luther but finds significant differences between Luther's understanding and that of Gregory Palamas.

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early Anglicanism,[8] early Methodism (both Arminian and Calvinistic),[9] in the writings of Jonathan Edwards,[10] and in the works of the eminent Baptist theologian Augustus Hopkins Strong.[11] In the mid-twentieth century the ever popular Anglican writer C. S. Lewis affirmed the doctrine.[12] Increasingly contemporary theologians are recovering and utilizing the ancient notion of *theōsis*. Perhaps surprising to some, a number of evangelicals from differing confessional backgrounds are among them.[13]

Noticeably absent from the list is John Calvin. It is very difficult to find secondary literature that discusses, however briefly, Calvin's acceptance or rejection of deification. F. W. Norris's assumption is typical of the rare comments one finds: 'John Calvin seems to have avoided teaching deification or not known of it.'[14] I will argue that Calvin knew about and affirmed the deification of believers. Though not a prominent theme in its own right,

[8] A. M. Allchin, *Participation in God: A Forgotten Strand in Anglican Tradition* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1988), and Dan Edwards, 'Deification and the Anglican Doctrine of Human Nature: A Reassessment of the Historical Significance of William Porcher DuBose', *Anglican and Episcopal History* 58/2 (1989), pp. 196–212.

[9] Allchin, *Participation in God*, pp. 24–44; Steve K. McCormick, 'Theosis in Chrysostom and Wesley: An Eastern Paradigm on Faith and Love', *Wesleyan Theological Journal* 26/1 (1991), pp. 38–103; Michael J. Christensen, 'Theosis and Sanctification: John Wesley's Reformulation of a Patristic Doctrine', *Wesleyan Theological Journal* 31/2 (Fall 1996), pp. 71–94.

[10] As with many, though not named as such, deification is an overflow from Edwards's contemplation of the Trinity and the incarnation. See the brief discussion in Robert W. Jenson, 'Theosis', *Dialog* 32/2 (1993), p. 111.

[11] Augustus Hopkins Strong, *Systematic Theology* (3 vols; Philadelphia, PA: American Baptist Publication Society, 1907–9), pp. 793–809; idem, *Union With Christ: A Chapter of Systematic Theology* (Philadelphia, PA: American Baptist Publication Society, 1913). Strong cites several other Protestants who appear to teach similarly.

[12] C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (rev. edn; New York: Macmillan, 1952), throughout book IV (most explicit on pp. 174–5); idem, *The Weight of Glory and Other Addresses* (rev. edn; New York: Macmillan, 1965), p. 18. The notion continues to find expression in contemporary Anglicanism. See the Doctrine Commission of the Church of England's *The Mystery of Salvation: The Story of God's Gift* (London: Church House Publishing, 1995), pp. 29, 189, 206.

[13] E.g. Philip Edgecumbe Hughes [Episcopalian], *The True Image* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1989), pp. 281–6; Thomas C. Oden [Wesleyan], *Life in the Spirit: Systematic Theology: Volume Three* (New York: HarperCollins, 1992), pp. 207–12; T. F. Torrance [Reformed], *Theology in Reconstruction* (London: SCM, 1965), pp. 243–4; Robert V. Rakestraw [Baptist], 'Becoming Like God: An Evangelical Doctrine of Theosis', *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 40/2 (1997), pp. 257–69.

[14] F. W. Norris, 'Deification: Consensual and Cogent', *Scottish Journal of Theology* 49/4 (1996), p. 420. Less typical, deification in Calvin is briefly mentioned by David J. C. Copper, 'The Theology of Image in Eastern Orthodoxy and John Calvin', *Scottish Journal of Theology* 35/3 (1982), pp. 233–4.

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deificatory language and imagery can be found at many points of Calvin's theology.

Four primary proof-texts for deification dominate patristic and Orthodox discussions: 2 Peter 1:4, Ps 82:6/John 10:34–5, 1 John 3:2 and John 17. I will begin by examining Calvin's commentary on 2 Peter 1:4 since there Calvin is most explicit. I will then illustrate the presence of deification language and imagery in various parts of Calvin's soteriology, eschatology and Trinitarianism. Calvin's commentary on John 17 will be discussed in the course of this. Additional evidence for Calvin's view will then be adduced from his debates with the 'half-papists' and Andreas Osiander. Calvin's explicit rejection of erroneous concepts of deification will further clarify what he believed and did not believe. Calvin's interpretation of Ps 82:6/John 10:34–5 will be reserved for last. It will be shown that Calvin diverged from the patristic interpretation of these verses. But, partly on the basis of 1 John 3:2, he would not have found the bold language patristic writers used these verses to support inappropriate – if properly understood.

Deification: the greatest possible blessing

2 Peter 1:4 claims that because of divine promises believers 'may become partakers of the divine nature'. Commenting on the first half of 2 Peter 1:4 Calvin notes that 'the promises of God are to be given the highest possible value, and that they are free, because they are offered to us as gifts'. The excellency of the promises 'arises from the fact that they make us partakers of the divine nature'.[15] Calvin immediately identifies partaking of the divine nature as that 'than which nothing more outstanding can be imagined' [*quo nihil praestantius cogitari potest*].[16] This phrase is a clear adaptation of Anselm's definition of God as 'that than which nothing greater can be conceived' [*quo nihil maius cogitari potest*].[17] Calvin's implicit reasoning is that God is that than which nothing greater can be conceived, i.e. the greatest possible being. Therefore, partaking of his divine nature is that blessing than which nothing more excellent can be conceived; i.e. the greatest possible blessing.

