Filled with 'The Fullness of the Gifts of God': Towards a Pneumatic Theosis

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FILLED WITH ‘THE FULLNESS OF THE GIFTS OF GOD’: TOWARDS A PNEUMATIC *THEOSIS*

By

Kirsten Laurel Guidro, B.A., M.A.

A Dissertation submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate School, Marquette University, in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Milwaukee, Wisconsin

May 2020
Once Jesus was asked by the Pharisees when the kingdom of God was coming, and he answered, “The kingdom of God is not coming with things that can be observed; nor will they say, ‘Look, here it is!’ or ‘There it is!’ For, in fact, the kingdom of God is within you.”

—Luke 17: 20-21, NRSV

“Of things unseene how canst thou deeme aright,’
Then answered the righteous Artegaill,
‘Sith thou misdeem’st so much of things in sight?
What though the sea with waves continuall
Doe eate the earth, it is no more at all;
Ne is the earth the lesse, or loseth ought:
For whatsoeuer from one place doth fall,
Is with the tide unto an other brought:
For there is nothing lost, that may be found, if sought.

‘Likewise the earth is not augmented more,
By all that dying into it doe fade.
For of the earth they formed were of yore;
How ever gay their blossome or their blade
Doe flourish now, they into dust shall vade.
What wrong then is it, if that when they die,
They turne to that, whereof they first were made?

All in the powre of their great Maker lie:
All creatures must obey the voice of the most hie…

‘For take thy ballaunce, if thou be so wise,
And weigh the winde, that under heaven doth blow;
Or weigh the light, that in the East doth rise;
Or weigh the thought, that from mans mind doth flow.
But if the weight of these thou canst not show,
Weigh but one word which from thy lips doth fall.
For how canst thou those greater secrets know,
That doest not know the least thing of them all?
Ill can he rule the great, that cannot reach the small.’


“Well, if it’s a symbol, to hell with it.”

—Flannery O’Connor on the Eucharist

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ABSTRACT
FILLED WITH ‘THE FULLNESS OF THE GIFTS OF GOD’:
TOWARDS A PNEUMATIC THEOSIS

Kirsten Laurel Guidero, B.A., M.A.
Marquette University, 2020

Across ecclesial lines, Christian language remains permeated by themes of imitative participatory union with God. However, ecclesial communions divergently retrieve these themes. Eastern Orthodox communities defend a particular doctrine of deification. Western traditions—Catholic or Protestant—continue to wrestle with the notion, at times negating or sublimating it into participation or likeness.

How might these communities construct an ecumenical doctrine of deification? Each tradition’s model recedes into a dense thicket of competing metaphysical frameworks, spiritual priorities, and terminology. Mindful of the freight bound up in trying to discover parity between traditions that have developed their structures apart from each other, this project takes shape as an ecumenical dialogue. The dialogue determines a common question and guiding framework, exchanges distinctive contributions on the topic, facilitates cross-examination, and then looks for ways members might constructively reread themselves.

Three deification loci—how via divine action in creation a creature becomes one with and like the self-determined God—determine dialogue parameters. This working definition of deification proves expansive enough to invite all three major Christian traditions to the dialogue table. It also highlights that the way any tradition relates these three components sets its terms of engagement with others. Dialoguing competing views reveals persisting difficulties in affirming creatures’ bodily union with the Divine. These disagreements also show how the traditions’ different metaphors for union with God, each emphasizing either divine self-determination or creaturely capacity, have become literalized into competing metaphysical constructions. The ensuing tension surface underdeveloped pneumatology and theories of divine action.

Without jettisoning traditional descriptions of deification, I suggest that refocusing them on the Spirit as the guarantor of divine action may guide them to a more trinitarian, metaphysically flexible, and ecumenical construction. The Spirit already appears within these traditions’ descriptions of theosis, so this project represents not an overhaul but a reorientation for guiding future work. The dialogue concludes by highlighting common resources that could lead members into envisioning together, across divides previously considered incompatible, a pneumatic deification. I close by drawing attention to how a pneumatic theosis might advance relemations of the doctrine as the core tenet underpinning all theology.
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Sharing space with anyone creates the happy difficulty of precisely demarcating the lines where their influence ends and your own ideas begin. Studying deification taught me that we share space with God’s entire cosmos, and thus exploring theology comprises a never-ending education weaving us together as part of an incomprehensibly vast magnificence. What a wildly glorious mess! Many are left out of these pages because I have forgotten, overlooked, or never knew what they did. So I thank these ones below and ask that my acknowledgment of their presences may begin to address who I am still missing:

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CHAPTER ONE: DEIFICATION DEBATED

I. Introduction: Deification Reclaimed?

A. A Full Salvation

“[A]s he who called you is holy, be holy yourselves in all your conduct; for it is written, ‘You shall be holy, for I am holy’” (1 Peter 1:15-16, NRSV). The call to be like God reverberates through Christian history. The early theologians argued that without the gift of God’s own deity, this command stands unanswered. They coined the term theosis, or deification, to designate how one attains God’s holiness through the gift of the divine life itself, by God’s own agency.3 Denys’ first explicit definition calls it “the attaining of likeness to God and union with him so far as is possible.”4 As Michael Christensen emphasizes, deification captures the sense of communion with and likeness unto God that permeates biblical descriptions of salvation, while Andrew Louth’s description of deification focuses on “human destiny, a destiny that finds its fulfillment in a face-to-face encounter with God, an encounter in which God takes the initiative by meeting us in the Incarnation.”5 Deification concerns the expansion into all of creation, and especially into human life, of the dynamics of the Incarnation. Made possible by the Son, who as the Word of creation takes on flesh to live, die, resurrect, and ascend, deification makes the

3 See Norman Russell, The Doctrine of Deification in the Greek Patristic Tradition (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 1-52, 214-215, and 333-344, especially 340-343, for how the Christian development of the doctrine transformed Greco-Roman terms such as apotheosis, culminating in Gregory Nazianzen’s first use of the noun theosis. In what follows and for reasons I will make clear throughout this dissertation, I use interchangeably these terms and their derivatives: theosis, deification, and divinization.
bold claim that this divine life now belongs to all. Louth and Paul Gavrilyuk have compellingly argued that in the absence of the doctrine of deification, theology loses the full significance of God’s reconstitution of humanity and the cosmos. Without *theosis*, salvation is spoken of in a constricted key. Norman Russell’s magisterial text on the development of the doctrine provides a thorough detailing of the beautiful and comprehensive approach to soteriology found in the Greek patristic traditions.

Interest in the suitability of *theosis* as a crucial component of Christian theology extends beyond Eastern Orthodox theologians, however. After several centuries’ ignorance of or even hostility to deification themes, recent work finds Protestants anxious to uncover and adopt resources from the early Church, especially as they ground their own christocentrism. As evidence, I will here mention only a few of the many recent works seeking to claim that deification exists not just for ‘the East’ now. The resurgence of deification vocabulary in these works motivates questions of theological anthropology as well as method.

As one notable example, A. N. Williams argued in 1999 for rapprochement between Catholic and Orthodox perspectives on the topic, stating that since “deification entails discussion not only of sanctification and theological anthropology generally, but also the doctrines of God and the Trinity, religious knowledge and theological method, it ultimately touches on almost every major branch of Christian doctrine.” Williams’ assessment of deification’s multi-layered significance for Christian theology can be heard

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echoing in the studies of deification by scholars of varied confessional locations that continue to crop up in all areas of theological discipline.

Following in those steps, the 2006 and 2011 volumes on deification from the Princeton Theological Monograph series included contributions detailing deification in Scripture, ‘western’ fathers of Christianity, Reformed and Russian Orthodox theologians, and contemporary Anglican and Baptist resources. Meanwhile, the 2007/2008 editions of *Partakers of the Divine Nature* included scholarship linking deification to medieval Coptic-Arabic thought, Anselm, Luther, Wesley, Bulgakov, and Rahner. In an essay in the *Partakers* collection as well as in his own monograph, J. Todd Billings rehabilitated common misperceptions of Calvin’s doctrine of God by focusing on participation and gift. In 2008 and 2009, Myk A. Habets and Gannon Murphy exchanged differing proposals on how to consider deification in light of Reformed theology, focusing heavily on theological method, doctrine of God, and concerns over how to understand salvation. Meanwhile, Michael J. Gorman’s *Inhabiting the Cruciform God* and Ben C. Blackwell’s *Christosis* each suggested ways in which Pauline texts describe union with God, relating Scripture and its patristic readers to doctrines of God and salvation. From the 2010 Anglican perspective of Paul M. Collins, deification reframes ecclesiology and

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sacraments as synergistic communion between the person and God. Two recent monographs, each employing a quite different method, hint at the significance of perfection for understanding how to identify and practice Christian ethics across differing traditions. Finally, as another interesting example of the ways in which claims to deification have become mainstreamed in Western contexts, all three of the papers in a 2014 AAR panel on intersections of Christian spirituality with psychology that did not otherwise discuss theosis casually used language of deification to ground their research’s significance, and the 2019 Christian systematic theology panels of the AAR focused almost exclusively on deification themes.

These references by no means exhaustively list recent treatments of theosis, although they do give a sense of the sheer variety of voices now joining the chorus to reclaim deification. Deification, it seems, is not just for ‘the East’ anymore. But even to mention these recent claims to theosis raises significant questions of theological coherence, historical accuracy, and ecumenical purchase. What does theology mean when it speaks of theosis in such varied contexts as those mentioned above? Can one properly claim that God reconstitutes all creatures by uniting them to God’s self? What comprises the full significance of deification? Is the idea of becoming one with God only notional, or can a person actually become divine? If so, how precisely can that occur? Do themes

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15 I recognize that here I am importing a potentially anachronistic and unintentionally polemical construction, as the patristic literature of hesychasm does not use ‘person’ to denote the one undergoing deification. However, because I am retrieving deification systematically and constructively, and because
of participation and perfection describe whatever it is that deification names? Who decides what ‘counts’ as deification? To try to name, delineate, and lay claim to the idea of deification immediately drops one within a complicated, many-layered debate holding various levels of freight within as many theological contexts. To address those questions, some, however generously-conceived, boundaries must shape the concept.

B. What is Deification, Anyway?

I view the major deification questions as two interlocking concerns: **one**, to what extent and how does deification unite the person with God; and **two**, how does this union, whatever it consists of, actually take place such that the person and God remain distinct from each other? A little help from Kathryn Tanner’s 1988 groundbreaking work *God and Creation in Christian Theology* clarifies the significance of these two boundaries. Tanner advanced the claim that modern theology has largely lost the ability to speak of God and creation in the ways the earlier traditions required as they distinguished themselves from Hellenistic conceptions. A thorough discussion and evaluation of her arguments is not required for my purposes; an overview suffices.

Tanner points out how divinity in the Hellenistic context referred to “a kind of being distinct from others within the matrix of the same cosmos…that which is most powerful, self-sufficient and unchanging among beings.” Christian claims affirm instead that God is indeed involved with the world but at an even deeper level: as the

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always using “the one being deified,” “the creature,” or “the human being deified” fairly quickly contorted grammar, I employ a range of terms to designate the ones participating in and becoming like God. See also my return to this topic in chapter five.

creator who most intimately knows and powers all that exists while at the same time transcending it. While these affirmations clash for Hellenism and often appear to clash for contemporary Christian thought, Tanner shows that the Christian God, “as transcendent, is beyond…relations of identity or opposition.” She demonstrates how early Christian discourse centered the incarnation in order to speak of God’s distinction from creation as not one of “simple opposition to change…[but] so as to allow for God’s entering into relation with the creature under all possible circumstances without danger of compromising the divine nature.”

She summarizes her points in the following two rules:

1) “avoid both a simple univocal attribution of predicates to God and world and a simple contrast of divine and non-divine predicates.” These standards generate the rule to speak of “God’s transcendence beyond both identity and opposition with the non-divine.”

2) “avoid in talk about God’s creative agency all suggestions of limitation in scope or manner” which means we must speak so as to make clear “God’s creative agency as immediate and universally extensive.”

Tanner includes diverse examples of ways early and modern theologians, even when typically considered as disagreeing, actually keep these proper rules of theological discourse.

At the same time, Tanner points out the need to discipline talk of creaturely efficacy according to these rules for speech about God’s transcendence. Here, she traces a number of important distinctions; chief among them for my purposes are the need to speak of the power, operation, and efficacy of created beings as dependent upon divine agency. God’s agency remains primary; creaturely agency represents secondary

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17 Tanner, *God and Creation in Christian Theology*, 57.
18 Tanner, *God and Creation in Christian Theology*, 57, discussing Tertullian and Irenaeus.
20 Tanner, *God and Creation in Christian Theology*, 47.
21 See her examples in *God and Creation in Christian Theology*, 56-80 as well as her section on creaturely capacity 104-19, the latter of which we will examine below.
causality. God “directly founds and sustains a created being in its power, operations and actual production of created effects.” Thus, God’s agency neither adds on to creaturely efficacy nor combines with it to make a third-order agency. So, while creatures affect one another, only God effects their actions to bring for their operations “by working interiorly, in their depths.” Finally, one could say that God is affected or determined by creaturely actions, but only insofar as this connotes the “complex creative intention” by which God self-determines.

Tanner’s discussion hints at problems we will soon uncover in greater detail. The boundary lines for Christian doctrine noted above must apply to any construction of theosis. As various models of deification try to keep both those rules in tension, each has to construct a sort of teeter-totter or pendulum. They must consider how their iteration of theosis keeps to the rules in three arenas: first, the divine locus of deification—how to describe the divine with whom the person is united; second, the human side—what conditions make up the creature’s capacity to unite with God; and third, the teeter-totter or pendulum itself—how to name and understand the ways God acts within creation. The deification paradigm tends to either wobble dangerously close to major boundaries in Christian thought, or simply falls apart while in use. I will now illustrate the difficulties by explaining each of these three areas.

1. Union with the Self-Determined Transcendent God

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As Michael Christensen points out, the crux of the dilemmas raised by *theosis* centers on the ability to adequately describe how a created being enjoys union with God. Though deification depends for its coherence upon the distinction between God and creation (or else no such doctrine would be either possible or necessary), how does the doctrine maintain this distinction? The distinction holds both promise and challenge, as it remains at one and the same time both the condition for deification and its apparent undoing. The tension inherent to the doctrine leads to a quest for balance.

Is the idea of becoming one with God only notional, or can a person actually become divine? If so, how? For if ontological difference does not obtain between God and the creature, union with the divine would not actually change her. But if this ontological difference remains final, then full deification appears an overstatement. From one angle, then, deification’s apparent abolition of the difference between divine and human raises questions for conceptions of God. How does a divinized person remain a creature and not transgress the divine prerogative? How can *theosis* work such that the primacy and alterity of God may be retained without violating the rules Tanner argues should govern Christian theology? In her words, the divine prerogative might make deification possible, since:

> [f]ar from appearing to be incompatible with it, a non-contrastive transcendence of God suggests an extreme of divine involvement with the world…A God who genuinely transcends the world must not be characterized, therefore, by a direct contrast with it.

As she explains,

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“[t]o suppose otherwise and attempt to secure God against a direct relation with creation is to suggest that God is finite, on the same level with things that can be altered by interaction and conditioned by external circumstance...God, as transcendent, is beyond those relations of identity or opposition, and is therefore not to be characterized in terms of particular natures in contrast to others.”

Tanner positively evaluates Thomas’ theology as instancing her rules in company with more contemporary theologians (such as Karl Barth and Karl Rahner). She writes,

[b]ecause it is not based essentially on an opposition with the non-divine, this radical transcendence of God can be exercised in both God’s otherness over and against the world and God’s immanent presence within it. A self-determined transcendence does not limit God’s relation with the world to one of distance. A radical transcendence does not exclude God’s positive fellowship with the world or presence within it...God’s transcendence alone is one that may be properly exercised in the radical immanence by which God is said to be nearer to us than we are to ourselves.

Though overall Tanner spends more time with representatives of Western Christian thought who exemplify these rules of speech about God’s transcendence, she considers the essence-energies distinction of hesychast theology equivalent.

Nevertheless, how precisely deification takes place remains open for debate. In Vladimir Lossky’s words defending a hesychast approach,

[i]f we were able at a given moment to be united to the very essence of God and to participate in it even in the very least degree, we should not at the moment be what we are, we should be God by nature. God would then no longer be Trinity...He [sic] would have as many hypostases as there would be persons participating in His essence.

For Lossky, if deification entails unfettered access to God in the totality of the divine nature, it would cast God as obliterating the distinction between divinity and humanity. Its referent and source destroyed, the doctrine then loses any meaning it may hold for human ontology. One may say as Louth does that God meets humanity in the

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29 Tanner, *God and Creation in Christian Theology*, 57, also on Tertullian and Irenaeus.
31 For Palamas, see Tanner, *God and Creation in Christian Theology*, 37N3 (174); for Aquinas, see 60-4 and 71-6.
Incarnation, but as that connection is forged through the Person of the Son, one of the three hypostases of the Trinity, how such a meeting of divine and human can be said to take place in created beings remains unclear.

2. Creaturely Capacity

Therefore, from another angle, the deification paradox concerns the creature’s capacity for deification. Is a person created with the ability to transcend her creaturely status, or does deification import something other into her existence? The situation might seem to be as Anthony Baker puts it: “[c]reatures are either ordered to union with their creator, which must annihilate them as creatures, or towards perfection of their created nature, a perfection which must remain immanent to createdness itself.” Then can there exist a created thing that can be brought to possess godliness? If a person undergoes such change, does she not then immediately cease being a creature? How could creaturehood persist through deification? But on the other hand, if creaturehood entails a core capacity for perfection—if perfection is somehow the natural end of the creature—how could creaturely perfection be cast in terms of union with God and not just as the result of a creaturely process? A person could become perfect, but only within the creaturely realm; she cannot really become divine, or she loses her humanity.

For her part, Tanner charges that deification denies creaturely powers and agency \textit{qua} created. If this negation occurs, it violates her rules, making creaturely action “simply the occasion for God’s own creative action…The creature becomes an empty

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33 Louth, “The Place of \textit{Theosis} in Orthodox Thought,” 34.
shell for an exercise of divine power.”  

 Such language excludes genuine created efficacy as an effect of God’s agency, which to the contrary “does not require any denial of the creature whose being is constituted in dependence” upon God. 

 Ostensibly for this reason, Tanner advocates avoiding speech where creation participates in divinity. She follows these points up with a notice that adherence to her rules helps the theologian “prevent any suggestion of a divinization of the creature and consequent loss of the creature’s own integrity.” In avoiding those implications, she notes, theologians might do well to over-emphasize one side of her rules for proper theological speech. She approvingly cites Thomas:

 [s]uch reasons may be behind Thomas’s insistence, for example, that God’s saving agency directly issues in a new created habitus: an infused created habit sufficient for further increases in the gifts of God’s grace heads off the idea that God’s power becomes the creature’s own, and makes clear that human free will unrevised by grace is not a principle factor in God’s salvation of us. 

 Thus, it seems deification would overstep Tanner’s boundaries. Nevertheless, hesychast theology and its essence-energies distinction, which she approves, began as a way to explain how theosis takes place. And if her first rule holds, that divine self-determination and transcendence entails no limits to God’s intimate involvement in creation, why couldn’t deification simply describe that interplay? Is there a way to address her concerns while still keeping both her rules?

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36 Tanner, God and Creation in Christian Theology, 86. Her later discussion of the Banez-Molina controversy is helpful: if God’s sovereignty requires the inadequacy of created causes, this calls divine transcendence into question. Instead, divine agency must be said to ground the creature’s “own self-initiated acts” (148).

37 Tanner, God and Creation in Christian Theology, 87.

38 Tanner, God and Creation in Christian Theology, 86.

39 Tanner, God and Creation in Christian Theology, 118.

40 Tanner, Ibid.
3. **Naming God’s Action in Creation**

As if these difficulties were not enough, they also lead to the third aspect of any attempt to claim deification as a Christian doctrine, namely how it could take place. How should God’s action in creation be understood? What model of divine action maintains both sheer divine transcendence alongside creaturely capacity for union with God while destroying neither God nor the person? How can deification be said to take place without violating the distinction between God and humanity and thus rendering the doctrine moot? Can the distinction between God and the creature be plumbed even through the process of deification?

In fact, though deification currently enjoys special remark, its most contested element remains this third notion: how union with God may take place such that it fulfills both the other requirements. How can theology render divine action that brings the person brought into transformative union with God without either encroaching upon the divine prerogative or destroying her own humanity? An impetus to maintain the distinction between God and creature through the processes of deification gives rise to varying descriptions of *theosis* that each come accompanied by a vehement argument seeking to establish its exclusive correct hold on doctrine. One can discern underneath the presenting issues the presence of deification’s core tension my rickety seesaw or off-balance pendulum. The problem primarily concerns bodies and the contingencies of matter. Here, the two most developed models of *theosis*—the essence-energies distinction and the indwelling of the person by grace—dramatically oppose each other precisely in terms of embodiment.
In the Orthodox legacies of hesychasm, in order to explain how divine presence suffuses bodies, the commitment to divine self-determination as the ground of all being in which all creatures participate for their existence and perfection comes with the essence-energies distinction. Recall Lossky’s concern that creaturely full union with God’s essence would increase God’s hypostases; thus he promotes Palamas’ essence-energies distinction to describe how deification takes place without violating God’s divinity:

[w]e are compelled to recognize in God an ineffable distinction, other than that between [God’s] essence and [God’s] persons, according to which [God] is, under different aspects, both totally inaccessible and at the same accessible. This distinction is that between the essence of God, or [the divine] nature, properly co-called, which is inaccessible, unknowable and incommunicable; and the energies or divine operations, forces proper to and inseparable from God’s essence, in which [God] goes forth from [God’s] self, manifests, communicates, and gives [God’s] self.41

As knowledge of Eastern Orthodoxy in the West dramatically increased due to the flood of refugees departing war and communism in Russia and Eastern Europe and ecumenical efforts got underway, Lossky and others successfully popularized the essence-energies distinction.42 Modern champions of the distinction take their cue from the theology of Gregory Palamas and support their claims with discussions of the dynamics of

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participation in antique philosophy. Additionally, others arguing for the essence-energies distinction suggest that there may be a difference between the theology espoused by Palamas and the ways Palamas has been pressed into service by neo-hesychasts. Several voices continue to champion Palamas’ understanding of deification as the original, correct manner of describing *theosis.* Ben Blackwell, for instance, claims the essence-energies distinction as support for his essential-attributive distinction, stating that the difference between essence and energies was posited in order to “roundly refute” essential deification.

Theologians such as David Bentley Hart and Jeffery Finch use Thomas Aquinas to argue passionately that the hesychast rendition verges on the illogical. In Thomism, a commitment to the self-determined divine transcendence privileges the soul removed from the body after death as that state of humanity that can attain the closest imitation of God. Hart thus argues that to posit the existence of the energies that are called


44 See, for instance, Marcus Plested, “‘Light from the West’: Byzantine Readings of Aquinas,” *Orthodox Constructions of the West,* ed. George E. Demacopoulos and Aristotle Papanikolaou (New York: Fordham University Press, 2013), 58-70, where he brings to light Yannaras’ critique of neo-Palamism. See also John Panteleimon Manoussakis’ critique of neo-Palamism in chapter four of his *For the Unity of All: Contributions to the Theological Dialogue between East and West* (Eugene, OR: Cascade/Wipf & Stock, 2015), 61-62, especially 61N22. Nevertheless, both of these instances continue to refer to Palamism, albeit a more historically and ecumenically approached Palamism, as a more authentic Orthodox rendering of deification.

simultaneously ‘not God’ and ‘wholly God’ endangers the coherence of any notion of
*theosis*: either creatures have access to God’s very ‘self,’ or they can participate only in
some diminished form of God.\(^{46}\) From Finch: “[I]f the will/energies are not involved in
the inner life of the Trinity, then how can anything be predicated of that life, since the
neo-Palamites insist that only the energies of God are knowable or communicable?”\(^{47}\)

Hart and Finch focus on grace as that which opens up the divine life to the participation
of created beings. Uncreated grace, the gift of God offered to those who do not and
cannot earn it, divinizes the person in a created way that elevates human nature to receive
grace’s effects. Deification, or more precisely, beatitude, then entails constructing
creaturely imitations of the perfect, uncreated divine nature.\(^{48}\)

Responding to these, what he takes to be fallacious western views of deification,
Christos Yannaras insists upon the essence-energies conception. He claims,

> [t]he theology of the undivided Church (the possibility for our approach to the knowledge
of God) is founded on the ontological differentiation of the ‘essence’ of God from the
energies of God. The distinction goes back to, and is presupposed in, every aspect of
Greek patristic literature…and constitutes the most striking difference between ecclesial
theology and the religionized metaphysics of the Western European tradition…The
energies represent the possibility for the imparticipable and incommunicable divine
‘essence’ to offer itself as willing personal communion.\(^{49}\)

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46 David Bentley Hart, “The Hidden and the Manifest: Metaphysics after Nicaea,” 111-131 in *The
Hidden and the Manifest: Essays in Theology and Metaphysics* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2017), an
edited and revised version of “The Hidden and the Manifest: God and ‘Being’ (with special reference to
Augustine and Gregory of Nyssa),” lecture given at Calvin College, November 5, 2007,
http://www.calvin.edu/faith/discipleship/fac_events/2007-2008/A14420-Hart-
Hidden%20Manifest%20God.mp3, link now dead.

47 Jeffrey Finch, “Neo-Palamism, Divinizing Grace, and the Breach Between East and West,” 233-
249 in *Partakers of the Divine Nature*, at 238.

48 See Finch, “Neo-Palamism,” 240-44.

The essence-energies distinction appears to safeguard God from the change induced by human participation, with Yannaras and Lossky postulating an imparticipable God only communed with by creatures through the created yet divine energies.

Hart and Finch seek to unseat this argument by questioning what the essence-energies distinction does to divine simplicity. Yet the uncreated-created grace distinction upon which they rely, appearing to safeguard humanity from being lost in deification, also produces serious liabilities. Deification cannot actually take place if the person only receives something created in this life. Here, Lossky’s and Yannaras’ approaches also hold purchase, because they try to maintain a possibility for the creature to actually unite with God in this life.

In hesychasm, God’s radical otherness from and extreme availability to creation appears to need to be protected by distinguishing between who God is and what God does. In Thomism, God’s radical otherness from creation appears to need to be protected by restricting divine availability to the uncreated life of the soul available after death. One can see how hesychasts view Thomism as bouncing the person off the deification pendulum entirely, while Thomists view hesychasm as tumbling God down onto the creaturely side.

4. Elusive Consensus

Is one version of theosis more authentic than any other, either historically or theologically? Are there certain formulations or traditions of the idea that can or should be corrected? Differences in describing the doctrine quite often serve as rationalization to render other perspectives illegitimate. A solution to the question of how to construct a
theotic ontology remains elusive. We can see how these concerns fold into one another with a quick return to how the specific deification nodes connect with Tanner’s rules. Then I give a brief overview of additional attempts to address these issues before I introduce the constructive approach of this project.

Tanner argues that modernity creates pressures that break down theological discourse to an extent previously unprecedented. She may be right to highlight the preponderance of more recent challenges to a non-competitive divine transcendence and immanence, but her take may also prove overly optimistic in its treatment of earlier theology. If Tanner can see clearly how both Thomas and Palamas are keeping to the rules of Christian speech about God’s transcendence, why did their immediate contexts not grasp this and why do their modern advocates still find each other’s models wanting? And how can she approve hesychasm but disapprove of its theotic goals? The gaps between Thomism and hesychasm we have briefly surveyed reveal that difficulties applying the rules of proper Christian speech may represent not a new phenomenon but rather an ongoing struggle. In other words, while Tanner especially roots issues in certain late antique or early modern tendencies as exemplified in Gabriel Biel, whence originated Biel’s take? I suggest that the modern developments Tanner decries run throughout the full scope of Christian theology, as even her chapter on the problems of modernity acknowledges.50 Taking all of these considerations into account, I ask whether struggles to properly speak of divine transcendence and human agency may run further back than Tanner is willing to admit. If I am right that some ambiguity already exists within both

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50 See Tanner’s references in God and Creation in Christian Theology to problems in Christian engagement with Platonism, Pelagianism, and so on at 117-8, and her account of Biel at 132-62.
Thomas and Palamas, then difficulties in adhering to rules of Christian discourse persist as a perennial tension.

None of the above material should be taken as impetus to downgrade Tanner’s warnings or to overlook her prescriptions for better discourse. Theological discourse ought to heed her proposals. But it may wish to do so with the important addendum that struggles to speak correctly of divine transcendence’s relation to creaturely agency remain perennial. It might chasten various traditions’ willingness to view the ‘other’ as the problem and instead help them to enact curiosity towards proposals that deviate from the norm of their own ranks’ cherished accounts of how God relates with creation.

Both models of deification assert the radical transcendence of God Tanner celebrates, but each also continues to build in conditions for its theology of perfection that strongly appear to the other to set up a competitive relation between creation, and especially contingent bodies, and the divine self-determined transcendence. So, whether theology claims that both sides originally display tendencies to violate or overstate the rules of divine and creaturely agency, or if it instead maintains that they simply misread one another as doing so, the end result remains roughly the same. Whether they outright violate the rules or whether they are simply articulating opposite sides of the rules without adequately taking stock of each rule’s reverse, they have not developed consonant ways to speak. I think it is fair to summarize that while both sets of ‘Eastern’ and ‘Western’ sources I have investigated do in places properly speak of divine and creaturely agency, their inability to recognize those efforts in each other demonstrates how fraught these discussions have always been. Even in an age of ecumenical dialogue, how we speak of theosis remains determined by centuries of ecclesial division that persist
in an inability to find a common way to speak of a supposedly foundational doctrine. Before I delve deeper into this point, a brief detour is necessary.

One attempted solution, typically stemming from Protestant quarters, simply argues against all notions of deification. The difficulties in crafting a coherent model give rise to a conviction that in itself, the very idea oversteps Christian bounds. I will now briefly explore two representative proposals from this larger cluster of perspectives to show that they, too, cannot quite resolve the problems deification raises—and, further, they violate Tanner’s rules.

II. Eliminating Theosis?

Given the recent rise of interest in theosis, especially in contexts beyond its more traditional Eastern Orthodox and Catholic frameworks, attempts to develop an ecumenically coherent version of the doctrine need to take seriously the plethora of resources offered by an influx of serious treatments from other voices in the field. Emphases generated by new angles of inquiry may plausibly offer reframing that could redirect the theme across its multiple ecclesial applications. In this section, I briefly investigate two of these new, typically Protestant, lines of analysis to determine what they add to the deification discussion. Recalling deification as a three-fold problem, each of these tactics tries to solve the metaphysical issues at hand by limiting the third loci: the scope of divine action in the world. The first approach actually comprises a cluster of modern treatments suggesting that the conundrum of divine action in creation may be resolved by focusing more on christology. Christ as the union without intermixing of the divine and human offers a new starting point for deification. The other revision turns to
exploring the role of deification language as metaphorical. If *theosis* should properly be understood to use and develop theological language in a non-literal manner, this, also, could revise the doctrine’s sticking points. Both of these proposed solutions correctly pick up on themes already present in both traditional lines of theological reasoning.

I now describe these efforts before showing why, despite the gains they do offer, they ultimately do not resolve deification’s metaphysical conundrums. This explanation, focusing on how metaphors function in religious language and communities, helps clear the ground for what I propose to undertake in the rest of this project: create a new model of deification that is explicitly ecumenically-derived as well as metaphysically coherent.

A. Attempts at Christological Solutions

The question of what takes place in deification without constricting either person or God finds considerable consensus when examined as a function of christology. This is no surprise when one considers the sixth century definition quoted above: if deification comprises likeness to and union with God, where else does Christian theology root such likeness and union than in the incarnate person of the Son, whose perfect human nature models sanctified human life for his followers? A christological center for deification rings throughout the biblical sources, with Pauline and deutero-Pauline literature sounding rich themes of participatory union with Christ, particularly in seeking virtue and bearing suffering. This christification grants believers adoption as co-heirs of God.51 Scholarship on 2 Peter illustrates a similar focus on sharing divine nature through

knowing and emulating Christ as the image of divine righteousness, power, glory, virtue, and incorruptibility.\textsuperscript{52}

Likewise, the patristic traditions on deification stress conformity to Christ as the heart of the matter: see, for instance, Irenaeus’ discussion of the Incarnation creating a communion between God and humanity so that all may participate in Christ’s own incorruptibility.\textsuperscript{53} Origen’s remarks that Christ’s followers, by pressing close to him, may share in the wisdom and virtue that belong properly to Christ like bodies absorb an ointment,\textsuperscript{54} and Athanasius’s restatement of the Irenaean exchange formula such that the Son who shares out of his own “presence and love” his image with humanity becomes precisely the key for redeeming that humanity into union with God.\textsuperscript{55}

Cyril of Alexandria’s analysis of 2 Peter 1:4 in his commentary on the Gospel of John describes Christ as a “frontier” between divinity and humanity who offers relation to the Father even as he relates divinity to human beings.\textsuperscript{56} Similarly, Gregory of Nazianzus acclaims the humanity of Christ as that which, mingled with his divinity, makes it possible for persons to receive deification through baptism.\textsuperscript{57} The salvific nature of the mingling or mixing of Christ’s humanity by his divinity receives additional treatment in Gregory of Nyssa, particularly as he describes the benefits of the


sacraments. Finally, in Maximus the Confessor, the christological locus of deification means that God can be seen as a paradigm of humanity—so long as the person engages in contemplative and rational pursuit of the virtues, particularly love. Love makes God “humanized” and makes the person “deified.”

An emphasis on Christ’s constitution of deification does not wane with the early sources. Williams notes that for Aquinas, deification describes the analogical relationship of the person adopted by grace to share in the divine relationship of the Son with the Father: “in the person of the Word, then, the Trinity in its entirety and creation in its entirety meet and converge.” The Word, as the One by whom the Father understands Godself and the world, expresses both world and Trinity to each other. Therefore, union with God “is expressed most fully in the person of Christ,” where sanctification is modeled by the participation of his human nature in his divine nature. In her treatment of Palamas, Williams focuses on how deification effects the person’s ability to see God, as rooted in the Transfiguration. Here, the figure of Christ visibly manifests God’s glory while hinting at the greater vision of God’s glories in the hereafter. God’s glory is given to humanity in Christ, but also through Christ to his followers. Nevertheless, the glory received or even seen within the self remains Christ’s, of divine origin. Such glory is shared out in the human bodies of Christ’s disciples because it has been received and held by Christ’s own humanity.

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63 Williams, *The Ground of Union*, 112.
64 Williams, *The Ground of Union*, 118-119.
Still closer to the modern debates, scholars such as Myk Habets and Carl Mosser find ways to lift up deification’s christocentricity within the Reformed traditions. Mosser’s early article focuses on deification in John Calvin’s commentaries on 2 Peter 1:4, John 17, Psalm 82:6 in John 10:34-35, and 1 John 3:2.65 Mosser shows how Calvin emphasizes the need for a mediator in order for humanity to enjoy fellowship with God: not just human sinfulness but also the lowliness of the human state in general prevent us from reaching God.66 His more recent piece on Calvin and deification painstakingly refutes mischaracterizations of the Reformer as opposed to deification, arguing that Calvin’s polemics concerned losing human identity to become equal with God.67

This Reformed emphasis on the radical discontinuity between God and humanity echoes in Habets: “[o]nly by means of the Incarnation does God join men and women to his Son in order for them to enjoy the benefits of salvation…The sole access to the Father is through Christ the Son.”68 Habets believes a difference obtains between deification as divinizing human nature and a Reformed understanding of theosis as recreating humanity in a sinless manner. He argues that divinized humanity belongs to Christ alone, although Christ’s followers can participate in Christ, and through him, enjoy fellowship with the Trinity.69 For Habets, a vocabulary of theosis can be retained if defined by christological

66 Mosser, “The Greatest Possible Blessing,” 42.
68 Habets, “Reformed Theosis,” 490.
terms. He counsels jettisoning deification.\textsuperscript{70} For his part, Mosser keeps deification and related terms while differentiating earlier formulations of theopoiesis from later Byzantine constructions of theosis.\textsuperscript{71}

Though a focus on the christocentric nature of deification seems at first potential grounds for a convergence of viewpoints among the scholars writing on deification today, even here such possibilities quickly give rise to controversies stemming from how any given tradition approaches Christ. A quick recall of the differing metaphysics of Protestant, Catholic, and Orthodox ecclesial structures simply in regards to sacraments suffices to prove the point. Moreover, the significance of Christ’s deified humanity may prove to be something all commentators find essential for salvation, but how each tradition sees that deified humanity necessarily affects how each will cast theosis. The three loci of deification loom unresolved. For divine self-determination, how should Christ’s perfect humanity be considered to relate with his divine nature? Can they be separated from each other? For creaturely capacity, how and to what extent does a person share in Christ’s deified human nature? Does her deification concern a supernatural change to her person granted by Christ, or only her union with the deified humanity of Christ? Again, taking refuge in the Incarnation does not solve this dilemma, for humanity is not divine as Christ is—and if one shares in his divinity, how does such transformation take place? Even if we grant sharing in Christ’s divinity, through a variety of ecclesial mediations, what does either option do to humanity? And how does this process,

\textsuperscript{70} For similar concerns, see again Bruce L. McCormack, “Participation, Yes, Deification, No.” J. Todd Billings’ work is generally very careful to use language of participation to describe Calvin’s perspective rather than that of deification, although he does not make the value judgments about deification that Habets and McCormack do.

\textsuperscript{71} See Mosser, “An Exotic Flower,” 38N2, and 43-44. He also helpfully refrains from passing judgment on the difference between these two strands of thought.
whatever it is said to be and however it is agreed to take place, relate the created person with the uncreated God? What actually can properly be said to take place in theosis?

B. “Only a Metaphor”?

A second Protestant approach to resolving deification tries to get underneath these controversies by analyzing how theological language works and then relativizing theosis claims. I will quickly overview Normal Russell’s conceptual models of deification before showing how Ben Blackwell makes use of Russell’s categories in his attempted resolution of theotic difficulties. This approach helps sharpen the questions of how deification may or may not take place and offers examples of ways in which differing systems of thought on theosis set the stage for its retrieval.

I begin with Russell, whose discussion lays out three ways in which deification language was used by the Fathers: nominally, analogically, and metaphorically. The nominal use of deification simply applies an honorific to a person of high repute, while the analogical can be seen in statements attributing divinity to human beings as a relative state of being. Christ remains the only human being who may rightfully be described with the language of deification. Others may be considered gods in a relative manner of speaking, related to God through the grace given by the Son. Russell’s schematization considers the metaphorical to hold more complicated conceptions of deification. Here, a person’s likeness to God through ascetic endeavors of imitation is considered an ethical usage of theosis language, while the sense that the person can actually be described as

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72 Mosser’s own forthcoming study, the scope and trajectory of which is hinted at in “An Exotic Flower,” and in his 2015 Leuven address, promises to provide an excellent addition here, but as it is being produced concurrently with this study, I cannot refer to it here.
transformed Russell names realistic. Russell links the analogical, ethical, and realistic models of deification as “a continuum rather than…radically different.” Russell distinguishes two different senses of the realistic use of deification language: the ontological, which consists of human nature’s transformation by the principle of the Incarnation, and the dynamic, in which the person receives deified humanity through the sacraments. In a final twist, Russell describes the analogical, ethical, and both realistic models of deification as “a continuum rather than…radically different,” then claims that Cyril of Alexandria and Maximus the Confessor most thoroughly synthesize the realistic and ethical models. Figure 1 below describes these types, moving from most figurative senses on the right to most literal senses on the left.

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77 The chart is the author’s own, representing Russell, *Doctrine of Deification*, 1-3.
Many of the Protestant theologians seeking to reclaim deification themes argue that only the analogical and ethical-metaphorical understandings can be maintained. They find realistic deification, in either of its types, too radical. Referencing Russell, both Ben Blackwell and Paul Collins refer to deification as a metaphor in the introductions to their studies. Collins accepts Russell’s description as well as his ethical-realistic distinction, and indeed continues to refer to deification as metaphor throughout his study. He notes the “ontological concern about the difference between or potential merging of the created and uncreated orders of difference,”78 and at one point cites Russell’s identification of deification as metaphor in order to question Lossky’s “realistic and ontological

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understanding of deification.” For Collins, Russell’s classification of deification as metaphor best accomplishes “understanding the goal and outcome of the divine purposes in creating and redeeming.” Deification therefore “may include ontological claims, but such claims need to be made within a careful and nuanced framework.”

Ben Blackwell divides deification between memorial uses (corresponding most closely with Russell’s nominal or analogical sense) and ontological uses. He subdivides the ontological type of deification into attributive deification (Russell’s two metaphorical senses) and essential deification (Russell’s two realist senses). Attributive deification works much the same for Blackwell as for Russell; he adopts a distinction between a person’s likeness to God and participation in God that corresponds to Russell’s ethical and realist demarcations. Like Russell, he notes that these types do not mutually exclude each other.

However, Blackwell jettisons Russell’s division of the realist sense into ontological and dynamic. To him, essential deification considers the person to either share “ontologically in the essence of the divine” or to “contain a divine element within” the self. To maintain an ontological distinction between creature and Creator, he thus prefers the memorial and attributive senses. Although he admits that this distinction at times breaks down, he still considers both these forms of deification different from a deification achieved by participating in divinity.

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84 Blackwell, *Christosis*, 104.
Attributive deification is thus best described as a metaphor, Blackwell states, claiming support from Russell’s use of ‘metaphorical’ to classify his ethical and realist types.\textsuperscript{86} He concludes, “[t]he choice of ‘metaphor’ is presumably used to guard against confusion with an essential deification.”\textsuperscript{87} Blackwell’s study concerns itself with maintaining this position, noting that any efforts to continue the distinction between God and humanity in a theology of deification must result in the attributive form. For him, only attributive deification can discharge modern—and, I would add, overwhelmingly Protestant—concerns to avoid a theology of \textit{theosis} that carries pantheistic tones.\textsuperscript{88}

In Paul, Irenaeus, and Cyril of Alexandria, Blackwell finds support for an attributive deification predicated upon the restoration of the person as image and likeness of God “through a participatory relationship with God mediated by Christ and the Spirit.”\textsuperscript{89} In his treatment, “[d]eified believers are ontologically transformed by the personal presence of the Spirit and therefore experience the divine attributes,” particularly immortality and sanctification.\textsuperscript{90} Such an understanding rules out “any hint of absorption” of the person into God or God into the person.\textsuperscript{91} Yet Blackwell also has to admit, “likeness and participation terminology is drawn from Plato and thus rightfully has affinity to essentialist deification positions as well.”\textsuperscript{92}

These treatments of \textit{theosis} raise significant questions in at least four important areas. One, do these takes risk fashioning polemical approaches predicated upon denying at least some of deification’s philosophical roots? Can whatever takes place in deification

\textsuperscript{86} Blackwell, \textit{Christosis}, 105.
\textsuperscript{87} Blackwell, \textit{Christosis}, 105.
\textsuperscript{88} Blackwell, \textit{Christosis}, 108.
\textsuperscript{89} Blackwell, \textit{Christosis}, 253.
\textsuperscript{90} Blackwell, \textit{Christosis}, 253.
\textsuperscript{91} Blackwell, \textit{Christosis}, 253. See also 267.
\textsuperscript{92} Blackwell, \textit{Christosis}, 105.
be reliably rendered if these earlier affinities are erased from its range of possibilities?

Two, behind these concerns with earlier descriptions of *theosis* lurk unfulfilled commitments to the rules of theological discourse Tanner elucidates. Worries over an ontological transformation of the person, her absorption of God, or God being shared out into creation trip over Tanner’s description of the non-competitive transcendence that marks the self-determined God. Thus, these approaches arguably violate her first rule, not only failing to solve the issues they find in older Christian traditions but also creating additional ones. Third, then, rushing too quickly past Russell’s classification of deification as a metaphor without examining what he means by this fails to actually resolve the very difficult metaphysical questions in play. I think these four theologians evince such tendencies when they overlook the tensions of deification that even their own descriptions invoke. Finally, they sidestep the ways that metaphors in general and as key components of religious language in particular construct realities. To better articulate deification today requires grasping the significance of the way language of *theosis* has functioned in the historical traditions. That work in turn demands a deeper consideration of the way theological language as a whole works.

**C. Metaphors All the Way Down**

I see a major problem that the Protestant appeals to christology and metaphor share: the gap between asserting a tenet of Christian theology or even describing its historical development and explaining why this must be so or how it ought to function today. In terms of christology, simply asserting that deification applies to the incarnate Son does not establish whether or to what extent Jesus’ followers may share in his perfect
humanity or access his divine nature. Likewise, with metaphor, while Russell is concerned with how deification language suggests ontological frameworks, he does so as a means of describing historical developments. His schema should not be hastily pressed into service as rationale for wholesale denial of some accounts of deification. This difference in motivation suggests a quite different role for his scholarship to play in contemporary reconstruction, best achieved by more careful attention to his stated purposes.

When Russell describes deification as a metaphor, he provides two rationales for that identification. One, that he does so in line with Janet Martin Soskice’s treatment of metaphor and religious language, and two, that Christian deification language begins as a metaphor but “matures” into a spiritual doctrine.\(^93\) The deification conversations cannot adequately take shape until they examine these two aspects of Russell’s work. I begin by giving a short overview of Soskice’s work.

Soskice shows that the difference between metaphoric and literal denotes a different “manner of expression” or usage, not a comment on truth or falsity: “[w]e do not imagine that there are two kinds of states of affairs, literal and metaphorical, but we do acknowledge that there may be two (or more) ways of expressing the same state of affairs.”\(^94\) Once an originally metaphorical usage becomes standard, or “lexicalized,” “it broadens out the accepted, dictionary definition of the term.”\(^95\) Here, the metaphor dies, or at least progresses towards ‘literal’ meaning. Soskice offers three ways to tell the difference between a dead metaphor and a living one: first, a living metaphor expresses

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\(^{93}\) See Russell, *Doctrine of Deification*, 2.


\(^{95}\) Soskice, *Metaphor and Religious Language*, 72.
“a dissonance or tension…whereby the terms of the utterance used seem not strictly appropriate to the topic at hand,” whereas a dead metaphor will not produce such tension; second, a living metaphor is not easily paraphrased whereas a dead one more fully “lends itself to direct and full paraphrase;” and third, a living metaphor connotes an original model while a dead metaphor’s “initial web of implications becomes, if not entirely lost, then difficult to recall.”

Soskice suggests that even if it is now a “dead” metaphor, a phrase holding a history of “metaphorical origin” should be labeled a metaphor.

Finally, she points out that attempts to determine “metaphorical” status often obscure the underlying issue of what a phrase does for a particular set of people: “[i]t is one’s metaphysics, not metaphor, which is at issue,” she clarifies. “To put it another way, the question is not simply whether we have a metaphor…or not, but what, if anything, the metaphor refers to or signifies.”

Whether or not one agrees with all of Soskice’s arguments, what matters here is that Russell lays claim to her treatment to justify his label of deification as metaphor. Note that Russell does not elaborate on his classification of deification as metaphor beyond his first few pages. His use may employ Soskice’s recommendation for classifying as metaphors even phrases that have accrued more literal common usage. It is also possible that when stating deification matures into doctrine, he means deification eventually ceases altogether to function metaphorically. It might be full lexicalization that Russell claims occurred to deification when he describes it as maturing with Maximus the Confessor and changing with the eventual Orthodox removal of both nominal and

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analogical usages. In either case, Russell’s entire study demonstrates that deification’s earlier, more strictly ‘metaphorical’ usages, the nominal and analogical types, do not exhaust the historical meanings of the idea.

To my second major concern with Protestant re-readings of *theosis*, even if Russell’s description of deification as metaphor can be taken as justification to confine the doctrine to a less ‘literal’ understanding, this does not solve the associated ontological issues. In the material above, Blackwell, Collins, and Habets each pay lip service to this strategy, although they struggle to consistently employ it. Habets clearly believes that human persons participate “in the divine being through the Son and by the Holy Spirit.” He also refers to the person enjoying fellowship with God by being granted access through the Son and Spirit, as well as to the person being ontologically changed by this redemption. It is not clear what this participation means and why it cannot be referred to using language of deification. Moreover, how does one distinguish an approved ‘ontological’ union of the human and divine as opposed to an unacceptable ‘metaphysical’ one? Blackwell’s discussion of the person’s ontological transformation into immortality and sanctification by the personal presence of the Spirit also begs questions. Meanwhile, Collins develops near the end of his book a rich discussion of deification worked out ecclesially through “a perichoretic and synergistic participation in the divine communion of love.” This participation towards which each person is called occurs by receiving the sacraments and by forming practical virtues—again, raising

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100 Habets, “Reforming *Theosis*,” 493.
101 Habets, “Reforming *Theosis*,” 493, 494-496.
102 See Habets, “Reforming *Theosis*,” 494.
questions as to why these (ostensibly real!) changes in the person ("synergistically"!) participating in God would not be considered ontological.

In each of these discussions that relies upon metaphor to relativize deification’s claims, we nevertheless find a defense of something clearly happening that transforms the person and the community. Unless we want to argue that this occurs in a separate, solely ‘spiritual’ ontological plane, metaphorical usage (however defined) cannot discharge the very real ontological questions associated with the activity (whatever we determine it is) of deification that unites without confusing (in whatever way we find theologically coherent) the created person with her uncreated transcendent God. In other words, the presence of deification themes in the very earliest theological language means that a pendulum of divine activity in creation already exists, and on it theology is already wobbling back and forth. As we have seen, that those wobbles create theological squabbles appears especially relevant for discussions of theosis. To move beyond the squabbles requires not a side-stepping of the issues but rather a headlong dive into them. An additional step requires peering more deeply into how metaphors and ecclesial communities develop in tandem.

D. Metaphors and Their Communities

Recent cognitive linguistics studies suggest that metaphors provide the building blocks scaffolding all the ways human beings speak and think. Metaphor does not represent a special instance of language but rather shape all language, identity, and culture. As Erin Kidd and Jakob Karl Rinderknecht cogently summarize George Lakoff

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and Mark Johnson, all human thinking and activity stems from “understanding and experiencing one kind of thing in terms of another.” Following Robert Masson in drawing together Lakoff and Johnson with physicist Alan Russell and religious scholar Mary Gerhart, Kidd and Rinderknecht explore how metaphoric expansion occurs when two concepts, each previously embedded within its own field of meaning, merge. Akin to the impact on language of Einstein’s work synthesizing electrodynamics with classical mechanics to advance theories of relativity, similar shifts occur in everyday life anytime we consider in light of new information something previously learned.

Sharpening Soskice’s descriptions, for Kidd and Rinderknecht, theology’s goal does not merely entail searching for a reality ‘beyond’ religious language or of sparking endless controversies over ‘literal’ versus ‘metaphorical’ constructions. Rather, theology considers how human beings describe and thus shape their lived experiences; there is no ‘metaphysics’ apart from metaphor. Therefore, even ‘nominal,’ ‘analogical,’ or ‘ethical’ uses of deification themes necessarily predicate its ‘realistic’ form. Describing a person becoming divine always connotes some bridge between God and creation. Though there is much they view differently, Soskice, Kidd and Rinderknecht, and Masson also at


times inhabit overlapping spaces. All attend to what any set of metaphors does for a particular community and how such sets develop.

In her closing defense of critical theological realism, from which Kidd and Rinderknecht would dissent, Soskice nevertheless hits on an insight they would all hold in common: “the importance to Christian belief of experience, community, and an interpretive tradition.” Experience matters for theological language, “for ultimately it is in experience that reference is grounded,” while community provides the context for the claims of each person who speaks theologically. Soskice stresses the need for accounts of theological language to take stock of how interpretive traditions connect their members to one another’s experiences and speech of God. Over time, and just as in any other community, a religious community uplifts and develops particular models or images. Or, as Kidd and Rinderknecht put it, “the human capacity for thinking about our world is both deeply enmeshed in particular times and places” such that “different communities have different maps for God. Theology must therefore attend not only to the fact that we map God but that we map God differently. Doing so requires considering the structures of our own theologies more seriously.”

These accounts of religious language dovetail with Russell’s study of the development of deification in particular: experiences of God expand the person’s and community’s language and imagery and give rise to complex traditions. Religious language accrues additional layers of meaning over time. In terms of deification, then, how any community disciplines its metaphors to shape its metaphysics of meaning in any

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109 Soskice, Metaphor and Religious Language, 149.
110 Soskice, Metaphor and Religious Language, 149.
111 Soskice, Metaphor and Religious Language, 149-161.
of the three *theotic* loci will pre-determine how it treats other models of deification. The questions deification raises persist, and they directly show up division. Understanding the classification of deification as metaphor, then, does not discharge the difficult questions provoked by the way early texts describe Christian salvation as the creature’s union with and likeness to God.

Of course, the debates could simply agree to part company: the Thomists keeping their use of beatitude to denote how they relate divine self-determination with creaturely capacity and the hesychasts sticking to the essence-energies distinction as the correct approach. However, acknowledging the role of metaphors in religious language pushes the student of *theosis* to question if different ecclesial emphases describing and performing deification could be reconsidered. The ecumenical contact and ensuing conversations detailed above provide evidence that hesychast, Thomist, and Protestant perspectives are already combining, challenging, and reshaping one another’s theologies. Given their ongoing encounters, there may be more the communities can say, especially if they more intentionally engage one another. Such a process can cultivate humility when encountering a different community’s model, promoting not only understanding but also potentially renewed consensus.113

### III. Engaging Deification’s Fault Lines

As the brief glimpses above have demonstrated, who defines deification generates substantial differences in how it may be said to take place. To reclaim deification is to debate deification. Any attempts to revitalize *theosis* cannot grapple with the doctrine as

if were a stand-alone, disembodied, objectively determined concept but must also wrestle with the conditions under which different iterations have developed. To construct a theology of deification does not entail throwing competing terms into a boxing ring but rather requires cross-immersion into the maps of the communities employing theotic language.

Moreover, if deification proves as essential to Christian theology as its original articulators argued, its three loci must be addressed—and because each one touches on how the others are framed, attempts to construct deification by isolating any one component will not do. Additionally, how these loci are defined and described pulls along the tradition’s own methods and reasons for disciplining its language and metaphysics as a container for its community’s lived experiences. Any treatment that does justice to deification’s comprehensive scope must consider how all these aspects can hold together. Therefore in this work, I employ multiple terms interchangeably: theosis, deification, and divinization; I include the Catholic framing of salvation as the distinction between created beatitude and the uncreated grace of the beatific vision; and I persist in drawing to the table the Protestants who at first blush disagree entirely with the idea. Approaching the problem in this way frames persisting disagreements less as debates to be won and more as a deep, multi-sourced well from which ecumenical consensus may be created.

A. Deification in Recent Literature

Several recent publications have brought deification and its attendant questions more clearly into theological discourse, highlighting not only the problems with defining
the doctrine but also how the various efforts to do so end up entrenching current ecclesial divides. Here, too, consensus at first appears nigh impossible.

For example, consider the reception of Williams’ *The Ground of Union*. Williams overviews deification in Thomas Aquinas and Gregory Palamas with an eye towards finding commonality on union with God as a means of creating union between the disparate Christian churches. She ultimately concludes that Thomas and Palamas do not, as is commonly assumed, differ on the basis of how theology relates to philosophical discoveries. She finds that their major difference consists of Palamas’ practice of using a plurality of images to illustrate God’s interactions with humanity while Thomas focuses on intellect and will as the major structuring principles for theology. Therefore, she proposes that doctrines of *theosis* in these two representatives of major ecclesial traditions do not contradict each other as much as their later adherents have believed them to do; a foundation for union, both with God and between the Roman Catholics and the Eastern Orthodox, can now be constructed from these two theologians’ works.