[15] John Calvin, *The Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Hebrews and The First and Second Epistles of St Peter* (trans. William B. Johnston; Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1963), p. 330.

[16] CO 55.446. CO = G. Baum, E. Cunitz and E. Reuss, eds, *Ioannis Calvini Opera quae supersunt omnia* (59 vols; Brunswick & Berlin: C. A. Schwetschke, 1863–1900). Bracketed Latin insertions and quotations are from CO, those in parentheses are found in the translations being quoted.

[17] Anselm, *Proslogion*, ch. 2, in M. J. Charlesworth, trans. and ed., *St. Anselm's Proslogion* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1979), p. 116. Cf. Owen's earlier rendering of Calvin's phrase as 'than which nothing can be conceived better' in John Calvin, *Commentaries on the Catholic Epistles* (trans. John Owen; Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1948), p. 370.

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With classic *theōsis* language Calvin interprets the meaning of the phrase 'partakers of the divine nature' in terms of being raised up to God and united with him. He writes: 'We must take into account whence it is that God raises us to such a peak of honour. We know how worthless is the condition of our nature, and the fact that God makes Himself ours so that all His possessions become in a sense ours is a grace the magnitude of which our minds can never fully grasp.'[18] Contemplation of this 'ought to give us abundant cause to renounce the world entirely and be borne aloft to heaven'. Calvin then boldly states: 'We should notice that it is the purpose of the Gospel to make us sooner or later like [*conformes*] God; indeed it is, so to speak, a kind of deification [*quasi deificari*].'[19] The older translation conveys the boldness of the thought more adequately: 'Let us then mark, that the end of the gospel is, to render us eventually conformable to God, and, if we may so speak, to deify us.'[20] In concert with the patristic writers Calvin views the believer's partaking of the divine nature as a kind of deification.

The language and imagery of *theōsis* throughout Calvin's theology

Imago dei

Deification is not merely an eschatological concept for Calvin. It is rooted in the divine intentions for the creation and recreation of humanity. According to Calvin humanity was created in the image and likeness (which are synonymous for Calvin) of God that our minds might zealously be virtuous and meditate upon eternal life. Humans were endowed with reason and understanding 'so that, by leading a holy and upright life, we may press on to the appointed goal of blessed immortality'.[21] As creatures in the image of God humans 'ought to be thought the reflection of God's glory'.[22] Furthermore, being created in the image of God is in some sense 'participation in God'.[23]

Humans rebelled against God, were separated from him, destitute of all glory, and spoilt by sin. The image of God became deformed. 'Our happiness', then, 'lies in having God's image, which was blotted out by sin, restored and reformed in us.' Christ is God's image as the eternal Word.

[18] *Second Peter*, p. 330.
[19] *Ibid*. (CO 55.446).
[20] *Catholic Epistles*, p. 371.
[21] *Institutes* 2.1.1. All quotations from the *Institutes* are from John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion* (ed. John T. McNeill; trans. Ford Lewis Battles; Philadelphia, PA: Westminster, 1960).
[22] *Institutes* 1.15.4.
[23] *Institutes* 2.2.1.

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But, 'even on His human nature, which He has in common with us, the imprint (*effigies*) of the Father's glory has been engraved, that He might transform His members to it'. It follows that 'none is to be reckoned among Christ's disciples unless there is seen the Glory of God impressed on him by the likeness (*effigie*) of Christ as by the seal of a ring'.[24] The goal of salvation, in other words, is for believers to have the image and likeness of God restored in them as fully as it is in Christ and thus to participate in God and reflect his glory.

Union with our mediator

In order to save humanity from the lapsed condition, the race needed Christ's intercession as mediator. To be a true mediator between God and humanity Christ had to be true God and true human. To benefit from Christ, believers must be united with him. Because of the great difference between our uncleanness and God's holiness, in the incarnation the Son had to become Immanuel 'in such a way that his divinity and our human nature might by mutual connection grow together. Otherwise the nearness would not have been near enough, nor the affinity sufficiently firm, for us to hope that God might dwell with us.'[25] But human sinfulness was not the only reason we needed a mediator. 'Even if man had remained free from all stain, his condition would have been too lowly for him to reach God without a Mediator.'[26]

Christ's accomplishment as Mediator made it such that 'all his things are ours and we have all things in him'.[27] His task was to make children of men, children of God, to make heirs of Ghenna, heirs of the kingdom of heaven.

> Who could have done this had not the self-same Son of God become the Son of man, and had not so taken what was ours as to impart what was his to us, and to make what was his by nature ours by grace? . . . we trust that we are sons of God, for God's natural Son fashioned for himself a body from our body, flesh from our flesh, bones from our

[24] John Calvin, *The Gospel According to St John 11–21 and the First Epistle of John* (trans. T. H. L. Parker; Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1961), p. 149.

[25] *Institutes* 2.12.1. 'By mutual connection grow together' [*mutual coniunctione . . . inter se colescerent*] is a reference to the hypostatic union and can be translated, perhaps more clearly, as 'by being brought into mutual connection unite'. Cf. the pointed criticism of Reist's incredible interpretation in Richard A. Muller, *The Unaccommodated Calvin* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), p. 8.

[26] *Ibid*. Calvin rejects that Christ would have been incarnated even if Adam and Eve had not fallen (*Institutes* 2.12.6–7).

[27] *Institutes* 3.15.5.