In response, other recent work has questioned Williams’ findings, particularly as they figure within the contemporary surge of interest in deification. Gösta Hallonsten, for instance, focuses on a distinction between themes of participation in God, which makes appearances throughout Christian history, and the full-fledged doctrine of deification in the East, which encompasses the entire economy of salvation within an overarching, holistic approach. He binds together under *theosis* the treatment of creation,

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anthropology, Incarnation, soteriology, ecclesiology, and sacramentology.115 This leads him to claim that the former approach applies to Thomas while the latter appears in Palamas. Therefore, in his view, Williams’ treatment conflates two incommensurate stances.116

These points are echoed in Paul Gavrilyuk’s late 2009 article, which points out that despite her laudable motivation to help foster rapprochement between East and West, Williams’ conclusions may be undermined by her loose definition of deification.117 Gavrilyuk predicts that a retrieval of the doctrine may bring the East and the West closer together, but he also stresses that fulfilling these expectations for union may prove elusive so long as imprecision governs discussion of deification’s hallmarks.118 In fact, longer-term misunderstandings and ecumenical failure may ensue. For Gavrilyuk, despite the growing interest in theosis as an ecumenical vehicle, caution requires the doctrine to be carefully treated before it may sustain such a weighty expectation.

Nevertheless, the question remains: carefully treated by whom? What will count as a careful treatment? Does congruence necessitate an entirely identical discipline of metaphors? Additional recent works trying to speak of deification in ecumenically-charitable ways display similar conundrums.

Russell’s 2004 monograph traces in a broad-ranging overview Greek patristic deification terms and concepts from Greco-Roman texts on apotheosis through Jewish

116 Hallonsten, “Theosis in Recent Research: A Renewal of Interest and a Need for Clarity,” 282-83.
paradigms to the Christian neo-Platonist development of the model of participatory union with Christ. His treatment includes glances at later treatments of deification up through Gregory Palamas, with brief discussions of modern approaches to deification and the role the doctrine plays in the early Latin and Syriac traditions. His text offers the best accessible survey of the historical and theological aspects of the doctrine, and it will provide crucial building block for my argument. Helpfully, he also suggests that the doctrine’s development cannot be said to be ‘owned’ by any one tradition: deification themes and building blocks can be traced to early Christian readings of the Hebrew Bible, and the contributions to its development range across ‘eastern’ and ‘western’ lines in the earliest Christian theologians. Russell’s treatment of the eventual rise of the ethical and realistic approaches as well as his inclusion of several ‘western’ theologians’ perspectives, allow for a potential identification of common themes of participation found throughout early Christian theology while also clearing the ground for an irenic problematization of deification. However, Russell’s analysis of modern interpreters concerns almost exclusively Eastern Orthodox formulations. Systematic consideration of the methods or logic at play in modern uses of the doctrine is truncated at best, as the brevity of his exploration of deification as metaphor already demonstrates.

Baker Academic’s 2008 compilation, Partakers of the Divine Nature, gathers material on deification from a variety of ecclesial perspectives on several historical periods, ranging from Andrew Louth’s defense of the doctrine to articles delineating theosis in New Testament literature, in Ephrem of Syria, in the Cappadocians and

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119 Also of interest is Jules Gross, La Divinisation du Chrétien d’après les Pères grec; Contribution historique à la doctrine de grace (Paris: Gabalda, 1938; trans. Paul A. Onica as The Divinisation of the Christian According to the Greek Fathers [Anaheim, CA: A & C Press, 2000]).

Maximus the Confessor, and even in medieval and reformation theology. The volume concludes with a few essays on *theosis* in modern thought, including Francis J. Caponi’s work on deification in Rahner and Jeffrey Finch’s questioning of the essence-energies distinction. Though Finch and Caponi begin to address the question of how deification works, neither of them develops a comprehensive logic for the doctrine, nor does either of them suggest how their approach might be harmonized with the concerns raised by those championing the essence-energies distinction.121

It is at this point that Habets’ 2009 article appeared, offering some aspects not already treated that necessitate a brief return. Though there is much in the article I applaud, including the attempt to formulate and promote deification in terms the Reformed tradition can affirm, I worry that in so doing, Habets risks a needlessly polemical construal of the essence-energies distinction. In his translation of deification into these specific Protestant categories, he generates a critique of the essence-energies version of the notion as both the Eastern Orthodox position and as synergistic; this language lumps together all Orthodox positions on *theosis*, when in fact substantial nuance and a wide range of opinions exist.122 Though I agree with many of Habets’ instincts regarding the ways in which the essence-energies distinction has often been described or functioned, I think it remains possible to critique such explanations in a different manner. After all, the essence-energies distinction arises out of a genuine desire to answer the question of *how theosis* as Habets beautifully describes it—“the participation of human being in the divine being through the Son and by the Holy

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121 For Finch, see “Neo-Palamism,” 233-249; for Caponi, see “Karl Rahner: Divinization in Roman Catholicism,” *Partakers of the Divine Nature*, 259-280.
Spirit”—takes place and what might be the ramifications for Christian theology of making such claims.123

The Princeton 2006 and 2010 collections contain several helpful essays exploring deification themes in particular historical periods or figures. Though all are instances of good work, most still run the risk of not addressing Gavrilyuk’s critique that such identifications across major time periods or ecclesial breaks may prove more wishful thinking than well-demonstrated congruence.124 As one exception, Vladimir Kharlamov’s essay in the second volume discusses the common claim that the essence-energies distinction holds precedents in earlier patristic theology, specifically in Basil of Caesarea, Gregory Nazianzus, and Gregory of Nyssa.125 I heavily resource his work later in this project, as he painstakingly demonstrates that though certain terms certainly do appear in these theologians before they appear in Palamas, the system of divine-human interaction that he constructed with those terms does not exist for Basil and the Cappadocians.

Anthony Baker’s 2011 book, Diagonal Advance: Perfection in Christian Theology, attempts to construct a coherent description of theosis by using the lens of perfection. Though the book offers solid reminders of the goodness of human work painstakingly traced over a sweeping variety of sources, it does not capture a logic for why human work holds this capacity. Though Baker affirms the sacramental capacities of creatures, he does not say what exactly makes something sacramental. A christologically-centered deification is championed, which sounds correct. But as Baker admits at one

124 See again his “The Retrieval of Deification,” 647-659, as well as Hallonsten’s differentiation between deification as theme and as doctrine in “Theosis in Recent Research,” 283-284.
point, ultimately the assertion that the union of humanity and divinity in Christ make it possible for these two categories to meet within humanity in general cannot discharge the necessity of showing how this may be so.126 Here, a double challenge issues: not only how can deification be ontologically defended, but also, is it possible to find language for so doing in which the various traditions Baker so courageously treats could each recognize and affirm its own traditions?

More recently, Constantinos Anthanasopoulos and Christoph Schneider’s 2013 Divine Essence and Divine Energies offers perspectives on the essence-energies distinction, focused on how it puts Aristotelian concepts to use in forming theories of divine presence, participation, and anthropology.127 Essays from many contributors defend the distinction, developing its philosophical roots and theological promise. However, the collection also includes an extensive piece by John Milbank arguing against the distinction and another from Antoine Lévy seeking to harmonize the theology of Gregory Palamas and Thomas Aquinas.128

For his part, Milbank takes a slightly sharper tone, arguing not just that modern defenses of Palamas misread Aquinas and Palamas but also that Palamas’ original position, “far from representing some supposed timeless Eastern purity, is on the contrary all too kindred with the most dubious shifts within the late Medieval Latin West.”129

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126 See Baker, Diagonal Advance, 156.
Milbank thinks this way because of his commitment to finding precedents in Iamblichus and other “theurgic Neoplatonists” that flower by way of Proclus for Dionysius’ theology of deification.\textsuperscript{130} Milbank’s analysis of theurgy and participation leads him to suggest that Aquinas “is more Byzantine than Palamas” in his holding together of imitation and participation “as preconditions of each other.” Palamas, he declares, by contrast has only “an openly crude and non-paradoxical metaphysics of participation.”\textsuperscript{131} However, Milbank admits that he can find points within Palamas that uphold his own theory of participation.\textsuperscript{132} And by the close of his essay, he argues that a further Eastern model—the Syriac Pseudo-Dionysius—better holds together than either East or West the possibility of deification as “greater remoteness with greater proximity, greater need for mediation with greater immediacy.”\textsuperscript{133} Here, Milbank wishes to bring peace to the long-opposed “pairs of contrasting opposites: either the Eastern ‘much now, but never everything’ or the Western ‘nothing now, but in the end everything’” by advancing “the ‘far Eastern’ theurgic resolution of this dire alternative, a case of ‘almost everything now, if you care to see, and in the end, the almost everything becomes one with the everything.’”\textsuperscript{134}

Lévy joins Williams in the quest to bridge these two major descriptions of \textit{theosis}. His essay argues that, against tendencies illustrated by polemicists in both Eastern and

\textsuperscript{130} Milbank, “Christianity and Platonism in East and West,” 161-167, quote from 163. See also his “Sophiology and Theurgy: The New Theological Horizon,” \textit{Encounter Between Eastern Orthodoxy and Radical Orthodoxy: Transfiguring the World Through the Word}, ed. Adrian Pabst and Christoph Schneider (Farnham: Ashgate, 2009), 45-85.

\textsuperscript{131} Milbank, “Christianity and Platonism in East and West,” 198, 200, 203.

\textsuperscript{132} Milbank, “Christianity and Platonism in East and West,” 202-204.

\textsuperscript{133} Milbank, “Christianity and Platonism in East and West,” 207.

\textsuperscript{134} Milbank, “Christianity and Platonism in East and West,” 208. I will return to these intriguing possibilities below.
Western traditions to claim a more ‘pure’ theology, both integrate Aristotle. He advances the possibility that neo-hesychast readings of Aquinas end up damaging Palamas, as well. A closer look at their own and the other’s histories brings these influences to light and thus disallows the conclusion that one tradition has managed to preserve a purely theological lineage. Lévy writes, “my aim is to describe a situation where both sides are right, since they relate differently to an object which is theoretically identical.” Lévy’s insight supplies a key premise for this project.

One benefit these two essays share is their ability to pinpoint the ways in which modern descriptions of the doctrine begin with theologians who rely on two different sets of presuppositions and use different terminology in order to perpetuate these two lines of thought. When the ecclesial structures develop their theologies in isolation from each other, it proves next to impossible to articulate a coherent doctrine that fulfills each set of presuppositions and concerns. Is there a way to address their concerns that would also respond to the drives to cast deification as theurgy, as the essence-energies distinction, or as the created-uncreated grace distinction? To meaningfully grapple with theosis, one must move beyond predications of an absolute division between the two approaches.

B. An Ecumenical Problem Demands an Ecumenical Approach

My exploration of theosis so far has surfaced its immense potential as well as its persisting controversies. Deification suggests incredible resources to heal humanity by bringing each person into living, conforming communion with her transcendent God.

137 Lévy, “The Woes of Originality,” 100, emphasis original.
Deification also promises to maintain God’s distinction from the created person right within their total union and likeness. I have shown how reclaiming *theosis* entails grappling with the metaphysical questions it generates across three loci. I have touched on the difficulties encountered when the two major deification traditions attempt to speak to one another, as their systems have developed their constituting terminologies of deification in different directions. I have also examined a few attempts at solving these questions within the two traditions as well as from Protestant perspectives.

So far, no suggestion has succeeded. Differing ecclesial commitments and traditions of reading the primary sources add fuel to the fires of misunderstanding and disagreement, with modern defenses of deification often swinging into polemics. The more one scratches the surface of contemporary treatments of deification and the more contrasting views calcify, the more impeded becomes any possibility to develop a truly constructive approach. Clearly, other methods need to be sought. This project concerns itself with articulating just such a path.

If deification is to be reclaimed as the foundational theological premise, in line with its origins and how those impacted early Christian thought, then surely theology needs to consider *how* to do so today. Is it possible to accept the stress Louth, Hallonsten, and Gavrilyuk place upon the essential and foundational nature of deification while also affirming that the definition of *theosis* is not ‘owned’ by any one model? Is it possible to clarify that what scholars such as Habets and Blackwell have received as deification may need further qualification? Is it possible to affirm concerns with divine transcendence and creaturely integrity while also uncovering and heading directly into whatever the consequences of *theosis* might lead theology to claim? How might Lévy’s insights bear
fruit? Better situating the diverse strands of theological reasoning that have made up various formulations of deification throughout its long history allows contemporary theologians to critically re-assess *theosis* in the search for potential unifying factors that may have been overlooked. Such a method enables discovery and acceptance of deification’s riches while also chastening whatever elements need to be clarified. But this constructive work cannot take root unless various traditions move past viewing the ‘other’ as the problem and instead enact curiosity towards proposals that deviate from the norm of their own ranks’ cherished accounts of how God relates with creation.

Three major difficulties stem from observations I made throughout the research for this project. First, the sheer amount of space particular modern voices give to tracking and explaining the development of their own theologies of participation can at times drastically outpace that which they give to other approaches. This tendency in and of itself seeds skepticism that truly fair hearings are on offer, particularly when various figures lambast one another’s perspectives as idolatrous. Second, because the modern debates concern reading sources that have become enshrined as the only acceptable authorities, the possibility remains keen that adherents may misread their own and other traditions. Third, I noticed that each model I surveyed tended to view all theological developments up to and within their own most cherished figures as necessary and correct. As we will see, even the offerings of the two most towering figures—Palamas and Thomas—include ambiguities that might need to be clarified or leave out some insights that came before them. Without acknowledging ways the traditions themselves require adaptation, how can these discrepancies be harmonized? If we demonstrate either their
own developments or their outstanding questions, current formulations cannot limit theologies of deification.

As the discussion above on community use of religious language demonstrated, addressing these issues remains complicated and delicate. Deification differences concern complex nests of religious *experiences* generating *terminology* that shapes *theology* to articulate the *metaphysics* that governs a particular *community* and back again. The ways ecclesial communities combine these nodes into competing structures means that in a redirection, *all* of them must be considered. Masson notes that attending to these points becomes all the more essential for ecumenical conversations, “where different metaphoric mappings and conceptual blends are always operative but usually in very subtle and unconscious ways.”

However, I suggest that acknowledging deification as an ecumenical problem opens up the application of ecumenical methods for its resolution. Put even more strongly, considering the ways differences in language and metaphysics break along ecclesial lines *requires* applying ecumenical methodology derived from the last seventy-five years of dialogue. Thus, I frame this project according to three stages of ecumenical methodology: entering dialogue, sharing gifts, and constructing a new approach. I describe each stage’s contours in terms of how ecumenism opens opportunities for shared religious experience to generate new theology, including metaphysics, that can draw disparate communities together. Throughout, I also gesture at insights from cognitive linguistics showing how each ecumenical dialogue stage intersects with ways current research describes language development.

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1. Entering Dialogue

First, as G. R. Evans writes, ecumenical theology requires “mutual acceptance, by churches engaging in dialogue, that each is truly body of Christ, and at the same time that each has imperfections and faults for which repentance is needed.”¹³⁹ Even though such a tactic at first may appear unpalatable for those whose ecclesial commitments include a sense of being the only true Body of Christ, the presence of others also claiming Christ prompts a community to better understand its own identity as not yet completed. Evans’ conviction that “where a sense of ‘otherness’ persists, theology cannot be done in wholeness, and the Church cannot be fully herself”¹⁴⁰ means that interlocutors must be considered equal in Christian dignity and rights. Dialogue itself must be expected to serve not just as a neutral instrument but as a personal encounter that transforms those involved in it, including in their judgments of each other.¹⁴¹ As Evans points out:

[t]he way ahead must involve an act of trust that the faith is common and that the expression of it by each community and time intends to be faithful and recognises a responsibility to preserve the faith in what it says. Without such trust it will always be possible to find fault with other ways of putting things than one’s own, and to point to ambiguity as though it were the result of deliberate deception.¹⁴²

Indeed, certain corners of the broader ecumenical movement are refocusing on the practices and postures necessary to move beyond the first harvest of agreed statements, through the current “ecumenical winter,” and into a place where visible unity can be

¹⁴¹ Maffeis, Ecumenical Dialogue, 99-100.
¹⁴² Evans, Method in Ecumenical Theology, 89-113, quote at 100.
realized. Paul Avis describes one new approach, that of receptive ecumenism, in much the same language as Robert Taft: the promotion of an “attitude of self-searching, of self-criticism and of seeking to receive the good things that God has given” the other holds the potential “to re-motivate, re-energise and redirect the ecumenical movement in our time.” The receptivity to the other required to enter dialogue makes the table a place of holy encounter. The willingness to know the other provides the impetus for seeing dialogue itself as a new religious experience, wherein the other becomes a missing and needed element of one’s own community, theology, and metaphysics.

Angelo Maffeis notes the goal of understanding one another’s witness to the truth, since “[t]he first phase of the encounter, therefore, has as its goal to arrive at an understanding of the language of the interlocutor and to recognize it as a viable way to express Christian faith.” For deification, the two main models and even their tentative Protestant adherents must acknowledge that simply by engaging the ideas of deification, they already exist in “real though imperfect communion.” To move beyond their current impasse, then, all interested parties must fulfill the preconditions for ecumenical dialogue of accepting the other’s model as at least potentially or partially a legitimate version of the doctrine, which in its fullness remains larger than their own understandings.

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146 O’Gara, *The Ecumenical Gift Exchange*, 4-5.
This chapter has already begun some of that work. First, I requested reticent Protestants more deeply consider Catholic and Orthodox theologies by encountering theories of religious language. Second, I introduced the three loci of deification and overviewed the major conflicts concerning how best to parse them to help structure this first stage. Each can better receive the other’s insights as a potential mirror to its own model once they recognize how their disagreements stem from answering the same questions at different starting points using different terms. Thus I proposed deification as a pendulum of divine self-determination and creaturely capacity that must follow Tanner’s rules. Putting dissenting trajectories in conversation with each other within this common organizing structure helps promote clearer understanding of both self and other. By acknowledging these streams as stakeholders in the *theosis* debates, I seat them together at the dialogue table and require myself to treat each approach as a legitimate, valued partner in the quest to find a coherent, inclusive model.

Employing Masson’s discussion of how language works, the first stage of dialoguing deification requires moving beyond assuming only one ‘true’ account of deification exists, or placing it as a single-scope network (trying to solve the debates by subordinating all other communities’ frameworks into one regnant approach, addressed above and again in chapter four). The way Masson describes simplex networks comports with this chapter’s goal. Here, using different words arising in distinct contexts may predicate multiple meanings but can still describe the same entity.147 The deification debates evince this trait when they continue to argue with one another, despite their differing language and metaphysics. While this correlation certainly pinpoints where the

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deification controversies remain mired, it cannot solve the disagreements. This line of investigation underscores the significance of using ecumenical methods: the way in which differing ecclesial communities discipline their metaphors in opposition to each other ironically endangers consensus over a theology of salvation as union with God and the other.

2. Exchanging Gifts

Building on this approach, as the second step, partners in dialogue approach each other by sharing honestly of their own traditions. As dialogue progresses, each recognizes the particular horizons of the others.148 Evans describes a mutual move into each other’s thinking, which “requires the parties to see themselves as standing on different sides” than their own.149 Such flexibility means historical differences need to be presented carefully, mindful that communal discipline of metaphors casts particular ecclesial doctrines as historical ‘fact’ or reads history in order to justify the particular ecclesial community’s own existence.

Applied to deification, accomplishing this second step takes up chapters two and three, where I overview in turn the various components of the two major deification traditions: hesychast deification in Palamas, followed by Thomism.150 For Palamas, I

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150 I wish to proactively address two potential concerns with this terminology. First, I do not wish to suggest that the many approaches to the problem of how creation may participate in God inspired by these two giants of Christian theology can be smoothed out into only two perspectives. Nevertheless, for my purposes, a lens broad enough to find common ground proves necessary. Second, I am sensitive to the fact that the terms “Palamism” and “Palamite” arise from unsympathetic caricatures of Gregory Palamas’ theology. As much as possible, I use instead the phrases “Gregory Palamas’ theology” or “hesychast theology.” However, at times it proves necessary for me to use “Palamism” or “Palamite” when I directly quote those who employ the terminology. Many thanks to Marcus Pleased for walking me through this concern.
focus on the *Triads in Defense of the Holy Hesychasts*, the *Dialogue Between an Orthodox and a Barlaamite*, and the *One Hundred and Fifty Chapters*. In discussing Aquinas, I delve into his *Commentary on the Sentences*, *Summa Contra Gentiles*, and *Summa Theologiae*. My goal is not to exhaustively discuss each model or even to trace all of the intricacies and nuances of its developments, but rather to succinctly summarize its major tenets, particularly in terms of how it treats the three loci of deification.

In these two chapters, I focus on outlining what makes up these trajectories and what concerns animate their approaches. Each example holds a venerable past and offers important resources that the other does not. Hesychast deification hallows the body by giving the person access to the uncreated divine; Thomistic deification claims the goodness of divine grace imprinting the created order. Thus the hesychast model starts with the creaturely capacity end of the deification seesaw, while Thomism begins with divine transcendence. These different emphases then determine how each model creates its model of divine action in creation. The careful engagement I undertake surfaces a common theme for both approaches: that attending to the role of bodies in each model serves as a focus for their differences, similarities, and potential mutual steps forward. The bodies of created beings in Thomas keep the person from perfect contemplation of God and in Palamas, would, if united with the divine essence, introduce into God the contingencies of matter.

At this stage of dialogue, attention to early descriptions of union with the divine, openness to learning from the other, and careful elucidation of the historical components of the major models allows stakeholders to acknowledge the goodness of others’ frameworks. Being immersed into both model’s priorities and descriptions, and thus
paying careful attention to their details, constitutes an additional religious experience of its own. Stereotypes, mischaracterizations, partial and partisan views, can all be challenged at the dialogue table. In Masson’s terms once more, chapters two and three asks the two models to see one another as mirror networks. Clustering notions iterated in two different contexts revisits differences by plumbing these differences within the shared frame of the three *theosis* loci. The frame provides a sturdy scaffolding for understanding such deeply entrenched disagreements and suggests ways the two original frameworks might blend into a new relationship. However, this closer look at the two major models of deification yields opposing definitions that effectivelycancel out one another. Differences over deified bodies thus become bodies of ecclesial communities developing in contradiction to one another. As each model continues to evolve, oppositions to the other tend to calcify into ever more complex rationales for its own development.

Therefore, in chapter four, I advance the exchange of gifts even further by allowing Thomism and hesychasm to question and critique each other. This stage requires a commitment to difficult work. As John T. Ford, CSC describes it, engaging in dialogue is like learning a new language—the language of an ecclesial community not one’s own, carrying its own terminology and metaphysical structures. Like language acquisition, dialogue carries certain risks: resonance (a concept translates across communities, though the words for it change or it is defined differently according to personal usage); dissonance (the ‘false friends’ of an agreed statement failing to achieve theological coherence or reception beyond the group who created it); and non-sonance

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(difficulty translating concepts due to deeply embedded divergent meanings). Ford suggests flipping these potential drawbacks on their heads by turning them into opportunities to rethink philosophical presuppositions, reconsider denominational terminology, and restructure systematic theologies “inherited without critique.”

Evans describes how such tasks engender in participants a natural fear of losing the original identity wrapped up in ecclesial language and metaphysical systems. To choose new words or phrases or to acquiesce to some element of the partner’s formulation looks like disrespecting an ecclesial culture, essentials of faith, and even God. Rather than engage in this demanding process, Maffeis notes, dialogues often confine themselves to simply making lists: only chronicling existing consensus and disagreement and tabling any in-depth work for a later time. This “lowest common denominator” approach does not fulfill the conditions of full dialogue, however, because it “ignores the organic character of the content of Christian revelation” and reverts to “a quantitative conception of propositions of the truth of faith.” Yet dialogues “cannot avoid encountering issues that determined ecclesial separation in the past;” therefore, they must “take up the terminology in which the problems had been formulated when dissent was manifested.” The Joint Working Group explains that this ongoing evaluation of one’s own and resourcing of the other’s positions requires

examining how our identity has been constructed in opposition to the other, i.e. how we have identified ourselves by what we are not. To overcome polemical constructions of identity requires new efforts to articulate identity in more positive ways, distinguishing

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153 Evans, Method in Ecumenical Theology, 89-113.
154 Maffeis, Ecumenical Dialogue, 66.
156 Maffeis, Ecumenical Dialogue, 84.

As they work to understand and receive the perspective of the other, dialogue partners must continually reassess their own understandings of the benefits of their community’s history and resources.

For deification, this step requires the models to understand where their concerns and concepts could be understood to line up with each other, where their own findings exhibit problematic tendencies, and where the other’s take suggests resources that their own approach lacks. Dialogue reveals that the two dominant models of deification suffer from a common oversight iterated in two slightly different versions: by overly stressing only one pole of deification’s core tension in relation to created bodies, each endangers the doctrine’s promise. Heyschasm’s focus on the body overloads the creaturely capacity end of the pendulum, while Thomism’s commitments to simplicity put too much weight on the divine self-determination side. These lopsided priorities qualify participative union with God in ways that threaten to undo the weighty potential \textit{theosis} carries. These conflicts also surface reasons why Protestant reticence on the doctrine remains so pervasive: encountering these traditions’ critiques of one another’s metaphysics leads newer ecclesial traditions to consider all possibilities of deification tainted.

However, all is not lost. Tracing the deification trajectories’ patterned ripostes to alternate frameworks of the theme can also produce a new diagnosis of their problems. Once again, participating in this exchange is itself a form of religious experience that can re-vitalize the dialogue members’ ability to engage in sustained reworkings of language,
theology, and metaphysics. Evans notes that carefully constructed accounts of historical dividing moments can contribute to this healing of memories, as long as members rigorously question self-understandings rooted in past visions.158 True to this stage of ever more deeply resourcing each other’s gifts, I close chapter four by asking how the two approaches might re-read one another. By the close of chapter four, accepting one another’s takes as legitimate attempts to grapple with an enormous theological difficulty cracks open new possibilities. The debates can then turn to the next step: in company with Protestants, receiving these different approaches as gifts that construct a new way forward.

3. Constructing a New Approach

Dialogue at this third stage asks members to advance beyond mutual understanding towards actively sharing each other’s resources. Consensus here does not merely consist of listed agreements and disagreements but discerns together the “criterion that judges the different positions, a dynamic factor that puts them in motion and makes them converge.”159

As O’Gara puts it, this sort of work represents a third (and, in her phrasing, also a fourth) stage of collaboration: recognizing not just a refined understanding of past issues but a new, common sense of mission for the future. Dialogue places the ecclesial communities in multicultural context where some older issues now look different, while inculturation forces the re-evaluation of past assumptions.160 O’Gara considers it

important to conceive of the complementarity of traditions in the ongoing work of
dialogue as less like a melting pot than like a mosaic, “where the picture can be beautiful
and whole only if the distinctive contribution of each piece is included.”\(^\text{161}\) She directs
these words to the Anglican-Roman Catholic dialogue’s difficulty in achieving official
full communion, but her encouragement also proves helpful for the deification debates:

\[\text{slowly, the desire for unity may have transformed our two communi}
\text{ons into two theological schools in some of the ways they relate to each other. We may have moved}
\text{into this new stage of unity and failed to recognize it...If I am correct, then our two communi}
\text{ons are coming slowly to share communion in the reality, the }\text{res}\text{ of salvation}
\text{without sharing full communion in the }\text{sacramentum}\text{ instituted to bring about this reality.}\(^\text{162}\)

This last step of dialogue calls the opposed models of }\text{theosis}\text{ to understand themselves as
closer to each other than they currently believe. This, too, comprises a religious
experience that dialogue members now describe in new, common language.

Representatives doing theology together thus “open paths of understanding” and “find
new language for faith where in the past positions seemed irreconcilable.”\(^\text{163}\)

Chapter five applies these recommendations to deification’s core tension. Guided
by receptive ecumenism’s call to convert to the other, by the two traditions’ repeated but
primarily implicit appeals to the Spirit, and by the way the two models turn on differing
approaches to the body in participative union with God, I turn to pneumatology. First, in
terms of ecumenical method, the conversion to the other advocated by ecumenism is
often identified as the work of the Holy Spirit. Dialogue thus constitutes a step into the
Spirit who is not exhausted by any of the communities present at the dialogue table but
present in and beyond all.

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\(^\text{161}\) O’Gara, }\text{The Ecumenical Gift Exchange},\text{ 7.
\(^\text{162}\) O’Gara, }\text{The Ecumenical Gift Exchange},\text{ 103.
\(^\text{163}\) Maffeis, }\text{Ecumenical Dialogue},\text{ 84.
Second, an emphasis on discerning the Spirit behind and through the norms of differing ecclesial communities thus suggests applications for the form and the content of the dialogue. Starting with the Spirit by tracing the contours of ecumenical work in general recasts descriptions of God’s divine action in creation for this particular dialogue. Staying with the mirroring network approach found in the gift exchange of chapters 2-4 opens the option to translate energies as grace, recapitulate grace as the energies, or redefine energies and grace as the concept of Sophia. However, because doing so risks remaining at the ‘false friends’ level of dialogue and does not address Protestant concerns that deification evacuates divine presence into creaturely categories, this solution remains problematic. By prioritizing only one model’s terminology, the other will be left out, with some metaphysical questions left unaddressed. Choosing only one of the existing frameworks does not go far enough to couch the radical promise of deification in an ecumenically-palatable way. My approach pushes the dialogue to consider how the Spirit might draw the two models out into new territory.

Thus, third, pneumatology offers a new grounding for considerations of the body in deification that can hold together the two models’ differing starting points and conclusions in an ecumenical theology of deification. Such a new model would ultimately take shape along the lines of the cognitive linguists’ tectonic double-scope network, wherein combining two divergent inputs develops a new, highly creative blend of what came before to take a different path than either of the inputs could have foreseen. For example, a tectonic double-scope network sees expectations of Messiah meet the historical Jesus mediated by Scripture to reconfigure what Messiah means, who God is,
and how God relates with humanity. With deification, my proposal advocates intentionally blending Thomism and hesychasm by locating the Spirit within their differing descriptions of religious experience, theology, and metaphysics.

Taft terms this ‘ecumenical’ scholarship: working “in order to reconcile and unite, rather than to confute and dominate.” Though he sees this as scholarship embedded in a common tradition underneath the intervening differences “accidentally” produced by “history, culture, and language” as opposed to essential variances of faith, I submit that such distinctions must be taken seriously, as they concretely shape divided communities. Such disparities do not have to be taken as threats, but can become fruitful grounds for constructive work if participants follow the steps of dialogue outlined above: describe the other in ways they would recognize, enter into the other’s viewpoint by incorporating their critiques of one’s own tradition, and accept the good one needs from the other’s tradition.

Chapter five thus seeks to honor both earlier pedigrees as well as other formulations of union with God as the most crucial thing theology can say. Since Scripture and the earlier Christian traditions remain privileged sources for ecumenical scholarship, I focus on how the traditions encounter biblical texts as well as patristic offerings. Chief among the former are selections from Genesis and the Pauline writings; among the latter, I turn in detail to the theologies of Didymus the Blind and Pseudo-Dionysius, who each write early enough to provide significant building blocks for

165 Taft, “Perceptions and Realities,” 38.
166 Taft, “Perceptions and Realities,” 38.
167 Taft, “Perceptions and Realities,” 38.
deification’s maturation while eluding later, ecclesially-divisive definitions.\textsuperscript{168} The pneumatological strand woven through both deification traditions and re-embroidered in contemporary theology suggests a pattern we can now better trace.

The Spirit may provide the only way to hold together all \textit{theosis} nodes in a new ecumenical construction. The Spirit balances the deification pendulum of divine-human synergy by indwelling created bodies without being diminished. By demonstrating a simple God at work in creation, the uncreated, undiminished Spirit makes bodies—including the divided bodies, language, and metaphysics of the traditions— one with God and thus with each another. Pneumatological deification harmonizes the two older approaches’ existing metaphors while offering a more solid metaphysical foundation for Protestants to claim deification. The chapter and project conclude by sketching how such a retrieval can re-animate the \textit{theosis} conversation and noting where further work beckons.

CHAPTER TWO: DEIFICATION DEFINED OR DENIED? GREGORY PALAMAS’ MODEL

I. Introduction

While the preceding chapter introduced the debates surrounding deification and laid out the framework for dialoguing, this chapter begins the conversation in earnest. In this and the following chapter, I unravel the two major competing models of deification—understood as Denys’ becoming one with and like God as far as possible—as they are most commonly employed today. I seek to show how their different terminologies and frameworks nevertheless roughly correlate enough to create a new constructive, ecumenical doctrine of theosis. I begin with Gregory Palamas defending how hesychastic prayer justifies a theology of deification.

As I noted in chapter one, I locate three main components in any theology of theosis: divine self-determination (defining who God is in se), the creature’s capacity to receive God, and how God acts in creation. Palamas’ formulations of these topics compare with the Thomist constructions we will explore in chapter three to offer a foundation for an eventual ecumenical model. As we will see, Palamas’ handling of these three areas of inquiry discloses his distinctive emphasis on the body’s role in deification. Palamas describes prayer’s effect as a permanent “fountain of holy joy” produced in the soul; such joy expands from the soul to transform the person’s body even when she is not intentionally praying.169 But for Palamas, as we will also see in Aquinas, the person cannot attain this joyful knowledge of and likeness to God through her own capacity. In

each layer of deification that he presents, Palamas doggedly searches for a way to hold together both this commitment to the utter inability of humanity to possess God as well as his strong conviction that God’s own divine presence may indeed be known and partaken of by creation right within its very materiality. In fact, I argue that his entire approach to deification stems from a commitment to hesychasm’s claims that God’s incorruptible presence remains available to corruptible bodies. Insisting on this paradox forms Gregory’s starting point; his theology of deification arises almost incidentally out of his effort to defend bodily experiences of union with God during prayer.

In terms of my three loci, Palamas begins with the conviction that the person, body and soul, is constituted by a receptivity to divine presence mediated by sharing in divine activities. On the pendulum of deification, then, Palamas starts with the side of creaturely capacity. His work is typically claimed as the first to systematically develop the essence-energies distinction, particularly as he treats how the person’s full union with God through prayer allows her to share in divine energies.\textsuperscript{170}

Below, I explore how Palamas’ responses to the three aspects of deification highlight his emphasis on the role of the body. I group how each of these topics appears under two main questions:

- First, I ask what in this model exactly happens to the person who becomes one with and like God? As subsets of this question, I dissect both aspects of the claim: a person who becomes one with and like God. I include how Palamas defines divine self-determination—what about God makes deification possible—as well

as how the person holds capacity for that union. This latter topic leads me to examine how Palamas’ distinctive emphasis on the body’s role in *theosis* generates his model of how God interacts with creation.

- Second, given its rendering of the process of deification, how does this version of *theosis* uphold the difference between creator and creature? This section addresses Palamas’ doctrine of God as substance, hypostases, and actor and the person’s corresponding reception of God, particularly as Palamas’ commitment to the body’s capacity for deification impacts the conditions that prime the person for her reception of divine glory. Finally, I conclude by discussing how divine action divinizes creation, leading to Palamas’ distinction between essence and energies.

I trace how Palamas develops his model in three of his major works. *The Triads in Defense of the Holy Hesychasts*171 (hereafter referred to as the *Triads*) represents Palamas’ first major attempt to systematically detail *theosis*. From the beginning, Palamas’ description synthesizes perspectives that on their surfaces mutually contradict each other. The difficulty of harmonizing these strands results in a complex approach that seeks to meld deification’s universal conditions of possibility—where anyone, philosopher or not, may be said to undergo *theosis*—with a tenacious argument for accepting the material and physical effects of deification’s unfolding as well as a firm commitment to God’s unknowable transcendence. Defending this radical availability of God’s uncreated presence to created matter prompts Palamas’ continued work. His

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Dialogue Between an Orthodox and a Barlaamite172 (hereafter referred to as the Dialogue), picks up where the Triads leave off, displaying more deeply the commitments that ground his formulation of theosis. The Dialogue imagines the optimal confrontation between a Hesychast and a Barlaamite (the epitome of Palamas’ foil who questions hesychastic prayer by adopting other models of union with God), ending with the convenient conversion of the latter. Finally, the One Hundred Fifty Chapters173 (hereafter referred to as the Chapters) offers an even more extensive philosophical and theological foundation for Palamas’ claims, delving into cosmology and anthropology.

In answer to question one, how deification takes place, we will see that deification occurs as the person gains access to God that permeates her, soul and body, with the light of divine glory. Palamas stresses God’s utter transcendence, goodness, and incorruptibility as contrasts to the changing, unstable, and contingent creation. God’s essence remains uncorruptible, untouched by the person’s flesh or any other physical entities, and indivisible by them. Yet, in correspondence with Tanner’s rules, this sheer difference actually relativizes creaturely contingency. As God’s total transcendence persists despite materiality’s corruptibility, such divine majesty can enter creation without constricting itself. Thus, on the creature side of the deification pendulum, God grants the person the ability to so receive the divine light in body and soul that she truly manifests the uncreated God in the created world, including within herself. Her facility to

172 I use St. Gregory Palamas, Dialogue Between an Orthodox and a Barlaamite, trans. Rein Ferwerda, Medieval Studies Worldwide/Episteme: Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, Binghamton University; Center for the Preservation of Ancient Religious Texts, Brigham Young University; Department of Philosophy, Pontificia Universitas Lateranensis (Binghampton, NY: Global Publications/CEMERS, undated).
be so changed rests primarily in her soul’s capacity to commune with God. As this glory illumines the composite person, it reaches from her soul to her body, infusing materiality with the divine. The hesychast model of prayer serves as Palamas’ key example of how deification works. So God’s action within creation consists of the natural symbol of divine glory coming present to the world refracting within itself God’s own light.

At the same time, in answer to question two, the hesychast model preserves the distinction between Creator and creature by explaining that as the uncreated divine light extends into all creation through the soul, it must be identified as God’s actions or energies. Therefore, in Palamas, God’s self-determination entails that God’s interactions with the created world maintain a clear break between God’s self and material flesh. So, regarding the person’s capacity, Palamas argues that the light of divine glory may be received by anyone, regardless of education or theological expertise, which makes deification a universal pursuit rather than a process reserved for the spiritual elite. Naming how God interacts with the world in hesychast deification, particularly with the claim that divine light infuses all creation, thus appears to require the essence-energies distinction: created bodies and souls can share in and display divine activity without partaking of God’s essence.

Supporting Palamas’ hesychastic explanation of how someone becomes like and one with God without violating Creator-creature differences entails affirming all three aspects of his model. This overview helps disclose the metaphysical concerns at play in the theosis question while sketching the profound ecumenical breach that persists between this articulation and Thomas’ model.
II. Palamas’ Trajectory

A. How is the Person Deified?

Three main themes in Palamas’ work promote theosis: the divine light of God, received within the soul and shared in its interplay with the body. In the intermingling of these arenas, Palamas articulates a startling theology of transformation. As the Triads offers more discussion of how a person may experience deification than the other two texts under consideration, the answer to this first question relies more heavily upon its explanations. Deification concerns access to the full transcendence of God, as the soul’s innate capacity for divine contemplation redirects the body’s passions. The presence of God in the deified life holds a wider scope than what one may expect, as neither divine presence is qualified, nor is the body relegated to a backseat. Palamas presents a holistic theosis generated by the hesychast model of prayer. These hallmarks of Hesychast deification offer a strong commitment to the person as a composite whole, whose entire self is capable of being reached by the indwelling of God’s presence.

1. Divine Self-Determination: Transcendent Divine Light

To describe what happens in deification, I begin with how Palamas contradicts Barlaam in his descriptions of what the person receives in her union with God. Palamas’ commitment to divine transcendence means that “[t]he Principle of deification, divinity by nature” remains “inaccessible to all sense perception and to every mind, to every incorporeal or corporeal being.”174 Barlaam contends that all else besides God must be

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174 The Triads, III.i.33; Gendle, 87-8.
created, thus any gifts of prayer are created. Gregory must find a way to argue that the hesychasts actually experience uncreated divinity.

To establish that what presents to those praying could not be other than divine, Palamas first attacks Barlaam’s notion that deification offers access to something created by referring to Scripture. In the *Triads*, Gregory claims that what is received in deification is truly of the same order as the divine transcendence. Otherwise, what could *theosis* possibly offer the saints? If whatever is experienced in hesychastic prayer should be identified as a sensible object instead, deification becomes only a ruse. Gregory turns to Scripture and Christology, arguing that when Christ was illuminated on Tabor, the glory irradiating him was only visible to those who possessed the gift of divine grace.175 The Christic light on Tabor must surpass created existence, for it gives human beings the divine life, goodness, ecstasy, beauty, and power proper to God’s divine nature, *and* it is only visible once disciples receive an eyesight superior to the capabilities of their physical eyes.176 These faculties and their powers do not naturally belong to human beings.

In the *Dialogue*, Palamas also cites 2 Peter 1:4 that God creates humanity for the purpose of sharing with them God’s own nature, and reminds his fictitious interlocutor that this precedent returns in Gregory of Nyssa’s writings, among others. Here, Christ becomes incarnate solely to fulfill the original unitive purpose of the Father. Thus, “the purity which we see in Christ and in the person who has part in Him is by nature one. But

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175 *The Triads*, III.i.22; Gendle, 80.
176 *The Triads*, III.i.22-23, Gendle, 80-1. Meyendorff notes that this claim should not be read as denigrating or bypassing the disciples’ bodies. Rather, it denotes the additional faculties granted to them once the eyes of their hearts have been divinely transformed. I will trace below this process whereby the expansion of the soul carries over to the body’s physical capacities.
Christ is the source and he who takes part draws the water.”177 The deified one receives what God gives—which is nothing less than God’s very self. Therefore, whatever is manifested in hesychastic prayer must consist of the uncreated power and energy of God’s uncreated nature.178

Similarly, Palamas argues that deification should not be considered merely the possession of human virtues. Defending theosis entails a more literal reading of the scriptural passages promising rebirth by the Spirit such that the followers of Jesus become true children of God. If theosis consists of natural perfection, especially in knowledge or intellectual rationality, “all men and angels without exception would be more or less gods.”179 Barlaam’s model predicated upon the person’s natural powers “would have belonged to all nations” before the coming of Christ, and “today it would belong to everyone irrespective of faith or piety.”180 Instead, “[e]very virtue and imitation of God on our part indeed prepares those who practice them for divine union, but the mysterious union itself is effected by grace.”181 Additionally, if what the person receives in deification is created and not of the divine nature itself, then Barlaam’s approach makes two divinities in God: one created and accessible, and one uncreated and inaccessible:

the divinity of him who has truly been divinized belongs to God to whom he has been united and by whom he has been divinized in grace; he has not thrown away his own nature but by that grace he has transcended nature. By calling that divinity created, you make God a creature.182

177 The Dialogue VII, quoting Nyssa, On Perfection, PG 46, 284D; Ferwerda, 50.
178 The Triads, III.i.24; Gendle, 81.
179 The Triads, III.i.30; Gendle, 86.
180 The Triads, III.i.30; Gendle, 85.
181 The Triads, III.i.27; Gendle, 83.
182 The Dialogue, VII; Ferwerda, 50-1.
And thus, Gregory can also cite the saints who become the Spirit’s instruments, as evidence for the uncreated nature of deification’s gifts. The saints shine forth God’s radiance just as a mirror produces another ray reflecting out the sun’s brightness. For they bear within themselves “the same energy” that properly belongs to the Spirit. So Palamas challenges the Barlaamite’s skepticism by stressing the sheer magnitude of deification’s offerings: “if it [what the deified person receives] is the divinity of people who have partaken, how much more is it the divinity of Him who gives part?”

He goes on to promise, “we too will become luminous if we lift ourselves up, abandoning earthly shadows, by drawing near to the true light of Christ.” In short, to Palamas, Barlaam’s take does not go far enough in acknowledging the Christian particularity that makes accessible the one sheer divine transcendence. On this read, Barlaam’s deification actually denies divine majesty, because only such majesty could overcome the gap between God and creation to share divine light. Palamas’ commitment to the person’s reception of divine light grounds his understanding of divine self-determination, for it is within the bodies of the deified that this divine, majestic, and transcendent light makes itself known.

Holding his commitment to divine self-determination in simplicity and transcendence in one hand, Palamas now must defend with the other how saintly holiness serves as evidence for divine manifestation in creation. Particularly, he seeks to show how the person may in fact reflect divine energy such that she mirrors the inaccessible Creator. Gregory creates a detailed theological anthropology that upholds the possibility of hesychast deification.

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183 The Dialogue, VII; Ferwerda, 50.
184 The Triads, III.i.33; Gendle, 88 and III.i.35; Gendle, 90.
2. Creaturely Capacity for the Divine: the Role of the Body

The *Chapters*’ theology of creation bolsters Palamas’ earlier claims not only with its argument but by emulating in its structure the process of *theosis* it describes. Palamas begins with sensory observations that lead him to inquire into the realities he believes lie above and behind the created world. As he discerns the universe’s structure, he derives creation’s capacity for divine permeation, including within its own materiality. His theology embues the soul with an inherent capacity to mediate divinity.

At the start, Gregory reasons that the contingency of created existences, those beings always coming into life and dying away again, necessitates “an underived, self-existent primordial cause.” This cause bookends creation, providing not only its beginning but also its ultimate end. Familiar themes from the *Triads* return as Palamas champions the same Spirit as the only source of certain truth and knowledge of God, the world, or humanity. The senses and the mind may perceive these truths, but they will run astray without the guidance of the Spirit who is their source and end.

This direction exists because persons are composite: our bodies and their capacities derive from matter and the sensible world, while our souls derive from the realities beyond the world, or rather, from God himself [sic] through an ineffable insufflation, like some great and marvelous creation, superior to the universe, overseeing the universe and set over all creatures, capable of both knowing and receiving

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185 *Chapters* 1; Sinkewicz, 82-3.
186 See *Chapters* 2; Sinkewicz, 84-5, where he argues that the terminus of created matter will not consist of a return to the non-being from which it was wrested, but “like our bodies and in a manner that be considered analogous, the world at the moment of its dissolution and transformation will be changed into something more divine by the power of the Spirit.”
187 *Chapters* 20-21; Sinkewicz, 102-3. The significance of the Spirit for Palamas will return in chapter four.
God…through struggle and grace., but also…able to be united with God in a single hypostasis.\textsuperscript{188}

This view of creation determines both Palamas’ epistemology and his hierarchy of being. The soul serves as the image of God within the created world, taking its origin from realities beyond the physical and bringing into the material world the promise of union with God. The soul, and the mind as its highest part, safeguards the ability of human beings to be deified, “for it is not the bodily constitution but the very nature of the mind which possesses this image [of God] and nothing in our nature is superior to the mind.”\textsuperscript{189}

The human soul, though incorporeal and created by God, does not permeate all things everywhere as God does. It may not be pinpointed to one place and does not exist self-sufficiently. Rather, the soul subsists in and is bounded by “the one who sustains and encompasses the universe.” Souls share in God’s power by sustaining, encompassing, and governing bodies, which serve as the souls’ servants.\textsuperscript{190} Palamas argues that in one sense, the presence of sensible bodies united with our souls renders human beings lower than angels, who share with people the image of God but enjoy closer proximity to the divine’s “utterly incorporeal and uncreated nature.”\textsuperscript{191} At the same time, human souls more closely emulate God by incorporating sensory perception with intellection and

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\item \textsuperscript{188} \textit{Chapters}, 24; Sinkewicz, 106-9. The translator’s note identifies the ineffable insufflation as Gen 2:7 (\textit{Chapters}, 109N43) and the single hypostasis as the soul of Christ’s human nature united to the divine nature in his person (\textit{Chapters}, 109N44).
\item \textsuperscript{189} \textit{Chapters}, 26-71; Sinkewicz, 110-1. Other animals possess souls simply as the roots of the physical life activities that operate their bodies. Human beings and angels, however, essentially possess life within their intellectual natures. Nevertheless, since angels do not possess bodies, the life of the soul in their beings does not doubly serve as the activity that sustains physical existence in the way human souls do (see \textit{Chapters} 124-5; 1145-8, 38). I am indebted to Marcus Pleston for conversations clarifying the way Palamas understands mind and soul.
\item \textsuperscript{190} \textit{Chapters}, 61-2; Sinkewicz, 54-7.
\item \textsuperscript{191} \textit{Chapters}, 27; Sinkewicz, 110-1; and 64; Sinkewicz, 159.
\end{itemize}
reason, enjoying a threefold knowledge that can imitate how God creates matter out of nothing.

These distinctions assign humanity a place as the pinnacle of creation and prohibit worship of anything created. Oriented to the Creator by the gift of soul, human beings may either put on the goodness of God or fall away into evil, determining which direction life events will bend.192 The insight gained from sense perception of the created world pales, then, in comparison to the knowledge of the divine nature that directs persons by being made present within them. Even weakness in the mind, as long as it is acknowledged in the person’s search for divine healing, surpasses all understanding of natural phenomena in their multiform complexities.193

Though all that exists participates to some extent in God in order to live, it is the free choice of approaching and receiving divine illumination that enables a person to receive a greater share of divine life. Therefore, only rational beings with the capacity to choose can direct their souls either closer to or farther away from God.194 The works and worship that enable theosis illuminate the person with greater shares of the divine energy accessible only through this rational soul.195 Worshipping God with the enlightened soul thus entails “conceiving the incorporeal incorporeally” so that, transcending the boundaries of what is physically perceivable, one comprehends and adores how God “sustains and encompasses the universe” and thus can also be found everywhere within and also beyond the universe.196 The soul’s capacity allows the person to enjoy union

192 Chapters, 30-33; Sinkewicz, 114-7.
193 Chapters, 29; Sinkewicz, 112-3,.
194 Chapters, 78; Sinkewicz, 174-5.
195 Chapters, 57-8; Sinkewicz, 150-3.
196 Chapters, 60; Sinkewicz, 154-5.
with divine goodness such that she realizes the kingdom of God within her own life. Such conclusions are not original to Palamas. What he does with them, however, sets apart his theology of deification.

For when Gregory seeks to articulate a particular way in which this union with God takes place, he also argues that deification reconnects persons with the divine rationality that transcends such materiality by taking place right within it. Rather than champion the primacy of the soul over the body safeguarded by intellectual pursuits, his hesychastic commitments lead him to trace how the embodied soul at prayer enables deification. As Palamas explains how the human soul mediates the glory of the deified life to the person’s body, his theology of theosis codifies the essence-energies distinction.

According to Palamas, deification shares physically-manifested aspects of God’s uncreated glory with creatures in particular ways. Given his depiction of theosis as taking the person past all sensory experience and expression, one might expect Palamas to denigrate the body’s role in deification. Instead, the opposite holds true. What sets apart Palamas’ hesychast deification is his contention that the person receives God’s uncreated glory as it becomes present in and through created matter. In fact, without the body’s location for divine radiance, theosis proves impossible. Though deification presents “everywhere,” “one cannot contemplate deification if there is no matter to receive the divine manifestation.”

Palamas supports this contention with several related expositions. First, he spends significant time defending how soul and body must unite in the activities of deification that enlarge and direct them. This connection, though it only works beneficially in one

197 *Chapters*, 56; Sinkiewicz, 148-51.
198 *The Triads*, III.i.34; Gendle, 89.
direction, remains crucial. A body that unduly directs the mind drags the latter into inferiority. But the grace of *theosis* constitutes a “permanent energy” united to and rooted within the soul that liberates it from being ensnared by bodily pleasures. As long as influence flows in this path, “the spiritual joy which comes from the mind into the body is in no way corrupted by the communion with the body, but transforms the body and makes it spiritual.”¹⁹⁹ This joy allows the whole person to become spirit, drawing the flesh “to a dignity close to that of the spirit” as it works in common with the soul, allowing them to engage together in these “blessed passions” that “transform the body into something better.”²⁰⁰

Palamas defends this notion by examining how material goods are created as well as by returning to christology. First, as he considers the general processes of human life, Gregory notes that once the created person’s sensory perception joins with the soul’s capacities for reason, the arts, sciences, and all forms of knowledge and creativity come into existence. Indeed, the rational and eternal soul’s cleaving to the material world as “the life-giving power” of bodies that enables such creation may be named “intellectual love.” “Through it [intellectual love] the soul naturally possesses such a bond of love with its own body that it never wishes to leave it and will not do so at all unless force is brought to bear on it externally.”²⁰¹ The obedient soul brings the body along with it, adding to intellectual incorporeality all the structures and existences of materiality.²⁰²

This love also connects the divine to matter. It definitively marks the human soul as the divine image, copying in its unwillingness to leave behind physical things God’s

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¹⁹⁹ *The Triads*, II.ii.9; Gendle, 50-1. We will return to the notion of energy below.
²⁰⁰ *The Triads*, II.ii.12; Gendle, 51-2.
²⁰¹ *Chapters*, 38; Sinkewicz, 124-5. See also *Chapters*, 91; Sinkewicz, 190-1.
²⁰² *Chapters*, 40; Sinkewicz, 126-9.
own eagerness to bear materiality into divine life. The soul makes a great hinge between
this world and the supernatural realities when it puts on the radiant marks of divine nature
to possess and manifest God’s image and likeness. It returns to its maker, but not empty-
handed. It brings the body and all materiality along with it.

This capacity is perfectly realized in Christ’s union of human and divine in one
hypostasis: “[t]hereby God leads us to a clear faith in the visitation and manifestation of
the supreme Word through the flesh.” 203 But this love is not limited to Christ. The person
may imitate Christ’s own manner of taking on flesh to allow matter to truly live. 204 The
person’s growth into divine likeness imitates Christ’s perfect humanity, which obtained
eternal life, body and soul, “for at the proper time the body attains to the promised
resurrection and participates in eternal glory.” 205 Here, Palamas’ focus on the body in
theosis becomes clearer. He writes that the body becomes God’s dwelling place, since
there is nothing bad in the body itself. 206

This bodily transformation is not simply an accidental echo of more ‘spiritual’ or
abstract matters, either. The body experiences all the same divine things as the soul being
deified—and these common activities do not alienate soul from body or the person as a
whole from the corporeal life. Rather, the body is no longer driven by material passions,
replacing them for the blessed passions of the divinizing experience of divine glory.
The body receives this glory from the soul, which allows the whole person, body and
soul, to unite to God. 207

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203 Chapters 63; Sinkewicz, 156-9.
204 The Triads, Lii.5-6; Gendle, 44-5.
205 Chapters, 39; Sinkewicz 126-7.
206 The Triads, Lii.1; Gendle, 42.
207 The Triads, II.ii. 12; Gendle, 51.
Moreover, while experiences of deification do cause the mind to “go out from every creature,” they also direct the mind to “return entirely” to itself.208 As Palamas argues, “to make the mind ‘go out,’ not only from fleshly thoughts, but out of the body itself, with the aim of contemplating intelligible visions—that is the greatest of the Hellenic errors, the root and source of all heresies.”209 By contrast, the only way to union with God is the path that leads through the self, including one’s body. Indeed, the inner quiet that predisposes her toward receiving the deifying gifts of the Spirit requires a person to “gather together the mind and enclose it in the body,” returning the mind to herself.210 As Palamas describes what the creature receives—divine light—he explains that such glory interacts with the person’s body as well as her soul, even while she inhabits a material world. Far from becoming a pretext for detaching the mind from the body—which might result in either bodily denigration or debauchery—Gregory’s deification keeps the person firmly anchored to embodied virtue.

Gregory develops this notion when he discusses hesychast prayer and the benefits of theosis for the body. Palamas directs practitioners to attend to this centering of mind within the body by learning how to control their breathing in slow inhalation, exhalation, and holding and by training their gaze upon their chests or navels.211 A rhythmic breath and concentrated gaze aid in the quieting of the body from sense perceptions that distract from full union with God. Further discipline of the body and emotions with “fasting, vigils and similar things” may also prove helpful, for the body and its dispositions should

208 The Triads, Liii.21; Gendle, 38.
209 The Triads, Lii.4; Gendle, 44.
210 The Triads, L.ii.3-4; Gendle, 43-44.
211 The Triads, Lii.7-8; Gendle, 45-6.
be seen as “a fellow-worker” given from God. Lest one find these instructions to unfairly chastise the body, Gregory continues to note that deification requires discipline not only in sense perception but also in intellectual activities. Both the flesh and the great and useful things of the mind must be surpassed in order to enjoy union with God.

The fruits of a deification so rendered include all the charisms of the Spirit expressed in both body and soul. Not only the ecstasies of the soul but also the actions of the body display deifying graces: tongues and their interpretation, words of instruction, healing, miracles, laying on of hands. Furthermore, Gregory notes, though all these gifts are acquired through the union brought in prayer, for some of them “it is possible that they may operate even when prayer is absent from the soul.” These charisms involving the body are just as much God’s gifts as spiritual ecstasies that forget the body, Palamas warns. He adds that “since [those being deified] are concentrated within themselves, it is through the mediation of their souls and body that God effects things supernatural, mysterious and incomprehensible to the wise of this world.”

As evidence, Gregory turns to scripturally recorded events such as the Holy Spirit’s gift of words to the apostles at Pentecost and Moses’ visitation by God. Speaking to Barlaam, Palamas asks how the Spirit could give the apostles words that they had to recollect in speaking when “according to you, those in ecstasy should forget, since they must be forgetful of themselves.” In the same way, Palamas marshalls the Exodus narrative of God’s response to Moses’ pleas for help. The text shows that Moses was

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212 The Triads, II.ii.5-6; Gendle, 48-9.
213 The Triads, II.ii.8; Gendle, 50.
214 The Triads, II.ii.13; Gendle, 52-3.
215 The Triads, II.ii.13; Gendle, 53.
216 The Triads, II.ii.14; Gendle, 53.
217 The Triads, II.ii.14; Gendle, 53.
praying in a manner Barlaam would approve of as gateway to deification, i.e., in silence, but the answer does not take shape consistent with Palamas’ opponent’s stance:

[d]id he then abandon his senses, not noticing the people, their cries, and the danger having over them, nor the staff that was in his visible hand? Why did not God ravish him at that moment, why did He not deliver him from the senses (which you seem to think the sole gift of God to those who pray)?

Instead, God empowers Moses within soul and body for the sake of the people he leads. Moses, holding knowledge of God within his soul, nevertheless engages in physical actions: striking the sea with his staff, walking through it, striking it once more to close it. His union with God did not alienate him from these bodily actions, Palamas points out, but allowed him to accomplish God’s plans through his body’s senses and movements.

Just so, in his earlier description of the glory given through deifying union with God, Gregory notes that this divine light serves as “the splendor of the deified flesh, flesh which enriches and communicates the glory of the divinity.” First in the person of Christ, then granted to Christ’s followers, theosis makes of flesh a magnifier of divine majesty.

With these detailed descriptions, Palamas articulates a stunning commitment to deification’s transformation of the body, not just of the categories typically associated with a capacity for divine indwelling, the “soul” or “mind.” The transformation of the soul brought about by union with God does not destroy “the passionate part of the soul” but simply redirects its energies to divine things. Here, too, the flesh is elevated, “becoming itself a dwelling and possession of God.”

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218 The Triads, II.i.14; Gendle, 53-4.
219 The Triads, II.i.14; Gendle, 54.
220 The Triads, II.iii.20; Gendle, 63.
221 The Triads, II.ii.19; Gendle, 54.
222 The Triads, II.ii.5; Gendle, 48.
soul progress towards the love of God that fulfills the divine commandments and purely and perfectly loves the neighbor.223 Though the natural path towards these goals remains consecrated life apart from the world, Palamas nevertheless concedes that those who live in the world can still pursue deification as they “force themselves to use the things of this world in conformity with the commandments of God.”224 One achieves this by offering oneself to God—and Palamas specifically names eyes, ears, tongues, hands, and feet as involved in the common progress of soul and body towards theosis.225

So far, so good. Palamas has defended the becoming holy of the saints with the argument that holiness, simply being who the transcendent God is, must be understood as the person actually participating in that simple, incorruptible divinity. This creaturely capacity serves as the heart of his theology of deification. He has added to this his theory that God endows the person with this capacity as part of what it means to be human: soul (or mind) and body in one composite entity, with the soul directing the body and the body following along. Created materiality bears divine glory as its identity. Now he summarizes how hesychast deification works by describing this union of God with the created world, once more arguing against Barlaam that what appears in this union is also created.

3. Divine Action in Creation: Deification through Natural Symbol

In the third section of the Triads, Palamas adds the final layer to his argument that deification involves God’s divinity actually permeating material beings. If God remains

223 The Triads, II.ii.19; Gendle, 55.
224 The Triads, II.ii.20; Gendle, 55.
225 The Triads, II.ii.20; Gendle, 55.
inaccessible to created reality, only capable of breaking in through created symbols, what
awaits those in glory but

more symbols of this kind, more mirrors, more enigmas?...For indeed if even in heaven
there are still to be symbols, mirrors, enigmas, then we have been deceived in our hopes,
deluded by sophistry; thinking that the promise will make us acquire the true divinity, we
do not even gain a vision of divinity.226

As fodder against Barlaam, whom Palamas quotes as defining divine glory as “a sensible
light” only symbolizing divinity, Gregory composes a double-pronged attack.227

First, he argues that there is no such thing as a sensible divinity. How could the
light of God’s glory disappear and thus prove more ephemeral than even the created
beings receiving that light? This divine glory does not seem capable of rendering Christ’s
flesh translucent to its power on Mount Tabor. Nor could it unite with God in the endless
ages of God’s eventual triumphant reign: “[a]nd will God be all in all for us, as the
apostles and Fathers proclaim, when in the case of Christ, divinity will be replaced by a
sensible light?”228 Again, Palamas’ commitment to divine transcendence provides the
basis for his argument. He sees the overwhelming abundance of the light of theosis as
more than the mere apparition of a material symbol that points to immaterial realities:

[f]or how could this light, so radiant and divine, eternal, supereminently possessing
immutable being, have anything in common with all those symbols and allusions which
are adapted to particular circumstances, which come into existence only to disappear
again, which at one time exist and another do not exist…?229

If his argument that deification offers something beyond the created world and not a work
of human nature is accepted, theosis cannot simply provide a created, sensory symbol of
God.230

226 *The Triads*, III.i.11; Gendle, 73.
227 *The Triads*, III.i.10-11; Gendle, 72-3.
228 *The Triads*, III.i.11; Gendle, 73.
229 *The Triads*, II.iii.20; Gendle, 63.
230 *The Triads*, III.i.26; Gendle, 82.
Second, Gregory builds a theology of symbol to more deeply address Barlaam’s propositions. Palamas proposes that all symbols are either natural or unnatural. If the deifying glory is an unnatural symbol, it must either exist on its own quite apart from that which it symbolizes or only briefly appear before dissolving into nothing.\textsuperscript{231} Palamas quickly rules out the latter option, since Christ’s glory must persist eternally.\textsuperscript{232} Not only that, but divine glory belonged to the Son before being perceived by the disciples on Tabor and was already allocated to humanity “from the start, from the moment in which he assumed our nature.”\textsuperscript{233} Likewise he renders insufficient the argument that the light of divine glory serves as an unnatural symbol, for it does not possess an independent reality separable from the divine nature. If that were the case, Gregory claims, the fact that Christ permanently holds the glory of \textit{theosis} would make Christ consist of three natures: divine, human, and transfiguring light.\textsuperscript{234}

Rather, what is shared from God with those who love and obey “transcends every intellectual power,” lies “beyond all things” and remains “impossible to comprehend.” The light of deifying union with God appears as the mind “slowly abandons all relation with these things [of creation], and even with those superior to them, in order to be totally separated from all beings.”\textsuperscript{235} This light transfigures the one enveloped by it into light, “[f]or it is in light that the light is seen,” and that which separates from all other beings “becomes itself all light and is assimilated to what it sees.”\textsuperscript{236} As he goes on to explain:

[i]f it sees itself, it sees light; if it beholds the object of its vision, that too is light; and if it looks at the means by which it sees, again it is light. For such is the character of the union, that all is one, so that he who sees can distinguish neither the means nor the object

\textsuperscript{231} The Triads, III.i.14; Gendle, 75.
\textsuperscript{232} The Triads, III.i.14; Gendle, 75.
\textsuperscript{233} The Triads, III.i.15; Gendle, 76.
\textsuperscript{234} The Triads, III.i.17; Gendle, 77.
\textsuperscript{235} The Triads, II.iii.33-35; Gendle, 64-65.
\textsuperscript{236} The Triads, II.iii.36; Gendle, 65-6.
nor its nature, but simply has the awareness of being light and of seeing a light distinct
from every creature.\textsuperscript{237}

Divine glory “becomes its own proper symbol” in the same way that fire’s transcendent,
imparticipable capacity to burn symbolizes itself in its sensorially perceivable heat.\textsuperscript{238}

Once more, the light of deification does not pertain to human nature, “for our nature is
not light, let alone a light such as this.” For Palamas, the proof is in the pudding. The
transformation of those being deified proves that they receive God. He goes on, “[t]he
Saviour did not ascend Thabor, accompanied by the chosen disciples, in order to show
them that He was a man…No, He went up to show them ‘that he was the radiance of the
Father.’”\textsuperscript{239}

Since Palamas identifies the light shared in deification with that which emanates
from the transfigured Christ, such light must not be considered created. Scripture and the
lives of the saints evidence the \textit{theotic} transformation of humanity by the presence of the
uncreated divine. The idea of symbolization adds weight to Palamas’ claims. Deification
must involve God sharing transcendent and immaterial divinity through the natural
symbol of divine glory. Later in the \textit{Triads}, Palamas connects this argument to the
problem of reception:

\begin{quote}
[t]his mysterious light, inaccessible, immaterial, uncreated, deifying, eternal, this
radiance of the Divine Nature, this glory of the divinity, this beauty of the heavenly
kingdom, is at once accessible to sense perception and yet transcends it. Does such a
reality really seem to you to be a symbol alien to divinity, sensible, created and ‘visible
through the medium of air’?\textsuperscript{240}
\end{quote}

This divine light must somehow prove accessible to the sensory perceptions of the
created, or they have no route to the communion with God central to the Christian story.
Of course, this paradox fits well with his theology of human nature, wherein the composite nature of the human being herself roots divine illumination within her flesh. Again, Palamas’ commitment to the permeability of matter by divine glory drives his theory of deification. The givenness of the hesychast’s physically perceivable illumination by the transcendent God leads him to develop this explanation of divine action in creation.

4. **Summary of How Hesychast Deification Works**

This quick tour of hesychast *theosis* gives us an outline of the model’s key defining features. Gregory’s thought stimulates questions. Key among them: how exactly can the created person be brought to this realm of uncreated light that transcends all knowledge and sense perception without destroying either her humanity or God’s divinity? I will return to this question below. For now, let us summarize Palamas’ description of what happens in hesychast deification.

My overview makes clear the radical promise of Palamas’ deification that any ecumenical resourcing must consider. A brief synopsis should suffice here, tagging back to my main areas of investigation. First, concerning the divine end of the deification pendulum, Palamas (unsurprisingly) stresses God’s absolute transcendence. Yet his affirmation of this classical tenet already comes packaged with the hesychast experience. If God grants the creature holiness, that must entail access to God’s own self, bringing her into the uncreated realm and making her truly a child of divinity in ways that transcend mere creaturely virtue. Second, we see how hesychast deification relies on a specific account of human nature. Though created, souls possess an inherent capacity to
receive divine illumination. Since souls connect with bodies, deification brings that glory into creaturely life by engaging within material bounds rather than by trying to overcome or dissociate from them. Escape from the material world proves less the focus than transfiguring all areas of creaturely life through the ordering of body and soul. Theosis takes place as the person redirects the eyes of her soul to receive divine glory, which it then shares with the body. The body responds by magnifying that glory with material actions. Third, then, as God interacts with creation, deification makes the ravishing light of the transcendent God present in correlation to scriptural accounts of Christ’s transfiguration and the promises to be with God. The uncreated divinity appears through the natural symbol of divine glory.

Palamas’ discussion of how the body extends the divine work in the soul sketches a theosis for the embodied life of the lay person, cloistered or not. Submission to God and care for one’s neighbor keep the person centered in her body, now animated by the soul’s connection with God. This connection allows her to maintain the communion of body with soul necessary for full deification and does not remove her bodily passions but simply redirects them toward divine purposes. The humility of desiring divine fellowship above all else allows her to transcend the strictures of her sensory world precisely by centering her within them. The zeal of the soul’s passions and the physical life of the body are not denied in theosis but rather re-directed towards God through the prayer of the soul that centers within and animates the body.

Palamas’ deification beckons to every person. But the components just discussed prove only part of Palamas’ overarching structure. Much of the balance of the Triads moves to technical deliberations on why deification can be said to take place. Though
deification moves the person within her embodied constructs, how she receives the divine remains something altogether mysterious, indefinable, and inaccessible. Holding together both sets of affirmations—that deification occurs within the person’s body to affect the sensible world and that deification brings to the person an utterly transcendent, incommunicable divine gift—prompts Palmas to codify what becomes known as the essence-energies distinction, which we will explore in the next section.

As we turn now to the second major question driving my investigation—how the hesychast trajectory maintains Creator-creature difference when the person undergoing theosis receives the actual, uncreated divine light within her soul and body—the Hesychast model gains complexity. How does Palamas’ take on this distinction add to his depictions of God’s self-determination, God’s action in creation, and the creaturely capacity to receive God? Additionally, how amenable will these explanations prove for constructing an ecumenical model of the doctrine? Can deification take place using a different construction of Creator-creature difference, or is it locked into the hesychast model?

B. How Does this Model Maintain the Creator-Creature Distinction?

The three strands of Palamas’ vision of deification and its effects now appear on the dialogue table. It is their combination that creates the framework for the essence-energies distinction. As Gregory holds together the intervention of divine grace and the access to God uniquely offered by Christian deification with the importance of the person’s body to refract divine glory, he must explain how God communicates actual divinity to the person’s created body without that partitioning divinity. Physical bodies
must not exhaust the divine essence or gain completely unfettered access to it. Once again, his discussion impacts deification’s three primary categories: God’s self-determination, the person’s capability to receive God while maintaining her distinction, and how God interacts with the receptive yet distinct creation.

1. **Divine Self-Determination: Essence and Energies**

To grasp why Palamas systematizes the essence-energies solution, we must return to his arguments against Barlaam’s contention that what is given in *theosis* is created. Gregory strongly disagrees, based on how divine simplicity transcends creation. Gregory determines that the divine essence, the “supreme mind” and “highest good,” possesses goodness not as persons do—as a quality that may animate some actions—but rather as its own substance. This mind admits of no distinctions between life, wisdom, goodness, or “any good that one might conceive of,” but rather possesses them all collectively, univocally, and in utter simplicity.” Divine goodness is neither threefold nor a triad of goodesses, but a

> holy, august, and venerable Trinity flowing forth from itself into itself without change and abiding with itself before the ages...being both unbounded and bounded by itself alone, while setting bounds for all things, transcending all things and allowing no beings independent of itself.242

Only this fully good God existing beyond the constraints of the material world could so permeate through *theosis* all of its nooks and crannies.

For Palamas, the divine deifies because in this unitive simplicity, God is three realities: substance, energy, and the Trinity of hypostases.243 He classifies divine energy

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241 *Chapters*, 34; Sinkewicz, 116-9.
242 *Chapters*, 37; Sinkewicz, 120-5.
243 *Chapters* 75; Sinkewicz, 170-1.
as similar to the hypostatic properties of God, neither substance nor accident in God. In fact, “[i]f the substance does not possess an energy distinct from itself, it will be completely without actual subsistence and will be only a concept in the mind.” The energies of creating, preserving, ruling, and transforming inferior beings according to God’s will and knowledge are contemplated in the three persons (thus God is one substance in three hypostases). God’s will is God’s energy; therefore God creates by will and not by nature. In Palamas’ framework, if divine substance and energy are to be collapsed, generation and procession within the Godhead will no longer be distinct from creation. Creation becomes divine, no longer distinguishable from God’s own substance.

Throughout his defense of hesychasm, Palamas develops this distinction. Answering Barlaamite concerns in the Dialogue that his distinction violates divine simplicity, Palamas stresses his commitment to divine self-determination as self-sufficient, simple, and transcendent being. The energies instance divine powers inseparable from God, the “Superessential Reality” who possesses them and gathers them together within itself. All manifestations, processions, and appellations of God stem from the one God, who “because it is a cause and a giver, stands above the unspeakable grace which proceeds out of it.” The divine energy makes the divine manifest,

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244 Chapters, 136; Sinkewicz, 242-3.
245 Chapters 135-7; Sinkewicz, 240-2.
246 Chapters, 97-103; Sinkewicz, 196-201.
247 The Triads, III.i.23; Genlde, 81. See also Dialogue, XVI; Ferwerda, 57, quoting Maximus that the one divinity is indivisible, having no parts (Capita theologica 2/1 PG 90, 1124D-1125A, and I, 5 PG 90, 1180A), and that “one and the same are the essence and the energy and the power of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit” (Capita theologica 2/1PG 90, 1125AC) (57-8/XVI). In Dialogue XVI; Ferwerda, 58, Palamas also quotes Nyssa that God, invisible in essence becomes visible in energies—seen in the characteristic features around him (De Beatitudinibus 4 PG 44, 1269A).
248 Dialogue, XIX; Ferwerda, 60.
revealing the substance through divine acts and qualities such as providence. Palamas continues,

[the essence is existing independently and is, in all respects, unthinkable: but the power which is around it in a physical way and which is understood by us according to our faculties on the basis of the creatures and which is named and praised...as foreseeing, creative and theurgic, is contemplating and directing everything.]

Gregory proposes that lacking such physically-perceptible things as these “realities” does not establish God’s transcendence but rather vitiates it. For instance, in both God and created entities, the will belongs to nature, not the reverse. In addition to will, Palamas claims that foreknowledge, compassion, judgment, and so on also exist in a physical yet uncreated way in God, just as does the uncreated light of deification.

Moreover, Palamas argues that since the divine supra-essentiality does not have a name of its own, terms such as divinity, essence, goodness, life, wisdom, or causation name God according to divine activities. Though divine powers are convertible with God’s energies and the divine names (such as goodness, holiness, virtue, immortality, and glory), to safeguard the simplicity of the divine essence beyond all names and understanding, they nevertheless must not be considered the divine essence itself. In fact, “everything that is said about God denotes something that surrounds that essence...That which is above all names stands in fact above all that which is named, and

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249 *Chapters*, 141; Sinkewicz, 246-7.
250 *Dialogue*, XXV; Ferwerda, 65-66. In support, Palamas quotes Basil, *Against Eunomius* 2/32; PG 29, 648A that “the creatures demonstrate the power and wisdom and skill, but not the essence itself.”
251 *Dialogue*, IV-VI; Ferwerda, 48-50. This rationale later leads Palamas to suggest that if divine substance and energy are equivalent, the Son and Spirit would become works of the Father’s will secondary to the divine substance (see *Chapters*, 97-103; Sinkewicz, 196-201).
252 *Dialogue*, XVII-XVIII; Ferwerda, 58-9.
253 See *The Triads*, III.ii.7; Gendle, 95-6 and III.ii.9-10; Gendle, 96-7.
the essence is higher than all the things around it.”

Therefore, distinguishing the various names for divine actions such as goodness and wisdom does not partition God, who is wholly goodness, wisdom, greatness, etc. Conversely, the names denote God, but do not admit of full possession of God’s substance. God is “properly whole” in relation to each, and through each God is known “as one and simple and undivided, as being everywhere present and active as a whole.”

The one eternal divine essence roots these energies as their transcendent cause, and therefore cannot be identified as them. Gregory holds these two positions together:

neither the uncreated goodness, nor the eternal glory, nor the divine life nor things akin to these are simply the superessential essence of God, for God transcends them all as Cause. But we say He is life, goodness and so forth, and give Him these names, because of the revelatory energies and powers of the Superessential…For, given the multitude of divine energies, how could God subsist entirely in each without any division at all; and how could each provide Him with a name and manifest Him entirely, thanks to indivisible and supernatural simplicity, if He did not transcend all these energies?

To collapse essence with divine energies would cause all of the energies to bleed into each other and obliterate their distinctions, such as the difference between divine will and divine foreknowledge. For instance, like God’s will, divine glory remains unoriginate,

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254 Dialogue, XX; Ferwerda, 61-2, quote at 61. Palamas here references Athanasius that being God is second to God’s nature (Dialogue with a Macedonian I/14; PG 28, 1313A) (61, XX), Basil that the activities of the Spirit are unnamable and innumerable and the Spirit remains so far above the ages that these activities are also above them (On the Holy Spirit 19; PG 32, 156D) (61, XX), and Denys that divinity refers to the one source of all and derivatively the power coming from God that is divinization itself (Divine Names 11/6; PG 3, 953D-956A) (62, XX). He also cites Denys’ letter to Gaius that divinity is “the gift which makes us God and good according to which we become God and good. For if that is the beginning of becoming God for those who become God, then God who is above all beginning is also above the divinity which gets its name in that sense” (Letters 2; PG 3, 1068A-1069A, quoted in Dialogue XX; Ferwerda, 62).

255 Dialogue, XLV; Ferwerda, 83-4.

256 The Triads, III.ii.7; Gendle, 95-6.

257 The Triads, III.ii.7; Gendle, 95-6; emphasis in translation. This reasoning supports claims that to God belong not just unintelligible beauty, wisdom, goodness, power, divinity but also intelligible beauty, wisdom, goodness, power, divinity.
uncreated, and unintelligible, existing not on its own but in dependence upon the divine 

essence.258

Late in the Dialogue, Palamas adds that identifying the divine essence and 
activities collapses both together into simply empty names; God’s distinct modes must 
not be so conflated.259 Any intelligible names must of necessity not exhaust the divine 

essence in se. The Barlaamite tries to exploit this discussion by following Basil’s 

contention that all qualities (such as good, wise, powerful, just) attributed to God signify 
the one divine substance who is known in those realities.260 This approach could lend 
weight to the Barlaamite position that divine essence and energies cannot be 
distinguished.

Nevertheless, Palamas’ advocate replies that while some divine names concern 
relation or participation, others refer to value, others still concern activity, none of them 

connotes the divine essence, which remains above all names. While these names for God 
could be considered to hold equal honor to one another, they are not interchangeable. 

Their different meanings must be preserved, even as they all refer to the one God, since 
they name God from their distinct comings to be within those being deified by the 
energies.261 So, to Palamas, maintaining divine simplicity actually requires the sort of 
distinction he derives, even apart from considering creaturely deification.

Finally, Palamas denies Barlaam’s repeated charge that his rendering makes God 
composite on the grounds that identifying God with divine actions collapses divinity

258 The Triads, III.i.25; Genlde, 82.
259 Dialogue, XXX; Ferwerda, 70.
260 Dialogue, XXVIII; Ferwerda, 76; quoting Letter to Eustathius; Letters 189.5 (PG 32, 689BC).
261 Dialogue, XXXIX-XL; Ferwerda, 77-9; quoting Letter to Eustathius/Letters 189.5 (PG 32, 
689BC) and Against Eunomius 1.6-7 (PG 29, 524B-525B), 1.8 (PG 29, 528BC), and 2.29 (PG 29, 640C).
down into the arena of material creaturely finitude. He reasons that since divine activity
can be perceived in the sensible world, to identify it as God’s own essence necessarily
constricts that essence into what can be sensorily grasped. Nevertheless, “when we speak
of one Godhead we speak of everything that God is, namely, both the substance and the
energy.” Palamas quotes Basil of Caesarea’s *Ad Eunomium* to establish the point that
“energy is neither the one operating, nor what is operated. Therefore, the energy is not
indistinct from the substance.” The one distinction is that begetting or generation
belong to the divine nature; these capacities belong to the nature from whom the energies
emanate as essential motions. The capacity and the actions that follow do not make
God composite; only if God could be acted upon could God be considered so.

In this model, the sheer gift offered in deification—access to the uncreated,
 eternal, transcendent God—demands such a safeguard, lest this God prove corruptible by
being placed on the same plane as creation. To protect the magnitude of *thesosis,* what the
deified person receives must originate from outside of her created life and capacity, but at
the same time, this life must not encapsulate the full divine essence. The essence-energies
distinction gives Palamas a crux upon which to balance the paradox of deification. One
must accept the divine singularity of essence, which makes deification the real ‘making
God’ of the person through her access to the uncreated realm, while at the same time
acknowledging the distance between divine activity and essence that preserves the

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262 *Chapters* 126; Sinkewicz, 228-31. In *Chapters* 147; Sinkewicz, 252-3 Palamas distinguishes
the uncreated substance as grace and uncreated energy as the illumination of that grace that both
nevertheless belong to the same God.


264 *Chapters*, 143; Sinkewicz, 248-9, quoting Cyril of Alexandria, *Thesaurus* 18 (PG 75: 312C)

265 *Chapters*, 145; Sinkewicz, 250-1.
person’s different identity from God. The hiddenness of the divine essence shrouds God’s substance from total identity with creation. Divine manifestation through the uncreated energies opens the door for the person to experience union with God’s activities as a whole being, body and soul.

Palamas supports this view by adding another layer to his theological anthropology. Deification shares physically-manifested aspects of God’s uncreated glory with creatures in particular ways. The significance of the person’s body, as led by the soul, helps Palamas relativize the role of the intellect in enabling theosis and maintain the person’s difference from the God to whom she is united.

2. Creaturely Capacities: the Insufficiency of Knowledge

What hesychast deification allows is a union with the Divine who totally transcends creation. In addition to the details already discussed, hesychast deification also produces an important qualification of theological knowledge. Palamas stresses that the soul’s vision of God in creation actually requires a certain form of ignorance. As human knowledge will always prove insufficient to the divine transcendence, the continual pursuit of knowledge actually entraps the person within the passion of striving. As the previous section demonstrated, for Palamas, the divine glory consists of essence and energies. So what Palamas safeguards is the person’s ability to fully participate in those energies with her own energy and activities. This commitment to souls and bodies concomitantly irradiated by divine glory makes knowledge less important than the

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266 See Dialogue, XXIV-XLV; Ferwerda, 72-84.
267 The Triads, II.iii.11; Gendle, 58-9.
obedience of the person as a whole. Thus God’s power spills over to all created life, even to the simple.

Palamas takes this issue so seriously that he opens the *Triads* by treating the acquisition of wisdom as a problem. He notes the prevalence of the opinion that monks should pursue wisdom from the scientific and cultural constructs of the day to increase their souls’ faculty of knowledge and presumably their *theotic* capacity. Since, according to this argument, the power of knowledge remains the greatest of all the soul’s faculties, education “dispels all other evils from the soul” and leads to the knowledge of God mediated through the creatures studying or being studied.\(^{268}\) It may be true that such pursuits lead to “a certain concept of God,” Palamas admits, but this is not a conception he considers “truly worthy” of the divine nature.\(^{269}\) His driving concern is to safeguard that God can be attained; as warrant, he cites Paul’s denigration of human wisdom that cannot fathom the wisdom revealed in Christ.\(^{270}\)

At first glance, it may not be clear why this argument proves key for the hesychast model.\(^{271}\) In making his initial case, Gregory almost purposefully inhabits the perspective of someone lacking precisely the formal education Barlaam champions, challenging education in general and philosophy in particular on their shortcomings. Of course, Palamas’ subsequent erudite defense of *theosis* fits oddly with these sharp early claims championing direct experience of God over deep intellectual learning. Palamas cannot simply mean that all knowledge is wrong, for he goes on to classify natural philosophy as

\(^{268}\) *The Triads*, I.i.17; Gendle, 25.
\(^{269}\) *The Triads*, I.i.18; Gendle, 26.
\(^{270}\) *The Triads*, I.i.18; Gendle, 26-27.
\(^{271}\) This approach also strongly clashes with modern sensibilities that would affirm the importance of philosophical analysis for theological knowledge.
divine gift. As John Meyendorff notes, these sharp contrasts between human and divine knowledge form Palamas’ rhetorical strategy to counter (what he reads as) Barlaam’s approach. Rather than approve Barlaam’s emphasis on philosophical education as the gateway to knowledge of God, Palamas wishes to preserve the possibility of bodily experience of God that both transcends and does not depend upon philosophy. Gregory wishes to secure first the possibility of deification unfolding in the lives of all people, even those lacking the education he himself possesses and will later use to challenge Barlaam. Once he establishes the deifying value of unlearned and embodied experiences, he can then engage Barlaam’s arguments with his own highly developed philosophical model.

What worries Palamas about Barlaam’s approach is the “falling away” into pride that distracts philosophy from its proper work and goal of acquiring truth and glorifying the Creator. The problem is not that education never catalyzes union with God but that it can provoke a pride in one’s own knowledge that gainsays virtuously imaging God. The natural gift of philosophical inquiry must be used rightly in order to work towards good. To acquire knowledge and rightly sift it entails much discipline, not necessarily more intelligence or knowledge. One may be liberated from the cares that block contemplation of God through observing and understanding what creation displays of

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272 The Triads, I.i.19; Gendle, 27.
273 See his notes 3-6 on The Triads I.i.; Gendle, 117-9.
274 See Meyendorff’s commentary at notes 4-6 and 27 on The Triads I.i; Gendle, 118-20.
275 The Triads, I.i.20-21; Gendle, 28-29. As Gregory clarifies, “no evil thing is evil insofar as it exists, but insofar as it is turned aside from the activity appropriate to it, and thus from the end assigned to this activity” (The Triads, I.i.19; Gendle, 28).
276 The Triads, I.i.21-22; Gendle, 29.
God’s majesty. The true spiritual gifts of God can then be received by the simple fishermen, publicans, and persecutors filling the pages of the New Testament, for they encountered a Christ who did not teach philosophy so much as embody the eternal wisdom that looks foolish to the wisdom of the world.

What does this process entail? As God wishes that we completely radiate the divine glory “in our inmost selves,” Palamas relies on Isaac the Syrian to claim that the soul possesses two eyes: one sees the secrets of nature which reveal the power, wisdom, and providence of God, while the other sees the glory of God’s own nature. The one eye that sees the knowledge mediated through understanding created things grants a person the inference of God’s existence. But the second eye receives God’s glory, in the mediating light of deification, so that the person “knows and possesses God in [her]self, no longer by analogy, but by a true contemplation, transcendent to all creatures, for [s]he is never separated from the eternal glory.” God grants this experience of God’s own glory not just to the incarnate Son but to those disciples who believe and manifest belief in their works. The varying capacities of those who are being divinized makes the energies present to different degrees within each one. This unifying divine action within creation grants grace to each partaker of the Spirit according to her developed capacities: “in those still imperfect as a certain disposition,” while “in those more perfect, as an

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277 *The Triads*, I.i.20; Gendle, 28. Overstating his case, Palamas asks, “[w]hat need is there to run these dangers without necessity, when it is possible to contemplate the wisdom of God in His [sic] creatures not only without peril but with profit?”

278 *The Triads*, I.i.22; Gendle, 30.

279 *The Triads*, II.iii.15: Gendle, 60.

280 *The Triads*, II.iii.15: Gendle, 59-60.

281 *The Triads*, II.iii.16: Gendle, 60-1. Note how, at least according to the translation, here Palamas claims that one may possess God! We will return to this apparent inconsistency below, in chapters four and five.
acquired” or even fixed state. By keeping God’s commandments, a disciple fuels her second eye’s vision.

Seeing God in the manner described above, as the light of glory beyond both knowing and unknowing, makes deification a spiritual pursuit rather than an object to be possessed the way philosophical knowledge may be accrued. Deification does not then consist of the person’s preoccupation with symbols or even scripture, but of becoming beautiful by participating in God’s radiance. Though the mind is certainly affected by this process, growth of the intellect is not the driving force of theosis; instead, what proves crucial is the person’s purification of heart. Deification produces knowledge of God, certainly, but it is a knowledge brought through experiential union, not a knowledge only about the divine. In fact, deification underscores God’s incomprehensibility by showing the person that what is glimpsed of God can only ever denote partial union. Theosis can only be sought once all created material “which imprints itself on the mind” has been stripped away and all intellectual activity has ceased. The danger of Barlaam’s requirement of philosophical training, then, is not confined to the risk of developing pride in one’s knowledge that renders one closed off to God but also the confusion of God with intellectual activity, abstractions, and concepts. Using philosophy to ascend to God even via apophatic theology does not suffice for the glorious

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282 The Triads, III.i.33; Gendle, 88-9.
283 The Triads, II.iii.16; Gendle, 61.
284 The Triads, I.iii.4; Gendle, 32-3.
285 The Triads, I.iii.5; Gendle, 34.
286 The Triads, I.iii.5; Gendle, 34.
287 The Triads, I.iii.17; Gendle, 34-5.
union which makes the intellect superfluous. For the words and activities of even scripture and prayer disappear in the ecstasy of pure union with God.289

Later, Palamas returns to these themes to produce another rebuttal against Barlaam. Here, divine transcendence also “transcends the fact of being inaccessible to the senses, since God is not only above all created things, but is even beyond Godhead.”290 Barlaam’s approach suffers another blow: not only is deification possible for those who are philosophically naïve, but the founding principle of using philosophy to determine what can be said of the heavenly realms turns out to include its own negation. Arguing that divine superiority to human intelligence warrants the use of philosophical inquiry to obtain union with God hits a dead end. God lies beyond all sensory perception and the knowledge gleaned by sensory beings. Union with God must also take place in a mode of “nonbeing by transcendence, that is [reached] by exceeding created things.”291 That excess includes knowledge. And, as Gregory clarifies,

if one uses these things properly, then through the knowledge of created things, spiritually understood, one will arrive at knowledge of God; and through the passionate part of the soul which has been orientated towards the end for which God created it, one will practice the corresponding virtues.292

God’s transcendence includes being irreducible to the wisdom of the sage and is once more claimed for the senses.293

289 The Triads, I.iii.20-21; Gendle, 37-8. See also The Triads, II.iii.18; Gendle, 63, where Palamas notes, “[i]ndeed, this light of contemplation even differs from the light that comes from the Holy Scriptures.” Scripture gives light as a lamp shining in a dark place, while mystical contemplation with the soul’s second eye grants light like the morning star glowing within full daylight.
290 The Triads, I.iii.8; Gendle, 57.
291 The Triads, II.iii.37; Gendle, 66-7. Not to be confused with God’s divine essence, nevertheless the state of non-being achieved by transcending all being is not sheer nothingness. It holds and communicates divine reality to the person: a reality beyond what the senses may achieve or comprehend.
292 The Triads, II.ii.19; Gendle, 54-5.
293 The Triads, II.iii.17; Gendle, 61 and II.iii.33; Gendle, 64.
With his focus on deification through direct experience, Palamas carves out affirmation of the uneducated to attain God’s glory alongside philosophers, where the passions of the soul and the practical concerns of daily life simply provide additional areas where divine redirection centers the person within her world. This provision means that even if they do develop their intellectual capacities, philosophers, the educated and elite, ordained monks and others in the upper echelons of society are not barred from deification. They, too, may join the ranks of the un(der)educated who enjoy reception of the light of God’s glory. To Palamas, then, obeying divine commands rather than pursuing ever greater stores of philosophical knowledge truly describes the conditions for theosis. Palamas emphasizes that the divine light shared with the simple ones being deified is the same as that which enveloped Christ on the mountain of transfiguration, that which in the Psalms marks God as the creator, and that which the epistles describe as dawning in the hearts of those who follow in the way of Christ.294 Gregory sharpens the point again:

[d]o you not see how this light shines even now in the hearts of the faithful and perfect? Do you not see how it is superior to the light of knowledge? It has nothing to do with that which comes from Hellenic studies, which is not worthy to be called light, being but deception or confounded with deception, and nearer to darkness than light.295

To summarize, theosis is not a matter of exceptional learning, of erudite standing, of academic achievement. Instead, it is the process of being united to the God who stands over and above all created entities. While knowledge of created beings can lead one to infer God’s existence, theosis does not concern these sorts of arguments. In fact, those kinds of pursuits may distract the person from the union with God enjoyed by even the

294 The Triads, II.iii.18; Gendle, 62.
295 The Triads, II.iii.18; Gendle, 63.
simple, uneducated, or lay people who take on the humble stature of needing and embracing God. Theosis concerns the state of the soul’s “second eye” that becomes one with God through prayer and which, seeing God’s being-transcending glory in a non-sensory manner, reflects it. What deification requires is simply a person willing and eager to obey divine commands, commands that cover both spiritual postures and day-to-day interactions with other created beings. Extensive intellectual knowledge does not suffice for the reception of divine light, and in fact may block such union. Again, what remains primary is the person’s sharing in divine actions, allowing her soul to guide her body’s material refracting of the divine light into materiality.

Palamas’ description of what the creature receives—divine light, the natural symbol of God’s glory—leads him to explain how such glory can interact not just with the person’s soul but also her body, even while she inhabits a material world. He offers one final component of the Creator-creature distinction to how God’s actions with creation should be seen as manifesting divine energies rather than the divine essence.

3. Divine Action in Creation: from Symbol to Energies

Palamas’ description of the Creator-creature distinction present through God’s action in the person’s body through her action, not just her knowledge, generates a final layer to his understanding of God’s self-determination as essence and energies. Palamas explains how God manifests in creation by continuing to develop the terminology of divine activity. Here, we will explore how these activities operate within matter and how Palamas defends this distinction as essential for a theology of theosis. As we have seen, for Palamas, the essence-energies distinction simply follows from who God is: the
unnameable, unreachable, imparticipable essence who manifests in divine activities. But as it is these activities that can be perceived and shared by physical creatures, the distinction between God’s essence and activity preserves divine activity as the real agency God demonstrates in relation with the world while at the same time acknowledging that creatures never gain full access to divine substance.

To Gregory, only this distinction between divine essence and energies allows deification to operate as a divine self-manifestation that does not divide or reduce God’s essence. These distinctions support Palamas’ cosmology, wherein God’s hypostases connaturally and eternally relate to and coinhere with one another without confusion while at the same time God permeates the universe as the sustainer in whom all that lives participates for its being.296 This taxonomy also makes God’s intervention in the created world truly mediate divinity while preserving divine incorruptibility in the imparticipable substance of the three hypostases. As Palamas defends the uncreated light the person receives in theosis in distinction from the divine essence, the paradox of deification roots in God’s own self. I will show how Palamas supports this notion by addressing two aspects of deifying divine action in the world: the uncreated yet divine nature of the energies and creaturely sharing in the energies versus possessing them.

First, I turn to the uncreated divine nature of what the person receives in deification. In the Chapters, Palamas reiterates that God possesses pre-existent and uncreated energies and powers.297 It is right to view these multitudinous instantiations of light, life, radiance, etc. as manifestations of one God without that entailing division of

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296 Chapters, 104; Sinkewicz, 200-1.
297 Chapters, 72-3; Sinkewicz,168-9. Confusingly, Palamas also claims that Father, Son, and Spirit possess one shared energy; we will return to this notion below.
God. These powers are “inseparably present everywhere” with the divine substance, yet their very plurality leads Palamas to argue that they must be seen as both distinct yet inseparable from the essence.298 The energies can be shared out among people as divine providence, will, wisdom, goodness, power, etc., but the divine substance is not so divisible.299 As the Dialogue made clear, that full measure denotes God’s simplicity, since in God all powers exist as a whole.300

Palamas supports his argument by turning to pneumatology and christology. First, in relation to the Spirit, their multiplicity marks the energies as distinct from the one Spirit.301 Since Palamas claimed in the Triads that the deifying life subsists in the Spirit’s nature and never exists separately from the Spirit giving it, the deifying energy can properly be called the Spirit, even while the Spirit “transcends the deifying life” it gives as “its own natural energy.”302 The Chapters adds that a share in these powers is granted to those being deified, but since the essence of God contains all of these powers in their fullness, creatures cannot access the divine essence without usurping divine identity and agency to themselves.303 The Spirit alone causes the glory irradiating the person by, as divine substance, completely possessing the full measure of that energy. However, anyone “who receives the divine energy cannot contain it entirely.”304

In answer to Barlaam’s continued protests, Palamas turns to christology. Alone among human beings, only Christ possesses the full energy of God “without measure, in

298 Chapters, 68; Sinkewicz, 162-3.
299 Chapters, 74; Sinkewicz, 168-71; and 81; Sinkewicz, 177-9.
300 Dialogue, LII; Ferwerda, 88.
301 Chapters, 71; Sinkewicz, 166-7. But note his acknowledgment that the energies exist as the Spirit’s processions, manifestations, and natural energies. The one Spirit stands as the agent behind each energy (Ibid.). We will return to this point later.
302 The Triads, III.i.9; Gendle, 71.
303 Chapters 108; Sinkewicz, 204-7.
304 The Triads, III.i.9; Gendle, 71.
its wholeness.” As Christ has two wills, two natures, and two energies, one must identify one of these sets as uncreated and divine, not subject to time or change. If the distinction between essence and energies does not hold, the Incarnation renders God composite, a mash of created and uncreated, or simply two gods opposite to one another. At the same time, Christ’s human nature is deified, perfectly modeling that process for all his subsequent followers. So, as the energies rest upon Christ, they are distinct from his humanity. If, as Palamas paraphrases Barlaam to say, what is given in deification is created, this would make both sets of will, nature, and energy in Christ human and created. Christ would lose divinity. The solution? One must acknowledge that the energies of the deifying light are divinity without being either created or the divine essence in se. This is why they are both considered uncreated and can allow created beings to access divine energy.

While people need perceptible things to receive God’s divinity, these perceptible things should not thereby be considered either divine essence or created. Barlaam’s supporter protests that these errors are not the necessary conclusion: “[n]o, we raise the thinking part of our soul from the visible divinity up to the completely invisible and solitary uncreated divinity, and so we revere the one uncreated divinity, the essence of

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305 *Chapters*, 95; Sinkewicz, 194-5. Interestingly, Palamas cites John 3:34 as the basis for this claim, but he must read ‘energy’ for the text’s given ‘spirit.’ This ambiguity suggests a different read of the deification paradox, as I will unfold below.

306 *Dialogue*, XII; Ferwerda, 54.

307 *Dialogue*, XI; Ferwerda, 54, quoting from the divine liturgy’s Trinitarian Canon, 4th song, song 6 on Mary giving birth to God.

308 *Chapters*, 70; Sinkewicz, 164-5.

309 *The Triads*, III.i.7; Gendle, 105.

310 *The Triads*, III.i.25; Gendle, 81-2.

311 *Dialogue*, XI; Ferwerda, 53. He supposedly quotes Symeon the New Theologian here, but the translator has been unable to locate the reference.
God itself.”312 But the orthodox replies that the Barlaam framework makes the visible glory and divinity of Christ created. God cannot be reached from created things, although God does make God’s self known through creation.313 Deification entails God acting in creation to share divine activity without sharing the divine essence.

So, second, when the person receives the divine energies through her soul to share with her body, such participation brings the realities of the divine powers to life within the person who accesses the fullness of God without possessing that fullness. Palamas argues that those who participate in anything possess a part of it and hold a common substance with it. In deification, creaturely possession of divine essence would make God divisible. He instead grants that the “energy and power common to the trihypostatic nature” is shared with participating creatures, while the substance remains restricted to Father, Son, and Spirit.314

Reception of the divine light of glory shares divine powers with creation, allowing the saints to “become thereby uncreated, unoriginate and indescribable, although in their own nature, they derive from nothingness.”315 What the person receives are the realities around God that Maximus Confessor describes as contemplated by the person.316 Therefore, Palamas argues that the light of God given in theosis should not be

312 Dialogue, XIII; Ferwerda, 54, adding “Come on, don’t think that we’re that stupid!” (55; XIII, emphasis translator).
313 Dialogue, XIV; Ferwerda, 55-6, quoting Nyssa again to the effect that the invisible God becomes visible by the energies, not in essence but in some characteristics (De Beatitudinibus 4, PG44, 1269A) and Basil that one cannot reach the essence from created things, for the created things show power, wisdom, craft, etc. but not the essence—and not even all of the power or craft (Against Eunomius 2, PG 29, 648AB). He also quotes Paul on God’s invisible power and nature being understood through creation (Rom 1:20).
314 Chapters 109-11; Sinkewicz, 206-211.
315 The Triads, III.i.31; Gendle, 86.
316 The Triads, III.i.19; Gendle, 78, evidencing reliance upon Maximus the Confessor. See also Andrew Radde-Gallewitz, Basil of Caesarea, Gregory of Nyssa, and the Transformation of Divine Simplicity (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).
classified as “anhypostatic,” for that would deny the permanence and reliability of the
divine glory persisting outside of and beyond the created bodies in which it can be seen.
The divine light as the natural symbol of God remains coexistent with God’s eternity.317
This means that the grace of deification should not be seen as independent of God but
rather “remains together with the persons in which it comes.”318 And therefore,
everything given in deification still belongs to God, as divine powers or activities. Such
manifestations belong to God so inseparably that to consider them created also “drags the
divinity down along with them.”319 This glory inheres within God’s essence without
being identical to that essence, for if it develops subsequent to the essence, the essence
itself must be considered imperfect.320

*The Triads*’ third section claims that energies given to the saints in deification
should then be considered “enhypostatic.” Divine energies do not possess their own
hypostases but rather become contemplated in the person’s hypostasis after the Spirit
sends them forth:321 “[f]or it is only when hypostatically united to a mind or body that we
believe the divinity to have become visible, even though such union transcends the proper
nature of mind and body.”322

317 *The Triads, The Triads*, III.i.18-19; Gendle, 78.
318 *Dialogue*, XXVI; Ferwerda, 66. Palamas analogizes from the gifts of deification to the worship
of the Trinity, noting that just as one venerates “the Spirit, one part of the trinity…we also call the grace of
the Spirit which is a common characteristic of the Father, the Son and the Spirit, ‘spirit.’ And God Himself
too, who is worshipped in the trinity, is spirit. Will we, on that account, be hindered from worshipping one
spirit” (Ibid).
319 “[T]hese things…are emanations and manifestations and powers and activities of that one
divinity; they are with that divinity in a physical and inseparable fashion” (*Dialogue*, XXVII; Ferwerda,
67).
320 *The Triads*, III.ii.5; Gendle, 93.
321 *The Triads*, III.i.9; Gendle, 71.
322 *The Triads*, III.i.33; Gendle, 87-8.
Even while undergoing *theosis*, then, the person remains unable to see God “in [the divine] superessential essence.” What the saints see in deification is the “deifying gift and energy, the grace of adoption, the uncreated deification, the enhypostatic illumination…the principle of the divinity…which one may see and with which one may be united.” Though the energy holds identity with God, God’s essence transcends it. Though God truly relates to the saints being deified “in a way proper and peculiar to each one,” the divine essence “transcends all that is participable,” all relationship, all principle.

What does become accessible to the creature in deification must of necessity operate differently than the Principle. Understanding divine glory, grace, and power as natural symbols or activities explains how they work as hinges connecting God with creation while maintaining the Creator-creature distinction. God truly reveals God’s self without being divided by the creation to whom God manifests:

God permits [God]self to be seen face-to-face, not in enigmas…[and] becomes attached to those worthy as is a soul to its body…to the extent of dwelling completely in them, so that they too dwell entirely in Him [sic] …But you should not consider that God allows Himself [sic] to be seen in His [sic] superessential essence.

God’s superiority to all created things means that union with the divine carries the person to a new existence: a mode where the transformed mind and body see beyond what their created faculties can grasp without participating in God’s own nature. The divine befriending of the person does not equate the divinizing light with either the full essence of God or a mere symbol: God’s essence does not enter the person’s limitations nor is the

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323 *The Triads*, III.i.29; Gendle, 84-5.
324 *The Triads*, III.i.29; Gendle, 84-85.
325 *The Triads*, III.i.29; Gendle, 85.
326 *The Triads*, III.i.29; Gendle, 84.
327 *The Triads*, III.iii.8; Gendle, 105 and III.iii.10, Gendle, 107.
light of *theosis* simply a created phenomenon leaving the person trapped within her created nature, only able to view herself. Rather, the hesychasts contemplate the glory of God impressed upon themselves, and it is this glory that enables their minds to transcend themselves in union with what lies beyond understanding. Deification involves sharing in the divine powers without fully possessing them.

4. **Summary of Creator-Creation Difference**

As Palamas continues to unfold his theology of deification, his rationale for the essence-energies distinction comes into view. I will return to my three main categories of investigation to organize how hesychast deification maintains the Creator-creature difference. Recall that we are paying attention to how the body’s reception of divine glory serves as Palamas’ jumping off point. This is his non-negotiable foundation. First, under divine self-determination, Palamas claims that God’s essence remains imparticpiable, while divine activities describe how the essence relates with creation. Divine simplicity of the essence allows God to be perceived in the multitudinous actions manifesting divine goodness and power in creation without being determined by such activities. Second, in terms of the creaturely capacity to so share in divine light, Palamas’ emphasis on the body leads him to stress the importance of charitable obedience over the acquisition of theoretical knowledge. As deification entails the sharing of divine powers, *theosis* cannot be restricted to the soul or intellect.

Third, in terms of how the divine action takes place within creation, hesychast deification underscores the distinction of divine essence from divine energies by relating

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328 *The Triads*, II.iii.9; Gendle, 57; II.iii.11; Gendle, 58; and II.iii.12; Gendle, 59.
them. Created beings certainly receive something divine and uncreated when they are
deified, or the entire notion remains a laughable exaggeration. Their enhypostatic sharing
in the divine powers keeps them in the dependent position proper to material beings who
cannot in themselves obtain to immortality and perfect goodness. Their reception of
divine activities means their own created souls and bodies can imitate and participate in
divine initiative. The essence-energies distinction allows God to share out the divine life
with creation to make the person divine without compromising divine transcendence.

III. Hesychast Deification as a Whole

This close reading showed how Palamas’ framework resolves the paradox of
deification with a carefully detailed metaphysics. Observing the corruptibility of bodies
exhibiting neediness and the instability accruing to bodily desires, Palamas joins the
tradition searching for a permanent anchor for deification. Again, my three guiding topics
structure the analysis.

First, concerning divine self-determination, God’s absolute difference from
creation sets the uncreated apart from material corruptibility and instability. In Palamas’
hands, the simple and self-sufficient divine essence remains the source and end of all that
exists, the fount of created realities’ redemption. The claim that this perfect God above
and beyond material realities takes up residence within these very fleshly confines offers
an escape hatch into the divine paradise of a fixed goodness, but for good reason,
Palamas wonders how wide this door swings. He fixes on the intra-divine distinction
between essence and energies as a way to describe how God works in se: a simple
essence beyond all that exists and the simple energies that reach from the essence to create and redeem.

Second, in terms of divine action in creation, given the sheer transcendence of the divine over creation, Palamas focuses on how God nevertheless transcends even the blocks raised by that created milieu. God’s manifestation cannot be negated by material reality, but rather takes place within those confines through the natural symbolization of divine light. This light can be claimed as the divine energy—the reality of the uncreated touching creation with activity that brings the person back to God. Palamas’ distinction between the uncreated divine glory as a natural symbol and the uncreated divine itself, and between God’s essence and energies fuel resolution of the problem of how God can be made manifest within the created world. In this version of deification, the uncreated energies filling the person’s soul reach to her created body and allow her to share divine gifts of virtue and healing with others (see figure 2 below).

Figure 2: Hesychast Theosis Across the Three Loci

Third, in terms of creaturely capacities, Palamas’ deification makes room for weak and contingent forms to receive divine life. His distinction between essence and energies
means that the body’s passions can join the soul’s redirection of fleshly faculties. Both bodies and souls are so far removed from the eternal God that both can be included in deification. His essence-energy distinction also leads him to prioritize the practiced virtue of the humble over the knowledge of the learned. Again, the created person’s radical difference from God surprisingly spreads the possibilities for *theosis* to all people.

Instead of defining *theosis* as simply the mental progression of cloistered individuals merely thinking proper thoughts or performing correct liturgies, his deification encircles the average person and her material world. Gregory’s arguments for the importance of physical acts of charity expand earlier Christian discussions of what it means to be virtuous, particularly as he insists upon the primacy of embodied prayer and the way material passions may be converted into desire for God. Deification cannot be wrangled by the philosophers or parsed by Barlaam’s logic; it must be experienced by the one willing to immerse herself in a mystery transcending understanding. She needs no special knowledge or training for this way of life beyond the pursuit of virtue that clears the way for the infusion of the energies.

Palamas holds certain resources for the deification tradition, particularly his emphases on deification needing to grant something beyond the created order as well as on deification extending to the person’s body. *Theosis* grants the person a share in God’s own glory, light, and joy; it takes root in a life of deep prayer; its effects are not restricted to some disembodied notion of the soul but extend to the person’s body; as a gift of God, it continues to fill the person even when her attention must be directed elsewhere. This contrast holds consequences for both sides of the deification paradox: within theological anthropology and within the doctrine of God. His explanations work for this model, but
we will eventually press whether they prove necessary for a contemporary, ecumenical model that retains the features of Hesychast deification through a different metaphysical construct.
CHAPTER THREE: DEIFICATION BY ANOTHER NAME? THE THOMIST MODEL

I. Introduction

Chapter two explored deification in Gregory Palamas’ hesychast model as well as in current defenses. This chapter now turns to examine how Thomas Aquinas and two later theologians following in his trajectory articulate their perspectives on the problems raised by the notion of deification. Right at the start, a qualifying word proves necessary to remind us of the simplex network nature of this project. Catholic traditions, particularly earlier on, do not maintain consistent usage of the terms deification, theosis, or divinization. Instead, the vocabulary typically used consists of terms such as the beatific vision or beatitude, perfection, felicity, grace or charity, union, participation, and the supernatural. As we will see, these substitutions demonstrate different theological constructs that distinguish the Thomist model from hesychasm. Nevertheless, bearing in mind Denys’ description of deification as becoming like God while being united to God as far as possible, I propose that it is possible to correlate these two strains of thought. Denys’ definition allows me to place in counterpoint to Palamas Aquinas’ reasoning that a person may imitate and participate in God through the processes of beatitude.

As with Palamas, so, too in this chapter, I show what Aquinas’s model of thought considers likeness to God to consist of and how this is achieved, particularly giving an eye to how he maintains the paradox of the doctrine: that the person can fully unite with God in such a way that her perfect likeness to God does not vitiate her distinction from God. To re-cap, the three main components I look for in his theology of beatitude are: divine self-determination (defining who God is in se), the creature’s capacity to receive
the divine, and how God acts in creation. As we will see, Thomas’ discussion of creaturely perfection emphasizes the soul’s capacity to most closely imitate and partake of God by contemplating the divine essence. I explore these three aspects under my two guiding questions:

- In this model, what exactly happens to the person who becomes one with and like God? As subsets of this question, I dissect both aspects of the claim: a person who becomes one with and like God. I include first how Thomas defines divine self-determination—what about God defines the person’s beatitude—as well as second, how the person holds capacity for that union. The soul’s perfect contemplation most closely imitates God’s own beatitude and thus sets the terms for how Thomas renders divine action in the world in general.