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> bones, that he might be one with us. Ungrudgingly he took our nature upon himself to impart to us what was his, and to become both Son of God and Son of man in common with us . . . the only Son of God, to whom it wholly belongs, has adopted us as his brothers.[28]

Calvin begins Book 3 of the *Institutes* by asking how we receive the benefits that the Father bestowed upon his only begotten Son – benefits bestowed not for his use but to enrich poor and needy men. The answer is that Christ must become ours and dwell within us. As long as Christ is outside us his benefits do us no good: 'all he possesses is nothing to us until we grow into one body with him'.[29] Union with Christ 'alone ensures that, as far as we are concerned, he has not unprofitably come with the name Savior. The same purpose is served by that sacred wedlock through which we are made flesh of his flesh and bone of his bone [Eph. 5:30], and thus one with him.'[30] This intimate union is not merely union with Christ as human mediator, but with God. In fact, the Word 'took upon himself the person and office of Mediator, that he might join us to God'.[31] It was for the purpose of continually bringing believers into ever closer union with God that Christ was given all authority. 'The Father has given all power to the Son that he may by the Son's hand govern, nourish, sustain us, keep us in his care, and help us. Thus, while for the short time we wander away from God, Christ stands in our midst, to lead us little by little to a firm union with God.'[32]

Baptism and ingrafting

Christ was baptized 'in order that he might have it in common with us as the firmest bond of the union and fellowship which he has deigned to form with us'. Our baptism testifies to us that we are engrafted not only into the death and life of Christ, 'but so united to Christ himself that we become sharers in all his blessings'.[33] Commenting on Paul's phrase 'if we have been united' (with Christ) in Romans 6:5, Calvin notes that

> our ingrafting signifies not only our conformity to the example of Christ, but also the secret union (*arcanam coniunctionem*) by which we grow together with Him, in such a way that He revives us by His Spirit,

[28] *Institutes* 2.12.2.
[29] *Institutes* 3.1.1.
[30] *Institutes* 3.1.3. Cf. Calvin, 'First Sermon on Deuteronomy 24:1–6' (January 1556) (CO 28.152).
[31] *Institutes* 1.13.24.
[32] *Institutes* 2.15.5.
[33] *Institutes* 4.15.6.

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> and transfers His power to us. Therefore, as the graft has the same life or death as the tree into which it is ingrafted, so it is reasonable that we should be as much partakers of the life as of the death of Christ.[34]

Nothing 'right or sincere is found in men so long as they remain in their own nature'.[35] Therefore there must be a disparity between the ingrafting of trees and our spiritual ingrafting into Christ. 'In the grafting of trees the graft draws its nourishment from the root, but retains its own natural quality in the fruit which is eaten.' The same is not true of spiritual ingrafting. Echoing 2 Peter 1:4, Calvin says that in spiritual ingrafting 'we not only derive the strength and sap of the life which flows from Christ, but we also pass from our own nature into His'.[36]

Lord's Supper

In one particularly beautiful passage on the Lord's Supper Calvin brings together many of the terms and images of deification. Godly souls can gather great assurance and delight from the sacrament of the Lord's Supper because

> in it they have a witness of our growth into one body with Christ such that whatever is his may be called ours. As a consequence, we may dare assure ourselves that eternal life, of which he is the heir, is ours; and that the Kingdom of Heaven, into which he has already entered, can no more be cut off from us than from him; again, that we cannot be condemned for our sins, from whose guilt he has absolved us, since he willed to take them upon himself as if they were his own. This is the wonderful exchange which, out of his measureless benevolence, he has made with us; that, becoming Son of man with us, he has made us sons of God with him; that, by his descent to earth, he has prepared an ascent to heaven for us; that, by taking on our mortality, he has conferred his immortality upon us; that, accepting our weakness, he has strengthened us by his power; that, receiving our poverty unto himself, he has transferred his wealth to us; that, taking the weight of our iniquity upon himself (which oppressed us), he has clothed us with his righteousness.[37]

In the same context of the Lord's Supper Calvin says that Christ is called the

[34] John Calvin, *The Epistles of Paul the Apostle to the Romans and to the Thessalonians* (trans. Ross Mackenzie; Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1960), p. 124.

[35] *John 11–21 and First John*, p. 137.

[36] *Romans and Thessalonians*, p. 124.

[37] *Institutes* 4.17.2.

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'bread of life' not because of the sacrament but because he showed himself as such when 'being made a sharer in our human mortality, he made us partakers in his divine immortality'.[38]

Glorification

The glorification of believers is an important theme in patristic and Orthodox discussions of deification. *Theōsis* is a union with God such that the divine glory shines through and is reflected by the redeemed. Calvin understands the glorification mentioned in 2 Thess 1:10 *not* as God's being honoured and praised but as God's luminescent glory shining through the saints in virtue of their union with him. When Christ returns, says Calvin, he will 'shine upon [the godly] with His glory' that 'they may partake of it'. It is as if Paul were saying that Christ 'will not possess this glory for Himself alone, but it will be shared among all the saints'. Furthermore, 'It is the chief and unique consolation of the godly that when the Son of God will be manifested in the glory of His kingdom, He will gather them together into the same fellowship with Himself' and 'will pour His glory upon them'.[39] Calvin continues this theme in his comments on verse 12 of the same chapter:

> Particularly worthy of notice is the remark which [Paul] adds that those who have extolled the glory of Christ are to be glorified in their turn in Him. The amazing goodness of God is especially seen in the fact that He desires His glory to be conspicuously displayed in us who are entirely covered with dishonour. It is, however, a double miracle, that He afterwards shines upon us with His glory, as though He would do the same for us in return.[40]

Commenting on Rom 5:2, Calvin links glorification and partaking of the divine nature: 'The hope of the glory of God has shone upon us by the Gospel.' The gospel in turn 'testifies that we shall be partakers of the divine nature, for when we shall see God face to face, we shall be like him (II Pet. 1.4; I John 3.2)'.[41] In the *Institutes* Calvin directly associates the partaking of the divine nature, glorification, and union with Christ: 'Indeed, Peter declares that believers are called in this to become partakers of the divine nature [II Peter 1:4]. How is this? Because ''he will be . . . glorified in all his saints, and will be marveled at in all who have believed'' [II Thess.

[38] *Institutes* 4.17.4.
[39] *Romans and Thessalonians*, pp. 392, 393.
[40] *Ibid.*, p. 394.
[41] *Romans and Thessalonians*, p. 105.

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1:10]'. In the very next sentence Calvin writes: 'If the Lord will share his glory, power, and righteousness with the elect – nay, will give himself to be enjoyed by them and, what is more excellent, will somehow make them to become one with himself, let us remember that every sort of happiness is included under this benefit.'[42]

Trinitarianism

For Calvin the union of the believer with God is fundamentally Trinitarian and involves all three members of the Godhead. As we have seen, according to Calvin Christ was given all authority and power in order to bring believers into union with God. He can do this because believers are in union with him as mediator. What has not yet been noted is the implicit structure of Calvin's thought here. It follows the two distinct levels of union with Christ found in his writings. The fundamental level is the hypostatic union of the eternal Word with the humanity believers share with every other person. At this level there is a communication of properties between Christ's divinity and his humanity.[43] The consequent level is the particular union of Christ with individual believers.[44] Christ unites believers to God because in his person God and humanity are already united. Significantly, this distinction is the very heart of patristic and Orthodox notions of deification. In patristic terms, individual believers can be deified because the incarnation of Christ deified human nature.

Calvin is keen to emphasize that all that Christ did was for our sake and all that he has is his only for him to give it to us. This includes the love of God the Father, the life and blessings of Christ, the Holy Spirit and even his unity with the Father. Christ unites believers with himself in order that they may participate, as members of his body, in the inner life and love of the Trinity which he has eternally known. Thus, the deification of the believer not only has a Trinitarian basis, but a Trinitarian goal. This is most clearly seen in comments Calvin makes on John 15:9 and 17:21–6.

The fullness of blessings and what was hidden in God are now made plain in Christ 'that He may pass it on to His people; as the water flowing from the fountain through various channels waters the fields everywhere'.[45] If the unity of the Son with the Father is not to be fruitless and useless, 'its power must be diffused through the whole body of believers'. From this

[42] *Institutes* 3.25.10.

[43] Cf. esp. *Institutes* 2.13–14.

[44] See further D. Willis-Watkins, 'The Unio Mystica and the Assurance of Faith According to Calvin', *Calvin: Erbe und Auftrag* (ed. Willem van't Spijker; Kampen: Kok Pharos, 1991), p. 78.

[45] *John 11–21 and First John*, p. 149.

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'we infer that we are one with Christ; not because He transfuses his substance into us, but because by the power of His Spirit He communicates to us His life and all the blessings He has received from the Father'.[46] In short, Christ had nothing for himself alone but was rich to enrich his believers.

Strictly speaking, Calvin writes, Christ was not loved by the Father for his own sake. Rather, God's love was completely poured out on Christ 'that it might flow from Him to His members'.[47] The love with which God loves us 'is none other than that with which He loved His Son from the beginning . . .. It is an inestimable privilege of faith that we know that Christ was loved by the Father for our sake, that we might be made partakers of the same love and that forever.'[48] Furthermore, Christ was loved 'that He may unite us along with himself to the Father'.[49]

The role of the Holy Spirit should not be forgotten as he also plays an important role. It is the Spirit who 'breathes divine life into us'.[50] The goal of this regeneration 'is that Christ should reform us to God's image'.[51] In the meantime the gifts of the Spirit (which we lack by nature) allow us to 'perceive that we are truly joined to God in perfect blessedness'.[52] In sum, the Holy Spirit is the 'bond by which Christ effectually unites us to himself'.[53]

Debates with half papists and Osiander

Deification as such was never a major point of dispute between Calvin and his opponents. Nonetheless, the language and imagery of *theōsis* are prominent in disputes on tangentially related topics. It is instructive to observe how deeply ingrained this is in Calvin's thought by the way it comes out in his rebuttals of the 'half papists' and Andreas Osiander. One also finds in these discussions additional important evidence for the thesis of this article.

Certain 'half papists' taught a doctrine of justification that, Calvin says, put Christ outside the believer. In response Calvin emphasizes that the salvific benefits which the believer receives are the effect of the union between Christ and the believer. Calvin stresses the nature and degree of

[46] *Ibid.*, p. 148.
[47] *Ibid.*, p. 97.
[48] *Ibid.*, p. 152.
[49] *Ibid.*, p. 97.
[50] *Institutes* 3.1.3.
[51] *Institutes* 1.15.4.
[52] *Institutes* 2.15.4.
[53] *Institutes* 3.1.1; 3.1.3.

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this union – it is union with Christ himself growing by degrees until he and the believer are completely one.