- Given its rendering of the process of beatitude, how does this model of creaturely perfection uphold the difference between creator and creature? Again, this question must be considered from both the Godward side as well as in relation to the person. For the first component, this section addresses how the full divine perfection of creation requires a focus on life after death. In order to facilitate union with the transcendent, impassible, and simple God, the person being perfected must definitively leave behind and move beyond the created world. To the second concern, I look at how Thomas’ commitment to the soul’s capacity for beatitude primes the person for reception of divine glory in the beatific vision. In other words, Thomas’ argument that ultimate felicity consists of contemplating God after death, beyond any possibilities for falling away, maintains a separate place for the way a person’s changeable desire, will, action, or affections prepares
her for eventual union with God. On the third topic, divine action in the world, I examine how the person’s reception of God’s influence before her death and after resurrection motivates Thomas’ distinction not just between creaturely beatitude and the full beatific vision but also between created and uncreated grace.

I excavate Thomist thought on these details by relying primarily on two sources: the *Commentary on the Sentences* and the *Summa contra Gentiles*, with occasional reference to the *Summa Theologiae*.329 We will see that for Aquinas, beatitude as the process of becoming one with and like God consists of the creature meeting her fullest and final end, obtaining the fulfillment of that for which she craves despite any wayward misdirection or confusion that this life may at times suggest as a poor substitute. Much like Palamas’ use of the essence-energies distinction, Thomas recognizes the risk full union with the divine poses to upholding the Creator’s difference from the creature.

However, since Aquinas’ focus differs from Palamas’ motive to defend the claims of hesychastic prayer that the body experiences divine light, his solution to the Creator-creature distinction takes very different shape than Palamas’ conclusions. Thomas reasons from a defense of divine simplicity as the ground of all existence, including the life of the composite person called to holiness as well as the holiness for which she seeks.

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The person’s physical matter derives from God’s creatively overflowing intellect but can never attain to that self-determined simplicity. These commitments at times lead Thomas to frame beatitude as the relation of incompatibles. Somehow the composite person’s beatitude follows the differentiations that mark the simple, uncreated, transcendent, and incorruptible God’s relationship to the complex, created, natural, and mortal cosmos. The problem is how the latter could join in the life of the former. I highlight here two basic outcomes Thomas’ commitments to divine simplicity create for his discussion of beatitude.

First, the direct sight of the divine essence that Thomas defends for the beatified soul seems at first to offer more access to divine nature than hesychast deification, but such access remains heavily qualified by the need for the soul to have moved beyond the body’s weaknesses and by the fact that this is a particular sort of sight belonging to the soul alone. Such supernatural beatitude thus becomes primarily the purview of the soul enjoying eternal rest beyond death. Thomas’ construction then risks portraying beatitude and the beatific vision as so radically distinct from one another that no link between the two persists.

So, second, in this life, a person may participate in beatitude and display the created marks of that grace, but she may not enjoy the beatific vision, which renders an ongoing fulfilled blessed existence. In trying to explain how and to what extent the person may share in God’s likeness during this life, Thomas eventually breaks from Peter Lombard to argue that whatever grace “leaves behind” in the soul cannot belong to a different nature than the created soul itself. Otherwise, instead of fulfilling the person created to glorify God by beholding and mirroring the divine glory, beatitude would
destroy her. What does exist in the creaturely realm are the habits that manifest created grace within the self which make her more able to eventually receive the supernatural grace of beatitude. These points offer fruitful nodes for comparison and contrast to Palamas’ theology of hesychastic deification.

These explorations offer careful extensions of Thomas’ paradox of grace and nature; at the same time, they motivate continuing questions, particularly in light of hesychast deification. While he shares some of the same terminology as Palamas, and though they clearly hold certain notions in common, Thomas’ distinctions between nature and grace (or the supernatural), between immortal and mortal beings, between matter and form and between the created or the uncreated may displace beatitude from this life and foreclose any possibility of the hesychastic divine-human synergy. Most significant for my purposes here are the ways in which Thomas begins on the God side of the deification teeter-totter and focus on the divine transcendent simplicity as the foundation for the person’s perfection. The drive to maintain and honor divine simplicity sets the terms for how they see perfection as only possible in the resurrection, when the soul’s capacity to rest in God will rise unfettered, pulling the body after it to the full extent that remains impossible during creaturely life.

After I trace these lines of thought in this chapter, we are well prepared for the final two chapters where I ultimately contend that, even though they appear mutually divergent, once retrieved under ecumenical methodology, these developments can still generate common ground with Palamas’ conclusions. Might the two traditions on perfection generate more clarity once they are placed in conversation?
II. Thomas Aquinas

Writing just before Gregory Palamas, and sourcing some similar patristic lines of thought about the life of union with God, Thomas Aquinas’ style of writing displays what appears at first a radically different approach to theological inquiry. For him, clarity is found in a systematic ordering of theological knowledge, often consisting of making propositions, suggesting possible counter-arguments, and then establishing a conclusion. Unlike Palamas’ writings, Thomas’ reader encounters far fewer overt polemics against the positions he believes erroneous. Similarly to Palamas, however, these reflections on perfection offer breathtaking claims safeguarding the person’s enormous capacity for union with God. These claims require Thomas’ rigorous metaphysical structure. I will suggest that like Palamas, Aquinas’ explanations of beatitude at times run the risk of mistaking assumptions of oppositional relations between concepts for proofs of their incompatibility. I begin with Thomas’ description of beatitude.

A. How is the Person Beatified?

Thomas’ earliest foray into answering this question appears in his *Commentary on the Sentences* (hereafter CS). Here, he tackles how to define beatitude, the vision of God comprising beatitude, delight as the completion of beatitude, and the surrounding glories that perfect and adorn beatitude. In what follows, I will discuss those findings in concert with corresponding material found in the *Summa contra Gentiles* (hereafter SCG). In all three of the sources I examine, Thomas’ discussion of beatitude builds on two key elements: a general understanding in the foundations of western thought that such as thing as a fully realizable creaturely goodness exists and his proofs for the existence of
Given these two premises, Thomas formulates the creature’s perfection as inextricably bound to the simple divine identity. How he believes the embodied creature may access that perfect simplicity sets Thomas’ treatment of perfection apart from Palamas’ deification.

1. Divine Perfection Mirrored in Creaturely Beatitude

First, in the *Summa contra Gentiles*, Thomas seeks to defend perfection as the end of human life. In regards to the idea that every creature possesses a purpose that she can realize, Thomas writes, “every inclination of an agent tends toward something definite…. [E]very agent in acting intends an end, sometimes the action itself, sometimes a thing produced by the action.” This ultimate end is “that beyond which the agent seeks nothing else.” Therefore, that goal must be something the agent believes is good for herself, in which her appetite and her very self find their rest. Yet an agent cannot produce something impossible or move towards an end that requires an infinite number of actions. Her end must represent something befitting her own powers and

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330 For the former, the Kwasniewski, Bolin, and Bolin translation of Thomas’ *CS 4* includes a helpful introductory note establishing how Thomas’ *beatitudo* includes prior Platonic and Aristotelian visions of perfection but redirects them toward the biblical revelation of blessedness in Christ (*On Love and Charity*, 335Nc); see also Edgardo A. Colón-Emeric’s *Wesley, Aquinas, and Christian Perfection*, chapters 3–4. For the latter, at least in the *Summa contra Gentiles* and the *Summa Theologiae*, Thomas only treats of divine providence—which includes the creaturely accomplishment of beatitude (or happiness, blessedness, or felicity, depending on the translation)—once he has established God’s existence. For *SCG*, note how Book I on God precedes Book II on God’s creation, both of which prove necessary for Book III’s investigation into creaturely happiness. For *ST*, note the way the Prima Pars on God (QQ1-43) establishes Thomas’ discussion of God’s creation in QQ 44-118 and thus lays the groundwork for the Prima Secundae Partis on creation’s last end. See also D. Stephen Long’s helpful recapitulation of this groundwork, *The Perfectly Simple Triune God: Aquinas and His Legacy* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2016), chapters 1-2.

331 *SCG* III.2.2; Bourke, 34-5.
332 *SCG* III.2.3; Bourke, 35.
333 *SCG* III.2.7; Bourke, 38-39.
334 *SCG* III.2.4; Bourke, 35-6.
Citing Matthew 5:8 and John 17:3, Thomas connects this end with the scriptural concepts of felicity, happiness, or beatitude.

This felicity is the person’s perfect happiness, that rest towards which she moves as far as she is capable. Her entire being and existence are ordered to this good end of her own perfection. Her drive towards perfection remains whether or not the agent knows her end, although if she does know it, she is “moved toward it” through herself. By contrast, an unknowing agent’s actions can be directed by another, similar to the way an archer moves her arrow. Both archer and arrow are directed to the same end, but the arrow remains unaware of the archer’s plans, and can be employed toward that end while only passively existing. For the active, knowing agent, her will takes an active role in her movement towards perfection. This intelligent agent can determine her end only when she considers “the rational character of the good” towards which she drives and which makes it her will’s object. The will creates appetites for foreknown ends, but it can only incline towards something if it shares in the end’s character of goodness. How these various elements of the person—desire, action, will, and intellect—contribute to the person’s beatitude according to her capacities will be detailed below as I examine how Thomas’ explanations of beatitude organize all of these aspects of personhood. In this opening section, I am only concerned with describing how Thomas describes the person’s ultimate goal.

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335 As we will see, this early commitment to perfection as the natural end of the human being generates difficulties that will prompt Thomas, as well as de Lubac and Rahner after him, to eventually take refuge in casting human being as a paradox, or a ‘suspended middle.’
337 *SCG* III.3.7; Bourke, 39.
338 *SCG* III.16.4; Bourke, 70.
Thomas unequivocally matches this ultimate goal to God’s perfectly good simplicity. God as First Being possesses “the full perfection of the whole of being,” out of which the Almighty wills existence to all things as their source and ruler.339 Since things are perfect to the extent they are good, divine being simply is this perfect goodness, which for God makes it the same thing “to be, to live, to be wise, to be blessed” alongside whatever else belongs to goodness and perfection. The divine perfection comprises perfection of nature, power, and authority.340 God is not potency, nor can God’s goodness become compromised by change. Nothing can be added to God, whose goodness is completely perfect because God exists as perfect act. “[T]he whole divine goodness is, as it were…divine existing being.”341 God as this one highest good causes “the goodness in all good things,” thus all things are ordered to God.342 This goodness cannot contradict itself. Each distinct good works toward the common good as its end. Thus God is the common good.343 Yet this character does not make God a means to attaining an end or a thing produced by those who seek the Divine Face. All things are oriented to God “so that they may attain [God’s] self from [God], according to their measure, since [God] is their end.”344

Therefore, each creature achieves its perfection, its “ultimate end,” by acting in accordance with her end as given by God. No other perfection or goal for her life could exist. Thomas notes that different beings manifest this order in different ways, according to their own natures. Simply existing alone already imitates and participates in God, as all

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339 SCG III.1.1; Bourke, 31.
340 SCG III.1.7; Bourke, 33.
341 SCG III.20.6; Bourke, 80.
342 SCG III.17.2-3; Bourke, 71.
343 SCG III.17.6; Bourke, 72.
344 SCG III.18; Bourke, 74-5, quote from 18.5; Bourke, 75.
things get their being from this One Who is subsisting being itself.345 Acting in pursuit of any end also holds roots in the divine, as doing so imitates God’s own practices of willing and directing acts towards an end.346 Human beings, however, bearing God’s likeness and reflecting the divine image, exist under a certain duality. We are both ruled by God and called to rule ourselves in accordance with that divine rule. Thus, the perfection the person seeks in God causes her to become like God in the same way all effects become like their agents: “a thing participates in the good precisely to the same extent that it becomes like the first goodness, which is God.”347 As the person cleaves to divine goodness, she in turn shares the divine likeness with other creatures, fulfilling Paul’s description of being co-workers with God (1 Cor 3:9).348 Beatitude cascades through the full order of creation. So the ability to attain the first principle, the perfection of beatitude, belongs only to rational creatures who naturally possess the appetite to internally and externally know and will goodness.

Thomas gives additional qualifications to how the fulfilled person relates to God’s own character. No creatures attain goodness to the same extent as divine goodness, which is “simple, entirely gathered together, as it were, into one being” and “the entire fullness of perfection.”349 This goodness and perfection simply is the substance of God. Yet nothing created can in the same way exist as her own act of being or as her own goodness; rather, she is good “by participation in goodness.”350 Further, her composite

345 SCG III.19.2-3; Bourke, 76.
346 SCG III.1.2-3; Bourke, 32.
347 SCG III.19.5; Bourke, 76.
348 SCG III.21.2-6; Bourke, 81-3.
349 SCG III.20.2; Bourke, 77.
350 SCG III.20.6; Bourke, 80. This does not mean that animals are higher than human beings. The simplicity of “elements in relation to animals and [sic] men” may be more advanced in the former than in the latter, but since the latter can achieve a greater perfection of knowledge and understanding, members of
nature fractures goodness out into a variety of activities and manifestations. So to reach
divine simplicity where goodness, being, justice, etc. are convertible—in other words, to
achieve the beatific vision—she must possess goodness in many other activities besides
just her existence. And since creatures keep imperfect goodness across this wide range of
behavior, in the pursuit of beatitude each person imitates divinity according to her
measure.351

Even when the person pursues an end contrary to her full perfection, she is still in
an important sense striving for God as her perfect end. Thomas explains in his earlier
commentary on Lombard’s Sentences that just because some do not seem to attain
beatitude does not mean that it is not their natural end or that they do not have an appetite
for it. He explains that, coming forth from the good, all things tend back toward the good.
Some bring this circle to perfection, while others cannot.”352 Therefore, in the same way
that we may desire something sweet but not have the appetite for honey, someone may
desire beatitude without recognizing it as the vision of God. Or, she may desire things
that run contrary to her actual beatitude but which she mistakenly believes are good. She
may cling to other things out of the very appetite for beatitude that occurs naturally. This,
too, however, exhibits her innate orientation to her good end.

Even in the short overview just given, we can see how Thomas’ analysis of
beatitude continues to assume his determination of God as simple. Thomas’ sense of
divine simplicity infuses his entire notion of beatitude: from how his definition of God’s

351 As we will see, that measure includes the person’s knowing, willed response of imitating God
in actions and existence.
352 CS 4, d. 49, q.1, a.3, qa.1; Kwasniewski, et. al., 366-9; quote at 368.
perfectly convertible goodness, justice, beauty, holiness, and truth makes these the unmovable origin and endpoint of all creation, to his emphasis on God’s subsistent Being making even just the bare existence of all creatures a participation in their perfection; from his understanding of sin as privation from the Divine Good rather than a being in its own right, to his specification that the rational person’s intentional imitation of God’s character marks out the particular end of human existence. For Thomas, divine simplicity undergirds the possibility of creaturely perfection and remains its non-negotiable starting point.

We have also seen Thomas’ treatment of beatitude as the person’s perfect end already makes use of such major concepts as the body-soul relation, will, desire, action, and intellect. Further exploration of these ideas adds important conditions to the possibility of beatitude. I will now more thoroughly demonstrate how both Thomas’ overarching scheme distinguishing the simple God from creation and his treatment of beatitude generate his take on creaturely capacities to be so perfected. As we will see, Thomas’ model of divine perfection sets clear parameters for creaturely perfection, which must attain as close an imitation to the divine beatitude as possible. Therefore, he turns to the intellect or soul as the hinge between creation and the eternal. These findings in turn prompt the details of our third point: how God acts in creation within the soul’s contemplation.

2. **Creaturally Capacity for the Divine: the Significance of the Soul**

To show how Aquinas views creaturely capacity for the divine, we must not lose sight of what we have just discussed. To Thomas, divine simplicity anchors perfection.
Creatures cannot know perfection without a simple (and therefore impassible) God undergirding such perfection, thus their perfection entails union with and imitation of that transcendence. Thomas concludes that as the person’s intellect bears a greater likeness to God’s simple and impassible character than any other creaturely modalities, the intellect better roots and carries out the creature’s pursuit of perfection. To show how Thomas develops this claim, I will explain how Thomas discusses the body-soul relation. His reasoning subordinates the body and its functions to the soul-intellect, which transcends them all. For Thomas, this construction alone maintains the primacy of divine simplicity and impassibility.

First, I explore how Thomas’ treatment of the body in contrast to the soul lays the groundwork for the rest of his explanation of beatitude. Aquinas’ vision of creaturely perfection depends on his vision of creation as a staircase of being. He orders various substances and their activities from the bottom rung of potency to a vegetative soul to a sensitive soul to the intellectual soul as the pinnacle of created beings. As we noticed above, all forms imitate God to some extent by taking part of life. Matter’s “last and most perfect act” consists of the soul’s ability to desire and generate form. Thomas determines,

the ultimate end of the whole process of generation is the human soul, and matter tends toward it as toward an ultimate form. So, elements exist for the sake of mixed bodies; these latter exist for the sake of living bodies, among which plants exist for animals, and animals for [people]. Therefore, [humanity] is the end of the whole order of generation.353

The preservation of all things holds a similar order of sustaining which is likewise directed towards humanity as its end goal. Mixed bodies are sustained by elements; plants depend upon mixed bodies; animals consume plants; and humanity requires all for food,

353 SCG III.22.7; Bourke, 86-7.
clothing, and tools, as well as for perfecting intellectual knowledge.\textsuperscript{354} Thomas believes that the motion of all bodies ultimately stems from intellectual principles. No body can be moved unless it is moved by another force. But as this understanding seems to suggest an infinite chain of bodies with no origin or ending, Aquinas famously suggests that God, who is an intellectual substance, serves as the “incorporeal first mover.”\textsuperscript{355} Only such an intellect could ground and sustain the processes that govern physical matter. God’s actions within creation stem from an intellect most closely imitated by the human soul.

This structure impacts how Thomas views the creaturely capacity for perfection. Though he views all creatures as existing in order to fulfill their ends, Thomas wishes to reserve beatitude as the end distinct to humanity. Only persons experience as their fulfillment the communion with God that constitutes beatitude. To defend this proposition, Thomas distinguishes between people and the rest of the created order. To that end, he carefully scaffolds three arguments.

First, since the fulfillment of bodily needs offered by activities such as food and sex are common to people and animals alike, they cannot define the perfection of the person’s beatitude.\textsuperscript{356} The goods of the body procured by its actions—goods such as health, beauty, strength, etc.—do not exhaust a person’s purpose. For both good and bad people can possess these goods; such goods are unstable and not subject to the will; and once more, animals can also possess such things and in greater measure than people.\textsuperscript{357} Thus, these bodily goods are not commensurate with the person’s perfection, who is God.

\textsuperscript{354} SCG III.22.8; Bourke, 87.
\textsuperscript{355} SCG III.23; Bourke, 88-93, quote from 23.3; Bourke, 89.
\textsuperscript{356} SCG III.27.4; Bourke, 111. See also CS 4 d.49.q.1,a.1, qa.1/sc3; Kwasniewski, et. al., 337.
\textsuperscript{357} SCG III.32.1, 3-4; Bourke, 119.
Second, beatitude cannot consist of bodily pleasures, since neither pleasure nor the operations accompanying such pleasures could possibly be considered the person’s ultimate end. Although each human being simply is ensouled body, the person receives being through her soul, not her body. Since the form of something is the principle of its specific being, her soul rather than her body encapsulates the person’s purpose. Her body may sustain physical life, but her soul as the form of the body conveys its very possibility of existence. Bodily pleasures accompany the activities necessary for physical life, such as eating or sexual reproduction, to ensure that creatures continue to practice these necessary activities. Pleasure in and inclination towards these pursuits serve as means for the person to attain her different, proper end. They goad her to fulfill bodily needs in service of progress towards that end. Once more, the beatitude of the person who is both body and soul must therefore consist of the soul’s goods directing the body, not the body’s goods on their own: “[f]or just as the body is for the sake of the soul as for an end, and matter for the sake of form…so too goods of the body are ordered to goods of the soul as to an end.”

Third, Thomas adds that the goodness of food, sex, and indeed any other goods concerned with the body require moderation. The maximalist enjoyment of such pleasures wreaks havoc on the body and negates the virtue of temperance. As the body needs the guidance of the virtues to direct its desires aright, this means that indulging bodily needs cannot fulfill the person’s highest good. The person’s beatitude entails being most closely united to God as possible through contemplation, but her bodily pleasures

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358 SCG III.27.1-2; Bourke, 110-1.
360 CS 4 d. 49, q.1, a.1, qa.1/ rep. obj. 6; Kwasniewski, et. al., 339, referencing Aristotle’s On the Soul II.
interrupt such contemplation. Rather than constituting good on their own, then, the body’s actions “are praiseworthy or good only to the extent that they receive the measure of virtue.” The body’s good can be the end of virtue, in terms of the effect of virtuous activity, but it cannot be the end for the intention of virtue, which is for the person’s perfect rest beyond bodily interruptions. And the body cannot reach this end of perfect virtue. Such a perfect rest beyond the body’s variable needs obviates the need for the virtues’ moderating work by incorporating the person within a mode of existence where more is always better.

All three of these points combine to explain why Thomas looks elsewhere than the body when he considers how God interacts with the world in the perfection of beatitude. As he puts it, “the end is the measure that imposes due limits on things ordered to an end.” The person’s end, her beatitude, by definition unites her with the perfection she must acknowledge as higher than herself. The divine perfection clearly remains out of reach of the body, which only produces goods of a limited nature. The body cannot serve as the measure of perfection.

By contrast, the person’s ability to intellectually perceive that such a state as perfection exists means that within her intellect or soul, she is in some sense suited for that life. Her soul’s perfect rest thus serves as the measure of her perfection. As the soul can grasp and build upon the body’s actions, while the body cannot do likewise with the soul, the perfecting union with God thus better corresponds to the person’s understanding

361 SCG III 27.10; Bourke, 112-3.
362 CS 4, d. 49, q.1,a.1, qa.1/sc3; Kwasniewski, et. al., 337.
363 CS 4, d. 49, q.1, a.1, qa.1/ rep. obj. 4; Kwasniewski, et. al., 339; SCG III 27.7-9; Bourke, 112. I will return below to Thomas’ fuller explanation of how virtue relates to beatitude.
364 CS 4, d. 49, q.1.a.1, qa.1/sc3; Kwasniewski, et. al., 337.
365 SCG III 27.5-6; Bourke, 111-2. See also CS 4, d.49,q.1,a.1, qa.1/sc3; Kwasniewski, et. al., 337.
than to the sense capacities she employs for bodily activities concerned only with the use and knowledge of the body. The soul judges, contains, and orders the body’s functions to that end of its perfection, while the acts of the body remain unable to attain that good on their own. Aquinas states clearly,

the soul is better than the body, which is not alive, and which does not possess the aforementioned goods except by means of the soul. So, a good of the soul, like understanding and that sort of thing, is better than a good of the body. Therefore, the good of the body is not man’s highest good.

The body, however, maintains an important place in Thomas’ sketch of beatitude. First, it provides the impetus to recognize our need for perfection. The goods of the body are those things that first appear to us as good things. They and the senses we use to take in perceptions of the world around us serve as the gateway to knowledge. Thomas writes, “I think of body so that I may be able to think of soul, which latter I think so that I may be able to think of immaterial substance, which in turn I think so that I may be able to think about God.” To ponder what our sense perceptions bring to our awareness leads us down the path of considering that such things as goodness or perfection may exist and that we may receive them. He notes, “eventually, when our knowledge is more mature, we come to have a distinct knowledge of [humanity’s] end, by discerning it clearly…and at that point we hunger for the highest good where it is to be found, namely in spiritual realities.” So, in the pursuit of perfection, the person must learn to subordinate her body’s sense cognition to her intellectual cognition.
Second, Thomas builds in recognition of the body’s key role in perfection with his views on how full beatitude ultimately impacts the body. Though the soul acts more perfectly when it is separated from the corruptible body, in the resurrection union of the two, the soul actually reaches a more perfect state. So the beatitude of the saints will increase after the resurrection, because its purview will be extended to not only their souls but also their bodies. Each person’s soul will rejoice in this good for the sake of her body, as well as in its own good. The reunification of body with soul in the resurrection will also increase the intensity of beatitude, which will then extend to the person as a whole without being impeded by any of the ways the body previously impeded the soul’s perfection. Thomas explains, “a body of such a sort is the glorified body, which is altogether subject to the spirit...[and such a union] is more like unto God than when [the soul] is separated from such a body, insofar as the composite has being more perfectly.” In addition, the soul’s innate power to exist within matter will be more perfectly fulfilled in this resurrection beatitude. Even though the soul does not now require the body for its intellection of God,

still the body’s perfection will in a way cooperate unto the perfection of intellectual activity, inasmuch as the soul, from its union with the glorified body, will be more perfect in its nature, and consequently more effective in its activity; and in this respect the very good of the body will cooperate, as if instrumentally, unto that activity in which beatitude consists.

The body is not forgotten in Thomas’ articulation of beatitude, although he certainly carefully qualifies its place and role in the person’s perfection.

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372 CS 4, d. 49, q.1, a.4, qa. 1 resp.; Kwasniewski, et. al., 379.
373 CS 4, d. 49, q.1, a.4, qa.1, rep. obj. 1; Kwasniewski, et. al., 379-80.
374 CS 4, d. 49, q.1, a.4, qa.1, rep. obj. 2; Kwasniewski, et. al., 380.
375 CS 4, d. 49, q.1, a.4, qa.1, rep. obj. 3; Kwasniewski, et. al., 380.
To summarize, alongside his acknowledgment of the body’s limitations, Thomas allows the body an irreplaceable role in the person’s beatitude. Her perfection results from the proper ordering of her body’s capacities to promote and lead to the expansion of her soul. Even though he does not explicitly frame these arguments in terms of divine character, I submit that Aquinas’ theological anthropology depends upon his core tenets of divine impassibility and simplicity. Following his definition of perfection explored above, he takes stock of the complications and corruptions to which bodies often prove subject to conclude that perfection must consist of an existence beyond such liabilities. Thus for him, the soul better serves as the person’s connecting point to union with God.

Now that Thomas has identified the creature’s capacity to cleave to the simple divine transcendence as her soul’s persistence in governing bodily needs so as to enter perfect divine rest, he can focus in on what this connection entails. Thomas gathers all of these threads together to locate the divine beatitude of creation in the soul’s intellectual contemplation of God.

3. Divine Action in Creation: Contemplation

Aquinas’ focus on the soul’s centrality in creaturely beatitude leads to his distinguishing of speculative knowledge of God as the gateway to perfection. Proper to humanity and ordered to nothing else, “this alone of human operations is found also in God,” as it orders all other human operations to its own self-sufficiency. Thomas identifies this perfection as “the working of the intellect in relation to the noblest objects

376 SCG III 37.2-7; Bourke, 124, quote from 37.4.
of understanding” that can be found in “the contemplation of wisdom.” 377 I will here show how Thomas takes four steps to reach this conclusion.

First, not just any contemplation fits the bill. Rather, full creaturely beatitude consists of divine knowledge, concerned with her ultimate end, the unmoved mover in whom the person can come to rest and fulfill her natural desire. 378 Such divine knowledge belongs to acts of speculative intellect, not practical intellect. Though practical intellect does produce goods common to many, this represents an end other than itself. Speculative knowledge, on the other hand, is sought for its own sake. The attainment of the end of beatitude, the act of knowing by which the intellect is united to the object, becomes proper to the one who attains it. Though the end of practical intellect can be both proper and common, the speculative intellect’s end is superior because it more perfectly attains to the self-sufficiency and simplicity of the transcendent God.

Second, in this sense, the good to which speculative intellect is joined is thus more common than the good of practical intellect, since the former is more separated from the particular or the singular, which is the purview of practical intellect. Though practical intellect concerns activity that is good, and such activity does develop virtue and beatitude, speculative intellect surpasses the practical. Speculative intellect may seem to do little to produce moral virtue, but Thomas considers that speculative knowledge leads to practical acts of virtue and thus on to beatitude. Speculative intellection thus creates both the person’s disposition towards beatitude and the merit that enables her to live it while directing her practical actions towards “the perfect knowledge of God” in which

377 SCG III 37.8; Bourke, 124-5.
378 SCG III.25.12; Bourke, 102.
her “eternal happiness consists.” As it exists in itself, the speculative intellect thus holds more noble character than practical intellect. As it does not merely enable practical actions or any particular work, it escapes the tyranny of the practical. The speculative intellect, assisted by correctly ordered practical knowledge, remains free to accurately judge the truth.

However, third, Thomas clarifies that the speculative nature of the knowledge that makes up beatitude is not to be entirely opposed to the practical needs of created beings. Beatitude is convertible with the notion of the reign of God in two ways: to mean those who, more or less perfectly, are currently walking towards heaven under the direction of divine providence as well as those who are established in their ends with nothing in them foreign to divine providence. This reign implies perfection in the one who rules, as the principle of perfection, and in the subjects as they receive their perfection from their ruler. However, those who are already established in that existence provide perfection for themselves and others, both sitting under God as under a ruler and seving as rulers themselves.

Four, this reasoning means that it is indeed more perfect for a person to pour perfection from herself into another than to keep it to herself. At the same time, Thomas argues that perfection takes different degrees in persons on the basis of their perfection within themselves, not according to how it impacts another. Again, he depends upon his doctrine of God. The perfection of God, existing in se, must still be counted greater than when considered as the cause of others’ perfection. So, too, the perfection of the

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379 Summa Theologiae, I.i.4, repl.; Fairweather, 39-40, quote at 40.
380 CS 4, d. 49. Q.1, a.1, qa3; Kwasniewski, et. al., 344-7.
381 CS 4, d. 49, q.1, a.2, qa. 5; Kwasniewski, et. al., 363-6.
contemplative in herself while contemplating remains more than that which exists in the artisan while she is making. Nevertheless, the created one whose contemplation establishes other contemplatives equal to herself is greater than the one who can only contemplate by herself. The premise appears to be that as the person roots herself in God through contemplation, her good as a whole being will expand and spill out into the practical and even purely bodily components of her life.

These four steps create a ladder justifying Thomas’ placement of the soul at the pinnacle of creaturely capacity for the divine. Only the soul’s ability to engage in the pursuit of knowledge of the divine bears close similarity to the divine’s own incorruptible, entirely self-sufficient transcendence. Yet this knowledge operates as the soul itself does: as the soul pulls the body after itself into divine life, so too knowledge of the divine spreads out to meet the needs of all creatures and settles practical concerns along the way to the fullness of perfection that drives the entire project. Thomas’ hierarchy of being encompasses all levels.

So what exact sort of speculative knowledge of the divine does perfection entail? Thomas clarifies that in contrast to general knowledge about God, such as what may be derived from observing the world but remains subject to error and defect, the knowledge of beatitude consists of an entirely different sort of information. He employs familiar

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382 *CS4*, d.49, q.1, a. 1, qa. 2: Kwasniewski, et. al., 344, citing Dionysius’ *Celestial Hierarchy* 3 [PG 165D-168A]. See also the translators’ helpful note 346N506, accessed 6.28.18 via https://www.cupress.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/LoveSupp.pdf, where they clarify that as God’s immeasurable greatness surpasses all practical goods, this does not mean “the good of the many in the practical order deserves to be neglected in favor of contemplation, or that there is not relationship between them. On the contrary, love for God leads, of necessity, to a desire to spread knowledge to one’s neighbors, so that they, too, may be perfected in this contemplation.”

383 *SCG* III 38.1-2; Bourke, 125-6.
argumentation to back up this contention, trying on possible solutions to find one that cannot be rebutted. I trace four additional rungs on this ladder of divine ascent.

First, beyond natural theology exists the knowledge of the divine acquired through demonstration. Demonstration shows God to be immutable, eternal, incorporeal, simple, one, etc. Yet these are tenets of negative knowledge, which show how a thing distinct from others nevertheless remains unknown within its proper self. Demonstrable knowledge of God, leaving more to be learned, therefore belongs to a different sort of knowledge than the affirmations that stem from the proper knowledge of God. However, second, demonstrable knowledge remains subject to error and uncertainty, which proves it lacks the character of full beatitude, which as fully actualized leaves no unfulfilled potency and nothing more to be desired or attained. And third, Thomas maintains again that while not many achieve demonstrable knowledge of God, beatitude can accrue to all people as a common good. But, fourth, surprisingly, Thomas argues that this blessedness available to all does not consist of the knowledge of God simply received through faith. Though this kind of knowledge surpasses both general knowledge as well as demonstrated knowledge of God, it is not sufficient for beatitude: “[f]or the intellect does not grasp the object to which it gives assent in the act of believing.”

Faith, Aquinas argues, is like hearing, giving assent to things offered by another person who one considers to possess more perfect and trustworthy knowledge than one’s own. There must be a knowledge that surpasses this need for faith, supplementing the

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384 SCG III 39.1; Bourke, 127.
385 SCG III 39.2-7; Bourke, 128-30. Relatedly, lacking natural knowledge of God makes one a fool, but lacking blessedness while tending towards it is praiseworthy (SCG III 38.3-5; 126).
386 SCG III 39.2-3; Bourke, 128.
387 SCG III 40.2; Bourke, 131.
person’s earlier trust with a fuller understanding of God. The knowledge of faith does not consist of resting, then, but of inflaming desire to finally see and participate in what one believes, which is now absent.\textsuperscript{388} Though he admits in a beautiful passage that “God is brought into the presence of love through faith, since the believer assents to God voluntarily, according to what is said in Ephesians (3:17): ‘that Christ may dwell by faith in our hearts,’”\textsuperscript{389} Thomas is after a more thorough union with God. Likewise, the will is primary for the knowledge of faith, and Thomas has already suggested that beatitude cannot consist solely of the acts of the will.\textsuperscript{390}

Knowledge of God that is the end of humanity perfectly joins one to God who is the ultimate end beyond the way items of belief are made present to the person by faith. In summary, then, Thomas’ beatitude ties the soul’s capacity to unite the person to the simple, transcendent God to the knowledge of the divine beyond practical know-how, demonstrable facts, or even the willed trust of faith. Such illumination consists of the soul fixing itself in perfect rest to the One whose rest enables the being of the entire creation.

\section{Summary of How Thomist Beatitude Works}

This overview of Aquinas’ unique take highlights how he painstakingly constructs beatitude on the basis of logical distinctions in his hierarchy of being. Just as with Palamas, Thomas offers specific resources for an ecumenical rendition of the theme. His theology of creaturely perfection raises a number of intriguing similarities to hesychast deification. Both assert that perfection, most clearly seen in God’s own character,

\textsuperscript{388} SCG III 40.4-6; Bourke, 131-2.  
\textsuperscript{389} SCG III 40.6; Bourke,132.  
\textsuperscript{390} SCG III 40.3; Bourke ,131.
remains the proper end of the person. Both theories also articulate a strong sense of the need for the soul to guide the person’s bodily choices, which then may witness to the beatitude that animates the soul.

The distinguishing element in Aquinas remains his unwavering commitment to a perfection that emulates the divine character of simple, impassible, transcendence. In other words, Thomas’ theory of divine self-determination makes beatitude an imitation of God’s own substance rather differently than Palamas’ divine self-determination that makes theosis the holding together of radically different orders. In fact, seeing God requires the person’s own participation in eternity, which is the being of the divine substance itself. The act of seeing God does not take place in time, because the principle is the divine eternal, which by its nature introduces the soul into the perpetual rest that is God’s own character.391 Focusing on this perfect divine character leads Thomas to search for how human life could most closely approximate God’s own being. For Aquinas, then, God’s beatifying action in creation rests in how the superiority of the soul over the body creates the intellect’s capacity to engage in speculative knowledge of God above all else. Thomas clearly wishes to defend the availability of God’s pure goodness to the embodied person’s daily life, but on my read his distinctions may risk qualifying the extent the person may be perfected in this life. His differences from Palamas come most clearly into view when we consider how he maintains the Creator-creature difference in his theology of beatitude.

B. How Does this Model Maintain the Creator-Creature Distinction?

391 SCG III 61.4 and 62; Bourke, 201 and 202-6.
Thomas takes pains to clarify that the contemplative knowledge of full beatitude holds no potency but participates in the divine by existing as actualized and perfect operation. Nevertheless, such lofty aims face a serious check, especially when he must combine this potential for the person’s perfectability with his commitments to the way bodily experience and practical knowledge interfere with the soul’s quest for perfection.

Here, just where they appear to dovetail, the deification models of Thomas and Palamas begin to sharply diverge. Palamas also stresses the need for the person to leave behind the sensible world in order to receive the divine light of deifying knowledge. But he ultimately champions the body’s permeability to that light, as mediated by the soul. Rather than develop a theology of how the sensible may be caught up by the spiritual as Palamas does, Thomas maintains his divides between those orders of being.

As before, I organize these findings into three sections. First, because of its identification with the divine self-determination beyond creaturely contingency, perfect beatitude cannot occur in the created world but belongs to the life a person may receive after death. Second, then, the soul’s capacities to unite with the divine must be sharpened to exclude other functions such as desire, will, action, and affection. Third, the distinction of soulish knowledge from bodily perception means that the divine presence in creation consists of the created effects of God. Beatitude in this life pertains to the created order. Exploring how Thomas justifies these findings explains his Creator-creation distinction and clarifies how his theology of beatitude intersects with hesychast deification.

1. Divine Self-Determination: Perfect Beatitude Beyond Life

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392 SCG III 38.6; Bourke, 126-7.
I want to show here how, given Thomas’ arguments above, the fulfillment of human existence, longing, and appetite that follows from the person’s perfect contemplative union with God cannot fully occur in this life. Thomas’ contrasts classify the fullest sense of beatitude—the beatific vision—entirely with the resurrected life, while he grants the created existence a conditioned ability to partake of some portion of perfection in human beatitude. Again, recall that the vision of God which is the most perfect beatitude cannot be an action measured by time, since it stands outside of time. Since Thomas ruthlessly follows his own logic, this means that the beatific vision itself is impossible unless or until the person transcends the limitations of time and her body. Thus sharing in the divine’s own self-determined transcendence and simplicity may only occur after death. I now show how Thomas develops this rationality in two steps.

First, Thomas’ stress on the soul’s leadership assumes that it will often be qualified by the needs and limitations of the body. Given his understanding that the soul remains hampered by its “natural affinity…for phantasms,” he contends that the soul cannot know either itself or separate substances on its own and then argues that people are likewise unable to see the divine essence that transcends all substances and which is the sole proper content of full beatitude. He concludes,

the higher our mind is elevated to the contemplation of spiritual beings, the more is it withdrawn from sensible things…Hence, the mind which sees the divine substance must be completely cut off from the bodily senses, either by death or by ecstasy.

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393 SCG III 48.1-2; Bourke,162-3. Thomas supports this assertion by arguing that we do not generally see in people’s lives the sorts of stability, perfection, complete goodness, freedom from fear or possible loss, and continuous action that this vision would supply (SCG III 48.3-8; 163-5).
394 SCG III 41-47; Bourke, 132-58; quote from 47.1; Bourke, 158.
395 SCG III.47.2; Bourke,158. This ostensible similarity to Palamas will quickly foment clear differences.
This distinction generates three related sub-claims. On one hand, the disparity between divine and human makes beatitude democratic and universally available: when the person enters beatitude, “the created intellect is exalted to the vision of the divine substance by a certain supernatural light” \[therefore\] “there is no created intellect so low in its nature that it cannot be elevated to this vision.” 396 The divine light is not connatural with any creature, but since it is supernatural, it cannot be hindered by the diversity of nature. The already infinite distance between the intellect at its highest natural level and God relativizes the distance between that highest natural level and the lowest natural intellectual level: “[t]herefore, it makes no difference what level of intellect it is that is elevated to the vision of God by the aforementioned light.” 397 Still, some may see God more perfectly than others, not because the supernatural light enabling vision of God is any different but because different people participate to varying degrees in the contemplation of this light according to their dispositions. 398 Each one sees God so perfectly that her “whole natural capacity is fulfilled” such that she “knows in this divine substance all the things to which [her] natural capacity extends” as pertaining to their perfectability. 399

On the other hand, Thomas’ argument here entails that the fullness of what God knows in seeing God’s own divine essence remains unavailable. Perfection exceeds the natural power of the creature, “since no creature by its natural endowments is capable of arriving at it.” 400 Of its own power, the created intellect cannot see all of God. 401

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396 SCG III 57.1; Bourke, 191.
397 SCG III 57.3; Bourke, 191-2.
398 SCG III 58.1-8; Bourke, 193-4.
399 SCG III 59.4-6; Bourke, 196-7.
400 CS4, d. 49, q.1, a. 2, qa3. Resp.; Kwasniewski, et. al., 360.
401 SCG III 55.6-56.2; Bourke, 188.
comprehension would match the creature up to divine substance, but this is impossible. Divine power is infinite, so no created intellect can know all that this power can do, even though obviously God knows all the divine power can do through knowing God’s own divine essence. These limitations include things God can make but has not (yet), the things God will ever make, God’s reasons for making, and the details of God’s will on creaturely predestination, election, justification “and other similar things which pertain to the sanctification of the creature.” Such knowledge in God works similarly to how knowledge works in people: as only the spirit within the person comprehends her full substance, so, too, only the Spirit of God knows these matters.

And so, that Spirit does not belong to persons the way it belongs to God. Due to the constraints and changes of material life, contemplation of God can begin in this life but only reaches fullness in the future. For this life, the divine eternity is not communicable to a person “in such a way as it becomes an adequate measure” of her or something within her, but it can still be communicated as something in which she participates. This participation means that as a person partakes of “divine activity in seeing God, so [she] is made a partaker of eternity, by which the divine activity is measured; and it is thus that [her] very activity can be called eternal life.” So, though felicity cannot be perfectly present, she may participate in that eternity “somewhat” in

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402 SCG III 55.5; Bourke, 187.
403 SCG III 56.3-56.4; Bourke, 188-9.
404 SCGIII 59.7-10; Bourke, 197-8.
405 SCG III 59.10; Bourke, 198, referencing I Cor 2:11.
406 SCG III 63.10; Bourke, 209.
407 CS4, d. 49, q.1, a. 2, qa3., rep. obj. 3; Kwasniewski, et. al., 360.
408 CS4, d. 49, q.1, a. 2, qa3., rep. obj. 3; Kwasniewski, et. al., 361.
this life as one’s soul joins to higher things. Thomas grants that even this limited participation according to the human condition should suffice to call her blessed.

But, second, recall how strenuously Thomas insisted that perfection connotes the person’s natural end. Her desire for beatitude is therefore also natural—so how could such a natural desire or even the capacity to think or discuss exist, if it could never be fulfilled? Thomas notes that the desire is natural to humanity, but the desire and its end are naturally oriented to a fulfillment taking place after this life. I cannot here detail fully the scholarship devoted to treating the relation between Thomas’ conception of the natural and supernatural ends of the person. Nor do I wish to argue for one perspective over another. Rather, I wish to simply point to the roots of the difficulty within Thomas’ early work, which carries through his corpus and which we will glance at again below as it resurfaces in de Lubac and Rahner. In his earlier commentary on the Sentences, Thomas acknowledges that if we could not attain any beatitude in this life, we would simply wish to die, which cannot be right. Referring to Platonic and Aristotelian discussions, Thomas finds a solution. He argues that the person’s future resurrected life must somehow be considered (in some respect) her natural end. To be human always includes the condition that “no matter how much someone in this life is perfect in knowledge or virtue or any other perfection, still there remains something for [her] to desire, such as knowing many things that [she] does not know.” Proper beatitude can

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409 SCG III 48.9 and 61.1-3; Bourke, 165 and 200-1.
410 See SCG III 48.1-16; Bourke, 162-7. See also CS4, d. 49, q.1, a. 1, qa.4 and d. 49, q. 1., a.2, qa1-3; Kwasniewski, et. al., 347-61.
411 CS4, d. 49, q.1, a. 1, qa.4, rep. obj. 2; Kwasniewski, et. al., 351. He argues that present human life is more perfect than any other animal’s present life, so since their existences include some attainment of their ends, ours must as well.
412 CS4, d. 49, q.1, a. 1, qa.4, sed cont.2; Kwasniewski, et. al., 348.
only take place after this life, but death should be desired not as an end in and of itself, only as a gateway to that beatitude.\textsuperscript{413}

Aquinas does not mean these distinctions between perfection and participation to partition God, but merely to underscore the limitations of creation in comparison to the fullness of the self-sufficient divine. This first plank of his Creator-creation distinction rests upon his definition of divine simplicity. So, then, a correspondent logic must direct his conclusions on how the creature’s capacity remains differentiated from the divine capaciousness. Considering the detailed treatment Thomas gives the other capacities of the soul sharpens his distinction between God and creation in beatitude.

2. **Creaturely Capacity: the Insufficiency of Other Activities**

We know that Thomas roots beatitude in the intellect’s contemplative knowledge of God. But what about the other functions of the person that involve the soul? The person also engages her soul in desiring, willing, acting, and delighting, particularly as she practices the virtues that develop the beatitude of this life. How do each of these components impact beatitude? I will now look quickly at how Thomas investigates each of these categories of soulish activity in order to hone his argument. In what will become a pattern, Thomas carves out a beneficial purpose for each one to serve as an aid to the soul’s most perfect act of contemplation but remains incapable of generating that contemplation on its own. His findings add stress to his emphasis on how beatitude requires the person’s immersion within God’s divine simplicity, transcendence, and impassibility, and thus ultimately belongs to the life after death, when the soul will fully

\textsuperscript{413} CS4, d. 49, q.1, a. 1, qa.4; Kwasniewski, et. al., 347-51.
direct her entire being. His discussion underscores his distinction between the perfect God and the imperfect creature made for union with her God.

I begin with desire, as it most closely touches on how the soul’s capacity for beatitude differs from the body. First, Thomas acknowledges that any and all appetites driving the creature to any good activities bear likeness to God in a doubled manner: at one level in reference to the goodness of creation itself and at another insofar as this goodness in fact echoes, imitates, and points to the deeper undergirding reality of God. In the first sense, desires exhibit divine likeness simply because they enable the creature’s own life, which is good. Here, the desires or appetites driving all of the particularities of the created life become in and of themselves vehicles actualizing creation to whatever level possible for the creature. Her own fulfillment is a good specific to her life, and the things she needs in order to obtain that fulfillment by the same definition also manifest goodness. Desires thus serve as signposts towards the creature’s ultimate goal, the goodness that becomes available to each creature in a number of ways specific to her make-up. The creature’s good builds up from the most basic level of merely existing as an individual, to include such species-contributive practices as sustaining life, procreating, protecting, providing for and guiding one’s offspring, and so on. As the creature fulfills the perfection of its genus, her goodness may also extend to a fourth stage, where she displays analogical likeness to God’s own self.

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414 *SCG III.24.6-7; Bourke, 95.*

415 *SCG III.24.6-7; Bourke, 95-96:* “Now, the good that is proper to a thing may be received in many ways. One way depends on what is appropriate to the essential character of the individual [such as seeking one’s good by desiring food]. A second way depends on what is appropriate to the species [such as procreating and nourishing offspring]. A third way depends on the essential character of his genus. It is in this case that an equivocal agent seeks its proper good by an act of causation, as in the case of the heavens. And a fourth way depends on the analogical likeness of things produced, in relation to their source.”
But that is only one ‘side’ of the relation between God and creation, and it is a secondary side. Desires also disclose the perfect goodness that is God, pointing to the creature’s proper end. Thomas notes this second sense of desire’s likeness to God when he adds, “[s]o, too, for this reason [the creature] tends to its own good, because it tends to the divine likeness, and not conversely.”\textsuperscript{416} In fulfilling desires and appetites that enable its own life, Thomas recognizes how the creature’s own fulfillment also points to the Divine Good right within the created world: “by virtue of tending to be good [any created thing] tends to the divine likeness, for a thing is made like unto God in so far as it is good.”\textsuperscript{417} Such analogical goodness depends upon the already prior, already deeper reality of God’s own goodness. The fulfillment of the created being names God’s likeness, for any fulfillment and goodness in creation derives from the Creator God whose Subsistent Being roots the creature’s life and goodness. Any created entity’s desire and action for its own survival and flourishing depends upon and honors the Divine perfection which roots its own existence, no matter which level of goodness it may reach. Here, too, divine simplicity allows goodness to be diffused throughout creation: “[a]nd it is in this way that God, Who is beyond genus, gives existing being to all, because of His own goodness.”\textsuperscript{418} Thomas’ doubled sense of goodness depends upon his sense of creation’s analogical participation in God.

Nevertheless, to Thomas, appetite cannot suffice for the highest levels of perfection. To that end, he asserts two arguments. First, he explains that

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the more perfect something is in its power, and the higher it is in the scale of goodness, the more does it have an appetite for a broader common good, and the more does it seek and become involved in the doing of good for beings far removed from itself. Indeed, imperfect
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\textsuperscript{416} \textit{SCG} III.24.6-7; Bourke, 95.
\textsuperscript{417} \textit{SCG} III.24.6-7; Bourke, 95.
\textsuperscript{418} \textit{SCG} III.24.6-7; Bourke, 95-96.
beings tend only to the good proper to the individual, while perfect beings tend to the good of their species. But more perfect beings tend to the good of genus, while God, Who is most perfect in goodness, tends toward the good of being as a whole. Hence, it is said by some people, and not inappropriately, that ‘the good, as such, is diffusive,’ because the better a thing is, the more does it diffuse its goodness to remote beings.419

As we have seen, although perfection applies to a certain extent to all creation, creatures with the capacity to reach a higher level of goodness more comprehensively imitate God’s all-encompassing goodness. Again, Thomas turns to his doctrine of God who undergirds all goodness and the desire for it but also remains at the pinnacle of the desires for good that animate this chain of being: “God, Who is most perfect in goodness and Who diffuses His [sic] goodness in the broadest way, must be in [such] diffusion the archetype for all diffusers of goodness.”420 The creatures who belong higher on this scale therefore imitate God’s diffusion by influencing others towards goodness: “[n]ow, inasmuch as a thing diffuses goodness to other beings, it comes to be their cause. As a result, it is also clear that a thing which tends to become the causes of others tends toward the divine likeness, and nonetheless it tends toward its own good.”421

So, second, Thomas determines four reasons why what marks the higher creatures in their place of such profound goodness on this chain of being is more properly their rationality than their desire. First, certainly participation in God’s likeness constitutes each creature’s end, even those who lack intellection. But for those who do possess intellectual capacity, since goodness fulfills each creature’s appetite, the intellective capacity must also be employed to perfection.422 Second, creatures with intellect hold a greater capacity for goodness because their intellect allows them to understand a greater

419 SCG III.24.8; Bourke, 96, referencing Ps. Dionysius, Divine Names 4.1 (PG 3; 693).
420 SCG III.24.8; Bourke, 96-7.
421 SCG III.24.8; Bourke, 96-7.
422 SCG III.25.1; Bourke, 97.
scope of good, imitating God’s character of diffusive goodness. As God is “always actually understanding… all things in the act of understanding [God’s self] — thus, the creature becomes more like God by actually understanding the Divine than by habitually or potentially understanding.”

Therefore, third, this highest function of the person consists of understanding God, the most perfect intelligible object on which the intellect may focus. Her beatitude belongs to her intellect, which greatly desires this perfect end, even though it grasps “but little concerning divine things.”

These three sub-arguments help Thomas unfurl his fourth reason why desire proves incomplete for establishing beatitude. He recognizes that all desire is rooted in the person’s natural drive for perfection. However, to be able to fulfill that desire is not natural but requires reason’s discernment and elements of volition. Therefore, even though desire underscores that perfection exists as the creature’s end, on its own it does not prove sufficient for the creature to obtain this perfection. Desire must be guided by the contemplative knowledge that marks the intellect’s state of resting in God.

A natural next step would be to consider the will. Don’t wills establish the development of creatures’ perfection by expanding and directing their appetites so that they follow what their intellects tell them? Doesn’t the person pursuing beatitude need to

423 SCG III.25.8; Bourke, 99-100.
424 SCG III.25.2-3; Bourke, 97-8.
425 SCG III.25.7; Bourke, 99.
426 Natural appetite and rational appetite join to desire perfection; the natural is always right insofar as nature goes, while rational appetite sometimes aims correctly and sometimes runs astray (see CS4, d. 49, q.1, a.3, qa. 3; Kwasniewski, et. al., 372-3). The person either wants something because she thinks she can reach her end through it, or because it on its own seems to offer perfection. Thus even those who crave sin actually desire beatitude, for something may have the appearance of a good “in which a certain shadow of freedom” appears (see d. 49, q.1, a.3, qa. 5, rep. obj. 2-3, quote at 3; Kwasniewski, et. al., 376). When the rational appetite is correctly ordered, someone can fulfill her end (as enabled by the gift of divine grace). Conversely, when rational desires remain disordered, the person demerits.
427 In this state, all desires, such as to know truth, live in virtue, receive honor, achieve renown; enjoy wealth and other pleasures; maintain preservation may be fulfilled in perfect happiness and satiation (SCG III.63; Bourke, 206-9, referencing Ps. 102:5).
will that she conform to what her understanding discloses? In two steps, Aquinas argues his way out of this possibility.

First, he considers whether the will’s broad reach might render it superior to the intellect. He determines that though the will is not peculiar to intellectual nature, the intellect itself proves peculiar to intellectual natures. So, happiness for such creatures does include acts of the will but must also extend to their intellects. Second, he ponders that objects which move powers must exist prior to the acts of those powers. The result is that the will’s acts cannot be counted as primary as the happiness to which it directs itself. The first object of the will is not its own action but the good thing towards which the will directs its actions. Here, he maintains what he explains in the *Commentary on the Sentences*:

[s]ince therefore the will’s first object is the ultimate end, it is impossible that any act of will be the will’s ultimate end. Nor can it even be said that the attainment of the end outside is immediately through an act of will; for there is understood to be an act of will before the attainment of the end, as a certain motion toward the end, and an act of will after the attainment, as a certain resting in the end.

The will’s ultimate end, which remains quasi-external to it, cannot therefore be identified with any act of that will. Rather, that end should be thought of as whatever act by which the will first stands related to God in such a way as to be at rest in him [*sic*]. But this is the vision of God according to intellect, because through this act there comes to be a sort of quasi-contact of God to the intellect—since every object of knowledge is in the knower insofar as it is known—even as bodily contact with a pleasant body leads to the beginning at rest of affection.

To clarify, Thomas adds two more reasons why the intellect rather than the will plays the key role in the creature’s perfection. First, the will only moves the intellect

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428 *SCG* III 26.2-6; Bourke, 103-4.
429 *SCG* III 26.8; Bourke, 104-5.
430 *SCG* III, 26.9-10; Bourke, 105.
431 CS4, d. 49, Q.1, a.1, qa2, response; Kwasniewski, et. al., 342, italics original.
432 CS4, d. 49, Q.1, a.1, qa2, response; Kwasniewski, et. al., 342.
accidentally, when it desires and acts for understanding, while the intellect primarily and directly moves the will because it perceives understanding as a good and desires the good end for the will. Thus, for the process of beatitude, the intellect remains primary not just over desires but also over the will. Second, the will can be deceived by false happiness. To correctly direct the will’s actions, the intellect’s discernment proves necessary.

Even though the intellect could also be mistaken, it is still its operation that is required to direct the soul aright. Again, Thomas’ reasoning underscores his commitment to the distinction between the unmovable divine stability and the vagaries of creation. The person’s perfection must involve her imitation of divine reliability, as far as possible.

However, given how the discussion above mentioned acts of the intellect as well as acts belonging to the will, could the acts themselves prove more significant for beatitude than the intellect itself? Indeed, in his commentary on Lombard’s Sentences, Aquinas notes that the end of anything is its proper activity. Since the principle of a thing’s proper activity is its proper form, and in humanity this is the rational soul, “beatitude consists either in the very acts of the rational soul, or in those things to which [humanity] is related through acts of the rational soul.” So, are human actions, specifically the actions of the soul or intellect, equivalent to beatitude?

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433 SCG III; 26.21; Bourke, 110.
434 SCG III; 2.11; Bourke, 105-6.
435 CS4, d.49.q.1.a.1, qa.1/res.; Kwasniewski, et. al., 337.
436 I will only consider the actions of the soul here, since we have already determined its primacy and Thomas’ discussion of the goods of all human activity is quite lengthy. In brief, in her actions concerned with art, Aquinas does not want to classify a person’s activity as blessedness, since such pursuits produce artifacts which cannot possibly represent the ultimate end of human life. The person’s activity concerned with production of material things, when done well, discloses an ordering to speculative activity, their quality of execution and beauty pointing to the goodness that underlies the cosmos. Art, when done well, simply joins every other human operation in directing the person to intellectual speculation. See SCG III 36; Bourke, 123 as well as SCG III.25.9; Bourke, 100: In this way, human activity bears some affinity to the activity of the stars: “[t]herefore, it is not unfitting to say that the motions of the heavenly bodies and the actions of their movers are in some sense for the sake of these generable and corruptible bodies which
Thomas ultimately produces four main arguments against this possibility, reasoning similarly to the way he treats desire and will. First, any thing’s end is that through which it is joined to its principle of perfection. As we know, for the person, that end is God. A person may be joined to God in two ways: when she acts like God, and when she reaches God through the union offered by knowledge and love. In the latter state of beatitude, her acts mediate this union she enjoys with God by habit. She is not so united to God when she exists merely in the former state of potency, although whatever enables her to eventually maximally imitate God in act is necessarily part of her ultimate good end. All human goods work together to form the person’s perfect activity just as do the habits informing her acts. Along these lines, a certain participation in beatitude remains possible during this life: “[f]or in the way in which effects are present in their causes, so activities are present in their habits.” Similarly to desire, then, the good of the soul’s actions can promote the person’s perfection. However, also parallel to his treatment of desire, Thomas does not believe that such contributions to beatitude define the blessed life itself. The many actions proceeding from the person’s habit towards her overall object of perfection are necessitated “only by the interruptions of time,” but in perfect beatitude, she will experience no interruptions or breaks in her actions, just the continuous state of being blessed.

Second, Aquinas clarifies this rationale in *Summa contra Gentiles*, where he distinguishes blessedness from even morally virtuous acts. Virtuous acts cannot escape

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437 *CS4*, d.49, q.1, a.1-2; Kwasniewski, et. al., 337-58.
438 *CS4*, d. 49, q.1, a.2, qa.2, repl. Obj. 5; Kwasniewski, et. al., 358.
439 *CS4*, d. 49, q.1, a.1, qa.1 res.; Kwasniewski, et. al., 337.
440 *CS4*, d. 49, q.1, a.2, qa.2 repl. Obj. 4; Kwasniewski, et. al., 358.
what characterizes all activity: “all moral operations can be ordered to something else.”

Not only do virtues remain ordered to other things than themselves, they require other things for their development and fall prey to the changes and chances of material life. For instance, the goods produced by virtuous actions achieve goodness only when they are properly employed, such as appropriately spending or giving away wealth. But then the goods of the virtues become similar to the goods of the body, which are not good in themselves. As we saw there, such mutability deals with the contingent problems of created existence and not with “the most perfect object of understanding or reason.”

Moreover, what these virtues create are means between the extremes of human passions, which are not equivalent to beatitude. The virtues provide grounds for perfection but prove unable to fulfill its conditions themselves. The direct ends of virtuous activity are all concerned with the vagaries of creation and not with perfect fulfillment. They cannot serve as the person’s ultimate end in and of themselves, for each of them operates differently when possessing something than when it does not possess it. They fail the test of being good in and of themselves. So, the ultimate end must be achieved by something that does rest in and of itself with this final, fulfilled manner, admitting no possibility of change. Unsurprisingly, Aquinas determines the missing ingredient that

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441 Thomas shows how each virtue holds distinct ends: for instance, fortitude, concerned with “warlike activities,” is ordered to the victory and peace that serve as the goal of the war itself, justice has the end of preserving peace, and so on (SCG III.34.2; Bourke, 120-1). Actions only display perfection when they are joined to their perfect end beyond themselves (SCG III. 34.3; Bourke, 121).

442 SCG III 28-31; Bourke, 113-8.

443 SCG III.35.1-5, quote at 35.3; Bourke, 122-3, quote at 122.

444 SCG III. 34.3; Bourke, 121. Similarly, Thomas finds that activity insufficiently matches his requirement for beatitude takes shape in ways that match the distinctive nature of humanity. Since animals may share somewhat in certain acts of moral virtue, such activity proves unable to bear beatitude’s unique character. Moral virtue thus cannot form human beatitude. See SCG III. 34.6; Bourke, 121.

445 SCG III. 26.12; Bourke, 106. Felicity can therefore not be found in glory or honors, for instance, since these depend upon being recognized by “important and wise people” who hold the power rather than the person’s own virtuous acts and at times falsely give such honor. Even actions that
directs activity to goodness to be reason. Once again, for ultimate fulfillment and rest to be reached, the person’s ultimate end must be more connected to reason in and of itself rather than the changeable results that reason or the moral acts it motivates can produce. 446

Finally, Thomas adds, acts should not be thought of as the ways by which human beings most closely imitate God, since except metaphorically, neither acts nor the passions prompting some of them belong to God. 447 Once more, Thomas’ theology of beatitude depends upon the transcendence of the unmoved, self-sufficient divine simplicity over the contingent, dependent, restlessly acting person. The element most similar to the simple transcendent God and thus most able to root within God’s ways appears to be the intellect or the soul acting according to reason.

One final question remains: what about the affections of the person? Could they surpass her intellect as her meeting point with the simple God? I will look at two examples. For instance, since the person’s ultimate end is delight for its own sake, her ultimate operation could be to delight. And her appetite likely desires such delight more than knowledge. But Thomas ultimately determines that such delight maintains a twofold existence that should not be considered beatitude. Delight either precedes the attainment of an end, which can be ordered to something else such as perfect activity, or it follows after attaining that end through the activity joining the agent to her end. This latter function constitutes participation in beatitude, representing the will’s being at rest, rather

446 SCG III 34.4; Bourke, 121.
447 CS4, d. 49, q.1, a.2, qa.2, repl. Obj. 5; Kwasniewski, et. al., 355-8. See also SCG III 34.5; Bourke, 121.
than beatitude itself. This delight of the will at rest makes a “quasi-formal completion of the ratio of beatitude, as being something additional to, yet consequent upon, vision, in which the substance of beatitude consists.”  

Beyond delight, would not charity as the most excellent of all virtues and the one that orders the rest of them to God, serve as the ultimate outworking of beatitude? Thomas acknowledges that “the ultimate resting in God in the fatherland will belong to charity.” But he follows up with a settled refusal: “[n]evertheless, this fact does not grant to charity that its act be the very substance of beatitude, but that it be either a certain inclination to beatitude, as in the wayfaring state, or the resting in beatitude, as in the state of the fatherland.” In other words, though the presence of true charity within the person identifies her as tending towards the existence yet to come or, within the fatherland, as proof of the existence of beatitude within her, it is not perfection itself.

For, while we are more perfectly united to God through affection than through intellect, because affection perfects and adorns intellection, “it is necessary that the first conjunction always be through intellect.” Love indeed inclines one to seek union before the intellect can perform it, but intellect must first know this union to some extent—“because appetite cannot be had for something altogether unknown.” The affections, then, become subject to the same conditions governing desire, act, and will.

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448 CS4, d. 49. Q.1, a.1, qa2, rep. obj. 2; Kwasniewski, et. al., 342-3, quote at 343.  
449 CS4, d. 49. Q.1, a.1, qa2, rep. obj. 3; Kwasniewski, et. al., 343. He also notes that charity resides in the will, so if perfection is charity, then, citing 1 Cor 13, “one should look to the will for beatitude” (CS4, d. 49. Q.1, a.1, qa2, obj. 3; Kwasniewski, et. al., 340). But as we have already seen, beatitude exists within the will not as its own activity but as its object (CS4, d. 49. Q.1, a.1, qa2, rep. obj. 1; Kwasniewski, et. al., 343).  
450 CS4, d. 49. Q.1, a.1, qa2, rep. obj.5; Kwasniewski, et. al., 343-4.  
451 CS4, d. 49. Q.1, a.1, qa2, rep. obj.5; Kwasniewski, et. al., 343-4.
They require the intellect’s direction in order to determine what is truly good and desirable and thus reach their own perfect ends.452

This tour through functions besides contemplative knowledge demonstrates how far Thomas applies his distinction between Creator and creature. Since beatitude involves the person bearing likeness to the divine transcendence as far as possible, it centers on her soul’s contemplation. Such contemplation best occurs after death, beyond the distractions of this life. Therefore in turn, other creaturely functions prove insufficient to establish this final contemplation—whether those be desires, will, actions, or delight. Each of these aspects of creaturely life finds its fulfillment in maintaining the person’s existence, supporting her soul’s pursuit of perfection. But their determination by materiality places them lower on the divine ladder of ascent than the soul and demands the soul’s overarching leadership: desires must be chastened, the will directed, actions purified, and affections tempered by the true, dependable and anchoring reality of God’s entire goodness, self-sufficiency, and transcendence. Thus, Thomas needs to classify the goodness that these various functions can portray during the person’s material life, which remains less than full beatitude.

3. Divine Action in Creation: Uncreated versus Created Grace

We have seen how for Thomas, beatitude cannot consist of the external goods of fortune, the goods of the body, or of the goods of the soul that pertain to sense perception. It likewise does not consist of intellective outworkings in moral virtues or of the

452 SCG III 26.13; Bourke, 106.
intellectual virtues concerned with action. Thomas performs some careful juggling to maintain these distinctions at the heart of his vision of perfection. He lays stress on the soul as the hinge between the eternal rest possible in a simple God and the changing composite aspects of material life. He defines the soul as “intellect in its essence” and therefore immortal. The soul holds an innate capacity to fully unite with and take on the characteristics of the perfect beatitude of God’s eternal simplicity. As the lowest of intellects but above corporeal matter, its actions are joined to temporal things existing in time while it also retains the ability to be brought by God to perfect rest.

Putting aside analysis of assurances that this new reality is possible, Thomas’ theology here still requires additional consideration. How does the person’s full beatitude take place? Not just an intensification of a natural power will suffice, as the beatific vision is not the same type of vision belonging to the natural intellect. In uniting with God, something new is attained. Therefore, the created intellect itself must be changed by acquiring a new disposition.

In fact, the divine essence itself must serve as the form whereby the intellect understands God, so as to elevate the created intellect beyond its own capacities “by means of an influx of divine goodness.” To protect God’s nature from being blurred with the person when God becomes this formal cause of her perfection, Thomas argues that though divine intellect is not “altogether foreign” to the soul as created intellect, the supernatural divine light strengthening the intellect to see God is not convertible with

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453 SCG III 37.1; Bourke, 123.
454 CS4, D. 49, q.1, a. 1, qa.4; Kwasniewski, et. al., 351.
455 SCG III 61.5; Bourke, 201.
456 SCG III 53.3-5; Bourke, 180-1.
457 SCG III 52-53; Bourke, 178-9, quote at 53.1; Bourke, 179.
The proportion relating created intellect to divine intellect does not consist of commensuration but a relation of difference, such as of matter to form or of cause to effect. The divine substance serves as “the first intelligible object and the principle of all intellectual cognition” that still remains beyond the capacity of the intellect. The created intellect sees God not by diminishing its distance from God but by receiving power from God within its distance from God such that person enjoys union with God in her act of understanding, not her act of being. The created intellect can participate in divine likeness, even though God remains a higher form than anything created.

So, Thomas’ view of perfection distinguishes not just between God and the person as composite created being but between her soul’s functions during this life and its capacities for future fulfillment in the resurrection. Her eventual beatitude beyond this life requires her soul to receive the fullness of divine presence in a new manner after her death, despite its previous constrictions by her created nature. Yet if this beatitude in essence is only received after death, how should one view the participation in perfection that the person (and her soul) may enjoy during this life?

In answer to that query, Thomas develops his sophisticated distinction between uncreated and created grace, God and the effects of divine action within the person’s soul. Somewhat similarly to how Palamas will phrase matters, Aquinas contends, “in the state of pure nature [wo]man needs a power added to [her] natural power by grace, for

458 SCG III 54.10-11 and 55.2-4; Bourke, 185, 186-7.
459 “[N]othing prevents there being a proportion of creature to God on the basis of a relation of one who understands to the thing understood, just as on the basis of the relation of effect to cause” (SCG III 54.13; Bourke, 186).
460 SCG III 54.8; Bourke, 184.
461 SCG III 54.9; Bourke, 185.
462 SCG III 53.3; Bourke, 180.
one reason, namely, in order to do and to will supernatural good. But in the state of
corrupt nature [s]he needs this for two reasons, in order to be healed, and in order to
achieve the meritorious good of supernatural virtue.” 463 Thus original creation and re-
creation do retain similarities. In creation, God grants being to all things as the form
received in the being itself, and this form provides the principle of “the natural operations
God works in things.” In re-creation, God grants “the being of grace” the formal principle
of which is “created habit;” “thus, that created habit stands to the operation of the Holy
Spirit partly as a term, and partly as a means.” 464 Thomas defines beatitude as simply
being. Everything that has being from another takes perfection from it. As one receives
being more perfectly, the more perfectly one unites with her principle of being. 465 Since
this life infused from God disposes a person to a higher end, rendering her participative in
the divine nature, it derives from grace rather than from human nature as such. 466 This
grace “exceeds every capacity of nature, since it is none other than a participation of the
divine nature, which exceeds every other nature.” 467

Thus, whatever occurs when the person begins her process of contemplation must
correspond to her created nature: “whatever is received into a thing is received into it
according to the recipient’s mode…[T]he creature’s mode is finite; thus what is received
into the creature must be some finite love.” 468 And since what is finite is created,

463 Summa Theologiae, I-II, Q. 109, Art. 2; Fairweather, 140-141.
464 CS1, d.1, q.1, a.1, distinction 17, repl. obj. 3 [Paris version, 1252-1256]; Kwasniewski, et. al, 13.
465 CS4, d. 49, q.1, a.2, qa.1; Kwasniewski, et. al., 352-55, referencing Boethius (On the
Consolation of Philosophy III, Prose 10.
466 Summa Theologiae, I-II, Q. 110, Art. 3; Fairweather, 161-162.
467 Summa Theologiae, I-II, Q. 112, Art. 1; Fairweather, 175.
468 Departing from Peter Lombard: “But every finite thing is created. Therefore in the soul having
the Holy Spirit, there is a created charity” (CS I, D.1, q.1, a.1, Distinction 17 [Paris version, 1252-1256];
Kwasniewski, et. al., 10). The rationale, to ascribe the responsibility for failing to attain full perfection to
whatever the soul receives is a created entity. Aquinas initiates this line of reasoning in the *Commentary on the Sentences*. Here, he considers and rejects the possibility that beatitude within the person could be named the Godhead itself becoming present within her. He prefers the opposing view that as participation in justice makes a person just, so justice becomes something created within us. If beatitude truly consists of the presence of God, metaphysics must recognize how God remains exterior to human nature.

So, Thomas later maintains that “throughout this life God can be known in no higher way than that whereby a cause is known through its effect.” Thomas explains that just as making occurs in two ways—as a painter makes a wall white (efficient cause) and as whiteness makes a wall white (form)—perfection works similarly. He takes up Lombard’s analogy based on how light is “in the shining body itself,” illuminating as an efficient principle as well as by giving the form of light to what is illuminated. God remains the cause of the soul’s perfection as efficient principle, but not as the form received by the soul. Instead, that form is made up by created charity and grace. God is the efficient cause of such becoming, while charity works as the form of that action. Charity is thus “the effect of infinite power” rather than infinite power in se.

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469 *CS I*, D.1, q.1, a.1, Distinction 17 [Paris version, 1252-1256]; Kwasniewski, et. al., 10.
470 *SCG III* 47.9; Bourke, 161. See also Thomas’ remark that though God can be known in the way a cause can be seen in its effects, as one glimpses God in another or even within the self, but this does not adequately represent the divine power (*SCG III* 49.4; Bourke, 168).
471 *CS1*, d.1, q.1, a.1, distinction 17, reply to obj. 2 [Paris version, 1252-1256]; Kwasniewski, et. al., 13.
472 *CS1*, d.1, q.1, a.1, distinction 17, reply to obj. 4 [Paris version, 1252-1256]; Kwasniewski, et. al., 13-14, last quote 14. Aquinas supports this construction by noting that a person’s inability to render an entirely equivalent return of goods does not necessarily obviate a relationship. He looks to the disparity between a parent and child as an example. Just as the child can never fully repay the parental being, education, and nourishment, so, too, the person receiving divine love and benefits remains unable to return to God an equivalent love. In these sorts of relationships, the person must return whatever is possible for her to give.
being ‘engraced’ stems from a doubled operation of the Holy Spirit: the operation
according to first actuality “which, in the one having the habit of charity, is to be pleasing
to God,” and the other which works a second actuality “moving the will to the work of
love.” Each of these manners requires “a means to be involved, not on account of any
weakness or defect on the part of the Holy Spirit at work, but on account of a necessity
on the part of the receiving soul.”473

Since Thomas’ translation of Romans 6:23 renders this life the grace of God,
grace names what the person receives from God.474 But the metaphysics involved means
that what is received takes different form from what is given. For Thomas,

[w]hat exists as substance in God occurs as accident in the soul which shares in divine
good…but since the soul shares in divine good imperfectly, this participation itself,
which is grace, exists in the soul in a less perfect mode than that in which the soul exists
in itself. Such grace is nevertheless nobler than the soul’s nature, in so far as it is an
expression or sharing of the divine goodness.475

Thomas further distinguishes between uncreated grace as the incorruptible being of God
and created grace as the presence of God made real within a person’s own finite mode.
Grace names both the created entity left within the person by God’s action as well as
God’s own uncreated character, both the created nature of beatitude within the person and
the original fount of perfection, Godself. In either sense—divine movement from God or
the habitual gift present within the person—grace can be seen as both operative and co-

473 CS1, d.1, q.1, a.1, distinction 17, reply obj. 1 [Paris version, 1252-1256.; Kwasniewski, et. al.,
12.
474 The steps are slightly more complicated. First, becoming able to know and see God comprises
life eternal (citing John 17:3). Then, eternal life seen as the gift of God makes it grace. See Summa
Theologiae, I Q.12, Art. 4; trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province (New York: Benziger Bros.,
1947), accessed January 18, 2016 via http://www.ccel.org/ccel/aquinas/summa.FP_Q12_A1.html. See also
his comment that “grace is nevertheless nobler than the soul’s nature, in so far as it is an expression or
sharing of the divine goodness” (ST I-II Q. 110, Art. 2; Fairweather, 160).
475 Summa Theologiae, I-II, Q. 110, Art. 2; Fairweather, 160.
operative: operative when God moves the will and co-operative when God provides the person the capacity to act and strengthens the will to carry through.476

Thomas’ arguments mean that perfection that is the end of human life holds a twofold shape: it exists as an external good, according to whatever makes up the principle of the full perfection—God—as well as an internal good, when considered as the self’s own burgeoning created perfection. Created beatitude “is a certain participation and likeness of uncreated beatitude. Yet it is not beatitude essentially, as if making [people] blessed by its essence.”477 This created internal perfection is simply the highest human good, not the highest of all goods, which can only be God.478 And so, even though what the person accesses on the way to her eventual perfection beyond death, is not God in se, “created beatitude, and grace, and other such things, are something nobler than the nature of the soul in which they inhere.”479

So Thomas decides that any references in Scripture to a person having seen God in this life

must be understood either in reference to an imaginary vision, or even a corporeal one: according as the presence of divine power was manifested through some corporeal species, whether appearing externally, or formed internally in the imagination; or even according as some men have perceived some intelligible knowledge of God through His [sitc] spiritual effects.480

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476 *Summa Theologiae*, I-II, Q. 110-2, Art. 2; Fairweather, 160-77.
477 *CS4*, d. 49, q.1, a.2, qa.1, rep.obj. 1; Kwasniewski, et. al., 354, emphasis original.
478 See *CS4*, d. 49, q.1, a.2, qa.1, rep. obj.3; Kwasniewski, et. al., 355: “[I]t is the same to desire God and to desire the greatest of goods that come to us from God.” Thus, even though accident as such is less noble than substance, and though beatitude here serves as an accident to the soul rather than its substance, this particular accident of perfection may be worthier than the substance of the soul when considered as how it orders and joins the substance of the soul towards something outside and nobler than itself.
479 *CS4*, d. 49, q.1, a.2, qa.1, rep. obj. 5; Kwasniewski, et. al., 355.
480 *SCG* III 47.3; Bourke, 159.
God beatifies the person “by communicating a sharing of the divine nature through a participation of likeness.”\textsuperscript{481} Though “[i]t is plain, then, that God’s love invariably causes some good to be in the creature at some time,” Thomas stresses that until after death “such good is not co-eternal with [God’s] eternal love.”\textsuperscript{482}

4. Summary of Creator-Creation Difference

This section of the chapter adds to Thomas’ description of what happens in beatitude his qualifications of how that may be said to take place in such a way as to keep the distinction between God and creation. We saw how for Aquinas, because it describes the eternal divine self-sufficiency, beatitude properly speaking can only be achieved by the soul’s resting in intellectual contemplation of God. Thomas’ treatment of desire, will, act, and affection clarify his model’s boundaries. Creaturely capacities really do contribute to the soul’s beatitude but only insofar as they fill up the person’s own instantiation of the chain of being. By fulfilling material needs, these other functions of the person can support the soul’s growth; nevertheless, the soul and its persistence after death alone remains primary for her ultimate perfection. Finally, these conclusions lead Thomas to classify all the goodness that may be identified within the person’s created life as created grace.

God’s beatifying action means that perfection cannot be lost, because it occurs in the eternity that is God; it completes the resting of natural desire which cannot rest unless it could endure perpetually; it entails full love without any sorrow or fear of being lost; it unites the person to the divine power which safeguards the person from being torn away.

\textsuperscript{481} Summa Theologiae, I-II, Q. 112, Art. 1; Fairweather, 175.
\textsuperscript{482} Summa Theologiae, I-II, Q. 110, Art. 1; Fairweather, 157.
by violence; it admits no possibility of failure because the sight is given through God; it also precludes any mixing with evil or fatigue in act or will because this intellection alone transcends bodily organs and corporeal powers. Thus, the fullness of the uncreated divinity may only be grasped after death in the resurrected life. Divine action in creation here and now respects the created order and can only be seen as created effects of the divine majesty.

III. Thomist Beatitude as a Whole

This survey of Thomas’ model of beatitude already suggests promising lines of similarity to Palamas’ hesychast deification. Like Palamas, creaturely perfection rests in the divine transcendence of total majesty, self-sufficient being, and simplicity. Also similarly to hesychast deification, in Thomas, the person must thus receive from the God outside of herself in order to find her perfection. The two models also both champion the soul’s capacity as that which most closely lines up to divine perfection and thus enables the person to taste such beatitude. Both trajectories grant the material world and the body a role in perfection. However, key differences now come into view, as well.

To Thomas, the opposition of divine self-determination to the contingent creature relativizes even her soulish capacity to unite with God. Her permeability to divine presence may be affected by a host of factors, but none so prevalent as her created life. Her perfection lies with the God beyond the created order, and so it remains out of her grasp during this life. Her capacity so to unite with God thus more sharply elevates her

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483 See SCG III 62; Bourke, 202-6 as well as CS4, d. 49, q.1, a. 2, qa3., rep. obj. 4; Kwasniewski, et. al., 361: “For the saints, through clinging to God, will obtain such stability from the divine gift that they cannot be changed—a stability God has by his [sic] nature, by reason of which [God] is eternal.”
soul over her body than in hesychasm. Thomist beatitude has the soul consent to seek the body’s good during this life as well as to pull the body after it into the resurrected perfection, but it does not permit the body to host divine glory within its actions the way Palamas does. In addition, Thomas’ dividing line between God and creature cuts above all the other creaturely functions that support the soul’s intellectual capabilities, marking desire, will, act, and affection as subsidiary to speculative contemplation (see figure 3 below). And such contemplation, done during this life, can only produce a created echo of the divine grace that the person may fully comprehend in her resurrection. Divine action in creation respects, as it were, the distinction between Creator and created, permitting echoes of the divine majesty to ring out within creation without that creation presuming to carry the divine presence within its own contours.

Figure 3: Thomist Beatitude Across the Three Loci
These specific components offer both hopes and difficulties for an ecumenical construction. I will return to them in chapter four, where I add in considerations of the ways in which Thomas’ beatitude has been extended by other thinkers.
CHAPTER FOUR: EXCHANGING GIFTS—DEIFICATION IN DIALOGUE

I. Introduction

The preceding two chapters detailing the two major deification trajectories dove deeply into the starting points each took for its model. Those origins generated models setting out conditions for the body’s participation in and likeness to God. By giving a close read of the ways each system generates specific conclusions on the three nodes of theological inquiry entailed by claims of deification, I have allowed each to stand within its own self-understanding, underscoring its place in the ecumenical dialogue that constitutes this project. To summarize: Palamas’ deification celebrates the sharing of divinity with creaturely matter by rooting its system in a defense of hesychast prayer; thus, it generates the essence-energies distinction to describe how without compromising the divine essence, God shares the natural symbols of divine activities with the bodily behavior of the person. Thomist constructions champions divine impassibility as the root and sustenance of all that exists. As union with this God forms the goal for which the person is created, full creaturely perfection consists of one’s contemplative union after death with the uncreated grace of the beatific vision. The virtues of this life imitate God as far as this mode remains able.

In this chapter, I now move to the next stage of ecumenical dialogue between the two theosis traditions, the exchange of their views. This exchange asks the models to dig deeper into their differences and similarities to determine how they might speak in unison. I relate them as mirrors of one another, differing constructs who can connect once placed in a shared framework. Their different starting points mean that though Palamas
and Thomas agree on certain aspects of their models of perfection, in approaching creaturely perfection from opposite directions, they ultimately disagree on how divine action occurs within creation. Hesychasm appears to Thomism to partition the self-determined transcendent God or blur the Creator-creature distinction. Thomism in turn appears to hesychasm to restrict deification to a supernatural zone inaccessible to the person’s body, keeping God remote from creation.

By placing the models in direct conversation with each other, I evaluate their disparities. These discrepancies are often framed as a zero-sum game, so despite significant gains in mutual understanding produced by recent exchanges, the two trajectories currently appear inconsonant. Not only does each model uphold deification in a manner that the other correctly suggests remains liable to internal contradiction, but each version’s modern defenders tend to categorically negate the other. When theological trajectories develop as these have in isolation from and opposition to each other, of necessity it proves impossible for each to receive the other’s logic on deification as currently configured. As I discussed in my opening chapter’s section on metaphors in communities, this means that the incongruence between the two major deification traditions cannot be solved by the two trajectories ever more forcefully lobbing their maps of metaphysics against each other.

Due to the way these topics generate reactivity—already well-documented in the previous chapters and about to be unfolded in greater detail—three cautions bear repeating. I do not argue that hesychast deification lacks any consideration of divine simplicity or that Thomist beatitude offers no meaningful explanation of the body’s role in perfection. Nor is the answer that one of their explanations of perfection—the one
downplaying knowledge and highlighting embodied actions, the other celebrating contemplation and showing how actions cannot exhaust holiness—proves erroneous. Rather, I argue that in considering deification, each model’s legitimate starting points and rich descriptions of the process produce more emphasis on one or the other crucial Christian priority (the value of the body or the transcendence of God), which sets at loggerheads their accounts of how those two poles are held together in one model of divine action in creation. Given this proviso, I make a second qualification: the fact that these differing emphases both appear in the Christian traditions does not make deification a faulty or false prospect; it simply shows where work remains to be done so that these traditions can claim together both that God is in the business of sanctifying matter and that God is not subject to matter’s contingencies. Finally, as a third clarification, the critiques that I include here comprise key points that are sufficient for dialogue but are not intended as exhaustive treatments.

My goal with this chapter is to nudge hesychasm and Thomism into acknowledging how critiques from the other show the weaknesses of their own version and suggest places where their own model in fact needs the other. By refusing to remain trapped within the ways those frameworks currently compete with one another, this chapter creates a positive evaluation of the other that begins constructing the foundations for the ecumenical scholarship I will advance in chapter five. Thus, after I summarize the persisting disagreements between hesychasm and Thomism according to the three nodes of theosis, I gesture towards a constructive perspective that can flip the problems on their heads while adhering to Tanner’s rules. Exploring the questions together sharpens the sense of need for a creative response that rises to a new level of ecumenical engagement.
What this chapter attempts, then, is not to flatten out differences, but rather to demonstrate that the nature of these disagreements suggests another approach to the problems of deification.

II. **Hesychast Deification and Thomist Beatitude in Conversation**

For each deification mode, I begin by querying hesychasm with Thomism before querying Thomism with hesychasm. For each strand of *theosis*, I include modern defenders and developers as representative interpretive authorities.

A. **Divine Self-Determination**

We begin by recalling how, starting with the permeability of the body to divine transformation (how deification works), Palamas claims that the divine energies naturally symbolize the divine essence (maintaining Creator-creature distinction). Thomas’ commitment to divine simplicity entails that the human soul reaches union with God (how deification works) only in the beatific vision beyond death, while created grace takes shape in the beatitude of this life (maintaining Creator-creature distinction).

1. **Hesychast Formulations**

Thomism initially responds to hesychasm by asking whether Palamas’ essence-energies distinction between God as imparticipable substance and God as the divine power or activity the creature receives remains truly necessary for the doctrine of God. First, to Thomist readers, the essence-energies distinction appears to say that the energies both are and are not God. The energies have to be identified as divine in order to back up
the contention that deification truly does involve the person’s participation in and union with God rather than with something created, but the need to qualify them as not the divine essence risks immediately taking back with one hand what the other has just granted. If the divine essence cannot exist without such powers and cannot be separated from them because they are how the essence is, then how meaningfully can assertions of the distinction address the mechanics of theosis? If these divine energies are necessary in order to mediate between the perfect, untouchable divine essence and contingent, fallible creation, how do they get this way? How could they arise except out of the divine essence, particularly since they are identified as divine? Assurances that a participable divine energy does bear identity with the imparticipable essence of God do not solve the issue. If making God equivalent to the energies constricts divinity, then how can the energies be fully divine?484

Moreover, how could an essence and its energies truly co-identify without sharing the same quality or capacity for participation? If the energies truly cannot be separated from the essence, a person’s participation in the former seems to suggest union with the latter, at least as far as is possible for a creature with God. How can a person participate in the energies as a human being but remain restricted from their proper essence by reason of that same created identity? Under these constraints, would not human ontology remain closed off to the divine? If a deified person’s union with and transformation into

484 See chapter two, where I showed that Palamas’ arguments that the energies are both distinct yet inseparable from the essence run headlong into assertions that “[t]he grace of deification is not completely independent but rather ‘remains together with the persons in which it comes,’” (Chapters 68; Sinkewicz, 162-3); that “when we speak of one Godhead we speak of everything that God is, namely, both the substance and the energy” (Chapters 126; Sinkewicz, 228-31); and again, that “energy is neither the one operating, nor what is operated. Therefore, the energy is not indistinct from the substance (Chapters, 143; Sinkewicz, 248-8, quoting Basil, Ad Eunomium 4; PG 29: 689C). In Chapters 147; Sinkewicz, 252-3, Palamas distinguishes the uncreated substance as grace and uncreated energy as the illumination of that grace that both nevertheless belong to the same God.
divinity extends to the light of God, while the essence of God remains off limits, does this deification truly grant her union with God? If there exists a distinction between God as essence and God as activities interacting with human nature, this seems to imply either that the Son only exists as the *latter*, or that there are two Second Persons—a Son who is God *in se* and the incarnate Son who interacts with the world according to the flesh.

Similarly, if their multiplicity distinguishes the energies from the one Spirit, why cannot the energies simply designate the Spirit’s multiply gifting presence within the person being deified? Additionally, why would the single energy shared between the divine persons need to be considered as multiple energies mediating God to creatures? Given the contrast Palamas makes between bodies and what is divine, how can the energies serve as the flexible portal connecting the two? From this perspective, Palamas risks confusion when he argues both that some energies of God have a beginning and an end while some have an end and not a beginning but then claims that “[e]ither all the divine powers are unoriginated, or none.”

These contradictory statements blur the definition of the energies, making it unclear how they can all truly be identified as divine. The hesychast parsing of the difference between the creature and God appears to Thomism to place a dividing line within divinity itself, not just as a statement of creation’s inability to ever fully know and participate in God. This tendency appears to negate the very premise deification stands upon: humanity can participate in God without corrupting God.

From the works surveyed in chapter two, it is not quite clear how Palamas sees the hypostases relating to the energies. It appears that the hypostases may interact with

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485 Compare *The Triads*, III.ii.8; Gendle, 96 with *The Triads* III.ii.11; Gendle, 97-98.
the world through the energies, even as they remain pristinely unconnected in the divine substance. At times, Palamas argues that the persons of the Trinity share an energy, which unites them as one essence, while each creature has its own distinct energies. However, Palamas also classifies this energy as similar to the hypostatic properties of God, neither substance nor accident in God. In fact, he states that “[i]f the substance does not possess an energy distinct from itself, it will be completely without actual subsistence and will be only a concept in the mind.” But is this conception necessary to pose of the Godhead, who should not be subject to the metaphysical rules governing created substances? Palamas does not clearly delineate how God’s dealings with creation, as the energies, correlate with the scriptural narratives of the Son’s incarnation and life on earth, nor with those that promise the indwelling of the Spirit. The question becomes all the more urgent when one acknowledges how the incarnate Son, figuring as both the guarantor of salvation and ultimate example for humanity, sets the terms for deification’s construction. Losing the way that the Son’s full humanity and full divinity together permeate, without mixing, intermingling, or division within the single personhood of Jesus denies the possibility of theosis as well as the promise that God incorporates all of humanity within this one Body.

Palamas tends to frame the essence-energies distinction as the clash between physicality and souls, while one modern advocate, David Bradshaw, widens the lens to focus more on the relation of divine free will and interaction with creation. Bradshaw

486 *Chapters* 112-3; Sinkiewicz, 210-213. It is not clear how Palamas relates this one Trinitarian energy to the energies and powers that serve as divine attributes and manifestations.
487 *Chapters*, 136; Sinkiewicz, 242-3.
adopts as his starting point the contention that faith and reason have been divorced within western Christianity, finding at fault its divergent development of Aristotelian metaphysics.489

Bradshaw begins addressing Thomist concerns when he treats the essence-energies distinction within the Cappadocians. He acknowledges that critics ask how the energies that connect God with creation can be God if they are willed by God, or how at least some of them could be otherwise than they are without that implying that God could be different. He responds that “a blanket assertion of freedom is no more adequate than a blanket assertion of necessity”; in other words, theology must distinguish between features that accompany divine manifestation from those that result from choice, “otherwise we shall have escaped emanationism only to land in voluntarism.”490 His eventual solution? To combine the Dionysian notion that procession from God “manifests, at a lower level of being, that which also ‘remains’ with God in His own nature,” with the Maximian contribution that “[w]henever we speak of the perfection-itself [i.e., any divine manifestation] as God we must remember that we speak of the divine prodoei, not ousia.”491

In defending this distinction as the only way to maintain divine self-manifestation, Bradshaw claims that the simple God of Augustine is actually a static God. This God either cannot live up to the pure act definition of Thomism or proves incapable of truly

489 See Bradshaw, Aristotle East and West, xi. His monograph is more philosophical, while his articles make theological applications. Compare, for instance, Aristotle East and West, xi-xiii: “Even to tell such a limited comparative history requires a connecting thread that can be traced up to the point of divergence and down each of the parallel branches. The thread that I have chosen is energeia” (at xi) with “The Divine Glory and The Divine Energies,” Faith and Philosophy 23/3 (July 2006): 279-298: “Both of these Scriptural themes challenge us to rethink our preconceptions about the nature of God and the relationship between creatures and Creator” (279).
490 Bradshaw, Aristotle East and West, 172.
491 Bradshaw, Aristotle East and West, 182, 191.
freely creating. To the first point, Bradshaw reads Thomas’ “pure act” against Augustine’s “perfect self-identity.” He asks how, if God is identical to the divine’s own will, God would become different if God chose other than God has, which to him renders God determined by acts of creation and manifestation. Bradshaw therefore believes that the hesychast structure keeps God untethered from such entanglements with creation, as this separates out the divine will that creates from the untouchable divine essence. In his perspective, the West—stemming from Augustine—reads this Aristotelian heritage one way, while the East’s unique resources produce a better perspective.

Bradshaw advances the theory that Palamas’ distinction between essence and energies best applies Aristotle’s grades of reality, wherein being at the highest level entails an activity that “contains its own end” and whose very substance is therefore actuality. Bradshaw shows that for Aristotle, divinity “thinks itself in thinking the forms and thinks the forms in thinking itself,” existing transcendentally beyond change while immanently constituting change as its formal, final, and efficient cause. For Aristotle, energeia then denotes the “activity that contains its own end and hence is not constrained to unfold through a temporal process.” Bradshaw traces how Aristotle develops the concept into the name for divinity, as only the Prime Mover causes all being.

492 See Bradshaw, Aristotle East and West, 222-9, 242-50.
494 Bradshaw, Aristotle East and West, chapters 1-2, quotes from 24-25.
495 Bradshaw, Aristotle East and West, 42-3.
496 Bradshaw, Aristotle East and West, 24.
while existing in a state of perfect fulfillment itself.497 Thus *energeia* as the cause of being for all that exists comprises actuality while also remaining the one existent free of potency.498

The rest of Bradshaw’s monograph proceeds from this close reading of Aristotle’s hierarchy of being to trace the Neoplatonic development of this lineage and finally to demonstrate *energeia*’s Christian applications.499 Bradshaw notes that even with these changes, the Neoplatonic concept of *energeia* keeps a doctrine of God close to the self-thinking thought of Aristotle’s Prime Mover. The divine self-intellection remains the activity *par excellence*, the one that precedes all others, giving rise by virtue of its necessary intrinsic structure to the intelligible order and plurality of the world.500

Meanwhile, in the Christian West, *energeia* shifts into meaning *esse* as the act of inwardly directed being identified with the Father, who contains and sends forth the life of the Son and the intelligence of the Spirit.501 Such developments shape the eventual scholastic identification of *esse* and *agere* for divine simplicity.502 Bradshaw thus

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498 Bradshaw, *Aristotle East and West*, 44.
499 For my purposes, the Neoplatonic shifts are less important than how Bradshaw considers them to be pressed into service by the East. See *Aristotle East and West*, chapters 3-4 and especially 135-50. Of special note in this treatment are the following two elements: First, Bradshaw recaptures Iamblichus’ description of how *energeia* accomplishes theurgy: a soul may acquire and operate under another *energeia* such that the divine may possess us (participation), we become wholly things of God (communion), or we exercise our own activity in concert with the divine (union). In all three possible stages, however, the person gains access to divine activity but not divine substance. Second, Bradshaw lifts up Procline participation, which works through a graded hierarchy such that the power of the One undergirds each subordinate member of the hierarchy. Each lower cause can only exert power insofar as the higher cause cooperates with and enables its productive activity: “[a]ll things participate in the divine *energeia* by being what they are; they could not do otherwise, for the very principles of causality require it” (146). In addition, non-divine souls can intermittently share in other divine activities than being—such as providence—as long as they participate in the One by cultivating the traces the One leaves in the soul. This looks like achieving silence by folding up within oneself all of one’s soulish multitudes. The many intelligibles of the created world must be present, then silenced so that one can approach their cause.
501 Bradshaw, *Aristotle East and West*, chapter 7, especially 108-114. Aristotelian actuality as the pinnacle of being becomes in Plotinus the pure activity that structures the whole of creation (see ch. 5); In Victorinus, the Father becomes the *esse* that, in knowing itself, comes forth as life—the Son, which in returning to its source becomes knowledge—the Spirit (114).
presents Gregory Palamas’ thought as a reaction to Augustinian *esse*, which Bradshaw defines as a static condition of wholeness. Noting the key features of heyschast *thesosis* mentioned above, Bradshaw turns to Aquinas’ thought, parsing how its combination of Augustine’s divine simplicity with Aristotle’s prime mover yields a God of self-subsisting form, outside of whom are only accidents, and within whom no accidents exist. Summarizing *Summa Contra Gentiles*, Bradshaw states that for Thomas, God operates in two modes: perfectly sensing, understanding, and willing *in se*, while perfectly creating, preserving, and governing the things made. Bradshaw finds fault with a distinction between God’s choice to create and the possibility of God choosing otherwise, arguing that this identification of God with God’s will risks making God dependent upon creation. To Bradshaw, Augustine and Aquinas after him follow a more purely Platonic view of God, wherein God is undivided wholeness, God simply is being, and all that is derives from the divine who is Form. God may be perceived only once the creature purges all sensory input in favor of the intellect. Bradshaw concludes that for Augustine, “intellectual contemplation” forms “the final goal of human life,” a framework he suggests Aquinas relies on in order to construct the *summum bonum*. Thus, Bradshaw considers any ‘Western’ and especially Thomist discussions of simplicity incompatible

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503 Bradshaw, *Aristotle East and West*, 234-41. These points include: the impact on both body and soul in the transformative work of deification; the embodiment of prayer; light offering a natural symbol of God; and the *energeia* constituting this light, the things around God, the divine names, the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, and the *logoi* standing between God and creatures. For Bradshaw, Palamas’ theology of the energies allows the one God to be present in multiple places and creatures the way that the sun works through its rays or the way a mind holds distinct items of knowledge. The energies as non-self-subsistent yet stable and permanent realities take enhypostatic form. They exist only in another’s hypostasis, thus God’s simplicity is not threatened by possession of multiple powers.


with divine free choice. Only the hesychast construction of the essence-energies distinction acknowledges full divine self-determination.

Antoine Lévy, representing the Thomists at the table, sharply questions this reading. First, he suggests that this ‘Western’ God of Augustine is no more static than the ‘Eastern’ God of (Bradshaw’s) Palamas, who likewise remains unchanged by divine actions vis-à-vis creation. As Lévy sees it, created realities as “the results within time of a divine operation which is as motionless and eternal as the divine essence” participate in God through the causal efficiency of God’s actions. God’s activities change the recipient without changing the giver. Here, “[t]he very notion of createdness implies the causal efficiency of God.”506 Or again, “[s]ynergy is not the absence of causal efficiency, but causal efficiency squared.”507

Second, Lévy argues that regardless of whether it is encountered under Palamas’ or Thomas’ framework, the divine decision to create contingent creatures does not make either God’s will or God’s decision itself contingent. Using Palamas’ language, Lévy drives the point home:

[t]hat the result of God’s creative energies is a contingent event or something that might not have existed, does not entail that the energies out of which the world has arisen are more contingent than the energies which emanate naturally from God’s essence, like Goodness or Beauty. The opposite case would lead to an infinite regression: God would have wanted these contingent energies to exist, so that He [sic] would have wanted His [sic] will to produce these energies, and so on. In other words, God might have willed something else than to create the world, but the positive will to create the world rather than not to create it must flow naturally and from all eternity from His [sic] essence…[S]o that] if God’s eternal decision to create and provide for a world within time and space flows naturally and eternally from His [sic] essence, the God of Palamas suffers exactly the same objection which Bradshaw raises against Aquinas: to what extent can this divine will be free if it is said to proceed from God’s necessary being or essence?508

508 Lévy, “The Woes of Originality,” 107. See also the tart back and forth between David Bentley Hart’s “The Hidden and the Manifest: Metaphysics after Nicaea” and Bradshaw’s “Augustine the
In other words, Bradshaw’s defense ignores the ‘turtles all the way down’ problem.

For Milbank, a theurgic Neoplatonism accommodates both a deification granting the creature access to God in se and Thomas’ account of divine simplicity. True theurgic synergy does not occur via mediating third orders between Creator and creatures but rather wells up “from within the created order and in one sense as that very order” because finite creaturely being always already depends so utterly upon divine being for its entire existence. To Milbank, Bradshaw’s defense of Palamism requires jettisoning such a tenet. For participation to work this way, creaturely beings must somehow exist independently enough of the divine that God’s gifts to them can only take shape within the structures of a creaturehood considered separate from divinity, not as already constituted by God’s own self-donating life.509 Milbank argues that paying more careful attention to tense may help generate a wider common ground, wherein the ancient theologians…speak of a single energy within God, and they choose the singular tense to indicate an identity between energy and essence. They only speak of many energies to denote the divine activity ad extra, and hence one can infer that plurality denotes…a certain diversity that is consequent upon finitude…[T]o say that this *energeia* is ‘God himself as participated by creatures’ is not to imply any distinction from the essence, but rather that, at the point where essence-as-energy is participated, it is diversified to the exact measure that there are diverse creatures…To create beings is therefore also to pluralise energy…[although] from the divine standpoint his [sic] outgoing also entirely belongs to him.510

But if such revisions are to hold, what of Bradshaw’s efforts not to ascribe voluntarism to God? This valid concern causes many Protestants to refuse deification altogether.

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510 Milbank, “Christianity and Platonism in East and West,” 178-9, emphasis original. He does not cite Kharlamov here, but he should have. Kharlamov makes much the same point in “Basil of Caesarea and the Cappadocians,” 123: “As far as energies in God are concerned, in a specifically trinitarian context, the Cappadocians often emphasize not energies, but one *energeia* in God, equally and identically manifested by all three Persons of the Trinity.”
Milbank takes refuge in terming *theosis* a paradox, but this may not sufficiently discharge the concern. Deification demands a more thorough accounting, particularly for an ecumenical consensus. I turn now to Thomist beatitude to consider how these resources may round out the question of divine self-determination.

2. Thomist Formulations

To hesychast thinkers, the Thomist articulation of divine simplicity may appear to lock God within God’s self to avoid creaturely contamination. Does Thomas’ vision of risk defining God in such opposition to creation that in fact God becomes ‘tied up’ away from creation? And does such a distinction of divine perfection in fact make creation as a determine God’s limits? Nikolaos Loudovikos understands Thomas, particularly in *SCG*, to unwittingly promote an onto-theology that renders an idolatrous doctrine of God. Loudovikos points to Thomas’ assertion that as impassible and immutable, God is pure act—God always acts with the whole of the divine rather than through participation in other powers. Identifying divine powers with the divine essence means no divine act occurs for any other end than God’s self, God does not enter the being of other beings, and God knows all things (only) in the all-encompassing divine essence. Yet Loudovikos suggests that these findings quickly meet a difficulty in Thomas’ acknowledgment that God engages in both internal and external operations. These considerations lead Loudovikos to conclude that Thomas’ line of argumentation produces a narcissistic God, with divine freedom bound by the divine will from actually desiring anything other than

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511 He has also, more recently, proposed turning to the concept of Sophia in order to maintain a theology of deification. Below, I briefly evaluate this suggestion’s suitability.

God. This position, he cautions, “also, of course, ignores the fact that what God loves is, in a way that escapes onto-theo-logic, more valuable for him [sic] than his [sic] essence.” 513 In other words, this depiction of God runs contrary to the witness of Scripture that in fact does depict God interacting intimately, gently, and humbly with creation—from ‘underneath,’ not from ‘above.’ 514

As Bradshaw sees it, this sort of God requires something like double predestination rather than allowing human persons any kind of (even analogical) free will: the identification of divine will with divine essence looks like God now proves unable to create anyone who could imitate the divine’s own freedom. 515 The problem, as he clarifies elsewhere, is not divine freedom per se, for such entails God always acting fully in accord with God’s nature; the issue is divine choice. 516 Bradshaw likewise asks how, in comparison to such unchanging divine aspects as goodness, God’s will should be considered both free and identical to the divine essence. This identification would appear to pose some sort of distinction in the divine essence—that which might or could change, and that which does not—which violates the Thomist critique of Palamas’ distinction.

A second aspect of the problem for hesychast readers is the impossibility of actually establishing the supposedly always prior perfect impassibility of the divine. Nikolaos Loudovikos instances Aquinas’ ranking of reason above faith, and revelation above both, as well as his contention that even the fulfillment of all three modes of knowledge keeps them imperfect, because they cannot attain to who God is in se. But if

514 We will return to this issue when we treat divine action in creation. For my purposes to consider only divine self-sufficiency in this section, it suffices to leave the discussion here.
these aspects are maintained, it no longer appears that theology has any grounds upon which to base the knowledge that is its content; created beings lack the ability to make such claims of God’s utterly transcendent uncreated and inaccessible being. For Loudovikos, Aquinas’ delimitations between the divine and the created undercut any availability of the divine to the creation. Similarly, it proves convenient to claim paradox just at the point where one’s model breaks down, but how does one know all the previous ground one’s trajectory codifies does not violate the divine mystery or that mystery provides justification for failing to press for further insight? For hesychasts, the progression via negation of Thomas’ theology actually ends up enforcing a human conceptualization of God:

[t]heo-logic’s way to onto-theology is thus somehow facilitated, since it will prove to be the highest way of the proper description of God’s absolute superiority—God is above our knowledge precisely because his [sic] onto-logical structure permits this to be substantiated.517

Bradshaw suggests that the essence-energies distinction as a crucial aspect of divine self-determination “succeeds in incorporating the apophatic approach to God in a way that western theology does not.” The distinction allows Thomas’ emphasis on God’s divine ousia “beyond any act of naming or conceptual thought” to be retained alongside the concomitant commitment that God can be known by “actively sharing in…[the ousia’s] energetic expression.”518 The energies are simply the ways divine character manifests itself, so divine simplicity is not a matter of divine absence, hiding, or restriction from creation. To claim the divine essence as beyond the perfections of divine energies shared with creatures, Bradshaw notes, is not to picture a divinity absconding

517 Loudovikos, “Striving for Participation,” 134-5, quote at 135, italics original.
from such perfections out of a failure to possess them, but to rest in the fact that God “possesses them in a way that is fundamentally and permanently beyond our capacities to apprehend.”

As Thomists rebut these concerns, they locate the possibility of beatitude in the soul’s gifted capacity to emulate the divine character of self-sufficiency that surpasses creaturely life. Therefore, distinguishing the divine from the person being beatified primarily depends upon locating perfect likeness to the transcendent God beyond the divide between this life and the resurrection. For instance, both Karl Rahner and Henri de Lubac desire to hold together God’s utterly self-determined transcendence with the divine condescension to create and then pull creation up into divine life. De Lubac in particular illustrates this tension. Writing against certain schools of thought that take Thomas’ distinction between creaturely goodness and the uncreated perfect God to close off human nature from the divine, he reclaims the supernatural as the rightful end of the person. He reaffirms God’s majesty and independence as “an inviolable mystery,” while at the same time he holds onto God’s self-revelation to creation. As he states the paradox,

Christians know that ‘God inhabits an inaccessible light,’ but there is another phrase which means just as much to them: ‘Come unto him, and ye shall receive light.’ It is one and the same faith which makes them certain both that the depths of God are inscrutable to the mind of man, and that they are known to the Spirit of God who wills to communicate himself to man, for ‘the Word, only Son of the Father, imparts to the saints a kind of kinship with the nature of God the Father and with his own nature by giving them the Spirit.’

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521 De Lubac, The Mystery of the Supernatural, 43.
522 De Lubac, The Mystery of the Supernatural, 125, quoting Cyril of Alexandria, In Ioannem, bk. 10, c.2; 15:1. Below, we will return to the second half of this quote on the Spirit.
De Lubac claims that the perfection who is God remains out of reach of the human person’s nature: “[f]or God’s infinite is not a ‘composite infinite,’ a false infinite that could be reached simply by an extension of the finite.”

Meanwhile, Rahner notes, “God’s nature considered as the principle of his [sic] possession of Godself in Trinity…becomes the causa formalis of all the properties of [the person’s] supernatural elevation.” God causes beatitude by communicating Godself in the gift of grace, for grace is God’s own presence. The possibility of perfection remains rooted in God’s self-gift alone. The perfection of creation depends upon a God who graciously self-communicates. Thus, the uncreated grace of full beatitude consists of the vision of God,

that communication of the divine Being taking place by way of formal causality…This union, so far as it takes place by way of formal causality, is not simply a consequence of created grace – indeed it precedes the created grace to the extent that this grace, as the ultimate disposition to the union, can only exist when God’s formal causality is actually being exercised.

Uncreated grace “prepares for its own reception by permanently ‘supernaturalizing’ the naturally transcendent human person” with the effect that “the Holy Spirit becomes an internal, constitutive principle of the human person” through a ‘quasi-formal’ causality.” Then “the indwelling of the Spirit in the justified,” which prepares the person for the beatific vision, occurs as “the consequence of the bestowal of created

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526 Rahner, “Some Implications”; Ernst, 335, italics original to translation.
grace.”

So, “[i]n order that it can be a dispositio for uncreated grace at all, [created grace] does indeed have first of all the character of a formal entitative, supernatural determination of the human spirit.” Thus both created and uncreated grace are gifts granted the believer, not resources arising out of her humanity.

This eternal life of God granting human perfection surpasses our capacities of understanding; this is why people need revelation as well as grace. Yet even so, “in the light it gets from God, and at whatever phase one looks at of its intellectual or spiritual life, the believing and hoping soul is ultimately left ‘facing an intrinsically impenetrable mystery.’” For de Lubac, “[s]uch paradoxes should not surprise us, for they arise in every mystery; they are the hallmark of a truth that is beyond our depth.” He sounds this note repeatedly: noting that “[r]evealed truth, then, is a mystery for us; in other words it presents that character of lofty synthesis whose final link must remain impenetrably obscure to us.” He goes on, “beatitude—the only beatitude—‘transcends all rational investigation.’” Not only does the divine content of beatitude—the divine life—remain a mystery beyond human comprehension, so, too, the process of sharing in the perfection that is the mind of God hovers beyond our grasp. The divine mystery can explain the

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528 Rahner, “Some Implications”; Ernst, 325, italics original.
529 Rahner, “Some Implications”; Ernst, 342. But as he states earlier in this essay, “uncreated grace can be conceived of under a certain respect as logically and really prior to created grace: in that mode namely in which a formal cause is prior to the ultimate material disposition” (Ernst, 334).
530 See Rahner, “Some Implications”; Ernst, 341.
533 De Lubac, The Mystery of the Supernatural, 171.
534 De Lubac, The Mystery of the Supernatural, 218, quote reference not supplied, although a similar quote appearing on 219 gives SCG 4.1.
possibility of beatitude up to a point, but because it is the content of such perfection, it safeguards the inherent paradox of beatitude.

However, both de Lubac and Rahner struggle to maintain this paradox, recognizing that if union with the omnipotent creator God comprises the natural end the person naturally yearns for, it may seem that God owes us our beatitude. The longing for God itself must be unexacted and capable of being dissociated from human nature as such, otherwise the Love which is God would “‘have to’ be offered by God.”535 Some model of divine self-determination must be found that adequately expresses the sheer gratuity of the perfection God grants the person as well as the indestructible place such beatitude carries as the core of the person’s identity. I will touch on the creature’s capacity in all of this below, but for now, I simply point out the persisting significance of divine transcendence and even mystery for Thomist metaphysics.

For hesychasm, divine simplicity may only be maintained as long as God, possessing no form in se, nevertheless comes present to all beings “as their form, the intelligible structure which makes them what they are.”536 This sounds like Thomas’ descriptions of being! However, for Palamas’ defenders, God should not be considered intrinsically intelligible, in some way or existence that we cannot reach; for then these contentions dissolve into each other. In other words, does the predication of the Thomist God in fact entail its own self-contradiction by requiring a human capacity to understand God, right within its inability to reach God? How does that claim comport with Thomas’ commitment to divine simplicity or de Lubac and Rahner’s articulation of mystery?