> For we await salvation from him not because he appears to us afar off, but because he makes us, ingrafted into his body, participants not only in all his benefits but also in himself . . .. Christ has been so imparted to you with all his benefits that all his things are made yours, that you are made a member of him, indeed one with him . . .. Not only does he cleave to us by an invisible bond of fellowship, but with a wonderful communion day by day, he grows more and more into one body with us, until he becomes completely one with us.[54]

In the 1545 edition of the *Institutes* these statements about believers being made one with Christ are even bolder when Calvin says that we are 'made of one substance with him' and 'daily he more and more unites himself to us in one, same substance'.[55] References to a unity of substance were likely removed in the 1559 edition to avoid the appearance of contradicting the rebuttals of Osiander he had inserted.[56]

Osiander taught that Christ as a man was foreknown by God and therefore the pattern after which humanity was formed. As a consequence he had to argue that Christ would have been incarnated even if Adam had not fallen. One of his inventive arguments was based upon Jesus' quotation of Gen 2:23–4 (the description of the first marriage) in Matt 19:4–6. Osiander took Jesus' quotation to imply that these words were a prophecy related to the union of Christ and the Church. Pre-lapsarian, the 'prophecy' implied that it was necessary for Christ to be incarnated even if Adam had not fallen. Calvin responds that in this passage Jesus 'is not discussing the mystical union with which he graced the church, but only fidelity in marriage'. Neither, says Calvin, will Paul's similar quotations help Osiander's view (1 Cor 6:16; Eph 5:31). For, though Paul 'set forth under the figure and likeness of marriage the holy union that makes us one with Christ', neither did he intend to indicate that the words of Genesis were a prophecy.[57]

More problematic was Osiander's view that justification was an in-

[54] *Institutes* 3.2.24.

[55] See Willis-Watkins, 'Unio Mystica', p. 80. N.B. Calvin does not always use *substantia* consistently.

[56] For the background of the debate with Osiander see James Weis, 'Calvin Versus Osiander on Justification', *The Springfielder* 30 (1965), pp. 31–47, repr. in *Calvin's Opponents*, vol. 5 of *Articles on Calvin and Calvinism* (ed. Richard C. Gamble; New York: Garland, 1992), pp. 353–69.

[57] *Institutes* 2.12.7.

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pouring or infusion of Christ's divine essence into the believer which rendered the believer righteous. Osiander supported his position by citing biblical passages indicating believers are one with Christ. Calvin agrees that believers are one with Christ. He denies that this means 'Christ's essence is mixed with our own'. Osiander is mistaken in the claim that 'we are substantially righteous in God by the infusion both of his essence and of his quality'. If God's essence were united with that of believers, Calvin contends, that would make believers part of God – an implication Calvin cannot accept. According to Calvin, Osiander's mistake was that he had not observed that scripture indicates that believers are united with Christ 'by the secret power of his Spirit', not by an infusion of the divine essence.[58]

Osiander's notion of 'essential righteousness' soon comes under two further criticisms that touch upon our topic.[59] First, Calvin attributes to Osiander the view 'that God pours himself into us as a gross mixture'. This parallels Osiander's error in thinking that Christ is physically present and eaten in the bread of the Lord's Supper. Calvin's view is that Christ is really present but not physically present. His understanding of the union between Christ and the believer is parallel. There is a real union, but not an essential or 'physical' union.

Second, Osiander is criticized for applying to the present what is proper only to the future state. Calvin has no intention of refuting Osiander's proof-texts on the union of Christ and believers. Instead he cites two additional passages that show that the kind of thing Osiander is postulating for the present in justification is reserved for the eschaton. The two passages are 2 Pet 1:4 and 1 John 3:2, standard patristic proof-texts for deification. Calvin denies that believers will ever be united to the divine essence, but they will partake of the divine nature and be changed to be like Jesus. Calvin aptly says of this union:

> That joining together of Head and members, that indwelling of Christ in our hearts – in short, that mystical union – are accorded by us the highest degree of importance, so that Christ, having been made ours, makes us sharers with him in the gifts with which he has been endowed. We do not, therefore, contemplate him outside ourselves from afar in order that his righteousness may be imputed to us but because we put on Christ and are engrafted into his body – in short, because he deigns to make us one with him.[60]

[58] *Institutes* 3.11.5.
[59] *Institutes* 3.11.10.
[60] *Ibid*.

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Calvin's two uses of the term 'mystical union' (*mystica unio*) in the course of rebutting Osiander is further evidence in favour of the thesis that Calvin's doctrine of union with Christ is substantially the same as the patristic notion of *theōsis*.[61] 'Mystical union' is very often a technical phrase for deification from at least the time of Pseudo-Dionysius. It was commonly used as such by medieval mystics, including Bernard of Clairvaux. Scholars have not failed to associate Calvin's mentions of *mystica unio* to Bernard's influence. Étienne Gilson's classic study of Bernard did not fail to make the connection between Bernard's mystical union and the patristic doctrine of deification. Gilson especially noted the influence of Maximus Confessor on Bernard and cites passages in which Bernard unhesitatingly speaks of deification.[62] On this basis it is reasonable to infer that Calvin too is referring to deification. Oddly, however, the obvious connection between mystical union and deification is not made in recent comparisons of Bernard's and Calvin's understanding of mystical union.[63]

'You are gods'?