These qualifications apply all the more so, should the person’s soul only prove capable of reaching likeness to God after death, for no theologian writes from such a perspective.\footnote{See Loudovikos’ sharp observation that “Thomas concludes with what Palamas started and tried to defend in his lifetime, namely the need for existential realization of participation… Thomas’ total silence, after his existential encounter with the light on 6th December 1273, is the total silence of the remote cave of the Skete of Veroia, whence Palamas started his ascetic struggle. It is in this sacred silence that Palamas meets Thomas and, after carefully listening to him expressing his unshakable conviction of the absolute essential unity of God in all his actions, he helps him articulate his conclusions” (“Striving for Participation,” 148).}

Though one could charge these defenses of hesychasm with reading Thomas solely through neo-scholastic lenses, the fact remains that such interpretations of Thomas were regnant in Catholic theology and ecclesiastical structures, particularly at a time when rapprochement with Palamas became an option and especially as governing the treatment of people outside the Roman Catholic Church. If Thomas could be read this way, and since he was so used for a long swath of history, the critiques hold some legitimacy.

3. Ecumenical Possibilities

This section on the self-determined divine transcendence helps crystallize why hesychast deification and Thomist beatitude seem incompatible. Their different starting points generate different understandings of divine self-determination. Their models seem discordant, but they are both wrestling with what counts as appropriate natural revelation of the God who offers creatures perfection through union with God’s self. And they offer differing answers as to how far theology can speak authoritatively of the divine mystery.

What cannot be denied is that both trajectories rely on existent philosophies to undergird their senses of God’s self-determined transcendence—hesychasm picks up
more on certain threads of Aristotelianism while Thomism highlights other aspects of Aristotle’s reworking of the Platonic forms. However, each tends to consider its own a natural and appropriate chain of reasoning while discounting the other as subjecting revelation to creaturely constructs. Hesychasm looks at its approach to divine transcendence visible in the energies as the appropriately humble human stance of recognizing that reasoning about God may only honestly start with observations of oneself and one’s own experiences of God. This priority primes Palamas to champion Aristotelian distinctions of being versus action as the way to safeguard the body’s participation in the transcendent God. Thomism, meanwhile, wants to enforce human humility by starting with the God who remains beyond all human frailty and thus serves as the one reliable ground of all being. Reasoning about God must start with the insufficiency of the material world to create more than idols. So he may lean more on Plato’s philosophy of the forms, also mediated through Aristotle, to find a way to scoop up materiality, carried Godward by the perfected soul into the perfection of God’s transcendent self-sufficiency.

As this brief tour has demonstrated, so far attempts by theologians from both models to argue the other into agreement prove unsuccessful. However, they do help each trajectory learn more of its own resources, practice interpreting the other with charity, and consider where their own model may exhibit deficiencies that the other could correct. As I will suggest below, it may prove possible to solve this dilemma without having to trade in either the Thomist sense of divine simplicity or the heyschast promise that theosis actually makes the human being divine in body and soul. To lay the groundwork for the third level of ecumenical engagement that follows in chapter five, I suggest that
both models’ findings on divine self-determination need to be brought into play to address what may be known of the God offering perfection to creation.

First, the two trajectories can affirm the challenge they both wish to address: the need to affirm God’s transcendence of creation and creation’s inability to exhaustively know God. Each side can also accept that their own version remains liable to critiques that ought to be taken seriously: language of divine self-determination should not imply that God can be divided, nor should discussion of God’s transcendence of creation be rendered as opposition between two members of the same set. Put strongly by David Bentley Hart, deification has to take stock of the fact

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\text{[t]here is no such ‘thing’ as the divine essence; there is no such discrete object of knowledge or of ignorance...God is \textit{essentially} Father, So, and the Spirit, and...there is no other reality prior to, apart from, or more original than the paternal \textit{archē}, which perfectly reveals itself in an eternal and coequal Logos and communicates itself by the Spirit who searches the deep things of God and makes Christ known to us.}^{538}
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Second, when it comes to parsing how God relates with creation, both models can affirm the need to ensure that commitments to divine self-determination must carry through into language of both creaturely capacities and divine action in creation.

Third, then, my proposal in chapter five takes two key resources, one from each model, to frame a different approach: describing God with Thomas as the pure act undergirding all that exists, while accepting the heyschast sense that the creaturely means by which theology learns to speak of God are already permeated by God. To more fully set up that prospect, I gather the threads on creaturely capacity.

B. Creaturely Capacity for the Divine

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On creaturely capacity, Thomas and Palamas hold much in common: they both root the person’s capacity for receiving the divine within her soul. Yet in hesychasm, the soul leads her body to mediate divine energies in all of her actions, which relativizes how much or how well she expands her knowledge of God. The soul guides the body into a material holiness. Thomas also centers the soul, but he does so by meticulously charting how the soul’s capacities mark it as distinct from the body and its actions. Thomas’ beatified soul reaches perfection after death, since only once it is removed from all bodily activities can it fully contemplate God. Putting the two approaches together yields similar results as the investigation of divine self-determination: much potential for collaboration, yet much opposition remaining to be cleared.

1. Creatures in Hesychast Deification

Thomist readings of Palamas worry that even as it provides a stunning affirmation of materiality’s significance for the deified life, hesychasm’s essence-energies distinction aggrandizes creaturely capacity. In other words, a hesychast resolution of deification’s tension over-emphasizes what is possible for created matter. By contrast, Thomism resolves these tensions by stressing how the blissful life more properly belongs to the soul post-resurrection. To Thomists, the hesychast commitment to the infusion of divine grace at one and the same time overloads creaturely capacity and risks blurring the body with the Divine presence.

For instance, when he describes how the deified person accesses the uncreated energies that animate her prayer and works of charity and through which she perceives God, Palamas relies upon her possession of a body in order to explain why she cannot lay
hold of God’s essence. But if bodies truly are not to be despised or blocked from reception of divine essence, how does bodily reception of divine energies not implode the distinction between divine and creation? The tension should not be overlooked, for it may jeopardize the central plank Palamas works so diligently to establish—that even contingent bodies may be suffused with the very glory of God, bearing divinity within their limitations, neediness, and passions.

Bradshaw’s discussion of Maximian precedents for hesychast deification well illustrates this conundrum.539 God the Word, as the principle of all creation, remains present in all that is, including the natural, sensible world; thus the ‘two worlds’ of sensibility and spirituality belong together as one reality viewed in two different ways.540 But the bodily senses become “a means of ascending to the direct perception of God,” since they may perceive the logoi—the causes of things—which exist within the Logos.541 Such divine omnipresence renders the Transfiguration a type of all deification. It is not Christ who experiences change, but rather the disciples, whose eyes are granted vision by the power of the Spirit lifting their passions away and enabling true, embodied sight. Bradshaw stresses, “to perceive the divine Logos in creation, and to perceive the logoi which are the formative causes of things, are one and the same.”542 He pairs this evidence from Maximus with other quotes where the Confessor distinguishes between the

539 In his summary, the energeiai for Maximus function in three modalities: referring to manifestations in creation as the logoi, denoting divine attributes as the things around God, and as pertaining to the activity and energy of God that can be shared with creatures (Bradshaw, Aristotle East and West, 206).
540 Bradshaw, Aristotle East and West, 204.
541 Bradshaw, Aristotle East and West, 202–4, quote at 203. This understanding arises from the Maximian emphasis on the logoi as the formative causes of things which manifest the divine Logos’ presence within creation. The physical realities of bodies and the world manifest divine realities such that they cannot be pulled apart from one another (see Ibid., 201-205).
542 Bradshaw, Aristotle East and West, 204.
“highest, apophatic theology of the Logos” wherein the Second Person remains supersubstantial and unparticipated in by anything, and processes into many beings and enables those beings to return to Itself by gathering them up together. 543

Bradshaw considers the *logoi* divine predeterminations of each creature’s calling, to which she may either answer with the obedience that opens the gate to deification or the denial of non-being. Bradshaw concludes that the *logoi* plainly serve as one aspect of the overarching concept of the *energeiai*. These divine perfections or “works” are accessible to participating creatures, such that in *theosis* God no longer moves all created things. Their partaking in the *energeia* will determine their own movements, wills, and identities—physically as well as spiritually. 544 Here, there is no destruction of personhood but instead “a firm and unchangeable adoption…so that we will yearn to receive motion from that from which we have being…like an image ascending to its archetype.” 545 Such adoption occurs when the person exchanges her identity for that of the divine through prayer, withdraws from conceptual thought, and engages in ascetic practices that transform her body with its desires. These pursuits are not private, but rather imitate Christ by publicly bearing God’s presence in the world. 546

Bradshaw argues that the *energeia* is not simply the work of the Spirit but should also be identified as the state of the soul that can receive God’s presence. Deifying synergy between God and the human person arises out of the person’s moral purity and

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543 Bradshaw, *Aristotle East and West*, 205, quoting *Ambigua* 7; PG 91, 1081B-C, Bradshaw’s translation.
544 Bradshaw, *Aristotle East and West*, 205-6. Bradshaw quotes a gorgeous section from Maximus’ *Ambigua* 7 to the effect that in this eschatological Sabbath of deification, God’s energy will be the only one that animates all things like “that of a whole benignly interpenetrating the whole of the worthy” (*Aristotle East and West*, 194, quoting Maximus Confessor, *Ambigua* 7 [PG 91 1076B-D], Bradshaw’s own translation).
obedience.\textsuperscript{547} The divine energies thus work hand in hand with human energies so that \textit{energeia} names God’s operations in the world as well as in the person.\textsuperscript{548} The energies prove the unity of the Trinity, they name all divine activity that creates and oversees the world while also manifesting God’s divine characteristics in such a way as to preserve divine transcendence, they offer a way to safeguard divine freedom from the world, and they enable the person to conform to God.\textsuperscript{549}

Moral obedience as a condition for the perfection that unites with God certainly holds across both models. But for Thomists, all of the details that Bradshaw and Palamas before him belabor may run aground just here. Though the hesychast model wishes to stress the significance of how bodies hold capacities to perceive the divine, if a distinction persists in God between essence and activities that manifest God to creation, how can the person’s energies actually share in the divine energies? If she truly unites with the divine by possessing the energies, she still trespasses upon the divine prerogative. But if she merely imitates the divine in a mode appropriate to creaturely existence, there may be more room for harmony with Thomism—and the essence-energies distinction ought to be removed.

Vladimir Kharlamov affirms,

[t]he absolute singularity of divine nature is not the inaccessible, simple, passive One of Plotinus…but rather this divine simplicity is the divine life itself, with its manifestations in the world…[P]articipation does not have to be identification with participated reality…As the reality of God cannot be understood as divided, then human participation

\textsuperscript{547} Bradshaw, \textit{Aristotle East and West}, 173-8.
\textsuperscript{548} Bradshaw, \textit{Aristotle East and West}, 177.
\textsuperscript{549} Bradshaw, \textit{Aristotle East and West}, 170. Bradshaw adds an additional element to his argument by focusing on John of Damascus’ treatment of divine energy as singular and undivided, though diversified within creation. Here, God comes wherever divine \textit{energeia} is present, and as all things tend towards the energy and rely upon it for their existence, it gathers all things together to return them to its own simplicity. As divine presence is a sort of activity occurring in all of life, God works through the energy to call all things to union with the divine. Therefore, the Damascene hits upon light as the best metaphor for how God may be present and active in all things without division (see Ibid, 207-213).
is in this reality as it is. The limit of human participation is not in the distinction between particable and imparticable aspects in God, but is only in the sense of its incompleteness due to human created ontological and metaphysical status.550

Kharlamov considers that humanity as the image of God entails understanding that nothing a person is or has lacks at least some level of participation in God. Imaging God therefore surpasses the limitations of human language in communicating knowledge of God.551 The incarnation underlines this significance human beings enjoy simply by existing as created. The incarnation thus also affirms the incomprehensible character of the divine nature at the same time that it renders this nature accessible. The holding together of divine and human occurs within the person herself, while language always struggles to balance apophasis and cataphasis in speaking of God’s immutable reality and humanity’s mutability.552 It is the Son’s incarnation holding together both these realities that opens the door to theosis as actual participation in divine being. If the essence-energies distinction holds, it is not clear how the Son can be who Christian theology claims him to be, how humanity can maintain its identity as God’s image, or how the Spirit can interact with the world.553

John Milbank argues similarly that receiving God’s glory simply constitutes creatures as such: “[i]t is not something ‘in addition’ to their creaturehood, any more than God’s glory as divine can be in any way pluralized.” 554 In other words, the spreading of

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552 Kharlamov, “Basil of Caesarea and the Cappadocians,” 139.
553 In fact, at one point in his defense of Palamas’ model of deification, Vladimir Lossky suggests that the Son and the Spirit constitute the energies themselves! See The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church, 85-7.
554 John Milbank, “Christianity and Platonism in East and West,” 195, emphasis original. Milbank’s piece argues with Bradshaw for a positive read of Neoplatonic theurgy against Williams’ indictment of the same, but against Bradshaw and with Williams that Palamas misunderstands divine simplicity.
God’s powers or glory into multiple recipients does not necessarily mean that God would thereby become multiplied, only that God can sustain being participated in by multitudes without that compromising divine unity and simplicity. As Milbank explains, “participation has to be thought as paradox, on pain of positing a common plane between Creator and creature that constitutes a kind of ‘third sphere’ of ontological reality which the doctrine of Creation ex nihilo must rule out of court.”\(^{555}\)

Milbank suggests that the Maximian notion of the *logoi* of creation does not comport with the essence-energies distinction. For Milbank, the *Logos*-*logoi* relationship demonstrates instead “a Trinitarian resolution of the *aporia* of there being an ‘outside’ of God, who is all in all. God, in himself [*sic*], as expressive *Logos*, includes all the diversity of what he [*sic*] creates, while this diversity remains at its very energetic heart.”\(^{556}\) In this way, the Second Person serves as the prime instance of how divine grace occurs always through the works both of divine creation and of human making. Yet this does not amount straightforwardly to a ‘distancing’ of God, because mediation is not regarded by Maximus as a kind of regrettable need to bridge a gap. To the contrary, for Maximus, as for all the great Christian thinkers, if God is love, then he [*sic*] is gift and participation…Just the same paradox which renders the imparticipable and the participated coincident, renders also the immediate and the mediated coincident.\(^{557}\)

Therefore, any and all theophanic manifestations of the Trinity occur in and through created mediums, and “*just because* there is no third between the Creator and the Creation, each creature, comprising both soul *and* body, is always in the direct presence of God” as mediated by created structures.\(^{558}\)

To summarize, though creaturely capacity remains the high point of hesychast models of deification, a Thomist read wonders if the attention given to safeguarding the

\(^{555}\) Milbank, “Christianity and Platonism,” 195.

\(^{556}\) Milbank, “Christianity and Platonism in East and West,” 193.

\(^{557}\) Milbank, “Christianity and Platonism in East and West,” 193.

\(^{558}\) Milbank, “Christianity and Platonism in East and West,” 194, emphasis original.
body’s ability to emanate holiness may disclose just as troubled a relationship of bodily creaturely capacity with the divine transcendence as what hesychasts read out of Thomism. A Thomist read could argue that Palamas’ recurring emphasis on the need for the essence-energies distinction may rely just as much on the incompatibility of created matter with God’s essence as hesychast defenses see in the Thomist hierarchy of being, or that the hesychast construction inflates creaturely capacity into divine identity. Turning to Thomist beatitude’s rendering of the same topics thickens the plot; here, similar problems occur.

2. Creatures in Thomist Beatitude

The problem can be stated plainly: does Thomism leave any way for God to be known and participated in by creation, within its materiality? Hesychasm will push against Thomas and his defenders in three keys: negation of creaturely perfection both in this life and the resurrection, imprecise definitions of creaturehood, and problematic ramifications for divine self-determination.

In the first arena, recall how for Thomas, perfection only arrives when the person, freed from the constrictions of material life, gains access to God’s own perfect and self-sufficient rest. In this life, the contemplative knowledge attained by her soul represents the closest imitation. Hesychasts question how far this model can support the full union of the created person with the transcendent God, in terms of either creaturely beatitude or the resurrected beatific vision.

Loudovikos argues that Thomas’ focus on the intellect unwittingly denigrates the body. Either the body’s functions are second to those of the intellect in created beatitude,
or the body of necessity plays second fiddle to the soul in the resurrection light of the beatific vision: “[a]ny possibility of a transformation of the bodily senses, so familiar in the Greek Patristic tradition, is completely lacking here, as for Thomas the main reason for the weakness of our intellect’s ability to see God is its connection with the body.” 559

In hesychasm, the soul leaves behind all materiality in the pursuit of divine indwelling only so that it may return to irradiate the entire body with divine radiance. Thomas may intend something similar, but his corpus does not unequivocally state so. Rather, he expends much time and energy carefully discussing why other creaturely functions such as desire, affect, will, and action may point to and support the soul’s contemplation but cannot mediate divine perfection. He lacks an articulation of deification directly available in this life, such as Palamas’ strong commitment to the redirection of bodily passions. Instead, when Thomas discusses the body’s role in both created beatitude and the beatific vision, it is always as something pulled after the soul’s intellection. Thomas’ statement that the soul brings the body into resurrection may have intended to imply that this resurrected body would in fact display material virtue upon its soul’s reception of the divine vision, but he does not explicitly say so. For Loudovikos, if the mind which sees God in the beatific vision must be cut off from the body’s senses, Thomas risks casting creaturely perfection as escaping her bodily existence and its limitations. 560 A hesychast will ask if Thomas’ articulation of the union engendered by the beatific vision does not merely describe an escape into an imaginary world utterly incompatible with the materiality of creaturely bodies.

Additionally, since Thomas ascribes inability to experience God in this life to the nature of creaturehood, hesychasts wonder if creatures ever could access the beatific vision. How can two such separate orders relate in any way? Even after the resurrection, do creatures not remain created? Broadening from SG to the *Summa Theologiae*, statements that God is in all things as their agent come paired with the familiar qualifications that beatitude is “a created thing in beatified creatures” as opposed to the divine beatitude that is God’s own uncreated being.561 Thomas here does stress more thoroughly the person’s participation in God and the divine presence as the power and agency moving all things. However, since he lacks clear descriptions of how such participation might impact his earlier limitation of the body’s role in beatitude and the beatific vision, Loudovikos notes that these developments may seem to restrict even further than SCG the body’s capacity to radiate God’s presence.562


562 Phillip Blond’s more sympathetic discussion of how matter functions in Thomas’ beatific vision comports with several of these concerns. See his “The Beatific Vision of St. Thomas Aquinas,” *Encounter Between Eastern Orthodoxy and Radical Orthodoxy: Transfiguring the World Through the Word*, eds. Adrian Pabst and Christoph Schneider (Farnham, UK: Ashgate, 2009), 185-212. Blond offers a helpful bibliography of scholarship on the beatific vision (185) and gives a summary that supports my focus on *SCG* as “the fullest account of [Thomas’] reading of the beatific vision” (188). He acknowledges the problematic status of matter and the body in Aquinas’ accounts of beatitude, noting that Thomas’s revisions in the *ST* of his earlier notions in the *CS 4* constrict the role of the body. Blond argues that a focus on matter as barrier to cognition of God increases over time, from the *Sentences* through the *Summa Contra Gentiles* all the way to the *Summa Theologiae*. In particular, Blond isolates *ST* I-II.4.5’s vexed transition from suggesting that the soul after the resurrection still needs the body to perceive phantasms necessary for thought to stating that the saints can attain the beatific vision apart from their bodies. Thomas’ division of happiness into two modes—the essence of perfection in the contemplation undergone by the disembodied soul versus an auxiliary perfection that does include the body but only as the soul’s enabler—entails that the separated soul sees more of the divine essence than the angelic mind. He notes that the *Secunda Pars* of *ST* in particular yields “an abstracted and disembodied account of the beatific vision...[where] the body is held to be an accidental extension to the intellective beatitude enjoyed by the saints. Indeed so stark is this reversal that Aquinas almost argues that the separated soul enjoys a greater degree of beatitude more than the fully resurrected soul in the newly spiritual body” (Blond, “Beatific Vision,”” 187). Blond succinctly summarizes the problem at hand: if God must still bypass our intellect in the next life in order to share the divine essence with us, why is such action not equally available to God now, before we die? Thomas’ all-
describes the light of God’s glory that the soul may eventually apprehend as both a supernatural disposition added to the intellect so that it may perceive God’s essence and a created light suited for the person’s created nature, hesychasts cry foul. As Loudovikos puts it, “how can [a person] see even the slightest part of divine essence, if it is obviously impossible to overcome his created limits through a light that is merely created like [her]?”

Others lean on apophasism to argue that Thomas overcompensates for previous restrictions when he renders the beatific vision full union with God. His beatific vision appears to place both God and the soul within a larger set that defines them both. Bradshaw, for instance, states that any person’s considerations of God belong to epinoiai, the conceptions formed by our reflection on our experiences, rather than to the noësis of full isomorphic knowledge of the divine. He claims that Thomist beatitude offers a noësis that fails to adequately grapple with the limitations of the person’s intellect to grasp and unite with God. For Constantinos Athanasopoulos, deification involves truly seeing with sense and intellect what surpasses the limits of both sense and intellect, as body and soul are united by the Divine who transcends them both as their Creator. Only when all reasoning, imagination, emotion, and memory fade from the consciousness does the pervading divine essence ill comports with his insistence that our created nature hampers our sight of God. Blond admits, “[i]t is hard not to avoid a gnostic conclusion when reading this” (Blond, “Beatific Vision,” 194). Blond cites with approval de Lubac’s critique of the problem posed by casting capacity for beatitude as merely obediential potency. But on my read, the unresolved issues in Thomas leave traces in all later developments.

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564 Loudovikos, “Striving for Participation,” 143.
565 He forms this conclusion based on the Scriptural narratives of Moses’ and Paul’s experiences of God as discussed by the Cappadocians (Bradshaw, “The Concept of the Divine Energies,” 46-7).
person receive what lies beyond all of these faculties. Thus noetic forms of knowing should not be championed as the fullness of union with God. Deification is not a matter only of epistemology or ethics, but of the heart, able to transform the entire person as a whole being. Intentions or belief that one is drawing close to God may be precisely when creatures least draw close to the divine mystery. The soul obviously retains its key role in this process, but the perfection attained through prayerful union with God more properly belongs to God’s infusion of the divine into creatures than to their own capacity.

Or as Roy Clouser has it, Thomist beatitude’s connection with the mind denies the unknowability of God’s essence and falsely suggests that the mind-soul can somehow naturally exhibit some sort of commensurability with God. Given the limits Thomas ascribes to created beings possessing materiality, how is any participation possible for the creature, at any point?

These complications give rise to the second arena of hesychast concern, that of difficulty defining creaturehood. Editing and extending Thomas’ work, both Henri de Lubac and Karl Rahner reach behind neo-scholastic adaptations to insist that full union with God in beatific vision must serve as humanity’s natural end, else it can have no bearing on human identity. They assert perfection and union with God comprise a natural fulfillment rather than an irruption into nature by a grace utterly foreign to

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creation. For without such an inherent capacity, deification entails processes utterly foreign to human ontology—and beatitude cannot truly take place. Both affirm that the capacity to receive grace constitutes creation from within. The person’s beatitude, the creation of grace within her, prepares the way for her to eventually receive the beatific vision. Thus God’s own self-communication can be said to be actually present not just in the incarnate Son but also in the justified person.

Yet both resources describe persons as both natural being and as determined by something beyond nature. In de Lubac, only human beings hold a nature that is both a particular species of created animal as well as the particular distinction of being “innately opened to the universal and directly related to God.” He argues against reducing humanity to ‘nature’ while also endorsing Martelet’s suggestion that anything in humanity not derived from divine adoption, “even if it does derive from the spirit and liberty in [her], can be called natural.” The person’s capacity for the divine makes her transcend the limitations of other creatures “whose whole nature and destiny are inscribed within the cosmos”; she alone in this unstable ontology is “at once something greater and something less than [her]self.” So de Lubac finds each person holding a natural desire for her perfect end that can only be fulfilled by the supernatural gift of a gracious God.

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570 De Lubac, The Mystery of the Supernatural, 105-6; quote at 106.
573 De Lubac, A Brief Catechesis on Nature and Grace, 15, 19-20, citing Marcel Régnier’s claims that humanity is ‘spirit’ endowed with specific operations that welcome nature in order to transform it (Régnier: “L’Homme, nature ou histoire?” Etudes 329 [1968]: 447-50); see also The Mystery of the Supernatural, 116.
In his essay “Concerning the Relationship Between Nature and Grace,” Rahner takes similar paths. Can grace actually be received if it belongs to a completely different order than what a person considers to be her identity? In Rahner’s words,

if [wo]man, just so far as [s]he experiences [her]self existentially by [her]self, is really nothing but pure nature, [s]he is always in danger of understanding [her]self merely as a nature and of behaving accordingly. And then [s]he will find God’s call to [her] out of this human plane merely a disturbance, which is trying to force something upon [her] (however elevated this may be in itself) for which [s]he is not made (on this view [s]he is only made and destined for it after [s]he has received grace, and then only in a way entirely abstracted from experience). 574

As he notes, the ontological presuppositions of such an extrinsicism prove quite problematic. For one, “where grace has not yet laid hold of the [one] who has awakened to freedom by justifying [her], [her] binding ordination to the supernatural end can only consist in a divine decree still external to [herself].” 575

But if human beings are created to receive this Love which is God, they must hold “room and scope, understanding and desire for it” such that “[t]he capacity for the God of self-bestowing personal Love is the central and abiding existential” of each person. 576

Such a capacity might describe Christ, by reason of the divine Word’s relationship to the humanity he assumes, and therefore spill over into the created grace seen in the justified

574 Rahner, “Concerning the Relationship Between Nature and Grace”; Ernst, 300, italics original to translation.
575 He goes on, “Even if this binding ordination is not counted one among the constituent elements of human nature as such, who is going to prove that it could only be interior to [the person] in the form of a grace already justifying, that an interior supernatural existential of the adult…could only consist in justifying grace already stirred into faith and love?” (Rahner, “Concerning the Relationship Between Nature and Grace”; Ernst, 300, 303, italics original to translation).
576 Rahner, “Concerning the Relationship Between Nature and Grace”; Ernst, 311-312. This must be true even for those who do not accept Christian salvation: “one of the damned, who has turned away from this Love and made himself incapable of receiving this Love, must still be really able to experience this Love (which being scorned now burns like fire) as that to which he is ordained in the ground of his concrete being; he must consequently always remain what he was created as: the burning longing for God himself in the immediacy of his own threefold life” (312).
person who manifests Christ. Yet this iteration, too, runs into trouble, because it appears to negate the difference between grace and a person’s quiddity that Rahner, for his part, continues to assume as foundational for his analysis. However much Thomism focuses on the giftedness of the perfection that is the beatific vision, such gratuity ill fits with the strict lines he drafts between nature and grace. Rahner sees the entire structure of beatitude indelibly blurring those lines:

[for an ontology which grasps the truth that [a person’s] concrete quiddity depends utterly on God, is not [her] binding disposition *eo ipso* not just a juridical decree of God but precisely what [she] is, hence not just an imperative proceeding from God but [her] most inward depths? If God gives creation and [humanity] above all a supernatural end and this end is first ‘in intentione’, then [humanity] (and the world) is by that very fact always and everywhere inwardly other in structure than [they] would be if [humanity] did not have this end, and hence other as well before [it] has reached this end partially (the grace which justifies) or wholly (the beatific vision).]

A hesychast rejoinder will thus ask what constitutes a person’s concrete reality when both her capacity for grace and the actual experience of indwelling grace remain supernatural gifts. Is a person ontologically suited for deification or does deification transcend her capacities? If the former, how does the created grace that comprises the creature’s capacity for God remain separate from her quiddity and yet not interpose an utterly foreign element into her life? If the latter, once more the question returns, how does the gift of grace as participation in God not destroy human nature as such? Why would the soul’s created nature not intrude upon the grace of the beatific vision in the same way created bodies do? Can a supernatural existential given to or through the soul

577 Rahner, “Some Implications of the Scholastic Concept of Uncreated Grace”; Ernst, 345. See also “Concerning the Relationship Between Nature and Grace”; Ernst, 317: “For that nature should remain nature for the sake of grace and yet always be grasped by the Christian as an intrinsic element in the single object willed by God when he willed man as his beloved in his Son—to bring this about is a task of the Christian life, and so a serious question for theology.” Grace, then, “as the divine moment that justifies, sanctifies, and ultimately divinizes,” allows the person to participate in God’s own goodness” (Francis Caponi, S.J. “Karl Rahner: Divinization in Roman Catholicism,” 259-280 in *Partakers of the Divine Nature*, at 260).

actually be received if it belongs to a completely different order than human identity? How can the resurrected body eventually capitalize on the benefits from its created virtues in a way that its earthly constitution cannot, and why? Or, if grace is created to harmonize with the person’s human nature, how could it transfigure into the uncreated grace that she needs for her eventual full union with God? If nature is always graced, what could a human nature actually mean? Paired with the insight above that created grace also totally depends upon the divine gift, the gratuitousness of that gift and her capacity for it makes it impossible to keep the Thomist categories clearly differentiated along the lines certain segments of his work suggest. It is difficult to claim both that grace or the supernatural existential constitutes the person from the inside out as a gift from God and that grace or the supernatural existential is not part of human nature. Additionally, it appears contradictory to posit a ‘supernatural’ order to which this constituting existential belongs which is not God’s self. To hesychasm, to focus on the supernatural does not show how God and the person may be united; it just lays another plank on top of the deification distinctions where the difference between creation and God still presents an unbridgeable divide. If what the person receives from God must be accommodated to her human nature, how can she actually participate in the divine even to the limited extent created beatitude makes available during this life? Thomas’ account of divine self-determination undergirding all creation appears to run headlong into his construction of beatitude.

579 What aspects of the person’s created holiness could fall within the purview of human nature and which belong to the effects of communion with God? As Rahner puts it, “[h]ow am I to know that everything I in fact encounter in my existential experience of myself…does in fact fall within the realm of my ‘nature,’ and would also exist, exist in just this form, if there were no vocation to supernatural communion with God?” (“Concerning the Relationship Between Nature and Grace”; Ernst, 300, 303). One may take refuge in the Incarnation’s constitutive importance for humanity, but to do so still does not fully handle the question of whether or how God’s presence can exist within human beings.
Finally, hesychasts point to how Thomas’ read of creaturely capacities raises problems for divine self-determination. In *ST* as in *SCG*, God’s will is said to communicate as the ground for each creature’s existence the goodness that is God. Or, in Rahner’s words, if perfection is truly a creature’s natural end “must not what God decrees for [the person] be *eo ipso* an interior ontological constituent of [her] concrete quiddity ‘terminative’, even if it is not a constituent of [her] ‘nature’?” So, to hesychasts what Thomas eventually gives the person in the beatific vision might just dissolve her into the divine. Clouser points out that in the Thomist view, God simply *is* the perfections. In his view, this construction risks making all perfections identical with each other, such that each person loses its meaning and God’s identity becomes an abstract property. He has a point: “[i]f God just *is* the form of all perfections, and those perfections are shared in lesser degrees by creatures, then creatures possess imperfect degrees (or ‘intensities’) of *the same uncreated properties*” which in turn has creatures possess a “less-than-infinite degree of *the same qualities with which God is identical in an infinite mode*.” If this union is what Thomas makes accessible in the resurrection, Clauser sees no way to maintain the person’s necessary distinction from God.

To avoid speaking as if God owes this supernatural gift to creatures, Thomas and his defenders explain that the creating will is not the will by which God wills God’s own existence. In Thomas, the divine will concerning creation is the unnecessary will, which Loudovikos considers better classified as one of the energies that without being changed

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580 Rahner, “Concerning the Relationship Between Nature and Grace”; Ernst, 300-3, italics original to translation.
581 Clouser, “Pancreation Lost,” 76-82. Clouser opposes scripture to this “pagan Greek idea of ultimate reality” (77), an unfortunate contrast because it ignores how dependent all theology is upon Greco-Roman philosophy as well as the ways in which Christian thought inventively reshapes those constructs.
582 Clouser, “Pancreation Lost,” 78, 79, emphasis original.
583 See Clouser, “Pancreation Lost,” 79.
into the creation communicates God outside of God’s self. Thus, for Athanasopoulos, creatures as the work of one of the divine energies, the will, still share in other divine actions, both during this life and beyond. To defend Thomas, De Lubac and Rahner simply exhibit increasing ease with concluding that human nature, similarly to the divine paradox that constitutes her end, must also remain at some level a secret. De Lubac will cast human nature as inherently unstable, open always to its fulfillment by God’s supernatural gift. Rahner, finding a contradiction in the notion that a creature’s nature holds capacity for the supernatural, proposes the supernatural existential that constitutes the person from the inside out. As he notes, since human nature never exists without the supernatural existential of God’s grace, nature is not definable, nor is it possible to say exactly what can be attributed to it and what to the supernatural.

A hesychast reading argues in reply that whatever experience of God comprises the person’s ultimate perfection demands some sort of continuity with our present lives, or any notion of deification risks incoherence. If God possesses all perfections and serves as causal being of all that is, whatever capacity the creature has for union with God exists as pre-determined gift overflowing from God’s own transcendent goodness. Therefore, how much can the created grace of beatitude truly connect with and prepare a person for her full union with the uncreated grace of God in the beatific vision? If sanctification

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585 See Athanasopoulos, “St. Gregory Palamas,” 60, as well as Bradshaw, “The Concept of the Divine Energies,” 47-9, where he defines divine simplicity as one of the energies. Bradshaw sees the need to articulate a form of participation that “begins in this present life and engages the body as the soul…[so that] our present acts of obedience to God, seeking Him [sic] in prayer, and sharing in His [sic] life through worship and the sacraments are the sort of thing that is ultimately constitutive of our final beatitude” (“The Concept of the Divine Energies,” 47).
586 De Lubac, The Mystery of the Supernatural, 217.
587 The gift of supernatural capacity granted by God is perfectly realized in the One prepared beyond the foundations of the world and beyond human reason’s comprehension. See Rahner, “Concerning the Relationship Between Nature and Grace”; Ernst, 314.
consists of similitude to God, possible only through the creature’s passively receiving supernatural grace, it only extrinsically heightens the person’s intellectual perception of God. If grace must be created to be received or perceived by the person, to hesychasts, any Thomist articulation of creaturely participation in God by grace remains restricted to efficient causality. Though Thomas considers all creatures continuously dependent participants in divine esse, his treatment of created beatitude nevertheless unfurls as if varying responses to God’s will change God’s own self. Without making the hinge between the person and God God’s own self, what else could serve as the bridge between creation and the divine? Thomism cannot account for how at one and the same time, God both wills God’s own self to be the perfectly actualized divine power while also willing the existence of creation as “partakers therein.” Without addressing how creaturely beatitude can take place as a participation in God’s already prior life, Thomism risks bifurcating God just as much as its defenders accuse hesychasm of doing. The full force of Thomas’ sense of the divine self-determination grounding all of life, action, and growth constricts.

3. Ecumenical Possibilities

Each rendition of creaturely capacity, dependent upon its vision of divine self-determination, struggles to articulate how divine perfection permeates the created person. Each version forestalls some of deification’s metaphysical difficulties by emphasizing how the immaterial, eternal soul serves as the proper locus for the divine to enter the person’s life. Despite this shared prioritization, because their doctrines of God become so different, as they develop their senses of creaturely capacities the two trajectories quickly
diverge. Whether by receiving the energies through Palamas’ praying posture sustained
during this life or by practicing created virtues in preparation for Thomas’ unfettered
contemplation after death, laying claim to the soul as the hinge holding together God and
creation eventually transfers the body problem into another plane.

Thomas’ version of theosis parses creaturely perfection as a matter of the
immortal soul’s compatibility with the divine self-determination. Thomism’s structure
clearly delineates how the created beatitude of virtuous actions prepare her for the bliss of
intellectual contemplation, achieved once the soul leaves behind the temptations of the
physical body. Thomism’s sense of creaturely identity demands distinguishing between
the created grace in virtues marking creaturely behavior and the uncreated rest the
intellect receives after death. By contrast, Palamas seems to delight in how the soul’s
mediation of divine glory disrupts such painstaking classifications. Union with God
cannot be parsed by distinctions of created and uncreated natures, nor can physicality act
as a barrier to the divine. These differences pale in comparison to the actual experience of
God mediated by the divine light of hesychast prayer—bursting forth in this earthly
physical life, to be thoroughly enjoyed in the companionship with God available after
death.

An ecumenical formulation must hold together hesychast emphases on the soul’s
prayerful catalyzing of the body with Thomist scaffolds of virtue that lead to the
unencumbered contemplation of the intellect. In chapter five, then, I move Thomism to
accept the hesychast insistence that the body can truly enjoy the divine presence in this
life, which should not be identified only or primarily as the work of the intellect.
Consensus here could prompt correlation of Thomas’ carefully defined virtues with
Palamas’ emphasis on gathering up all of creation to return it to God. Both the virtues powered by the contemplative mind and the transformation of bodily passions and activities can then be seen as complementary irradiation of materiality by God’s own presence.

More significantly, however, Rahner’s and de Lubac’s developments of Thomism join with hesychast concerns to more thoroughly excavate how human nature is constituted by participation in God. In other words, if in deification divine transcendence does not compete with creaturely capacity, such capacity already involves the divine as its ground, growth, and ultimate end. Yet the two current versions find each other imbalancing that connection. Can they more clearly articulate together how that might take shape? Agreeing on how to do so demands work on our final locus: how theology should name the divine action that enables such participation. I turn now to that area of concern.

C. Naming Divine Action in Creation

For this final locus, I dialogue the two models in terms of how they view deification’s conditions and processes. Each trajectory’s vision of divine self-determination and creaturely capacity coalesces to form its overall depiction of God’s action in the world. As we might expect, many Thomists critique hesychasm’s distinction by questioning patristic precedent, while several hesychasts focus on Thomist difficulties articulating grace and being. Holding together their critical examinations of one another yields two potent ecumenical suggestions.
First, digging into the background and rationale of these two theories suggests that their present iterations may be neither necessary nor best. Imprecision and at times self-contradiction lurk within both models, and their historical components suggest other potential formulae for how divine self-determination relates with creaturely capacity. In other words, both models hold undercurrents of flexibility in naming God’s action. But each tradition calcifies its language of divine action into its current totalizing frameworks. Each thus considers the other’s methods and conclusions to end up constricting divine self-determination and creaturely capacity.

Second, then, if the goal of deification is to maintain divine self-determination as not threatened by creaturely capacity, descriptions of divine action in creation must first and foremost be forged by those principles. Since both trajectories want to orient their models around this creaturely participation in the simple God, and since their lineages contain richly varied resources, their regnant metaphors may not need to be removed so much as redefined. Excavating descriptions of divine action in creation yields a new entry point into an ecumenical deification grounded on Tanner’s rules.

1. **Hesychast Energies**

Critically examining hesychast accounts of divine action yields intriguing suggestions for ecumenical union. Of supreme note for my purposes here remains the role of language. Tracing the development of hesychast logic shows up a communally-discerned intertwining of metaphysics and metaphor discussed in chapter one. This history suggests that the details of such interdependence can be renegotiated.
When Palamas supports his essence-energy distinction with the allegation that those who participate in anything possess a part of it and hold a common substance with it, Thomists view the energies as either dividing God or not divine. Additional support for these critiques appears once one notes Bradshaw’s slippage between treating the energies as divine activities or as distinct ontological states. Two instances offer tantalizing glimpses of a different approach for theosis. First, Bradshaw wishes to substantiate the claim that creatures may only speak of God by referring to the energies. In his framework, divine energy is all we may know and thus all we may speak of. But he must admit that while at times Gregory of Nyssa identifies divinity with operations or actions, at other points he speaks of ‘god’ as substance. Thus, Gregory’s own usage calls into question whether Palamas’ later distinction can appropriately claim his work as a totalizing precedent. Second, in the same section Bradshaw leans on Gregory of Nyssa’s rules for naming the divine by identifying divine actions. He writes, “the energeiai are not merely activities of God, but must be God Himself [sic] under some nameable aspect or form.” Can the energies be both actions and manifestations of God? Both God and not God? No matter how much Bradshaw moves to qualify the point—first arguing that such divine movements are not automatic interventions of God ad extra but rather intentional divine acts that reveal God in a certain form; second by equating activity with

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588 Bradshaw, Aristotle East and West, 165.
589 Bradshaw, Aristotle East and West, 165. Even here, ambiguities persist in the original patristic thought lines, for at times Gregory of Nyssa refers to divine features rather than energies (see 163-4N39). In Bradshaw’s view, because he focuses on establishing that what may be said of God can only be based on observations of these activities, a difference in nomenclature between features and energies does not matter. I disagree.
energies—problems remain. In part, it is precisely Bradshaw’s careful treatment of the Cappadocians that raises more questions than his approach can answer.590

Bradshaw tries to offset these objections by showcasing Palamas’ reliance upon earlier authorities. Bradshaw sees Palamas crowning the Eastern doctrine of participation by systematizing the energies as the distinct substrate of creaturely union with God. The Maximian ‘things around God’ become Palamas’ natural symbols of God’s action in creation. Bradshaw argues that these realities function just like the Cappadocian energies. Although he admits that Maximus includes abstract qualities such as infinity, simplicity, eternity, and immutability that go beyond the Cappadocians’ “paradigmatic” energeiai of wisdom, life, and power, he claims this shift stems from Cappadocian difficulties describing “such abstract concepts as acts, or even as qualities manifested in action.”591 As another defense of Palamas puts it, the energies constitute “forces proper to and inseparable from God’s essence, in which [God] goes forth from [God], manifests, communicates, and gives [God].”592 Here, being, non-being, divinity, and simplicity instance powers God possesses that cannot be separated from the divine essence but which belong to a distinct ontological category simply because this is how all being exists.593

590 See Bradshaw, Aristotle East and West, 169: “By contrast the energeiai of God are not ‘automatic’ but are acts by which God reaches down to creatures and manifests Himself [sic] to them. It will be noted that in saying this I have slipped back into the language of activity…[but] ‘activity’ was the normal meaning of the term…The Cappadocians’ view is that God’s acts of self-manifestation are not interventions of God ad extra, but God Himself [sic] appearing in a certain form.”

591 Bradshaw, Aristotle East and West, 190-1. This assertion seems dubious, particularly when Bradshaw notes the precedent within the Cappadocians to identify God’s nature itself with these more abstract qualities. It is precisely Bradshaw’s honesty about this difference that fosters concern with hesychasm’s model of divine action in creation.


593 Bradshaw, Aristotle East and West, 135ff and 234-41. Backing up to explore earlier grounds for ontologizing the energies does not resolve the issue. For instance, when Bradshaw considers
Bradshaw supports his reading by quoting both the *Mystagogy* and the *Ambigua* 10, wherein Maximus suggests that ‘being’ functions as a divine name, not as revelatory of or directly equivalent to divine essence.594 If such were the only function of ‘being’, the hesychast conclusions might garner more support: a mediating chain of ever-greater ontological thickness would prove necessary to connect the creature with God. Yet the actual quote from the *Mystagogy* gives rise to more complicated conclusions. First, *both* ‘being’ and ‘non-being’ name God. Following Denys, Maximus says that both names are proper to God: one affirms the being of God as cause of beings, while the other denies that God can be classified as one among beings. And second, in another sense, neither name is proper to God, “because neither sets forth the substantial, natural essence of the one under discussion.”595

Since *both* being and non-being apply to God without exhaustively defining God, a serious question follows: are the other ‘things around God’ that figure in the Cappadocians, Dionysius, and Maximus *necessarily* realities separate from the divine essence, or could they function instead as divine names that must be relativized simply because they *both* identify and cannot exhaustively define God? In other words, can these names serve as natural symbols without needing to be considered ontologically distinct from the divine essence?

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594 Bradshaw, *Aristotle East and West*, 191, quoting Maximus the Confessor, *Mystagogy*, Introduction; *PG* 91: 664B-C (translation his own), and *Ambigua* 10; *PG* 91:1180D, trans. Andrew Louth.

Iamblichus, he notes that *ousia*, *dunamis*, and *energeia* represent three different levels of being. Separating out the energies as distinct from essence without also distinguishing power (or goodness, justice, righteousness, etc.) suggests a wrinkle in the harmonization of Neoplatonist and Christian metaphysics that requires further development. Later, in working with the Cappadocian frameworks, Bradshaw notes that they use the unity of divine *energeiai* as proof of the unity of divine *ousia*. But why should energies and essence prove so tightly connected, unless the work of the energy directly reveals God?
For instance, Vladimir Kharlamov’s substantial essay produces an avalanche of evidence calling into question such readings of the Cappadocians. Pointing out that enough ambiguity exists around these terms for Vladimir Lossky to interpret them in reference to apophaticism while Bradshaw reads them as energies distinct from God’s essence, Kharlamov situates the origins of *energeia* rather differently.\(^{596}\) For Kharlamov, the interpretive key to the Cappadocian argument with Eunomius concerns the inability of creatures to exhaustively and definitively circumscribe the divine essence, not the ability to systematize levels of being. Focusing on Bradshaw’s use of Basil, Kharlamov retorts,

> “there is no one universal term that can fully define God’s essence. Therefore, what we can see in Basil is not the distinction within God between his [sic] essence and energies, but the distinction between knowable and unknowable aspects of divine reality.”\(^{597}\)

Thus no one divine name for God or God’s actions (including being or essence) can exactly express or completely locate God’s identity, but each and all together can communicate sufficient understanding of God. Kharlamov argues that the multiplicity of names for divine manifestation display not a break between the essence and its qualities, but rather that these different ‘things around God’ refer to divine actions even as they name “the reality of God as he [sic] is.”\(^{598}\) Thus if both essence and energy receive the same name ‘God,’ they should not be considered ontologically distinct: “[in] the Cappadocians the divine *ousia*, nature, godhead, and archetype are not above the Persons

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\(^{598}\) Kharlamov, “Basil of Caesarea and the Cappadocians,” 131, 143, quote at 143.
of the Trinity, but are the very constitutive aspects of how human beings can refer to the Being of God.”

These findings comport with Palamas’ statements that one can call sunlight ‘sun’ as well as calling the source of such rays ‘sun’ without needing to assert the existence of two suns. Moreover, as Palamas says elsewhere, the varying capacities of those who are divinized determine the degree to which the energies are present. The energies themselves do not set the terms for participation. They cannot be changed by contact with the material. Kharlamov suggests, “[t]he differentiation lies not in the essence/energy distinction, but in the difference between the manifestation of God and the apprehension of this manifestation by the human mind or soul.” Indeed, reading the divine names in such a manner allows for both hesychast defenses on one hand and qualms over hesychasm on the other to be addressed: “[t]his approach allows for God’s essence to some degree to be communicable while still remaining incomprehensible.” Here, God’s self-determination remains preserved through accounts of creaturely perfection without restricting God to a notion of imparticipability. Otherwise, this system of theosis risks becoming its own onto-theology.

As Lévy reminds his readers, Palamas offers some support for this view when he remarks that some realities require distinctions to be made simply on the level of the

599 Kharlamov, “Basil of Caesarea and the Cappadocians,” 113. See also 112, where he notes that when the Son and the Spirit perform actions displaying such divine names, they are thus marked as fully divine and thus one with the Father.
600 See Palamas, The Triads F.III.iii.11; Gendle, 108.
602 This last point sustains some ambiguity within patristic evidence, underscoring the need for careful ecumenical retrieval. However, I find the reasoning of Basil’s Against Eunomius provides substantial weight to Kharlamov’s argument. See Against Eunomius, trans. Mark DelCogliano and Andrew Radde-Gallwitz, The Fathers of the Church: A New Translation, vol. 122 (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 2011).
person’s intellect. Could the essence-energies distinction work similarly, distinguishing God’s inexhaustible fullness from the always incomplete extent to which one may participate in God? Could it refer to the finitude of human language and comprehension rather than to a third-order metaphysical reality mediating God and creation? To put the matter in terms of our opening discussion on the ways language develops in communities, can the hesychast crystallization of the energies into a literalized term for divine action in the world be redeveloped into a metaphor? Such metaphysical and linguistic humility holds benefits not only for understanding additional ways ‘essence’ and ‘energies’ function in the early theologies of the East but also for grappling with the development of this whole trajectory of deification itself. Palamas’ theology of natural symbols could be redirected along these lines. Can God be fully present in the deified person’s body as these energies, undivided between the spiritual and material worlds and still superior to matter, both participable and incorruptible?

Such a re-reading holds at least three benefits: first, it maintains and even strengthens Palamas’ and Thomas’ convictions on divine self-determination. Here, divine self-determination must be named by participating creatures. But it also essence-energies work as divine names, rather than an exhaustive Second, it affirms Palamas’ treatment of

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603 Lévy, “The Woes of Originality,” 120N1, quoting Palamas, One Hundred and Fifty Chapters 81 (Sinkewicz translation, 49-54) and Philotheos Kokkinos’ restatement of that finding in Antiirrhetica (PG 151, 880C), among others.

604 Lévy again: “From the perspective of Augustine, the divine operation never separates from the divine essence, except in the earthbound imagination of pseudo-theologians. Of course, for Gregory also, the energies never really separate from God as they direct the world or are directed towards it; they do not have a temporal or a spatial existence. However, these energies, according to Gregory, are an objective reality from the point of view of creatures, since they experience physically and also investigate intellectually this providential deflection of God’s absolute being-in-energy towards themselves” (“The Woes of Originality,” 116, emphasis original).

605 And, of course, even if earlier theologies rendered the energies and names as originally functioning in this mediating fashion, must they always be seen to do so in order for deification to take place?
bodies as capable of bearing divine perfection right within their materiality.

Understanding the energies in this way dovetails with Gregory’s theology of natural symbols. Third, it opens the possibility for additional meeting point with Thomism appears—but as we will see below, Thomist beatitude presents its own descriptions of divine interaction with the world that struggle to make sense of the difference between the creature’s experience and the Godward view that originates them.

2. Thomist Grace and the Supernatural

Thomas’ model of how God interacts with the world carries its own ambiguities. For hesychasm, concerns primarily stem from the way Thomas’ description of divine self-determination sets the terms for his vision of perfection. In particular, the distinctions he develops between created and uncreated grace that echo the difference between the participation of beatitude and the full union of the beatific vision seem to clash with his insistence that creation always already participates in the Divine. Trepidation with Thomas’ model reduces to a simple question: does God actually act within the created world or not? Here, I will trace two aspects of the Thomist account of divine action in the created world that hesychasts find problematic: distinctions between created and uncreated, and the foundations of analogy as the best way to describe God’s action in the world. Again, paying attention to metaphysics and language illuminates a new direction.

First, to hesychasts, Thomas’ distinctions between created beatitude and the uncreated beatific vision based on the incommensurability of human and divine natures seem to remove God from creation and close off any divine-human synergy. For
Loudovikos and other defenders of hesychasm, if the self-determined God serves as the ground of all, the status of being created should not lock God away from directly acting within that which is made. If the person’s created nature raises some sort of barrier to receiving the full divine light, this denies the all-pervasive Being of God in which by default all created existence already participates. When union with God must be qualified by contact with creation, can reception of the beatific vision, even after death, truly make the person one with and like God? For hesychasts, there should be no need to postpone the perfection available to the person—any perfection is simply God’s self, which already centers and constitutes all that she knows and can be. As Loudovikos puts it, rather than positing Thomas’ two different levels of beatitude, “[p]articipation is inconceivable without deification” as its eschatological end. From a hesychast view, Thomas’ salvation appears hampered by created realities.

Even when Thomas develops his distinctions between created and uncreated grace as belonging to, respectively, the earthly participation in God and the fullness of resurrected union with God, he cannot quite sidestep these issues. In either sense, Thomas says that grace “obviously” leaves something in the recipient. Nevertheless, the good of God’s love present in the creature “is not co-eternal with his [sic] eternal love” that the person receives once she resurrects. At the same time, grace can be said to be created “when it is men [sic] who are created in grace, i.e., when they are created anew out of nothing.”

607 Summa Theologiae, I-II, Q. 110, Art. 1; Fairweather, 157.
608 Summa Theologiae, I-II, Q. 110, Art. 2; Fairweather, 160. In either sense—divine movement from God or the habitual gift present within the person—grace can be seen as both operative and co-operative: operative when God moves the will and co-operative when God provides the person the capacity to act and strengthens the will to carry through (Summa Theologiae, I-II, Q. 111, Art. 2; Fairweather, 166-168).
The need to distinguish between the two orders makes the entire concept of grace fuzzy. Should grace be thought of as a created thing and as the uncreated presence of God? How does the uncreated grace that names God’s self-communication with the person relate to the created grace of her capacity and longing for God? How can this presence of God that is the simple pure act of God in se also be a created reality which the person receives during her earthly life? How could grace be both uncreated and created without proposing a split in God deriving from the supposed contamination of finite humanity? Does grace toggle back and forth between human and divine ontologies to somehow mediate the one’s participation in the other? Does this deification actually grant the person likeness to and union with God, or does it make grace a third-order entity interposed between God and the person?

The hesychast emphasis on the paradox of theosis reaching into created matter despite its radical difference from the Divine continues to propel its critique of Thomist beatitude into our second major area of concern. Here, in addition to confusions over the nature and content of perfection, the Thomist model of divine action undercuts theological language, including the development of analogy. Struggles here impact Thomas’ model of participative ontology.

Clouser and Loudovikos explain. To Clouser, once Thomas’ view of simplicity joins with his take on divine transcendence, this destroys all language for God. He argues that any distinction between the res significata and the modus significandi still requires some underlying similarity between the two: “for there to be any analogy whatever—
two things to be alike at all—there must be some respect in which they are alike. And whatever that respect is, is a property they share in common.”609 Clouser continues,

[s]o if someone were to try to get round this critique of proper-proportionality-plus-simplicity by saying that God’s goodness is in no way identical with what can be true of any creature but is merely like creaturely goodness, then there would still have to be some respect—such as ‘alike in goodness’—which is common to them both.610

Loudovikos agrees. Analogy requires at some level dialogue and reciprocity:

[t]he Palamite view is the traditional Greek Patristic understanding of analogy as an analogical action between different beings. Analogy here always means a synergetic dialogical reciprocity, where these beings come into communion thoroughly, not only intellectually, and ‘energy’ is the circulating gift of love between them. This dialogical reciprocity is finally nothing else than the eschatological, personal formation of human nature in Christ, by the Spirit.611

To oppose (rather than distinguish) the uncreated to the created ruins any ability to draw the person up into this dialogical connection with God. Loudovikos wonders, if God’s external relations have no real being in God, is any real otherness from God possible in this system? A hesychast read of Thomism worries that without any prior relation between God and how we understand these terms, we can no longer understand the words such as justice, power, mercy, and wisdom as revelatory of the divine: “[t]hey cannot designate the same properties and so cannot be the properties we connote in ordinary speech at all. If simplicity is insisted on, then our language cannot convey anything that God is even like.”612 The need to deny a real relation between God and the created world, ostensibly on the grounds of divine transcendence and simplicity, poses a contradiction between God as the ground of all that is created and the ability of the person to fully and

609 Clouser, “Pancreation Lost,” 80.
610 Clouser, “Pancreation Lost,” 80. He explains in a footnote that if all created things bear the likeness to divine being that Thomas wishes his ladder of being to guarantee, such likeness requires sameness at some meeting point, which the doctrine of simplicity denies because of its definition of sameness as identity with God’s essence (80N1).
612 Clouser, “Pancreation Lost,” 82.
freely participate in God. To lay claim to the Incarnation does not solve this issue, because in classical constructions, the divine and human natures of Christ do not meld.