Patristic writers commonly refer to deified or glorified believers as 'gods'. The biblical text cited to justify this language is Ps 82:6. The relevant statement reads: 'I say, ''You are gods, sons of the Most High, all of you.'' ' In his commentary on Psalm 82 Calvin writes: 'I indeed grant that it is quite common for the Hebrews to adorn with the title of *God* whatever is rare and excellent.' Here it appears 'that this name of the Divine Being is applied to those who occupy the exalted station of princes, in which there is afforded a peculiar manifestation of the majesty of God'.[64] Therefore, the name 'gods' in this psalm is to be understood as referring to judges 'on whom God has impressed special marks of his glory'.[65] Commenting directly on v. 6, Calvin says that 'God has invested judges with a sacred character and title' and that 'This verse may also be viewed as addressed by God himself to rulers, and as intimating, that, in addition to his clothing them with

[61] In several other passages Calvin uses similar terminology, e.g. in *Institutes* 4.17.1 he speaks of the 'mystery of Christ's secret union with the devout' which is 'by nature incomprehensible'.

[62] See É. Gilson, *The Mystical Theology of Saint Bernard* (trans. A. H. C. Downes; London: Sheed & Ward, 1940), pp. 25–8, 123, 132, 211.

[63] E.g. Dennis E. Tramburello, *Union with Christ: John Calvin and the Mysticism of St. Bernard* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 1994). Tramburello focused so narrowly on comparing Calvin's thought with late medieval mysticism that he neglected the common stream upon which Calvin and the mystics drew, the patristic writers.

[64] John Calvin, *Commentary on the Book of Psalms* (vol. 3; trans. James Anderson; Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1949), p. 330.

[65] *Ibid.*

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authority, he has bestowed upon them his name.'[66] This exegesis is consistently maintained in the *Institutes* as well as in his commentary on John 10:34–5.

This interpretation clearly diverges from patristic interpretations. But Calvin does not contradict the doctrine or the language the fathers used these passages to support. In fact, he says nothing whatsoever about the patristic interpretation. Should we infer from Calvin's divergence that he would have viewed the bold language of the fathers as inappropriate? No. On the contrary, the logic of several of Calvin's statements, including comments on Psalm 82, leads to the conclusion that Calvin would have had no difficulty with the application of the term 'gods' to glorified human beings so long as the term is properly understood.

In the discussion about angels in Book 1 of the *Institutes* Calvin notes that when scripture mentions all the angels very often the designation 'gods' is applied to them. This 'ought not to seem anything marvelous; for if the honor is given to princes and governors [Ps. 82:6] because they are vice-regents of God, who is the highest King and Judge, there is far greater reason why it should be conferred upon the angels, in whom the brightness of the divine glory shines forth much more richly'.[67] Calvin's argument is that the term 'gods' can be properly applied to persons who imitate God in ruling and judging since he is the paradigmatic king and judge whose power they are entrusted with. It can be applied to angels even more appropriately because they do not merely imitate God's functions, they reflect the divine glory itself.

In his commentary on 1 John 3:2 ('when he appears we shall be like him'), an important patristic deification proof-text, Calvin describes the eschatological transformation of believers in such a way as to intimate that they will reflect the divine glory even more than angels do. When Christ returns 'we shall be like Him in that He will conform our lowly body to His glorious body . . .. For the apostle wanted to show us briefly that the ultimate aim of our adoption is that what has, in order, come first in Christ, shall at last be completed in us.'[68] What is Christ's glorious body like to which believers will be conformed? This glory is so great that 'it will fill the ungodly with fear' and 'they will flee from the sight in terror. His glory will so dazzle their eyes that they will be confounded and stupefied.' We 'shall be partakers of the divine glory', Calvin says, and God already 'begins to restore His image in us; but in what a small measure!' When glorified,

[66] *Ibid.*, p. 334.
[67] *Institutes* 1.14.5.
[68] *John 11–21 and First John*, p. 267.

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believers will then be prepared to see God to the degree that 'our little capacity can grasp'. It is not the vision of God that affects the transformation but the transformation that will permit the vision of God. For, unless 'our nature were spiritual and endued with a heavenly and blessed immortality, it could never come so near to God'. Once transformed and fitted for the vision of God we will then be like Christ – dazzlingly radiant, glorious, immortal beings whose sight will strike fear into the hearts of the ungodly.

The appropriateness of angels being designated gods due to their reflection of the divine glory combined with statements about believers' glorification leads to the conclusion that glorified believers can appropriately be designated gods. Further, believers are in union with God and share not only his glory but his power, life and love. It follows that they could be referred to as gods in an even stronger sense than when the term is applied to angels. Though Calvin does not explicitly draw this conclusion, his reasoning inescapably leads to it. For broad theological reasons rather than a single proof-text he would have found the designation of glorified believers as 'gods' acceptable and even appropriate if one properly understood what was and was not meant by it.

A counter-example?

There is one passage in the *Institutes* that *prima facie* looks like a clear counter-example to the thesis of this essay. In rebutting Servetus's arguments against infant baptism Calvin comes to one argument that he deems more absurd than the rest. According to Calvin, Servetus had offered something like the following argument: (1) 'we become gods by regeneration'; (2) gods are those 'to whom the Word of God came' (quoting John 10:34 in reference to Ps 82:6); but (3) it is impossible for infants to have received the word.[69] The unstated conclusion is that (4) since infants cannot receive the word, be regenerated and thus be gods it is inappropriate for them to be baptized. Calvin mentions that it is one of Servetus's 'delusions [*deliriis*] to imagine deity in believers [*deitatem affingit fidelibus*]' and that to 'twist a verse of a psalm into such an alien meaning is an act of abandoned shamelessness'.[70] Clearly, Calvin strongly disagrees with this view but says 'this is not the place to examine it'. Rather, he merely repeats the interpretation of Psalm 82 we examined earlier.

It is unfortunate that Calvin chose not to comment further. Does this passage undermine the argument of this essay? By no means. The evidence adduced in favour is remarkably strong, varied and pervasive; it can hardly

[69] *Institutes* 4.16.15.
[70] *Ibid.* (CO 2.1000).

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be overturned by a couple of very brief comments. Further, Calvin's comments are directed against Servetus's teaching, not against the patristic doctrine. It has already been shown that Calvin would have disagreed with the patristic interpretation of Ps 82:6 just as much as he disagreed with Servetus's. But there is no reason to suppose that the two doctrines the verse was cited to prove would have been viewed as the same by Calvin. Thus, it would be inappropriate to assume that the same opinions would have been applied to the patristic fathers who cited the passage in support of *theōsis*.

Since Calvin chose not to comment further we cannot know what precisely his main difficulties with Servetus's view were. It seems quite likely, however, that his chief objections would have been similar to those cited earlier against Osiander: (1) Servetus was inappropriately applying to the present life unfulfilled eschatological promises, thus making believers out to be more than what they actually are; (2) Servetus's teaching that 'deity' was in believers failed to make the all-important distinction between sharing in God's nature and possessing his essence. He might have also objected to the unqualified use of such bold language, though, as was shown, Calvin could have affirmed the use of such language in certain contexts if it were clear what was meant and what was not meant by it. That Calvin's rejection of Servetus's unorthodox teaching does not in any way undermine the thesis of this essay is confirmed by Calvin's affirmation of *theōsis* in other contexts where he addresses erroneous deification concepts.

Erroneous concepts of deification and important distinctions

Calvin did not employ the boldest language of the Church fathers probably to prevent misunderstanding rather than because of questions about its legitimacy. For Calvin was aware of pagan and heretical notions of deification that used similar language with very different intent. For example, Calvin knew of the ancient pagan practice of exalting outstanding heroes, kings and inventors to the status of gods. He referred to this practice as 'invented deification' (*apotheosis inventorum*)[71] and 'false deification' (*falsa apotheosis*).[72] He traced the rise of polytheism and idolatry to this practice and considered it one of the worst forms of rebellion against the one true God.

In answering more subtle pagan and heretical notions of deification Calvin always (except in the case of Servetus mentioned above) set the substance of the Christian notion against them. The Manicheans 'used to dream that we took our roots from the stem of God and that when we have

[71] Calvin, *Comm. Isaiah* 28:29 (CO 36.483).
[72] *Institutes* 2.8.26 (CO 2.286).

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finished the course of our life we shall revert back to our original state'. Similarly, in Calvin's day there were 'fanatics who imagine that we cross over into God's nature so that His nature absorbs ours. This is how they explain Paul's words in I Cor. 15.28 – ''that God may be all in all''. They take this passage in the same sense. This kind of madness never occurred to the minds of the holy apostles.' Against these views Calvin set the true meaning of the apostles' words: 'They were simply concerned to say that when we have put off all the vices of the flesh we shall be partakers of divine immortality and the glory of blessedness, and thus we shall be in a way one with God so far as our capacity allows.'[73]

Plato is commended for being the only ancient philosopher who 'recognized man's highest good as union with God'[74] and for everywhere defining 'the chief good of man to be an entire conformity to God'.[75] But because Plato 'had learned nothing of the sacred bond of that union', he 'could not even dimly sense its nature'.[76] Plato's conception of deification began right, insofar as it went. However, because 'he was in the midst of errors, he afterwards glided off to his own inventions'. Christians should disregard 'empty speculations' and be satisfied 'that the image of God in holiness and righteousness is restored to us for this end, that we may at length be partakers of eternal life and glory as far as it will be necessary for our complete felicity'.[77] The source of this life and glory, the sacred bond of union of which Plato was ignorant, is Christ himself, the head of the church. He 'is clothed in heavenly immortality and glory so that the whole body may be conformed to the Head'. What was begun in the head *must* be completed in all the members because 'to separate him from ourselves is not permissible and not even possible, without tearing him apart'.[78]

Some of Calvin's bolder statements could be misunderstood as saying the same things as the views he rejects. Thus, he very often qualifies them or makes important distinctions. For example, deification is not the result of human work or merit. All of God's promises 'ought to be properly and justly deemed to be the effects of his power and glory', especially the promise of partaking of the divine nature.[79] Peter's word 'nature' does not refer to God's essence but to 'kind' or 'quality' (note the functional similarity with the Orthodox essence/energies distinction). Thus, 'it is clear

[73] *Second Peter*, p. 330. Cf. *Institutes* 1.15.5.
[74] *Institutes* 3.25.2. Cf. Plato, *Theaetetus*, 176b; *Republic*, 10.613a; *Laws*, 4.716c–d.
[75] *Catholic Epistles*, p. 371.
[76] *Institutes* 3.25.2.
[77] *Catholic Epistles*, p. 371.
[78] *Institutes* 3.25.3.
[79] *Catholic Epistles*, p. 370.