Thomist beatitude of course presupposes difference in its description of created versus uncreated grace. But then how can Thomas claim the radical participation in God that sustains all of life? Is there ‘anywhere’ for God to act at all? Loudovikos reads Thomas’ system as negating precisely what it requires. He believes that what Aquinas promotes is a God actually locked up within the divine essence, totally divided from creation, and thus holding limits determined by that creation, which can then take no actual participation in God’s being. Loudovikos thinks Aquinas renders God captive to the metaphysical structures he employs. To hesychasts, Thomist insistence upon categories of created-uncreated differences represents a claim too extreme for the limited human intelligence to make, either of God or of herself. For hesychasts, deification can be observed by the created person who finds herself changed by receiving the light of the divine glory, but it is precisely her awareness of her dependent creatureliness that both fuels her insistence that all matter can and will be swept up into the divine embrace and keeps her from speculating on how, from the divine ‘side’, God sees this process occurring and why it must be so. Her utter dependence renders her unable to obtain a God-size view of how the Divine interacts with creation:

[f]or Palamas, to initiate his life in Christ by thinking about God’s being was absolutely unnecessary and even dangerous. His conviction was that he would be able to see God in God’s terms, even in this life, beyond human intellectual understanding, beyond concepts—in [God’s] uncreated light.613

As Clouser puts it, God’s creation of all laws makes God subject to none of them.

Thomas’ defenders would ostensibly agree, but a hesychast read might push back as to

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whether, rather than naming a divine law, Thomas’ sense of divine self-sufficiency actually subjects divine action to laws derived from human rationality. For Palamas’ defenders, God’s reliability does not depend upon an idea of the impossibility of divine change, or a still and simple transcendence capable of being shared in by the soul after death, but rather the revelations of God’s actions, which exhibit change as God relates with the changeable creation through the energies while God’s essence, present within those energies, does not shift.

By contrast, the deification Palamas describes centers God as the uncreated reality upon which all else depends, but which remains shrouded in mystery. The distinction between creation and God keeps the theologian from positing laws for God’s action that she extrapolates from her creaturely existence. Instead, she observes divine action from her end of the pendulum: in the witness of her experience and in Scripture, God accommodates to her as to all else that is made by allowing creation a share in the Divine. Clouser explains that God’s presence in the energies discloses this uncreated reality upon which all else depends in an accommodation of the Divine to our composite selves. He describes Palamas’ distinction not as suggesting a separate ontological reality for the divine actions in creation but rather as the trustworthy witness that a person’s actions give to their identity without such actions leaving pieces of themselves scattered about. God’s actions belong to God and reliably communicate Divine character, particularly as God chooses to accept the energies as part of the accommodation to human participation.

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614 See, for instance, Clouser, “Pancreation Lost,” 89.
616 Clouser, “Pancreation Lost,” 90-3.
For hesychast defenses, since “nothing can be conceived outside God,” deification should concern neither the person’s natural imitation of God nor the destruction or supernaturalizing of humanity. Instead it directly makes God available to the person who participates not on the merits of her created virtue but as she responds to God’s sharing of God’s self without any confusion of natures.617 God creates these actions in tandem with creation and takes them into God’s self so as to manifest the Divine self to composite, dependent creatures.618 In sum, then, the hesychast response finds Thomas over-emphasizing divine self-determination as the grounds for a separation between God and creation in this life which then demands the over-correction of restricting the person’s union with God to the eschaton, where it then over-corrects once more into a blurring of the Creator-creature distinction.

3. **Ecumenical Possibilities**

In this third locus of deification controversies, just as in the previous two, the major models exhibit serious conflict. However, investigating divine action in creation also showed that focusing only on proving one metaphysics better than the other, as if they could somehow be extricated from the historical processes disciplining theological language in the two traditions, represents an ecumenical ruse. To the contrary, tracing both iterations pointed to the significance of language for describing divine action in the world—and thus, the words themselves can manifest what they describe. The terms

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617 Loudovikos, “Striving for Participation,” 131. This comfortability, Loudovikos contends, is why hesychast deification focuses so much on the liturgical and ecclesial contexts of *theosis*. The person receives the divine gift of glory as she joins her community in enacting her utter dependence upon God.

employed in theological traditions reveal truths unknowable otherwise. The words and
the metaphysics developed with them may at the same time both naturally, yet
incompletely, symbolize God.

As we have seen, the ways the two trajectories account for divine action at times
act to the contrary, as if their own community’s formulations alone accurately witness to
and comprehensively define the Divine. In terms of the two traditions’ different
metaphysics, their efforts thus also incompletely theologize deification. They end up
limiting descriptions of divine action by the starting points of their own structure: either
divine self-determination or creaturely capacity. These habits put the trajectories at risk
for making God subject to their own systems.

First, the essence-energies account motivates concerns: is God ontologically
identical with the divine actions? If not, then how can one say that the person truly
participates in God? If so, how does deification not blur the Creator-creature distinction?
It is difficult for Western ears to countenance a model wherein God’s actions both
accurately disclose divine identity and do not evacuate the divine nature into creation.
Thomists consider this version of the deification tension to set in motion not a delicately
balanced pendulation but the ‘falling down’ of God from the divine side into the creation
end. The continuum itself, the hesychast construct of divine action in the world, proves
defective.

On the other hand, Thomas’ account of divine self-determination sketches out an
ontology of participation for all existence that should govern divine action in the world.
Once linked to his theology of beatitude, however, his construct appears to erect barriers
between the person and God. The person may echo the divine simplicity with a soul fixed
in theological contemplation, but even this only generates a created beatitude, an echo of the Divine within the created world. The categories of uncreated divine and created person begin to mutually exclude each other, with a link that could actually hold them together left unarticulated. Divine action ‘bounces back’ upon the Godward side of deification while the person herself is jettisoned off to the ether, awaiting her eventual resurrection union with a God she cannot attain in this life. Again, divine action in the world seems based on a self-contradiction.

Yet the entire premise for deification concerns the claim that God acts within creation to make it holy and like the Divine. Theologies of theosis need a model of how this takes place that more congruently describes and holds together both ‘ends’ of the deification pendulum. To get there, the two trajectories need to together redefine their language. But they must begin from the underdeveloped middle of the deification pendulum, from the conviction of God’s action already at work in creation. Beginning with divine action itself as described but never exhaustively defined within the two traditions’ existing vocabularies reorients deification to its original promise. Reframing descriptions of divine action based on Tanner’s rules for theological language suggests ways these competing metaphysics may better resource one another to forge a shared map of the same territory. Bridging ‘grace’ and ‘the supernatural’ with the ‘energies’ and ‘natural symbols’ can supply the foundation for a full model of deification.

III. Deification in Search of Common Ground

This chapter detailed the major differences that generate friction between hesychasm and Thomism. Palamas, by starting with the creature’s capacity for union with
God, reasons from the ‘ground up.’ Divine self-determination must include consideration for the person’s deification because it is precisely this process of \textit{theosis} that reveals who God is. Without the presupposition of deification, we would have no awareness of the divine. Therefore, Palamas develops his theology of divine glory appearing as a natural symbol within creation and the essence-energies distinction \textit{as} the way to describe how divine simplicity interacts with creatures. In Thomism’s view, the hesychast emphasis on the deified body holds out an immense offer, extending holiness and divine glory even unto all the nooks and crannies of physical matter. Yet it may place too much weight on bodily capacity. Hesychast deification therefore risks collapsing nature and grace into one another, dividing God and voiding creaturely agency.

Thomas, beginning with divine self-determination, takes a ‘top down’ approach. The body and its actions prove insufficient to mediate to the person the God who as pure act transcends matter’s contingency. Therefore, a soul completely united with God serves as the benchmark of creaturely perfection, which becomes attainable only after death. God’s action in creation now takes the shape of the created grace habituating the person to an eventual full union with uncreated grace. In the hesychast view, Thomas’ perfection grants certain benefits, including clear descriptions of divine simplicity, transcendence, and causation. Yet his model restricts the life of God the person receives in this life to something holding a downgraded ontological status. Her status as creature blocks her from receiving God’s self. Thomism’s treatment of creaturely capacity risks contradicting its own model of divine self-determination while failing to acknowledge the person’s inability to define God.
Lévy suggests that the eventual differences between ‘East’ and ‘West’ on this point stem from making use of the same paradigm to discuss the same issue but from two different vantages, such that in the Latin perspective, “relativity falls entirely on the side of the creature, whereas it falls on the side of God in the Byzantine tradition.”619 This perspective helps the traditions reclaim one another more like the double-scope networks of cognitive linguistics, where the combination of two complex input networks generates a new field of meanings neither could produce or foresee on its own.620

To facilitate this process, rather than viewing God as the top with creation as the bottom and thus starting to reason about theosis from one or the other place, I argue that the next phase of dialogue should take up divine action. The relationship of divine self-determination with creaturely capacity offers the two traditions a way to receive one another’s differences as gifts that promote a new articulation. I also argue that the only way to do that is to start with pneumatology.

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619 He goes on, “[f]rom the Greek cosmocentric perspective, the creative, providential and deifying energies of God are seen as flowing from God’s motionless essence in the direction of the created universe. From the Latin anthropocentric perspective, God’s mysterious activity lies indefinitely beyond anything which the temporal horizon of the created mind can encompass” (Lévy, “The Woes of Originality,” 119, emphases original).

CHAPTER FIVE: A NEW FULCRUM? TOWARDS A PNEUMATIC DEIFICATION

I. Introduction

This chapter closes the round of ecumenical dialogue comprising this project. Once dialogue partners better understand one another’s theologies (ch. 2-3) and exchange concerns (ch. 4), they can better accept where they need the other’s input. That collaboration, if pushed further, can create a new model for deification inclusive of both traditions as well as Protestant perspectives. The constructive work, as with any ecumenical dialogue, remains to be fleshed out beyond the beginnings I can sketch here. The goal here is not to resolve the problem by completely outlining a new ecumenical model; rather, it is to set up the deification questions in a new light in order to gesture at a promising approach for that eventual construction.

We pick up where we left off at the close of chapter four. Though the two traditions exhibited plenty of difficulties trying to harmonize their accounts of divine self-determination and creaturely capacity, exploring accounts of divine action showed clearly that neither model’s historical trajectory nor starting point describes God’s action divinizing creation coherently enough for the other’s model to accept as is. Indeed, exploring divine action forced both deification models to admit the ways their own metaphysics, based on their own preferred terminologies, proved insufficient, incomplete, or even at times self-contradictory. Other possibilities were present along the way both traditions developed. Pressed under the other approach’s questions, some of these options appear more desirable than the ones actually chosen. Investigating divine action acknowledges that neither community’s current set of terms and rationales can
exhaustively determine the doctrine. But recognizing this fact accomplishes a good: it
levels the ecumenical playing field and demonstrates the need for a new approach.

I believe that focusing on divine action in creation rather than beginning with
either divine self-determination or creaturely capacity can help transform the dialogue.
Divine action sharpens the focus of the debates back onto the core premise of
deification—that God does work in creation to infuse it with divine presence—as the best
starting point to re-envision the doctrine. God may be present in matter despite confusion
as to how, be reliably referenced even by differing terminologies, and appear in the
distinctive metaphysics of diverse spiritual communities, without becoming subject to
creation. Attending more carefully to divine action in creation as the primary locus of
deification can also retrieve both models’ elements rather than deciding for all of one at
the expense of any of the other.

Moving forward requires carefully attending to the nuances of the two existing
theosis models. Rather than try to convert them into one another’s existent terms (in the
cognitive linguistic terms, a single-scope network), I propose that an ecumenical
deification requires a solution that is both more difficult and yet more ecumenically
promising. This approach would consist of re-reading both traditions (moving beyond a
mirror network into a double-scope network; advancing dialogue from lists of
commonalities or differences into mutual construction) as differing sets of metaphors for
a metaphysics of the Spirit, who enables the continuing permeation of creation by God’s
presence. I can only argue here why this approach is necessary; spelling it out in detail
will take further work.
Focusing deification on the Spirit turns out to find much purchase in both Orthodox and Catholic traditions on *theosis*. To start with the Spirit lifts up places where both trajectories include pneumatological components that have been drowned out by regnant metaphysics. What I propose is therefore not so much an overhaul as a search and rescue operation. Searching for these overlooked resources and re-reading the chosen terms (grace, energies, or the supernatural) as the Spirit instead helps the traditions reclaim themselves and one another. Starting with the Spirit also helps prompt the younger ecclesial communities to adopt deification within their own contexts while bridging their own pneumatic gifts back to the older traditions. This deepened pneumatology of God’s action in the world—in bodies, in language, and in disparate religious communities—safeguards in a non-competitive relation the two ends of deification’s pendulum: divine self-determination and creaturely capacity.

In what follows, I detail why this turn to the Spirit holds the most promise to construct a coherent ecumenical deification. I begin by showing how the existing maps of divine action in creation cannot convert with one another. I then detail why a pneumatic lens works better than these other attempted solutions. I point to ways the two current models already include appeals to the Spirit that could be redirected in an ecumenical, double-scope tectonic model that addresses hesychast, Thomist, and Protestant distinctives. I especially indicate some earlier Scriptural and patristic resources common to all the Christian traditions that could help steer this rereading. Since a full outworking awaits additional receptive engagement conducted by all participants, I confine myself to noting how the Spirit directs the deification questions so that the three major Christian traditions can better resource together their existing theologies of participative union with
God. Thus finally, in my conclusion, I gesture at ways this insight can further theologies of deification as well as enrich other areas of theological inquiry.

II. Why the Spirit?

A. Other Alternatives: the Energies, Grace, or Sophia

When the two oldest models of *theosis* encounter one another, they fail to see eye to eye, primarily when they grapple with the body being deified. I argued above that their differences on the role of the body can be traced to which side of the *theosis* pendulum forms the basis for their structure. Thomas requires escape from bodies to meet the physically uncircumscribable God; Gregory insists that only transformation right within the body captures the significance of Christian salvation. They developed competing theories of divine action to support their distinctive starting points.

To move forward, Thomist beatitude could accept the hesychast model of God’s essence-activity distinction in place of its own between created and uncreated grace or the supernatural existential. Alternatively, hesychast deification could relinquish its definition of the energies as actually divine to allow beatitude’s created grace to serve as the sole natural symbol of God’s activity in the world. Either of these possibilities would represent a great accomplishment in ecumenical relations. But on my read, these alternatives fail. Trying to solve deification via promoting any one of the previously existing terms would compress the debates into what cognitive linguistics terms a single-scope network. Masson explains that in these conceptual moves, one input provides the overall organization for the entire redirection of a metaphor.\(^621\) Such an asymmetric move

remains a non-starter. It would entail less than mutual conversion to the other, and because of the entrenched way the languages of deification have already developed, it risks foreclosing any possibilities for retrieving the tenet.622

First, no matter which construct was chosen as the guiding frame, choosing one would re-calcify deification language in problematic ways. The discussion of divine action in chapter four clearly showed how the terms from both traditions end up charting deification as a zero-sum game. Both saw their own community’s iteration as the ultimate governing metaphor. But that stance makes both subject to charges of onto-theologizing, wherein their chosen terms set the boundaries for speaking of God. Given that these constructs tend to operate this way, choosing one of them would likely continue that trend. Such a decision—ratifying only one community’s disciplined metaphor over the other’s—would raise havoc for considerations of deification as well as for theology in general.

Second, as we uncovered in chapter four, the two traditions fault one another’s theories of divine action for errors in divine self-determination and incoherence in creaturely capacity. Both theories, rather than enabling a balanced pendulum, destabilize the *theosis* paradox. Since none of the term-concepts in use by either tradition—the energies, grace, the supernatural—linguistically or metaphysically convert to both divine self-determination to serve as the grounds for descriptions of divine action and creaturely capacity as the description of what happens in that divine action, none of them resolves the metaphysical concerns raised by the other tradition. None of these terms can actually hold the full deification pendulum together, so they cannot solve the disagreements.

622 Note that this latter option represents some Protestant perspectives detailed in chapter one, viewpoints we have already determined cannot hold.
Without a better way to mutually describe divine self-determination at work in the world, any ecumenical progress will remain shaky, unable to obtain widespread reception.

Third, because many Protestant communities harbor deep concerns about the metaphysical implications of the two current versions’ terminologies, adopting any configuration as it currently stands could not create a truly ecumenical formulation. Though I see Protestant attempts to remove language of deification as a sleight of hand, the younger traditions do offer legitimate insights that help the current models see how poorly they harmonize and suggest other ways forward. As this chapter brings those voices back to the table, a different way forward must be plumbed.

Another option would subsume both current iterations under the Sophia construct, currently enjoying a resurgence of popularity from John Milbank’s attempts to resuscitate Bulgakov’s metaphysics for *theosis*. I now briefly summarize how Sophia works before delineating why I think this proposal also fails along the three lines just mentioned.

Milbank writes that though “there is no third term between the essence of the Godhead and the person of the Trinity themselves,”623 theology nevertheless still needs a between, a *metaxu*. Otherwise, theology “tends to get a resolution of all relations into impossible free-standing univocal identities, resulting in an unexplained pluralism, or else alternatively into a monistic equivocal flux whose self-grounding remains equally inexplicable.”624 Milbank quotes Bulgakov to the effect that the “hypostasing” love of the Trinity which is Sophia becomes “the fully hypostasized ‘love in person’ of the Holy Spirit” who as the mutual joy of Father and Son yet hypostatically exceeds them “because

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this joy is something ‘objective,’ communicable beyond themselves as the *ethos* or peculiar shared ‘culture’ of their mutual love.’

If Sophia simply described the glory of Godself as shared with humanity, *not* a third ontological order, divine action in the world and thus divine self-determination and creaturely capacity might still be described according to Tanner’s rules. Sophia could serve as a complex metaphor catching up the energies and symbols with grace and the supernatural. But this is not what Bulgakov and Milbank argue—nor could it ever fully obtain, given Soskice’s account in chapter one on religious communities ‘literalizing’ metaphors. For Sophia constitutes not one of the many convertible names of God but an ontologically separable substrate where God meets creatures. Why would God require such a mediator in order to relate to God’s own creation? If God cannot directly relate with created bodies, why should the addition of Sophia change anything? How does divinity get ‘into’ Sophia, and how does distinct human nature access it? How can the person’s communion with created Sophia actually reach the uncreated Sophia? How does Sophia work as *metaxic* border? If she moves back and forth between divine and created, is she not now the God above God? Does she not simply infinitely repeat the distinction between God and creation without ever actualizing deification?

625 Milbank, “Sophiology and Theurgy,” 52.
Sophia might perform better on point one above, as a new metaphor potentially holding both the energies and grace or the supernatural. But on point two, a turn to Sophia cannot address the inability of the two trajectories to agree on divine action, because Sophia cannot unequivocally ground divine action and creaturely capacity within divine self-determination. Thus, Sophia fails on point three—hospitality to Protestant views—as well. Milbank supplies the critique that applies to both traditions as well as himself:

[w]ere there such media, then persons and relations and essence would become specific instances of something more general and fundamental. Likewise, if there were a third term between God and the Creation, if God were related to the Creation and not just the Creation constitutively related to God, there would be a greater than God and God would not be God…in the case of Christology, there is no third term between the two natures…nor between God who is able to become man and humanity which is destined to be deified.627

IV.

As he acknowledges here, an element such as Sophia (just like the energies, grace, or the supernatural) cannot be a hypostasis, as creation already lies within God and “God must be also that in [God’s] self which goes outside God.”628 Sophia cannot solve the theosis problems but falls prey to the same issues as do natural symbols, energies, grace, and the supernatural.

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feminine identity while also binding together the heavenly world of a (masculine) God? Since Sophia is not controvertible with God’s ousia, here the feminine cannot maintain connection with God but continues to be displaced from the Trinity as a separable category. We arrive back at Balthasar’s difficulty enabling the embodied (feminine) creature to leap over the metaphysical divide into (masculine) divine life. In her creaturely capacity, Sophia faces further disjunction. If both Son and Spirit reveal creaturely Sophia to the world, why identify only the Spirit with femininity? Once again, femininity aligns with a ‘quieter’ divine Person, and Sophia’s (feminine) subordinate roles repeat a gender hierarchy. These concerns raise serious doubt as to whether Bulgakovian-Balthasarian kenosis can honor different bodies as much as Martin and Milbank hope. For “[i]t is in this body that man seeks to place himself and the world, in the ‘between’ opened by woman’s duality, not least as mother and bride. But…this logic is always to be frustrated, for it will also demand that, as perfect creature and perfect Mensch, woman will be also neither, always tending towards being ‘something’ uncreate. But if she disappears, then so does man…For women’s bodies appear to be fixed outside of meaning in order to secure meaning” (Lucy Gardner and David Moss, “Something like Time; Something like the Sexes: an Essay in Reception,” 69-138 in Balthasar at the End of Modernity, ed. Lucy Gardner, David Moss, Ben Quash, and Graham Ward (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1999), at 96).

627 Milbank, “Sophiology and Theurgy,” 49.
Another solution must be sought. Focusing on the Spirit as the overlooked element in existing models generates a new frame for how both models can conceive God’s action within the bodies of the created world.

**B. Pneumatological Insufficiency**

I suggest that the continuing division of Thomist and heschast deification may stem at least in part from a lapse of attention to the Holy Spirit as doctrinal content: the Spirit who shows divine self-determination already working within creaturely capacity. I find that repeated difficulties in speaking of God as three map onto the ways the two models unbalances the deification continuum. Both models announce a commitment to participatory metaphysics grounded in divine self-determination that should rule out opposing divine agency with creaturely capacity, but both lapse into qualifying their theologies of participation on the basis of bodies or human nature. Thomas’ enthusiasm for the self-determined, self-contained God leads him at times to speak as if divinity can only be maintained if the body is kept in a place separate from God’s supernatural agency. If the beatific vision can be tainted by bodies, bodies threaten the divine life of God that is the beatific vision. Thomas’ read of the divine transcendence for which the person yearns may create notions of the Father as incompatible and out of reach of creation. Similarly, Palamas’ commitment to recognizing the divine presence in the bodies of the ones who pray leads him at times to speak as if created realities likewise compete with God’s self-sufficient transcendence. This insistence that the creature can bear the light of the divine presence finds its basis in the incarnate Son’s transfiguration but may myopically identify divinity with creation.
Each version of divine action seems to the other to collide with Christ’s revelation that God is not opposed to human nature and thus does not compete with it, but rather enfolds and enables the full perfection of humanity. Deification cannot occur if divine action in creation remains predicated upon binary oppositions between God and creatures. That dichotomy all too easily reduces into a polarity of Father versus Son or the Son’s divine nature versus the Son’s human nature. From these positions, each constructs their own model, which risks emphasizing not just one end of the deification pendulum but also one Person of the Trinity at the expense of the other. Either way you slice it, such binary constructs break the *theosis* pendulum, violating both Tanner’s rules for speaking of God and fomenting ecumenical discord.

Yet understanding God as three, not two, remains a persisting theological difficulty. In a pair of articles ten years apart, Robert Jenson and then Eugene Rogers compellingly raised the thesis that theology overlooks or silences the role of the Holy Spirit. In contrast to Jenson’s negative assessment, Rogers’ article notes a muted pneumatology as perhaps “the tendency of the Church (almost) always and everywhere” and wonders if this is as it should be. In his article, Jenson proposes a turn to Orthodox theology to resolve Protestant thinness on the Spirit, but Rogers’ account heavily qualifies this with his examination of the secrecy of the Spirit noted by Florensky.

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Both diagnose lapses in conceiving the Spirit common to both Western and Eastern theologies.631

In 1995, Thomas Weinandy reflected further on such concerns with The Father’s Spirit of Sonship, arguing that the West has granted the Spirit only a “passive function” while the East’s emphasis on the monarchy of the Father downplays the procession of the Spirit.632 For Weinandy, both traditions remain captive to philosophical concepts incompatible with Christian revelation, producing an emanationist sequentialism that grants conceptual priority to Father over Son and Son over Spirit.633 Weinandy proposes that properly understanding the Trinity requires instead the three persons to “logically and ontologically, spring forth in one simultaneous, nonsequential, eternal act in which each person of the Trinity subsistently defines, and equally is subsistently defined by, the other persons.”634 However, he also suggests that theology’s pneumatic hush remains appropriate to the Spirit’s nature “to lie hidden and perform the humble task of revealing the Father and the Son.” To forget the Spirit keeps with the Spirit’s mission “not to make himself [sic] known, but to manifest the love of God the Father and Jesus as Son.”635 Weinandy’s path to recapture the Spirit’s role in defining Son and Father ends up in a

631 Jenson, “You Wonder,” 300, and Rogers, “The Mystery of the Spirit,” 243-44, 247-49, 252-55. In Unbaptized God, Jenson further suggested that the Spirit may have a unique connection with such long-term bearing with the other. He labeled time as “what happens when the Spirit ‘comes’”; this, he thinks, could keep time, event, and personal agency from mutual exclusion (Unbaptized God: The Basic Flaw in Ecumenical Theology [Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992], 125).
633 Weinandy, The Father’s Spirit of Sonship, 9-10.
634 Weinandy, The Father’s Spirit of Sonship, 14-15.
635 Weinandy, The Father’s Spirit of Sonship, 84-85. Here, he quotes approvingly Hans Urs von Balthasar’s definition of the Holy Spirit as “the ultimate Subject” (in Explorations of Theology III). Both of these perspectives exhibit commonalities with Ephraim Radner’s concerns that focusing on the Spirit renders theology unreliably fuzzy (see discussion below). However, other sections of Balthasar’s corpus helpfully complicate this account of his pneumatology and should not be overlooked. See my forthcoming “The Dove Beyond the Abyss: Balthasar, Gender, and the Spirit.”
cul-de-sac with the very same sorts of pneumatology he decries: the Spirit continues to be considered as an impersonal love, downgraded from the personal Father and Son.

In “The Second Difference,” John Milbank also suggested that theology “still awaits its complementation by a ‘theopneumatics.’” Milbank finds fault with both Catholicism and Protestantism for being unable to provide a correct pneumatology. His primary concern with modern transcendentalist Catholicism lies in its stress upon the Spirit over the Logos character of the Son, which gives rise to “an absolutely open, individual subjective capacity” rendering divine presence “aspiration away from the world, rather than…worldly structures which reflect divine intelligibility and beauty.” Protestants do not fare much better, with Milbank arguing that Hegelian-influenced Protestantism, renders the atonement merely a “gnoseological event” which ends up justifying the fall as the establishment of worldly autonomy and human freedom.

Milbank’s own attempt at a ‘theopneumatics’ offers a consideration of the Church “poised between” Christology and the subjective Spirit who shapes persons in the image of Christ. As the Spirit only exists “in its relation to the origin through the Son,” so subjective elements of this aesthetic-hermeneutic rendering of the Trinity are kept within textual ones. Milbank’s argument holds certain affinities with Weinandy but also somewhat retreats: his critiques hit their targets, and his concern to acknowledge the

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639 Milbank, “The Second Difference,” 186. This move creates an aesthetic-hermeneutic model of the Trinity, where analysis of the structures of reception cannot specify judgment on form, but where “the categories of reception, and so the constitution of the receiving subject, are entirely derived from ‘privileged’, selected dimensions of nonetheless objectively recognizable patterns of structuration” (188).
640 Milbank, “The Second Difference,” 188.
Spirit within creation seems laudable. However, his resulting pneumatology does not, on my read, capture a Spirit fully equal with Father and Son. It is not clear which ‘textual elements’ count as connecting Spirit to Son or how the Spirit is not being evacuated into ‘Church.’ The same problems Jenson notes would also plague this approach.

These three attempted retrievals suggest that even the intentional pursuit of trinitarian speech does not guarantee success. Proclivities to speak of God in binary oppositions continue to haunt these attempts. Arguably, both formal theories of *theosis* take shape with similar gaps. Contemporary defenses of both hesychast deification and Thomist beatitude make appeals to the Spirit to justify their own trajectories, but, on my read, they do so without a common, fully-developed pneumatology. They include equivocation between the Spirit and the energies or between the Spirit and the gifts from God necessary to create virtue, rendering the Spirit subjected to theories of divine action rather than sought as the necessary terms of engagement for those notions. To quickly grasp the difficulties, let us briefly examine how each trajectory portrays the Spirit.

1. **Deification’s Missing Third in Divine Self-Determination**

The Spirit does figure heavily in both models’ descriptions of the divine action already at work in creatures as the grounding of all life, action, and growth within the donated existence of the Divine. However, each tradition nevertheless shies away from such conclusions, introducing serious qualifications of the extent to which the person may access the life of the Spirit. I begin with hesychasm, where examining the essence-
energies distinction through the lens of the Spirit yields a new approach to deifying
divine action in the world.

On the Godward side of the deification pendulum, Palamas himself includes
statements identifying the Spirit as divine action. For only two examples of many: “[t]he
Spirit is the one through whom” the deified person sees641 and the deified life belongs to
those who participate “in the inseparable life of the Spirit…Such a life always exists,
subsisting in the very nature of the Spirit, Who by nature deifies from all eternity.”642
Bradshaw includes some intriguing quotes, such as John of Damascus’ description of the
Spirit as accompanying the Word while manifesting the Word’s energy: “[I]n coming to
rest upon the Son the Spirit ‘declares’ the Son and manifests His energy.”643 Gregory of
Cyprus sees the Spirit take existence from the Godhead, not just from the Son, but
nevertheless defines the Spirit as shining through the Son.644 Bradshaw also includes how
Gregory of Cyprus argues that the phrase ‘through the Son’ equally means the eternal
manifestation of the Spirit and His bestowal upon creatures, arguing that this extends
Athenasius’ teaching that the Spirit is the energeia of the Son.645

On their own, these statements warrant further consideration of how the Son and
Spirit relate under the essence-energies distinction. When Bradshaw concludes his
monograph, he defends the essence-energy distinction by referring to how the Spirit’s
procession from the Father to rest on the Son manifests the Son’s energy as well as the
Spirit’s own self. He says, “[i]t is hard to know what else the uncreated light could be

641 Gregory Palamas, The Triads B.I.iii.21; Gendle, 38.
642 Gregory Palamas, The Triads, E.III.i.9; Gendle, 71.
643 Bradshaw, Aristotle East and West, 217 quoting John of Damascus, De Fide Orthodoxa 1.6-7.
644 Bradshaw, Aristotle East and West, 218-9, quoting Gregory of Cyprus, Tome 4 and 11, PG 142
240B-C, 243C.
645 Bradshaw, Aristotle East and West, 219, quoting Gregory of Cyprus, Tome 4 PG 142, 240C;
than this eternal, reciprocal glorification of the persons of the Godhead.”

Vladimir Lossky also hints at such an understanding when he theorizes the possibility for human beings to unite with God through the hypostasis of the Logos, and when he claims that “all energy originates in the Father, being communicated by the Son in the Holy Spirit.”

Going so far as to describe the Logos as “the exterior manifestation of the nature of the Father by the Son,” Lossky has to admit that in Irenaeus’ conception, the Son is “almost identified with the manifesting energies,” and finally, that “[t]he Son and the Holy Spirit are, so to say, personal processions, the energies natural processions. The energies are inseparable from the nature, and the nature is inseparable from the three Persons.”

If these suggestions hold, then it seems the Spirit holds a special role in showing forth God’s glory.

When we examine Thomas and the Spirit, similar potentialities arise. On the Godward side, when he describes the maturity granted by perfect knowledge, Thomas states that the person hungers for “spiritual realities.”

In his own words, “the Holy Spirit constitutes us God’s friends, and makes [God] dwell in us, and us dwell in [God].”

Moreover, “[the Spirit] dwells in us…and so we possess…[the Spirit] as one whose resources we enjoy. Now, this is in the Holy Spirit from the Father and the Son:

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647 Lossky, *Mystical Theology*, 70 and 82, quote at 82.
649 *CS4*, d.49, q.1, a.1, qa1./rep.obj.2; Kwasniewski, et. al., 338.
that by the love which…[the Spirit] causes in us…[the Spirit can] be in us and be possessed by us.” But Thomas’ connection of this perfect union with the soul’s entrance into eternal life after the body’s temptations have been quieted causes him to classify the Spirit’s involvement with the person as an effect rather than a direct presence. Likewise, as we saw above, the need to bifurcate grace between the incorruptible being of God and the habits developed within a person’s finite mode risks making God a subset of grace. If the Spirit identifies only with a disembodied life, placed in contrast to the material world and hampered from fully redeeming the person until she leaves behind such existence, the Spirit cannot be described as fully God. But if the Holy Spirit’s agency to dwell within the person, sharing resources as the one being deified possesses the Spirit, is acknowledged as not subject to limitation, the Spirit’s action in the world shows divine self-determination in exactly the lines Tanner’s rules require.

2. Deification’s Missing Third in Creaturely Capacity

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652 Thomas explains, “a body of such a sort is the glorified body, which is altogether subject to the spirit…[and such a union] is more like unto God than when [the soul] is separated from such a body, insofar as the composite has being more perfectly” (*CS4*, d. 49, q.1, a.4, qa.1, rep. obj. 1; Kwasniewski, et. al., 379-80). And again, “the higher our mind is elevated to the contemplation of spiritual beings, the more is it withdrawn from sensible things…Hence, the mind which sees the divine substance must be completely cut off from the bodily senses, either by death or by ecstasy” (*SCG* III.47.2;158). See again *CS1*, d.1, q.1, a.1, distinction 17, reply obj. 4 [Paris version, 1252-1256]; Kwasniewski, et. al., 13-14, last quote 14.
On the person side of the pendulum, additional hints appear. For Palamas in *The Triads*, the body and all the created structures of the world remain essential; there is no deification if there is no matter to receive *theosis'* “divine manifestation.”\(^{655}\) So, what actually makes up this divine manifestation? More recently, Bradshaw glosses Basil’s connection of the gifts of *theosis* with the Spirit as simply the divine energy.\(^{656}\) But this characterization runs headlong into his later remarks that the energies are not just divine operations but God “as manifested within creation,” that the benefits God gives people are the *energeia* and gifts of the Spirit “so in that sense the Spirit Himself [sic] may be called *energeia* and gift,” that the Son’s giving of the gifts and *energeia* of the Spirit comprises the temporal consequence of the eternal procession of the Spirit from the Father, and that the Trinity’s communion “is thus the cause and foundation of the bestowal of the Spirit upon creatures.”\(^{657}\) Though Bradshaw tries to skirt this issue by defining the energies as not just individual acts “but also the states of soul that make these acts possible,”\(^{658}\) such maneuvers seem to perform sleight of hand. For instance, Bradshaw views any energy, once acquired, as adding “an integral and enduring characteristic” to the person even when it is not openly manifested, yet the primary source material from Basil refers to these souls indwelt and illuminated by the Spirit as thus becoming ‘spiritual,’ capable of sharing grace with others.\(^{659}\) Bradshaw quotes Basil of Caesarea that just as a skill exists potentially within an artisan but only operates when

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655 Gregory Palamas, *The Triads* E.III.i.34; Gendle, 89.
658 Bradshaw, *Aristotle East and West*, 173. Here, some intriguing similarities between this conception of the energies and the Catholic descriptions of created grace arise, but I will show below how this may not be the best solution to the deification dilemma.
the person uses those abilities, “so also the Spirit is present with those who are worthy, but works as need requires.”

Indeed, additional hesychast sources suggest that the Spirit holds special purview in divine action by enabling creaturely participation. A few examples should suffice to establish this point. One, Bradshaw mentions how several New Testament sources list spiritual gifts as the performances (energema) of the Spirit and describe the life of faith as continual cooperation with the Spirit in matters both supernatural and natural. Two, Bradshaw notes how in Athanasius, divine action occurs from the Father through the Son in the Spirit. The Spirit seems to come to the fore as specially connected to these aspects of union or communion. Three, Bradshaw affirms in his read of Basil of Caesarea that participation is not just cooperation with God but actual participation in divine being. Four, he likewise notes how for John of Damascus, God’s universal presence can be read as a kind of activity, “using the same term as that used in Scripture for the gifts of the Holy Spirit and God’s active cooperation with man.” Here, the life of the Trinity itself is a movement that allows for self-manifestation without dependence upon creatures; the Spirit proceeds from the Father to rest on the Son, which glorifies the Son and manifests the Son’s energy while making Spirit known. This manifestation of the Spirit in particular allows creatures to partake of divine life.

As Vladimir Kharlamov puts it,

our participation in the nature of God does not necessarily make this nature knowable…In the best conceivable situation, it is the most complete union of human

661 See Bradshaw, Aristotle East and West, 122-3.
662 Bradshaw, Aristotle East and West, 155-6.
663 Bradshaw, Aristotle East and West, 174.
665 Bradshaw, Aristotle East and West, 219-20.
666 Bradshaw, Aristotle East and West, 220.
beings with God as the full realization of human capacity, but it is not complete appropriation and knowledge of God, nor is it the merger of human and divine identities.667

By contrast, only a binary metaphysical grid, overlaid upon both the Trinity and divine action in creation, could give rise to the need for separating out essence from action, or for collapsing the Spirit into either Son or energies. On both the divine and creaturely ends of the pendulum, then, the Spirit may serve as a better identifier of the energies as the One granting access to divine life without being constricted by such donation. Though brief, these glimpses suggest ways that hesychasm can look to the Spirit to explain deification as union with God that does not exhaust God.

On the creaturely side of deification, both de Lubac and Rahner include ambiguity between nature, grace, supernatural, and Spirit: whether that appears as the distinction between humanity’s nature and the grace it needs to fulfill that nature or whether they posit a supernatural existential as a sort of holding room for the person’s openness to and capacity for the created grace she needs in order to eventually receive uncreated grace.668 For example, when de Lubac describes God’s action in creation as the supernatural dynamic, he acknowledges that Christian language uses the terms *pneuma* and *pneumatikos* to designate this reality.669 Though the inaccessible divine light remains “inscrutable,” it remains “known to the Spirit of God who wills to communicate [the

668 To recap, “the Holy Spirit becomes an internal, constitutive principle of the human person” through a ‘quasi-formal’ causality” (Caponi, “Karl Rahner,” 267, referencing Rahner, “Foundations of Christian Faith” in *Theological Foundations*, 19:8-9. See also Rahner, “Some Implications”; Ernst, 332). Created grace, which enables the indwelling of the Spirit, which in turn prepares the person for the beatific vision, can only exist as the formal causality of uncreated grace. Rahner notes that the end result stays the same: “the indwelling of the Spirit in the justified,” which prepares the person for the beatific vision, occurs as “the consequence of the bestowal of created grace” (Rahner, “Some Implications”; Ernst, 325, italics original). See also de Lubac, *A Brief Catechesis on Nature and Grace*, 22-4, 33-41, concluding with this quote: “[t]he supernatural, one might say, is that divine element which [humanity’s] effort cannot reach (no self-divinization!) but which unites itself to [the person], ‘elevating’ [her],…in order to divinize [her]” (41).
Divine Self] to [humanity].” Yet he quickly distinguishes the term Spirit from the human spirit, arguing that the word remains too indeterminate to reliably refer to either *pneuma* or to the fruit of a divine reality produced by the Spirit. These bifurcations create difficulties when De Lubac also describes this grace as that which “is in us...[and] constitutes us,” even as it should also be understood as “a completely free gift” of God. These tensions lead to statements such as the claim that the influx of God’s Spirit does not remain external to the person but “without any commingling of natures...really leaves its mark on our nature and becomes in us a principle of life” and that the supernatural end of humanity which is the eternal life granted by the Spirit cannot flourish “save in circumstances wholly other than those of space and time.”

Like de Lubac, Rahner also identifies this constituting principle as reliant upon the Holy Spirit, yet heavily qualifies this statement when he argues that Scriptural passages describing direct interactions between human beings and the Spirit denote merely a created effect of the communication of the Spirit [or the Spirit’s] inner transformation of the justified as such, hence an inner quality which inheres...hence what scholastic theology calls created grace.

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670 De Lubac, *The Mystery of the Supernatural* 125. De Lubac’s quotation of Cyril makes this work of the Spirit a natural corollary to Christological doctrine: “the Word, only Son of the Father, imparts to the saints a kind of kinship with the nature of God the Father and with his own nature by giving them the Spirit,” quoting Cyril of Alexandria, *In Ioanem*, bk. 10, c.2; 15:1.


674 De Lubac, *The Mystery of the Supernatural*, 100.

675 For the identification of this principle with the Spirit, see Caponi, “Karl Rahner,” 267, referencing Rahner, “Foundations of Christian Faith” in *Theological Foundations*, 19:8-9. See also Rahner, “Some Implications”; Ernst, 325, 332, 342. For the latter, note how Rahner shifts to admitting “[a]t the same time uncreated grace can be conceived of under a certain respect as logically and really prior to created grace: in that mode namely in which a formal cause is prior to the ultimate material disposition” (“Some Implications”; Ernst, 334). The Scriptural examples include: being led by the Spirit (Rom 8:14),
Although he admits that \textit{pneuma} should not be considered primarily as a non-personal power for or quality of sanctity, Rahner sees the \textit{pneuma} in these texts signifying “a non-personal created quality of the sanctified man himself.”\footnote{Rahner, “Some Implications,”; Ernst, 321. See also 322, where he argues that sanctification does not rely so much upon God’s personal Spirit communicated to and received by the person as it does upon God’s seed, love, or witness taking its stand “upon a created quality inhering” in the person or the Spirit’s conjunction with a person resulting in the Spirit’s gift.} Indeed, he claims that inner sanctification is rather “first and foremost a communication of the personal Spirit of God,” and thus every created grace remains “a consequence and a manifestation of the possession of this uncreated grace.”\footnote{Rahner, “Some Implications,”; Ernst, 322.} Even stronger, he states that persons possess their own pneumatic being as a consequence of possessing the Spirit.\footnote{Rahner, “Some Implications,”; Ernst, 322.} So Rahner describes the Holy Spirit as the “internal, constitutive principle of the human person” beatifying her through a ‘quasi-formal’ causality.”\footnote{Caponi, “Karl Rahner,” 267, referencing Rahner, “Foundations of Christian Faith” in \textit{Theological Foundations}, 19:8-9. See also Rahner, “Some Implications”; Ernst, 332. We will come back to the role of the supernatural below.}

However, emphasis on the Spirit’s indwelling of the just that allows her to receive the beatific vision suggests pneumatology as a productive line for divine action.\footnote{Rahner, “Some Implications,”; Ernst, 325, italics original.} Can the person’s dependence upon the gift of the Spirit be reconsidered as her composite nature? Her capacity as a creature would thus include the Spirit as her ground and end, and her contemplation of God would be neither an “imaginary vision” nor a corporeal glowing with the Spirit (Rom 12:11), being sanctified and justified in the Spirit (1 Cor 2:15; 6:11), drinking of the Spirit, being anointed and sealed by the Spirit, or being created, renewed, reborn, strengthened, and illuminated by the Spirit (Eph 3:16; Tim 1:12; 2 Tim 2:1; Eph 1:18; 5:14; Heb 6:4) (“Some Implications”; Ernst, 320-321).
manifestation of God’s spiritual effects, but the progressive fulfillment of her purpose to imitate God in this life and unite with God in the resurrection.

3. Re-visioning Deification by the Spirit’s Action in Creation

Reading these enticing hints suggests more work can be done ecumenically developing the Spirit as both an originating basis for metaphors of energies, natural symbols, grace, and the supernatural and as the mediator of God and creation. But as we have seen above, developing a pneumatological metaphysics of deification remains the road not taken. Facing their differences, each model falls back on its preconceived metaphors for divine action, retreats to its primary ‘place’ on the theosis pendulum, and then treats gaps in the other’s coherence precisely on pneumatic terms. So, for instance, Loudovikos queries Thomas’ differentiation of the beatific vision from beatitude as a natural progression of the soul leaving the body. He finds this threatening to Chalcedonian christology but also notes, “[w]hat is the role of the Holy Spirit in Thomas’ vision of God? Is [the Spirit’s] role confined to helping us to get off our bodily nature, along with the passive part of our soul? And do we need the Spirit at all for something like this?” Among others, Loudovikos suggests that Palamas’ essence-energies distinction more directly connects the Holy Spirit to the work of the full Trinity in deifying the person.

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681 Thomas Aquinas, SCG III 63.10; Bourke, 209; SCG III 47.3; Bourke, 159.
682 See Nikolaos Loudovikos, “Striving for Participation,” 144.
Conversely, Antoine Lévy and John Milbank argue that the Thomist approach more fully respects the Holy Spirit. Lévy notes the identification of the Spirit with the sun, where the sanctifying energies of grace are seen as its rays while Milbank argues that the Spirit is both uncreated gift as well as the conveyor of created gifts. From Milbank:

while the Spirit is in a sense the point of ‘linkage’ between the Trinity and the Creation, this does not at all imply any ontological ‘middle realm.’ To the contrary, the striking Christian understanding of the Holy Spirit as the ontological connection enabling both creation and deification means that it is God [God’s self] who mediates between [the Divine] and creatures and that the energies which [God] communicates to them simply are [God].

The ways the two traditions already lean on the Spirit as both justification for their own constructs and as ballast for critiquing the other’s formulation underscores the sense that beginning here lays a new path. By overloading one or the other end of the deification pendulum, these deficiencies violate Tanner’s rules for theological discourse. Since many adherents of either tradition fault the other precisely on pneumatological terms, approaching this problem ecumenically prompts each tradition to acknowledge where its own reticence on the Spirit leads to the deficiencies identified by the other. To get out from under these contradictions while adhering to Tanner’s rules, theologies of deification should instead start with the pendulum itself, divine action in creation. Centering the pendulum will correctly address both its sides. And since each existing version of deification includes language tying the Spirit to both the self-determined God and the indwelt creature undergoing deification, I submit that theories of divine action can only work to hold both ends together if they are articulated pneumatically. The first way the Spirit shifts the dialogue is by attending to the Spirit in ecumenical process; the

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second move connects that process to its content.

C. Ecumenical Methodology

Grounds to focus deification debates on the Spirit are readily supplied by ecumenical methodology itself. Ecumenical practice and reflection as a whole remain permeated by pneumatological warrants. Given these ways appeal to the Spirit, I propose to employ the Spirit as the guiding lens constructing an ecumenical theosis. As a prelude, I answer concerns that a pneumatologically-centered ecumenism dissolves into theological imprecision and error. Clearing that suspicion highlights how successfully pneumatology may address the tangles of deification problems. Given the extensive apparati defining the two traditions’ theological systems, any true ecumenical exchange would need to root itself in foundational elements of Christian thought that both hold in common. When that occurs, each can give the other its own gift and accept the other’s donation precisely as a move of pneumatic receptivity.

Many analyses of dialogues as well as agreed statements tend to stress the Holy Spirit’s significance for ecumenism and often attribute their successes to the work of the Spirit. For instance, Philip J. Rosato’s 1978 piece argued that ecclesial traits can be found wherever the Spirit works. Drawing on Cardinal Kasper’s work, Rosato stressed the need to situate ecclesiology within and underneath pneumatology rather than the other way around. However, other reflections on the relation of Spirit to ecumenism sound alarms.

686 Some material in this section is adapted from my previously published essay, “‘In the Unity of the Holy Spirit’: A Third Article Theology of Receptive Ecumenism,” Third Article Theology: A Pneumatological Dogmatics, ed. Myk Habets (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2016), 463-78.
687 Philip J. Rosato, “Called by God, in the Holy Spirit: Pneumatological Insights into Ecumenism,” The Ecumenical Review 30 [April 1, 1978]: 110–26, especially 110 and 112. However, he
that identifying the Spirit at work in ecumenical dialogue may be illusory if official, structural union does not result. Jeremy Bergen cuts to the heart of the matter:

"[t]he question might be raised whether assertions of the Spirit’s leading and blessing of dialogues is premature, given that in very few cases visible unity or lived communion has been the result. While the churches together may confess many things about the Spirit … might it not be advisable to judge the presence of Spirit amid divisions by the fruit of lived communion?"

Meanwhile, the Princeton Proposal admits that “[s]hort of a decisive intervention of the Holy Spirit, the full visible unity of ‘all in each place’ described in the New Delhi statement does not lie in the immediate future.” It is by no means clear how such an intervention could be recognized by different traditions as long as their senses of the Spirit and the Spirit’s relation to ecumenism remain so disparate.


690 See Michael Root’s warning that “our failure to live out the unity we are given is nothing less than a frustration of the Spirit’s work” to constitute and preserve the life of the church, in “Essential Unity and Lived Communion: The Interrelation of the Unity We Have and the Unity We Seek,” in The Ecumenical Future: Background Papers for In One Body through the Cross, the Princeton Proposal for Christian Unity, ed. Carl E. Braaten and Robert W. Jenson (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004), 106-25, at
Perhaps it is the attempt to privilege the Holy Spirit within ecumenism that goes amiss. Some worry that an overly pliable pneumatology vitiates Christian theology of its content. Along these lines, Ephraim Radner argued for “a limited pneumatological definition of Christian unity,” as in his view, only “a more exclusive christological explanation” brings reconciliation. Radner focuses on the insufficient pneumatology of three seventeenth-century theologians, the trajectories of whose arguments misdirect contemporary discussions of unity—although he also spends time charting how aspects of earlier theological stances paved the way for these errors.

In particular, Radner notes that Augustine’s famous naming of the Spirit as “love” can be used to reduce the Spirit into a principle of “pneumatic abstraction.” This potential for decoupling the Spirit from Christian particularities he sees originally held in check by early and medieval commitments connecting the Spirit to loving unity via submission to Scripture and christological character. For Radner, the modern era decouples these links, which leads astray the ecumenical movement’s understandable move to set a nonmaterial arbiter of union—the Spirit—in place of various idolatrous alternatives. Therefore, if ecumenism’s focus on the Spirit is maintained, it must be

123. See also Douglas Koskela’s analysis of Yves Congar’s contributions to ecclesiology in light of the Spirit rings true in a wider context: though the need to subordinate church to Spirit remains a significant advance, differing conceptions of precisely how this intersection of pneumatology and ecclesiology should be framed still create ecumenical disjunction (Ecclesiaity and Ecumenism: Yves Congar and the Road to Unity [Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 2008], at 159–60).


qualified by the acknowledgment that the Spirit demonstrates the divine priority of union—the “fact” of the divine instrument of unity—while the “form” of union remains Christ. “Nothing,” Radner concludes, ‘looks like the Spirit’; the Spirit reveals all that there is that has a ‘look’ and thus a form, and this ‘mind of God’ is Christ himself … the Spirit recedes behind all these forms, for the sake of absolutizing their practical value … it is Christ’s concreteness that emerges, as that one concrete element of God that is given to us redemptively … the Spirit presses him forward into our midst so that there is nothing else to be seen.696

So is all this ecumenical attention given to the Spirit a diversion of theological energy and focus that will water down dialogue in general or deification in particular? I think not. There is much in Radner’s analysis that I find compelling. I consider worthwhile his argument detailing the loosening of pneumatology from shaping the form of Christ and the consequences for ecclesial unity. I happily accept his admonishments that unity “looks like” and ought to be defined by the character of Christ, and that it is the special task of the Spirit to reveal such a form. Nevertheless, I find troubling the statement that for Christ’s “concreteness” to “emerge” the Spirit would need to “recede.” This almost seems to pit the divine Persons against one another rather than explicate their union as the Trinity. I suspect that the problems Radner detects are not a necessary function of all pneumatology but rather the results of current poorly conceived pneumatology.

First, Radner’s portrayal of what he takes to be modern pneumatological errors can support his analysis but not necessarily his proposed response. For instance, Radner’s own claim that the Spirit still holds the responsibility to “press” Christ “forward into our midst” provides a counterpoint to his argument. One could argue that an accurate

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understanding of the Spirit cannot entail the former getting in the way of Christ because the Holy Spirit, properly understood, unites persons and communities to Christ by forming Christ within them. The Spirit remains active, not just a “fact” of divine union but its necessary constitution that can then be mutually recognized. If we take seriously Radner’s concerns over pneumatological errors, the path towards resolution of such blunders should seek not to circumvent the Spirit but rather run right back through pneumatology.

Second, Radner’s fears of pneumatological fuzziness may impose an unrealistic standard that cannot accurately depict the ways in which any theological tenet has actually been developed over time. Surprises and redirections have always marked theological construction and application, as the detailed explorations of the two deification models above amply demonstrated. To settle a matter such that further discernment is no longer required does not accurately reflect how theology has ever worked.\textsuperscript{697} To interpret and take part in these intricate dance steps requires constantly recalibrating expectations and building up fortitude.

Advocates acknowledge that ecumenical processes in and of themselves cannot produce such a posture. Rather, a truly mutually-receptive and fruitful ecumenism “is a work of the Spirit which stirs both in grace-filled delight in another’s beauties and in a longing awareness of a fitting match between our own particular lacks and needs and the other’s particular gifts.”\textsuperscript{698} Robert Taft remarks, “[i]t is a contest in reverse, a contest of

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\textsuperscript{697} Radner’s insistences can be traced to his perspective on the Anglican schisms in the United States. See Ephraim Radner and Philip Turner, \textit{The Fate of Communion: The Agony of Anglicanism and the Future of a Global Church} (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2006) and Radern’s own \textit{A Brutal Unity: The Spiritual Politics of the Christian Church} (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2012).

Christian love,” where the “theological foundation is our common faith that God’s Holy Spirit is always with his Church, protecting the integrity of its witness.”\(^{699}\) Scholars of ecumenical method acknowledge how the discipline uniquely recognizes its practices and content as not just traced to theological acumen, or good intentions, but as gifted by the Holy Spirit.\(^{700}\) The prevalence of appeals to the Spirit to shape the posture of ecumenical dialogue evokes the promise of a different dialogic method.

Kevin Hector’s recent work on the Spirit of recognition proves instructive.\(^{701}\) Hector argues that the ascension of Christ does not convert the authoritative presence of God into either Scripture or church. Rather, via the Spirit, Christ’s ascension draws all into the Trinity as well as towards one another. Hector explains:

> the Spirit, on this account, is first of all the Spirit of Christ’s recognition of what counts as following him, a Spirit he conveyed to those whose practices he recognized, and that they conveyed to still others. In this way, the norms according to which Christ assessed whether one was following him were passed along to others, and, since these norms are the means by which one is transformed to Christ, it follows that this account provides some explanation of one of the central works traditionally ascribed to the Holy Spirit.\(^{702}\)

The Spirit enables people and communities to go on in the same ways Christ demonstrated to be revelatory of God.\(^{703}\) Identifying anything as disclosive of God and thus authoritative for Christian community therefore depends upon the mutual recognition of Christ’s normative Spirit indwelling believers. This means that conformity

\(^{699}\) Taft, “Perceptions and Realities,” 38.

\(^{700}\) See Braaten and Jenson, “In One Body Through the Cross,” §3-6, 12-15.


\(^{702}\) Hector, *Theology without Metaphysics*, 91.

\(^{703}\) Hector, *Theology without Metaphysics*, 191.
to Christ can be acknowledged even across areas of significant doctrinal difference so that discerning a *shared identity* does not depend upon the parties becoming *identical*.704

This Spirit of recognition does not render ecclesial boundaries totally relative; rather, it offers a new way to understand how such boundaries shift when they intersect a new context, perhaps especially in ecumenical dialogue. If dialogue experiences of gaining mutual understanding, accepting the others’ questions and concerns as legitimate, and lifting up what is good in both the own and the other community can be identified as the Spirit at work, the debate over *theosis* cracks open. Given the necessity of both ‘ends’ of the deification pendulum and the ways each model maintains its distinctives as legitimate for its own construct, each tradition can acknowledge the Spirit at work in the experiences, language, and metaphysical commitments of both self and other. The task remains how to synthesize these offerings.