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. . . that man is made to conform to God, not by an inflowing of substance, but by the grace and power of the Spirit . . . who surely works in us without rendering us consubstantial with God'.[80] Though believers will be made like Christ, John does not mean that we shall be equal to Christ: 'For there must be a difference between the Head and the Members.'[81]

There is a final important point which Calvin does not explicitly make but which is latent in his comments on a related topic. A deified being can never be considered the same kind of being as the uncreated God. Servetus held that the Father was essentially God from whom the Son and Spirit derived their deity. Calvin responded that the Father would then be the deifier and 'nothing would be left in the Son but a shadow; and the Trinity would be nothing else but the conjunction of the one God with two created things'.[82] In other words, if Christ was in some sense a 'god' by deification he would be a created being and not the uncreated Creator described in scripture. *Mutatis mutandis*, deified believers, even if properly designated 'gods', remain created beings and therefore different kinds of beings than the one God.

Conclusion

The believer's union with Christ and the Father, the indwelling presence of the Spirit in our hearts, restoration of the divine image, being made like Jesus and our eventual glorification are each important themes in Calvin's soteriology and eschatology. They are all pervaded by the language and imagery of *theōsis*. There is a risk that readers unfamiliar with the patristic writings may fail to see this since I purposely refrained from quoting patristic parallels to focus attention directly upon Calvin's own statements (as well as save space). Insufficient familiarity with the patristic writings is precisely why many of Calvin's interpreters have not recognized the presence of deification in Calvin even when it has stared them in the face. That and the uncritical acceptance of Harnack's claims have caused many to assume its absence rather than engage in empirical investigation.

One should not overstate the significance of deification's presence in Calvin, as the Finns have done with regard to Luther. It would be wrong to say that deification *per se* is a major element of Calvin's theology or that its presence warrants a radical reinterpretation of Calvin's theology. It must be remembered that deification is a part of the catholic tradition that Calvin and the other Reformers inherited, affirmed and defended. One should

[80] *Institutes* 1.15.5.
[81] *John 11–21 and First John*, p. 267.
[82] *Institutes* 1.13.25.

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never be surprised to find elements of this tradition in the writings of the Reformers.

More often than not deification in Calvin is presupposed as background rather than explicitly in the foreground. It has the habit of finding its way onto the stage of other issues for brief appearances but never headlines. Therein lies its significance. The largely presuppositional role of deification in Calvin's thought is strong evidence that by the end of his life Calvin had developed something like what the Eastern Orthodox term the patristic *phrōnema* or mindset. The fact that the patristic notion of *theōsis* is present in Calvin's theology, yet he never once (so far as I know) cites a patristic authority in support, strengthens this claim.[83] It is both implausible and unnecessary to insist that Calvin reinvented a doctrine that was found in many of the writers we know Calvin had read at length (not the least of which are Irenaeus, Augustine and Bernard if not Athanasius and the Cappadocians). But we should not expect Calvin to have appealed to patristic authority on the matter since it was not a major point of dispute in the sixteenth century. The pervasive but largely presuppositional presence of deification in Calvin's theology is best explained by patristic influence on his biblical exegesis at a level deeper than what can be detected by merely counting and classifying patristic quotations.[84]

Can we then speak of 'Calvin's doctrine of deification'? No and yes. Richard Muller rightly remarks that Calvin himself 'might well object to the notion of ''Calvin's doctrine'' of anything, inasmuch as the doctrines that Calvin held and taught were, in large part, not his own! . . . What Calvin intended to teach was the church's doctrine, not his own doctrine.'[85] Though not as bold as the Church fathers sometimes are, Calvin's understanding of deification is simply the patristic notion of *theōsis*. In this sense we should not speak of 'Calvin's doctrine of deification'; he was simply teaching and, more often, presupposing the Church's doctrine. Nor should we speak of 'Calvin's doctrine of deification' as if he had substantively developed or systematized the doctrine beyond what the patristic writers

[83] According to Lane's criteria one should not claim that Calvin's thought had been influenced by the Church fathers without citing where Calvin directly quotes the fathers. The quotations, in turn, must do more than show precedence for Calvin's views or lend authority to Calvin's positions. Further, one cannot argue that Calvin knows more of a writer than he quotes. See Anthony N. S. Lane, *John Calvin: Student of the Church Fathers* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1999), chs 1–3. Lane's criteria rightly temper exaggerated or uncritical claims of influence, but they are at times unduly restrictive and open to criticism.

[84] Calvin's exegesis was *influenced* but not *determined*; his independence as an exegete is obvious.

[85] Muller, *The Unaccommodated Calvin*, p. 7.

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wrote; on this subject Calvin was quite unoriginal. In another sense, however, we can. The role deification plays in Calvin's theology, its relation to other doctrines, and the minor developments one finds warrant comparative study of 'Calvin's doctrine of deification' with that of individual Church fathers, medieval mystics, Eastern theologians, Aquinas, Luther and other sixteenth-century figures.

Finally, it is worth pointing out that although the search for common ground was not a motivation for my study, Calvin's doctrine of deification does have value for intra-religious and inter-religious dialogue. Calvin's doctrine is not a bridge of common ground that reconciles Reformed thought with Eastern Orthodoxy or any other religious movement that espouses a notion of deification (e.g. Mormonism).[86] But it can be a point of departure, especially for dialogue between Reformed and Orthodox Christians. At the least, 'Calvin's doctrine of deification' is something interesting for the Reformed to talk about among themselves.

[86] N.B. the traditional Latter-Day Saint (i.e. Mormon) concept of deification ('eternal progression' or 'exaltation' in LDS parlance) is very different from anything found in the orthodox Christian tradition.

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