Here, I part ways with Hector, who believes that arguing for the Spirit of recognition renders metaphysics unnecessary. With Rowan Williams’ critique of Hector, I see theological claims always entailing metaphysical constructs.705 Differing from both, I think what is needed is a metaphysics grounded upon the Spirit of recognition Hector so brilliantly describes. Only such a metaphysics could do justice to deification as the union of all with God in and through their own differences. The Spirit proves the key not just to animate the *method* for grappling with deification but also for reconsidering the *content* of the doctrine. In other words, since dialogue depends upon the Spirit for its justification

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and sense of process, acknowledging the Spirit at work in and through the dialogue leads
towards looking for the Spirit within the content of this particular ecumenical
disagreement; at the same time, centering pneumatological aspects of deification will
then also support continued work necessary for mutual conversion and constructive path-
forging. In fact, statements alluding to the Spirit’s power and place in deification can be
tracked in several of the sources I have already identified above. However, no theology of
theosis has advanced a full pneumatological solution.

At the same time, the historically underdeveloped and flexible nature of
pneumatology some find troubling actually proves beneficial. As Daniel Castelo has
recently argued, far from representing a theological drawback or vulnerability, pneumatic
imprecision can actually benefit attempts to shape a “pneumatological cosmology.”706
Perhaps only this accommodating Spirit can serve as an umbrella capacious enough to
both re-read and combine the deification traditions in a double-scope network. Perhaps
only the Spirit can sweep up the variously-defined experiences that give rise to the
theological terms and metaphysical structures at both ‘ends’ of the deification pendulum
by proving convertible with both the locus of divine self-determination and the locus of
creaturely capacity.

In fact, the year after Weinandy’s conclusions were published, D. Lyle Dabney
contributed his own suggestion that modern theology needs to turn to the Spirit (as
relational, as language) as its rightful prolegomenon over either ontology (the Father) or

2015), 5-6, 8-9, 13-18, 42-3; ‘pneumatological cosmology’ originates on 77.
epistemology (the Son). Dabney follows Jenson in seeking an interpersonal, transjective Spirit in order to move theologies of divine action away from either claiming absolute continuity with God through specific institutions or positing an absolute discontinuity that requires God to disrupt creation. For Dabney, merely living already centers one on the Other—the God from whom our own life comes. Beginning with the Spirit who grounds this participative relationship correctly orients speech about God:

> [t]he Spirit of God is not human spirit aspiring to the divine, but neither is it the subjectivity of God making an object of the human. Indeed, rather than subjective or objective, the Spirit is better conceived as transjective; that is to say, that by which we as individuals are transcended, engaged, oriented beyond ourselves, and related to God and neighbor from the very beginning.

Here, the otherness between God and creation presupposes not just difference but also relatedness, and it is the Holy Spirit, the one in whom we know ourselves to be engaged with God, who makes possible this genuine connected otherness of created beings and the divine.

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709 Dabney, “Otherwise Engaged,” 161, italics original. Note his difference here from the Milbank-Radner contingency. Dabney’s comments here prove promising for an engagement with Balthasar’s later intersubjective pneumatology, a connection I hope to take up at greater length in the future.

Dabney argues that focusing on the Spirit can thus bridge the gaps separating theological systems that emphasize creaturely capacity from those that emphasize divine difference. Starting with the Spirit enables one to name the possibility of God known “even in the midst of every impossibility” as evinced by the Trinitarian kenosis of God creating, incarnate, crucified, and resurrected. He suggests,

[t]he Spirit of which such a theology speaks, therefore, is defined neither in terms of a general ontology or anthropology nor simply as the bearer of a redemptive message from the God who stands over and against us in Christ. Rather, the Spirit of God, this theology insists, is the Spirit of the cross; the Spirit, that is to say, of the Trinitarian event of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, an event in which God has entered into our death and made it God’s own and has thereby taken us into God’s life and made it our own.

Dabney shows the Spirit carrying through all of creation God’s action in Christ, where language and relation of all things are always already their dependent participation in God. His return to the Spirit can explode entrenched disagreements. The Spirit also enables theology to keep Tanner’s rules, wherein God’s transcendence does not collapse into or oppose creatures, but rather defends divine agency as present in while not constrained by creatureliness.


713 Dabney, “Last be First?,” 255. Once again, connections with Balthasar come into view, particularly the ways he grounds all of his theology in his explorations of the Paschal Mystery and as he has been re-read by critics such as Linn Marie Tonstad (see especially her article “Sexual Difference and Trinitarian Death: Cross, Kenosis and Hierarchy in the Theo-Drama,” Modern Theology 26/4 [2010]: 603-631, at 625: “[i]nstead of focusing what must be possible for God on the basis of the cross, resurrection—considered not merely as a restitution of wrongness, but more fully as the inauguration of a new, irreversible reality where friendship and adoptive relations structure the whole cosmos—needs to become the lens through which trinitarian theology considers the whole of the divine economy as well as the being of God itself”). See my forthcoming article, “The Dove Beyond the Abyss.”
These suggestions for reclaiming pneumatology hold promise for *theosis*, because they acknowledge the ways the traditions have developed various descriptions of religious experience *and* of the self-determined God into differing sets of hardened or literalized metaphors. They respond by articulating how accounts of pneumatic action can sweep up and re-align these differing accounts, which seems especially promising for ecumenical purposes. Pneumatic language metaphysically maintains both ends of the deification pendulum—creaturely capacity and divine self-determination—by operating less as an interpolation from ‘outside’ and more as a renewed, dialogically-experienced way of seeing the other’s experience, terminology, and structures as already involved in seeking the Spirit. These approaches allow the Spirit to be retrieved in direct connection with divine action.

Starting with the Spirit *as* the pendulum of deification itself can incorporate the full deification pendulum, combining the Thomist understanding of God as the simple pure act with the hesychast understanding of the energies as divine actions that composite creatures can join in without exhausting the divine essence *in se*. To begin with the Spirit thus lifts up the distinct components of each model by relating the simple, transcendent divine self-determination along *and* the permeability of the body to divine glory by signifying *both* intellectual contemplation *and* embodied prayer, requiring *both* practiced virtues *and* passionate receptivity to the divine transformation, and describing divine action as analogy *and* synergy, mystery *and* revelation. What happens when, at the dialogue table, the two trajectories first turn to the Spirit as divine action in the world? Can energies, symbols, grace, the supernatural, and Sophia now name the Spirit’s
tabernacling among bodies that does not threaten God? How might reclaiming the Spirit as divine action balance the full deification pendulum?

III. “Filled with the Fullness of the Gifts of God”: Contours of A Pneumatic Theosis

A. Pneumatic Hints in the Three Traditions

Describing pneumatic divine action requires highlighting existing efforts. We have seen the Spirit feature in Aquinas as the indwelling agent whose interaction with the receptive person’s own *pneuma* prepares her for the beatific vision and in Palamas as the one whose power enables the receptive person to see God. In addition to these gestures noted above, a few contemporary discussions lay claim to the Spirit. Russell’s exhaustive treatment of the development of *theosis* in the patristic traditions includes the focus on the Spirit held by many contributors: facilitating reception of Christ in the Pauline letters, granting eternal life and new creation in Johannine writings, enabling the vision of God in Justin Martyr, in Tatian and Irenaeus enabling return to God, in Origen working participation in Christ, making baptism deifying for Didymus the Blind, deifying believers without obliterating their bodies in Athanasius, appropriating the divine life to persons by becoming in us “some quality…of the Godhead” for Cyril, and in Macarius as the presence guaranteeing salvation. Yet beyond making these references and mentioning how the Eastern Orthodox position attempts to respond to ontological issues, Russell does not offer a prescriptive schema.

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As I noted in my discussion of Blackwell, he finds the nature of *pneuma* the point of departure between an attributive deification or an essential deification—between a deification defined in ways which Reformed Protestants can accept and a deification that pushes into areas of synergy/theurgy. In attributive deification, the Spirit mediates divine presence while remaining separate; to the contrary, essential deification posits Spirit as “divine material in which believers come to share.”715 Blackwell’s work concerns itself to keep deification on the attributive end of the spectrum. However, he also describes attributive deification as granting the person “a pneumatic body” through the personal presence of the Spirit.716 What this means in terms of any impacts on the person from the mechanics of sharing in divine presence is not quite clear. In a similar manner, Habets claims the agency of the Spirit in bringing *theosis* about: “the operation of the Spirit,” “through Christ and the Spirit,” “the Spirit is Christ’s other self through whose presence in us Christ makes himself present to us,” “*theosis* [is] the participation of human being in the divine being through the Son and by the Holy Spirit,” “*theosis* is the consubstantial self-giving of God to humankind through Christ and the Spirit.”717 In fact, Habets’ disagreement with a (neo-)hesychast rendering of deification stems from the concern that calling God’s presence in the person the energies vitiates the divinity of Christ and the Spirit.718

Other contemporary texts dealing overtly with how deification takes place tend to leave the role of the Holy Spirit underdeveloped, if they even mention it at all. One exception remains the 2010 translation of Ivan Popov’s work from the turn of the

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718 Habets, “Reformed *Theosis*,” 494.
twentieth century, which sets out a detailed description of deification’s workings that does stress the Spirit. Popov’s treatment of the pneumatological dimensions of a “realistic” approach to theosis strengthens my rationale for returning to the early sources in order to highlight the pneumatological significance of the doctrine.719 But his work remains outside of mainstream conversations on deification and has not yet been integrated into systematic considerations of how deification works. Meanwhile, Baker’s powerful but isolated sentences about the Holy Spirit’s role in empowering the believer’s reception of divinity do not formulate a coherent logic of deification’s process (although his postlude on Vesta as the one who “always comes to where [the Son] is” hits closer to the mark).720 The Spirit’s full significance for deification will have to be sought elsewhere.

B. Towards a Pneumatic Theosis

The rest of this chapter details some initial ways returning the traditions on theosis to the Spirit may help them reformulate this important doctrine. Mindful of the freight bound up in this effort, I adapt Robert Taft’s approach by sourcing texts on the Spirit of earlier purview than either of the two models’ settled formulations. Taft privileges the first millennium of Christianity out of concern to re-set the playing field with shared elements. Advancing deification beyond single-scope or mirror-networking and into a tectonically-shifting, double-scope network benefits from prioritizing Scripture and patristic theology as the authoritative materials all streams of Christianity still share.


720 Baker, Diagonal Advance, 301-323.
Confining analysis to these shared elements provides safe boundaries for a constructive approach that will otherwise appear too radical to bear. A shared starting point narrows down possibilities and prompts greater awareness of ecclesial communities’ theological dependence upon the past, which also helps foster greater interdependence for the present and future.

In keeping with Taft’s recommendations, I select the contributions of Didymus the Blind and Denys the Areopagite. Composing *On the Holy Spirit* between roughly 360-365, Didymus writes early enough to provide significant theological foundations that escape later divisive definitions. His work proved influential for the development of Nicene and post-Nicene pneumatology, which suits him for a place at the deification table. With regard to Denys, Thomas quotes him second only to Augustine, and the East has never questioned his influence. He also supplies the definition for *theosis* with which I have been working throughout this project: becoming one with and like God as far as possible. Reclaiming their theologies as sources for both hesychasm and Thomism provides a common anchor for a reinvigorated sense of divine action in the world. Laying claim to them does not suggest that Palamas and Thomas corrupt a more pristine form of theology that must be recovered to correct later developments. Rather, given recent turns to the Spirit, their work can now be reconsidered in company with contemporary voices in order to form a more comprehensive pneumatological deification.

At the same time, Taft also stresses the need for theology to nevertheless take stock of “the ongoing witness of the Spirit-guided apostolic Christendom of the East and
Including other voices besides the loudest partners at the specific table widens the scope of Christian theology at the same time that it exhibits faithfulness to the traditions. I accomplish this goal by pointing to work done by Protestant theologians intersecting with deification loci, especially in terms of engaging Scripture as the privileged location for those communities. Once more, attention to the Spirited posture by which one pursues constructive theology in the company of the other creates a new religious experience generating language, theology, metaphysics, and communal fellowship. The heart of union with God and thus one another can be retrieved as *profoundly and reliably* a function of pneumatology.\(^{722}\)

As we explore how the Spirit of divine action holds together the two ends of deification—divine self-determination and creaturely capacity—I attend to how thinking deification in pneumatic terms better adheres to Tanner’s rules for theological discourse than either of the two models on their own has achieved. By advocating for a pneumatic rendering of divine action in creation, I do not imply that Father and Son can somehow be absent from the Spirit’s operation. Rather, I claim that deification may be the special economic purview of the Spirit, who with the Son serves as Irenaeus’ two hands of the Father. Avoiding getting stuck on either end of the deification pendulum, pneumatic divine action claims that God the Spirit is also always already the pendulum itself, specially witnessing to both divine self-determination and creaturely capacity. Beginning with divine action in creation, the way that merely existing means one is already being

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\(^{721}\) Taft, “Perceptions and Realities,” 38-39. See also Maffeis’ description of the role Scripture can play in new ecumenical work: Scripture serves as “witness of the constitutive moment of the tradition and, therefore, offers the basic criteria of discernment” (Maffeis, *Ecumenical Dialogue*, 74).

\(^{722}\) Since my focus is more on RE as a mind-set and less on ecclesiology, my take here differs somewhat from that of Denis Edwards, “The Holy Spirit as the Gift.” I hope that what follows displays consonances with Edwards’s excellent piece.
caught up in the life of God by the Spirit, shows us most correctly both ends of the
deification continuum. Orienting divine action pneumatically contains the energies,
natural symbols, grace, and supernatural by showing them as names for the self-
determined Spirit at work within creaturely capacities. Only the Spirit can contain all of
these metaphorical names for God’s action while being literalized as one of the Trinity.

I begin with pneumatic divine action disclosing the self-determining God, then
turn to deifying pneumatic divine action constituting creaturely capacity. For each locus,
I show how this focus on the Spirit could re-read the opposing spiritual experience-
theological terminology-metaphysical structures the communions have developed. I
suggest ways the deification models can continue this pneumatic ressourcement of one
another to fill out a comprehensive doctrine. I conclude by gesturing to ways a pneumatic
theon can help redirect other important theological concerns.

1. **Pneumatic Action Discloses the Self-Determined God**

   Though Didymus’ primary aim consists of proving the Spirit’s full divinity, his
arguments intriguingly connect with deification. Didymus establishes the Spirit’s equality
with Father and Son using a double-pronged approach, whereby the character and the
fruit of the Spirit’s actions prove the Spirit’s identity. His argument sharpens how the
self-determined divine remains radically available within the core of creation.
Understanding the Spirit by Didymus’ logic pushes deification to begin ‘in the middle,’
understanding all theological descriptions of all divine action as already located in the
midst of what God has always already been doing. I begin with character; fruit will be
examined under creaturely capacity.
Historian Lewis Ayres shows Didymus relying upon the idea of the Divine as “undiminished giver.” In Philo, the divine or the first principle is that which can give without suffering loss; in Athanasius, a person’s knowledge and virtue demonstrate “a participation in the undiminished giver’s gift of itself.” Didymus applies this lineage to argue that being an undiminished giver, participable yet incorruptible, distinguishes the Divine from creation. If the Spirit acts in these ways, as ‘undiminished giver,’ it too must be fully divine. And indeed, Scripture describes the Spirit as the one in whom Christians participate, the one in whom they receive a share when they enjoy communion with God: “those who enjoy communion with [her] are called ‘sharers’ in the Holy Spirit.” When the Spirit indwells, those indwelt receive the benefits of communion with God. Because Scripture describes this indwelling as producing “speech, wisdom and knowledge,” the Spirit does not itself participate in such virtues. For “that which is essentially good cannot be capable of participating in an external goodness, since it is what bestows goodness on other things.” Because the Spirit does not rely upon anything else for the strength of these sanctifying and virtue-promoting actions, the Spirit is not mutable like a creature.

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723 Didymus the Blind, On the Holy Spirit, 2.21-24; DelCogliano, 150.
724 Didymus the Blind, On the Holy Spirit, 2.13; DelCogliano, 147.
725 Didymus the Blind, On the Holy Spirit, 2.10; DelCogliano, 146.
As Richard Layton remarks, Didymus’ entire school was predicated upon practicing wise exegesis as mimetic pursuit of God.\(^7\) \(^2\) Didymus notes elsewhere that just as Scripture calls the Son the Father’s Hand or Arm without meaning that God has parts, so, too, the texts naming the Spirit as the Father’s Finger should not be considered in a “lowly” fashion, as of bodily limbs in their sizes and proportions.\(^7\) \(^2\) Thus, reading Scripture ends up providing proofs of the Spirit’s divinity that is co-equal with Father and Son, which then confirms the Spirit’s involvement in directing scriptural interpretation as a mode of participation in the Spirit as one of the Trinity.

Didymus drives home the logic:

[S]ince an invisible creature…cannot be participated in but is capable of participating (for if it could be participated in, it would not be capable of participating in any good), although it is simple in itself and receives another’s good, it must have its good by participation and must not be thought to be placed among those possessed by others but rather among those possessing other things. For the Father and the Son are possessed rather than possessors, but the creature possesses while not being possessed. Let us once more consider the Holy Spirit: if [s]he too is actually holy through participation in another’s sanctity, then [s]he should be classified with the rest of creatures. But if [s]he sanctifies those who are capable of participating in [her], then [s]he should be placed with the Father and the Son.\(^7\) \(^3\) From all of this we learn that the substance of the Holy Spirit can be participated in, and because of this, that [s]he is uncreated.\(^7\) \(^3\)

The undiminished giver is not bound by spatial restrictions, nor, as the fount of all being, operative only ‘within’ the divine nature. So, though Scripture names the Spirit using creaturely terms, the Spirit comprises the substance of what deifies the person. Therefore, experiences of participating in the Spirit do not subject God to creation but actually confirm the Spirit’s divine identity.

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\(^7\) \(^2\) See Richard Layton, *Didymus the Blind and His Circle in Late-Antique Alexandria: Virtue and Narrative in Biblical Scholarship* (Urbana and Chicago, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2004), esp. 8-35.

\(^7\) \(^2\) Didymus the Blind, *On the Holy Spirit*, 3.87; DelCogliano, 170-1.

\(^7\) \(^3\) Didymus, *On the Holy Spirit*, 2.18-19; DelCogliano, 149.

\(^7\) \(^3\) Didymus *On the Holy Spirit*, 2.54; DelCogliano, 160.
The Spirit as undiminished giver heightens understandings of God as the one and only participable, shared in as the basis of all existence. Rather than positing a static God opposed to the yearnings of creation, Didymus terms the Spirit’s nature “active and ‘distributing.’” Didymus cites John 20:22 and Matt 28:19 to note that the Spirit is not partitioned by being partaken of by those dispersed across numerous physical locations. For, if the Holy Spirit were one of the creatures, [s]he would indeed have a circumscribed substance just like all things which are made. For even if invisible creatures are not circumscribed by place and limits, they are nonetheless limited by the distinctive feature of their substance. But the Holy Spirit, even though [s]he is in many, does not have a circumscribed substance.

Therefore, if those stationed at the farthest ends of the earth in order to bear witness to the Lord were separated from each other by the greatest possible distances, and yet the Holy Spirit was present to and indwelt them, then it is clear that the substance of the indweller is uncircumscribed. Thus “[t]he Holy Spirit also sanctifies those whom [s]he deigns to fill, as we have already demonstrated above when we showed that [s]he can be participated in and received by many at the same time.” The Spirit uniquely fills each person, drawing each to distinctly witness to the Spirit by granting her the multiple titles and names recorded in Scripture.

Meanwhile, Denys picks up on this view of divine action as the ground of deification. When he begins his treatise On the Divine Names, he describes the Divine One as “there at the center of everything and everything has it for a destiny.”

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732 Didymus the Blind, On the Holy Spirit 3.97; DelCogliano, 174. See also 4.112-3;179.
733 Didymus the Blind, On the Holy Spirit 2.22; DelCogliano, 150.
734 Didymus the Blind, On the Holy Spirit 2.21; DelCogliano, 150.
735 Didymus the Blind, On the Holy Spirit 2.23; DelCogliano, 150.
736 Didymus the Blind, On the Holy Spirit 6.236; DelCogliano, 216.
737 Didymus the Blind, On the Holy Spirit 3.36; DelCogliano, 155.
Therefore, God must be understood as “the life of the living, the being of beings, it is the Source and the Cause of all life and of all being, for out of its goodness it commands all things to be and it keeps them going.” Looking carefully at these quotes, we may at first glance easily affirm common tropes of transcendence: God exists before, and above, and beyond all things, separate from creaturely finitude. Yet at second sight, God’s transcendence brings God closer to creation than each being is to itself. For Denys employs paradoxical definitions to alert the reader that when theology speaks of the God who remains beyond human grasp, it could not make such assertions unless God also communicated in loving revelations “proportionate to each being.”

Thus, God is not just the cause of cohesion or life or perfection so that it is from this or that providential gesture that it earns a name, but it actually contains everything beforehand within itself—and this in an uncomplicated and boundless manner—and it is thus by virtue of the unlimited goodness of its single all-creative Providence. Hence the songs of praise and the names for it are fittingly derived from the sum total of creation.

Denys illuminates divine transcendence not as God’s opposition or competition with creation but rather as how God serves as the source and grounding, life and growth, support and goal of all life. God as transcendent means that God remains near at hand. In other words, theology can only know God’s transcendence of the world by knowing God acting in the world. Such knowledge remains a never-ending quest.

Moreover, this action that both calls creation into existence and maintains it from within continues to unfold across time. Thus, Denys writes,

as Cause of all and as transcending all, he is rightly nameless and yet has the names of everything that is. Truly he has dominion over all and all things revolve around him, for he is their cause, their source, and their destiny. He is ‘all in all,’ as scripture affirms, and

Luibheid, 54. As he continues, referencing Col. 1:17, God is “there before all things and in it all things hold together.” Because it is there the world has come to be and exists. All things long for it” (Ibid).

Denys, The Divine Names I.3; Luibheid, 51.

Denys, The Divine Names, I.2; Luibheid, 50. God attracts “sacred minds upward to its permitted contemplation, to participation and to the state of becoming like it” (Ibid).

Denys, The Divine Names I.7; Luibheid, 56.
certainly he is to be praised as being for all things the creator and originator, the One who brings them to completion, their preserver, their protector, and their home, the power which returns them to itself, and all this in the one single, irrepressible, and supreme act…742

As God contains all things known as well as those yet unknown, the names creation gives to God are as incomplete as the whole creation itself is. Nevertheless, naming and praising God with its own gifted radiance is precisely creation’s task. This rendering powerfully underlines what both hesychasm and Thomism wish to maintain: that the God who is simple—in fact, the only truly simple One—grounds the lives of all beings that exist, which are by definition composite. Yet Denys’ statements also chasten the ways Thomas and Palamas exclude one another’s terminology and metaphysics. Denys insists that divine action should be seen as the self-propelled, self-sustaining life of the Trinity, the pure act in which all else must participate for its own life, energy, and actions.

Putting Denys together with Diymus’ undiminished Spirit calls theologies of deification to avoid presenting the divine self-determination with whom the creature unites as moving from a top down, or indeed from the bottom up, in opposition to creaturely capacity. The previous models remain incomplete as long as they remain isolated from each other. Their opposition keeps them from actually metaphysically grounding, theologically describing, and ecumenically experiencing the union of deification because their theologies do not reach across the full deification pendulum. Rather, they should begin by understanding divine self-determination as already present, active within, and witnessed by creation. Recognizing the Spirit of divine action as already at work, showing divine self-determination present in creaturely bodies, lets the communities see God in one another’s models. Tanner’s insistence that divine

742 Denys, The Divine Names I.7; Luibheid, 56.
transcendence not be read as opposition to creation nor divine agency as possible of being constricted by anything, even by creaturely modes themselves, here works hand in hand with theosis. Indeed, her rules require such a doctrine to maintain both claims.

If the two deification models discipline themselves by these earlier shared resources, they will need to edit their later developments. For hesychasm, in a major revision, the application of Aristotle’s essence-energy or essence-activity divide to God’s own self can be seen as misdirected. Such a distinction cannot apply to God, but rather describes created beings who alone may or may not act in accordance with their true identity as participating within the Divine’s own gracious life. For Palamas and those following in his wake, accepting these edits allows the original basis for the essence-energies distinction—to preserve divine action as truly accessed by the person within her mortal body—to finally blossom. Palamas’ drawing of the whole person—including emotions and passions—into the character and form of Christ’s own life can now be defended by the agency of the undiminished Spirit. The energies’ instantiations of light, life, radiance, and so on are now viewed as multitudinous manifestations of one God that do not entail division of the divine Principle. Palamas’ insistence that the person shares in God’s own activity in the world can be affirmed, revised by Didymus’ and Thomas’ acknowledgment that God’s actions and substance are one. Created beings thus become additional natural symbols in the world of God’s own self, united with the entirely simple God who as pure act cannot be partitioned into substance versus activity. Denying any third-order interposing mediator between God and creation also means rejecting an uncreated Sophia.
Rather, reclaiming undiminished giver theology bears some affinities to John Zizioulas’ revision of the essence-energies distinction, where in place of considering energies as potentially impersonal or apersonal, the reception of the risen Christ in the Eucharist via the Spirit allows the one being deified to receive her own personhood as she shares in Christ’s personhood.743 Bringing Didymus’ Spirit as undiminished giver into this discussion would press Zizioulas to deepen his pneumatological basis. Particularly, Zizioulas’ highlight of God as Trinity should connect access to the risen Christ with the gift of the Spirit’s own life, character, and fruit. It would also press Zizioulas to engage the very real concern that his model of deification risks casting those ‘outside’ of the churches’ Eucharist fellowship as less than those included (and which churches’ tables offer true personhood will always raise another set of questions). Though Zizioulas acknowledges the Spirit’s agency in connecting partakers of the divine nature with the new life of the risen Christ, the Spirit’s role could be developed more fully, particularly with regards to understanding the Spirit at work in all of creation (on which, see the discussion of creaturely capacity that follows).

743 See John D. Zizioulas, Being as Communion: Studies in Personhood and the Church (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1985), especially 110-42, as well as Aristotle Papanikolaou’s helpful summary in “Divine Energies or Divine Personhood: Vladimir Lossky and John Zizioulas on Conceiving the Transcendence and Immanent God,” Modern Theology 19/3 [July 2003]: 357-85. Zizioulas reworks hypostasis from simply describing the irreducible distinctions in God or the union of divine and human natures in Christ; rather, the term signifies the realization divine-human communion itself (“Divine Energies or Divine Personhood,” 377-8). Bringing Didymus’ Spirit as undiminished giver into this discussion would press Zizioulas to deepen his pneumatological basis for theosis. Particularly, the Trinitarian God marking the divine-human communion Zizioulas wishes to highlight should connect the person of the risen Christ with the gift of the Spirit’s own life, character, and fruit. It would also press Zizioulas to engage the very real concern that his model of deification risks justifying abuses against those ‘outside’ of the churches’ Eucharist fellowship, as they are less than persons (and which churches’ tables offer true personhood will always raise another set of questions). Though Zizioulas acknowledges the Spirit’s agency in connecting partakers of the divine nature with the new life of the risen Christ, the Spirit’s role could be developed more fully, particularly with regards to understanding the Spirit at work in all of creation.
On the other hand, the undiminished giver also carries implications for Thomas’ bifurcation of uncreated and created grace, de Lubac’s account of the supernatural, and Rahner’s description of the supernatural existential. The undiminished giver may reverse Thomas’ denial of Lombard’s identification of the Holy Spirit as the charity alive in the beatified person. For Didymus such concerns need not apply. As the traditions that follow Thomas insist, God as pure act simply is the ground of all. The divine substance and activity remain one, maintaining Thomist divine simplicity. At the same time, as Thomas earlier admits, all beings already share in the ground of their Being. Otherwise they could not exist or act. Thus, the one being deified experiences her existence, actions, desires, will and intellect transcended by being engaged, and she is returned to them in a manner consistent with hesychasm’s view of the prayers that continue during the person’s daily actions, even passionate ones.

Such a view creates a modified return to Richard Fishacre’s commentary on Lombard’s Sentences, where he suggests that the Holy Spirit unites with the person’s will to produce the charity of created virtuous acts. Fishacre considers such virtue as both an action of the soul and an act of God, who shares out with the person the divine substance which is the divine action. Geertjan Zuijdweig points out why Thomas disagreed. For Thomas, operation in matters of perfection follows the proximate cause, not the first cause—thus, there must be a created likeness to the Holy Spirit through a

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745 See especially Zuijdweig, “‘Utrum caritas, ’” 54-7.
746 Zuijdweig, “‘Utrum caritas, ’” 57, referencing and translating Richard Fishacre, In primum/a librum Sententiarum (1241-1245), d. 17, c. 10, p. 353, 221-6.
form present within the soul, deliberately willed by the person. Yet if we overlay Didymus’ theology of the Spirit as undiminished giver, the virtues and habits of the ones being deified are themselves the presence of the Holy Spirit made real within the person’s distinct material existence, with no additional ontological layer required. As the ground of all being, virtue, free will, right desire, and truth, God can always only give God’s own self.

Reclaiming pneumatic divine action as the best way to identify divine self-determination chastens both current models. The hesychast worry that only a distinction between essence and energies rules out pantheism meets a corrective also given to Thomism: God’s direct sharing of the full divine substance with created beings does not vitiate God. Indeed, such sharing only underscores divine self-determination. Thus, in a pneumatic deification uncreated grace and the divine energies simply designate the gift who is the Spirit, present within the specific and unique ways God continues to meet and call each creature forward. Grace is not a thing in God or the world, neither are the divine actions cut off from the divine will or substance. Thus they do not need to be pressed into a different mode to become compatible with creation; rather, they simply name divine action at work within matter. This pneumatological correction casts divine action in the world as creaturely sharing in God without that partitioning or disrupting the Divine.

Moreover, as the two major traditions surveyed above practice receiving these resources already present in the other’s tradition, they find themselves joined by younger voices in theology who cannot accept previous paradigms of theosis but do wish to

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engage the Spirit. Reading Denys’ account of divine action through the Spirit corrects strained language contrasting ‘metaphorical’ to ‘literal’ participation or setting up ‘participation’ or ‘sanctification’ as preferred alternatives to ‘deification.’ Insisting upon calling relation with God by these other terms, as many Protestants do, rather stunningly misses the point. Denys shows that there is no such thing as a generic participation; no such thing as a metaphysics-free Christianity. The one being deified can always only participate in the God “in whom we live and move and have our being” (Acts 17:28, NRSV). In fact, paying attention to how Denys names himself after one of the persons listed in this Acts account of Paul’s converts from the Areopagus sharpens the matter. The chapter describes Paul presenting to Athenians the futility of trying to worship all possible gods, including unknown ones, through the shrines made by human hands. Paul declares that a God who creates “the world and everything in it…does not live in shrines made by human hands, nor is he served by human hands, as though he needed anything, since he himself gives to all mortals life and breath and all things” (Acts 17:24-25, NRSV). On the basis of the resurrection, he proclaims such a God “not far from each one of us” (Acts 17:27, NRSV), perfectly articulating divine self-determination according to Tanner’s rules. This earliest account of Christian mission establishes grounds for deification on the basis of a God who, without need of human hands, nevertheless comes as close to humanity as their own life, movement, and being.

Thus, Sarah Coakley’s recent calls for a retrieval of pneumatology cast the Spirit as the missing presence theology needs to recover through the ecstasy of prayerful union.

748 The phrase quotes Paul repurposing either the Cretan philosopher Epimenides or the Platonic philosopher Posidonius, demonstrating how just quickly the Christian dialogue with and expansion of Greco-Roman religio-philosophical categories began.
For Coakley, the sighing Spirit of Romans 8 marks the Trinity as the ceaseless dialogue into which the deified one is caught up by the prayer that makes her “co-heir with Christ.” She sees Paul describing “one experience of an activity of prayer that is nonetheless ineluctably, though obscurely, triadic,” where God the Trinity simultaneously does the praying in the person, receives that prayer, and thereby brings the prayer into “the Christic life of redeemed sonship.” Coakley argues that prayer in the Spirit becomes “an act of cooperation with, and incorporation into, the still extending life of the incarnation.” Making Spirit ‘first’ does not constitute a new, intra-divine competition, but rather upturns idolatrous views to understand God the Trinity as “a ‘source’ of love unlike any other, giving and receiving and ecstatically deflecting, ever and always.”

It is Coakley’s genius to connect this prayer modality with all the other ways in which human desire for the transcendent simultaneously draws the person out of herself while more deeply constituting who she is. This is only possible because God’s own

749 Sarah Coakley, Living into the Mystery of the Holy Trinity,” 225.
750 Coakley, “Living into the Mystery,” 226, italics original. Prayer forms a privileged disclosure of the Trinity: it reveals the Father as source and end of our longing, it takes shape by the Spirit who enables the incorporation of creation into divine life, and it makes available the life of the Son who is the perfected creation.
751 Sarah Coakley, God, Sexuality, and the Self (hereafter, GSS),114. References and quotes from Irenaeus, Origen, and Athanasius beautifully extend these suggestions. But because claims of the Spirit’s influence increasingly became associated with ecstatic challenges to ecclesiastical authority, gender norms, and political stability, theology developed muting countermeasures. See GSS chapters 2-4 as well as Sarah Coakley, “Prayer, Politics and the Trinity: Vying Models of Authority in Third—Fourth-Century Debates on Prayer and ‘Orthodoxy,’” Scottish Journal of Theology 66/4 (Nov. 2013): 379-99. GSS chapter four gives accounts of fieldwork investigating experiences of the Spirit in both Church of England parishes and breakaway congregations. Though the latter group at first seems more open to the Spirit, its expectations of ecstasy eventually generate pressures requiring a corresponding clamping down of female leadership, any feelings besides those of a constant spiritual progress, and silence. This sort of emphasis on the Spirit ends up recognizing only certain forms of pneumatological presence, perhaps sacrificing greater pneumatic vitality in the pursuit of ‘orthodoxy.’ Coakley wonders if the congregation exhibiting more correspondence to Troeltsch’s ‘church’ type in fact displays greater Trinitarian maturity by being able to sense the Spirit’s presence even in the midst of depression, spiritual aridity, and set prayers and liturgies.
752 Coakley, God, Sexuality, and the Self, 333-4, quote at 334. Coakley here promotes Weinandy’s proposals that the Spirit sources the Father and the Son, the Father begets the Son in the Spirit, and the Father and Son together give rise to the Spirit.
self-determination cannot be threatened by creaturely participation. Coakley finds that through and across the difference between God and creation, the Spirit of divine ecstasy takes up humanity in all its desires and physicality to participate in divine life without losing self-identity.754

Deification in this vein affirms Kevin Hector’s insight that “[the Spirit of] God enables one to see God,” and “one perceives God through God.”755 The Spirit reveals God always already available, always already speaking, always already acting within the life of creation. So, in Eugene Rogers’ construction, as the divine life primarily present in Christ and then poured out on all who confess that name, the Spirit loves to rest upon matter.756 Rogers explains, “[t]he character of the Spirit, the Giver of life, is to be sought not in any mysteries of life itself, vitalist or not, but in the particular mysteries of her own particular life, to the extent that human beings can know it, in the life of the One who lives with the Son.” The Spirit remains the One God gives to befriend matter for the sake of Christ.757 Protestants can now accept deification as a sense of God’s own self acting

754 Coakley, God, Sexuality, and the Self, 313-8, referencing Divine Names. To truly grasp the triune God, then, theology needs to move headlong into the messy entangling of human and divine desires (see how Coakley excavates Gregory of Nyssa and Augustine with an eye to how each one’s thought corrects the other’s struggles to fruitfully relate sexual desire with desire for the divine, which she connects back to the ecstasy wrought by the Spirit in GSS, 281-94). Coakley also cites Luce Irigaray to promote this interruptive pneumatic power, both of whom partially echo Hans Urs von Balthasar’s claims in “Spirit and Institution,” Explorations in Theology IV, 209-243, especially 218-23 that the Spirit brings lovers out from mere dual egoism into awareness of a ‘third’ entity uniting and drawing them on. Coakley endorses a Dionysian ecclesiastical hierarchy, wherein God’s transcendence of humanity (not a hierarchy in the Trinity) undoes worldly male hierarchies through this same purgative power of the Spirit. Below, we will retrieve more details from Denys’ Divine Names. Retrieving the Spirit as truly third also moves theology past the filioque dispute to an understanding that the Divine Persons do not compete with one another.

755 Hector, Theology without Metaphysics, 191, italics his.

756 See Eugene F. Rogers, Jr., After the Spirit: A Constructive Pneumatology from Sources Outside the Modern West (London: SPCK, 2006), 32-49. Note Rogers’ insistence on using feminine pronouns to refer to the Spirit, a choice Milbank also makes.

757 Rogers, After the Spirit, 54-58, 62; quote at 54. See also Kathryn Tanner’s description of the work of the Holy Spirit in Christ the Key (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 296-301.
within creation through the agency of the Spirit rather than via third-order categories such as how hesychasm develops energies or how Thomism regards grace.758

Since we have begun appealing to creaturely capacity, I turn now to consider how a deification centered on pneumatic divine action addresses that end of the pendulum. As we have seen, both Thomist and hesychast theologies of deification include tendencies to oppose creaturely capacities to the self-determined God. While they exhibit the most trepidation over how the body impacts the person’s full union with God, explicitly connecting bodily limitations to the incompatibility of divine essence and creatures, the

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758 In the same vein, I register qualified agreement with Anthony Baker’s take on the Holy Spirit’s role in empowering mediation of divinity: “If, following the ascension, the work of God in Christ is handed over to those led by his Spirit, then the way in which the disciples go about perfecting that work suddenly takes on the greatest possible significance. In plain language: Christ is absent; those who long for a sabbatical from the work of atoning/creating can no longer hear his tetelestai from the cross, but must instead look to and listen to one another” (Diagonal Advance, 136). Or, “[t]hus, in Christ’s wake, the world finds its perfection in the Spirit-led continuation of his work” (Diagonal Advance, 139). A little later, Baker seems closer to my take when he states: “The Creator/creature distinction is a radicalization of the prophetic metastasis; it also, and through this radicalization, marks an ontological thaw, a springtime in which the frozen liturgical alphabet mobilizes into a boundary-crossing fluidity. Christ’s going away is to our advantage, and the sending of the Spirit ensures that our longing for a lost God will finally be something other than either a tragic yearning or a resignation to noncontemplative obedience” (Diagonal Advance, 146). Yet at the end of Diagonal Advance in his retelling of the Prometheus myth, Vesta simply leaves her fire, an intermediary object, not Vesta herself to rest on and within the ones seeking God—and this generates my main quibble. Additionally, the myth suggests the creation of humanity stems from the exilic separation of the Son from the Father—which makes creating always already tainted and thus competitive with divine self-determination. By contrast, Vesta herself must stay with Prometheus as the guarantor of his release. Baker takes firmer ground in an earlier article where he notes that Christ’s entire life is a human mediation of the divine, based on the role of the Spirit in that life, and that human poiesis in the church stems from such an origin (Baker, “Poiesis and Immediacy: A Reply to Davis,” Political Theology (Jan. 2009) 10/1:167-76, at 174-75). I firmly agree with Baker that we can discern human existence as capable of and ordered towards mediating divinity, but it seems to me that this work does not create intermediate entities but simply reveals the Spirit shining within creation. (Here I also register a complaint over how Baker assesses John Locke against John Wesley [Diagonal Advance, 271-84, especially 279-84], for Locke could support Baker’s emphasis on the ability of the human person to make holy the stuff of creation. That is to say, if Wesley had recourse to a more robust philosophy of how God is mediated through entities, as Baker recommends, he would still have to experience or participate within these mediations himself in order to engage in the work of poiesis. I think Baker’s beef is with Descartes, not Locke!) (See Baker, “Poiesis and Immediacy,” 172-5). Baker’s dissertation, “Making Perfection: An Experiment in Theological Ontology,” (Charlottesville, VA: The University of Virginia, 2004) also evinces greater willingness to point up the primacy of the Spirit’s work in deification. I cannot help but think that Fritz Bauerschmidt’s comment at the 2012 AAR session on Diagonal Advance remains apt: deification without its underpinning of askesis does not exist, and askesis is a slow, shallow spiral, not a diagonal line, because the spiral connotes the dimensionality of making the world divine through the will, desires, virtuous actions, and prayerful mode of existence.
same concerns ended up haunting notions of the soul as well. As we saw in chapter four, dialoguing the two major models exposed the ways they seem to require access to a mediator ontologically distinct from human nature. Not only does this endanger consistent applications of divine self-determination, it also appears to require the destruction of human nature for that nature to unite with God.

In order to harmonize the two existent theories of deification and to maintain God’s non-competitive relation with creation, theology needs an explanation of creaturely capacity wherein the person totally participates in God body and soul.

Deification requires something compatible with human nature such that human beings can receive it, assimilate it, and be assimilated by it. Resourcing the Spirit once more transforms this portion of the theosis pendulum.

2. **Pneumatic Action Describes Creaturely Capacity**

Powered by a retrieval of pneumatic divine action disclosing divine self-determination, I propose that the traditions now re-read creaturely capacity by the Spirit. Beginning once more with Didymus and Denys, creaturely capacity can adapt the insights above from the divine end of the theosis pendulum that the Spirit serves as both the ‘agent’ and the ‘stuff’ of deification. Creaturely capacity for becoming one with and like God now references the self-determined divine in which all beings already participate. As Castelo puts it, deification entails recognizing that “Spirit-matters are the

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759 This may be why Báñez requires the physical promotion for God to act upon/with the creature (See Tanner, *God and Creation*, 148-52).
most natural things there are…Nature is Spirit-graced to its core…[and] the natural is itself miraculous.”

Returning to Didymus, God as the only undiminished giver changes how we identify the fruit of such participation. Since what creatures receive when they receive the Spirit does not itself participate in a higher order, what they receive must be divine. And therefore what they receive is a who: the divine Spirit itself. It is the Spirit herself whom the believers receive when they are indwelled: “[t]he gifts of God reside in the substance of the Holy Spirit.” So Didymus can state that the Holy Spirit both “exists in those goods which are conferred by the Lord,” and that the Spirit simply is “the fullness of the gifts of God.” Even stronger, “the goods bestowed by God are nothing other than the subsistent Holy Spirit.” Being an undiminished giver means that whatever the giver has to offer comprises its own self; the Spirit’s divine character makes the Spirit’s gifts divine fruits. A somewhat lengthy quote helps establish this point:

For just as, when the Son gives, he is not deprived of those things which he gives and does not share with others to his own detriment, so too the Spirit does not receive what [s]he did not have before. If [s]he receives what [s]he did not have earlier, then when the gift is transferred to another, its bestower is left empty-handed, ceasing to have what [s]he gave. Therefore…so too we now ought to acknowledge that the Holy Spirit receives from the Son that which belongs to [her] own nature. This does not signify that there is a giver and a receiver, but one substance, since the Son is said to receive the same things from the Father which belong to his very being. For the Son is nothing other than those things which are given to him by the Father, and the substance of the Holy Spirit is nothing other than that which is given to [her] by the Son.

Intriguingly, Didymus identifies these goods of the undiminished giver Spirit as the virtues. For instance, Didymus refers to the Spirit granting persons shares in “all the

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760 Castelo, *Pneumatology*, 74, 75, emphasis removed.
gifts of God, wisdom, knowledge, faith, and the rest of the virtues.”

He describes these virtues—goodness, joy, peace, grace, power to perform miracles, and so on—as gifts of the Spirit’s own self. He states explicitly that the Spirit simply is “goodness itself because his [sic] nature sanctifies and fills the universe with good things.”

In a move strikingly parallel to how our two models of deification will describe the effects of contemplation, Didymus writes, “whoever is filled with [the Spirit] acts entirely according to reason, teaching correctly, living irreprehensibly, doing signs and wonders in a true and perfect manner.”

Though he does not develop a full explication of how the resurrected life and the virtuous mortal life relate, Didymus clearly relates them. Referring to Romans 8:11 on the Spirit who raised Christ from the dead giving life to mortal bodies, he comments,

[...]doesn’t it seem to you that he is saying: ‘If the Spirit of [her] who raised Jesus from the dead’—that is, [s]he who is the Spirit of the same Jesus Christ—‘dwells in you, then as a consequence of this, along with your immortal souls even your mortal bodies will be given life by [her] who raised Jesus Christ from the dead and manifested him as the ruler and the first-born of the resurrection.

Thus, assimilation to the divine life requires some continuity in the person practicing virtue on the way to perfect virtue.

Both this process and its end are enabled by Christ as model and medium, although at times Didymus cannot reconcile suggestions that the end comprises an infinite progress with the conviction that a final consummation exists beyond which no advance remains. The closest he may come is a section in his commentary on Psalm

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766 Didymus the Blind, *On the Holy Spirit*, 3.46; DelCogliano, 158.
768 Layton, *Didymus the Blind and his Circle*, 45-8, quote at 46-7. See his remark on 53: “At a theological level, which Didymus does not fully explicate, the simultaneous promotion of seeking and
37, where Didymus refers to 1 Cor 15 to argue that the resurrected body cannot be completely different from the earlier pilgrim along the way:

[t]he first and the one after seem to be two, but I mean two in the same way as if I say that a human being is first an infant and then a child…In the same way that the ages do not make the creature that matures into a different substance but a transformation or a change takes place in manner and knowledge, so also an adult comes from a child and the adult is not a different person from the child but is the same person.769

Either way, for Didymus, creatures of the undiminished giver are themselves undiminished in their capacities for union with God. Their capacities remain limitless, even within physical contingencies and restrictions, because they describe and belong to God, the one participated in, rather than the human being. Thus, rather than the creature itself, scriptural descriptions show that the inexhaustible Spirit sets the terms for matter’s participation: the Spirit’s presence in creatures does not subject the Spirit to creation; the incorporeal Spirit fills persons, rather than the other way around. In Ayres’ words on deification in Gregory of Nyssa following similar paths:

God’s distinction from the creation says nothing about God’s ability to act immediately within it—and it is because God is distinct and because God’s presence is unmediated we can begin to comprehend and narrate appropriately the universal unmediated sustaining and redeeming action of the divine power. Because God is distinct God can act immediately…and transforming human lives and becoming ‘all in all.’770

Material bodies originating from God cannot pose limits to their Source and End. The person’s perfection, describing her status as a participating creature, remains her natural end but also her natural progression through this life.

769 Didymus the Blind, Commentary on the Psalms, 259.3-16, Papyrologische Texte und Abhandlungen 1-3, 33.1, eds. Louis Doutreleau, Adolphe Gesché, and Michael Gronewald (Bonn: Habelt, 1968-70), quoted in Layton, Didymus the Blind and his Circle, 156.

770 Ayres, “Deification and the Dynamics of Nicene Theology,” 394, italics original.
But exactly how far can deification theologies flex to accommodate one another and still remain faithful to the God they seek to describe? Denys’ discussions of evil clarify the matter. Denys affirms that not only does the Good ground all of existence, “the Good cannot produce what is not good.”

Rather, “[p]erfect goodness reaches out to all things...[even extending] as far as the lowliest of things.” Thus, the Good “gives power even to the very things lacking it, insofar as they participate in it. And, if we must speak the full truth, even the things that resist it owe their being and their capacity for resistance to its power.” As he explains, “[e]ven the person who desires the lowest form of life still desires life and a life that seems good to [her].” And even such misdirected desires stem from the person’s existence in the Good who is God, as

“that which totally lacks a share in the Good has neither being nor a place in existence, whereas that which has a composite nature owes to the Good whatever place it has among beings, and its place among them and the extent of its being are directly proportionate to the share it has of this Good.”

So, though it remains more dissimilar to the Good than to non-being and lacks its own substance, all evil of necessity carries something of the Good: “[e]vil is not a being; for if it were, it would not be totally evil. Nor is it a nonbeing; for nothing is completely a nonbeing, unless it is said to be in the Good in the sense of beyond-being.”

In this approach, not even devils are evil by nature; no such thing as an evil nature in fact exists. Evil is and can only ever be a falling away or falling short from goodness, a deficiency, a lack of perfection that exists only as an accident—“by means of

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771 Denys, *The Divine Names* 4.19; Luibheid, 84.
772 Denys, *The Divine Names* 4.20; Luibheid, 86.
773 Denys, *The Divine Names* 4.20; Luibheid, 87.
774 Denys, *The Divine Names* 4.20; Luibheid, 87.
775 Denys, *The Divine Names* 4.20; Luibheid, 87.
776 Denys, *The Divine Names* 4.20; Luibheid, 87.
777 Denys, *The Divine Names* 4.21 and 4.26; Luibheid, 90, 92.
something else.” Evil therefore can characterize how things act in opposition to the Good, but it cannot produce, much less describe, their being. All it can do is “in a limited fashion to debase and to destroy the substance of things.” Yet with God who knows evil under the form of the good (as its insufficiency), “the causes of evil things are capacities which can produce good.” It is not the evil in and of itself that can become good—rather, it is the capacity for existence itself, given by God then bent awry by evil, that can be redirected: “[b]irth and being occur because of the Good. That is to say, evil in itself is a destructive force but is a productive force through the activity of the Good.”

This chain of reasoning leads Denys to three very important conclusions on divine action, presented so casually they are easy to overlook. First, he situates the bending or twisting of creaturely capacity as incapable of canceling out the goodness offered by God. This move does not ignore evil, but rather refuses to allow it to set the terms for theological reasoning, especially concerning how persons receive and respond to the life of God. Moreover, Denys flatly proclaims that bodies are neither evil nor its cause; they take their origin and states of subsistent being from the Good who does not make evil. So, second, bodies in and of themselves do not set limits for the expanse of God’s indwelling. Rather, they offer up ever-shifting, ever-expanding configurations of physical matter for the divine presence to indwell. Third, for Denys evil constitutes “the inability of things to reach their natural peak of perfection.” We cannot overlook the

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778 Denys, *The Divine Names* 4.31-32; Luibheid, 94. See also 4.21; Luibheid, 90-2.
779 Denys, *The Divine Names* 4.19-20, quote at 4.20; Luibheid, 85-6, quote at 86.
780 Denys, *The Divine Names* 4.30; Luibheid, 93.
781 Denys, *The Divine Names* 4.19-20, quote at 4.20; Luibheid, 85-6; quote at 86.
782 Denys, *The Divine Names* 4.27-28; Luibheid, 92-3.
783 Denys, *The Divine Names* 4.26; Luibheid, 92.
significance of this statement. Here, perfection is itself natural, and by God’s self-
donation, the capacity for perfection naturally belongs to bodies, matter, and all the rest
of creation simply as what it means to be created by the self-determined Good. Denys
presents a God who is the Good constantly providing existence, being, light, life,
goodness, beauty, justice, and so on to all that exists, even when such creatures attempt to
rebel and contradict their own gifts of life.

Pneumatically retrieving these accounts of divine action can address both
hesychast and Thomist theologies. With the entry point into perfection being neither
presumptions of an unreachable God nor the boundaries of a constricted humanity’s
limited abilities but rather the God so transcendent as to be more immanent to the person
than she could be to herself, God at work in creation befriends different forms of matter,
bornes, and language without either collapsing into or destroying them. And, since both
Didymus and Denys finds evil non-self-determined, even the sin committed by creatures
cannot pose a risk to the Spirit’s self-determination. Evil cannot be thought to act in the
manner of a substance, for it is not participable as God is. Evil exists only as the will or
action of a participating creature parasitically bending away from their true source and
subsistence. Thus, moving away from God into evil, or even being filled by Satan, does
not represent sharing in a substance that competes with God. Meanwhile, sharing in the
Spirit accesses the incorruptible substance who is the divine will, being, and power all in
one and who represents the creature’s natural end.784 Centered in the Incarnation, where
not only does the Second Person completely take up human nature but also exhibits

complete bodily dependence upon the *Theotokos*, attending to the creaturely capacity side of the deification tension requires re-examining how the Spirit’s indwelling connects with created being. Even bodies struggling with sin or passions do not belong to a different ontological order. Instead, their weakened natural procession into full participation in and likeness of God still speaks to their inherent capacities for deification. Such participation, even when distinctively and differently named by various creatures or communities’ metaphysics, does not divide God, for God cannot be threatened when irradiating creatures with God’s own self.

Understanding the undiminished giver Spirit as the mediation of God already at work within creaturely life dovetails with some insights from both deification traditions. Both Thomas and Palamas retain portions of this arguments that underpin their accounts of virtues, holiness, transformation of passions, and so on. The Spirit does feature in some portions of Thomas’ work as the indwelling agent whose interaction with the receptive person’s own *pneuma* prepares her for the beatific vision and in Palamas as the one whose power enables the receptive person to see God. Yet their disagreements with each other stem from struggles to fully maintain God’s undiminished giving as compatible with the creature’s natural capacity. Each sees the other setting up a system that endangers divine self-determination with some creaturely intrusion, while the entire point of the undiminished giver remains that such competition cannot ever actually occur. Undiminished giving shows that communication and union with God constitute the creature’s source, end, and thus her existent, infinite capacities as a creature. As Denys remarks, then, God serves as both the self-determined ground of all being and the

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capacity of the creatures God deifies: “the Good gives substance to what lacks itself precisely for the full share of itself.” 786

Since God’s presence in the world does not require a third category of divine ‘stuff,’ so, too, human integrity in union with God does not need to be exploded. There is no need for tortured insertions of the additional “impossible” mediums of a heavenly Sophia as well as an earthly Sophia, just as there is no need to oppose supernatural to natural, nature to grace, actions to essence, bodies to God’s action, or creaturely capacities to God’s goodness. 787 Nor does deification require an augmentation foreign to human ‘nature’ or the cessation of bodily life. Rather, participation names the life of God that calls creatures from non-being into union and likeness with their ground of existence. The God in whom creation always already participates sources virtues and actions alike. Articulating divine action along these lines re-reads the hesychast-Thomist categories of natural symbols, created Sophia, created grace, and the supernatural such that they name the presence of God (divine self-determination) acting within a participating creation (creaturely capacity).

For hesychasm, claiming pneumatic divine action as the basis of creaturely capacity refines the conviction that the person in her body communes with God only via the natural symbol of the divine activities rather than with the divine substance. Instead, the energies of God indwelling the person’s body, emotions, and actions are now identified as the Spirit. Plenty of passages in this tradition identify the Spirit as the one enabling theosis and the one present within the one being deified; they would just now have to be read more directly. Virtuous, transformative sharing in the substance of the

786 Denys, The Divine Names 4.20; Luibheid, 88.
Spirit extends Palamas’ views of hesychast prayer. The call from Palamas for the one being deified to bring her passions, emotions, and all the created structures of the world along in her deification finds an anchor in her creaturely ability to share in the Spirit by partaking of the divine creative powers, grace, love, activity, holiness, teaching, and substance. Understanding creaturely capacity as the Spirit’s gifted presence within matter also reorients theology to Eastern Orthodoxy’s insistence upon the foundational nature of deification by requiring creation and human nature to be thought in light of *theosis*, the end for all beings, rather than the other way around.

For Thomism’s distinction between divine and human natures, this revision requires more of a leap. Adherents see a pressing need to maintain creaturely agency, in both positive and negative senses. The responsibility for the person’s readiness to unite with God or failures along that path lie with herself, not with God. However, Thomas himself considered the possibility that the presence of God within the person should be identified with the Holy Spirit. Though he rejected this possibility, overturning his conclusions to recognize the Spirit as the indwelling presence of grace would allow Thomas to better apply his language of human participation as the soul’s accidental sharing in the divine substance.

Thomism can also retain its emphasis on practicing virtuous desiring, acting, willing, and contemplating as simply markers of the person’s being united with God’s donated presence. Though Didymus does not systematically treat all virtues like Thomas, his reasoning can be applied to the remainder of the virtues, such as grace, joy and peace,

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the power to perform miracles, the ability to defend the faith. The concern for these virtues to analogically mirror God in the created realm can only work once the undiminished giver God is recognized as always already constituting such creaturely modalities with God’s own given presence. As Denys’ explanation clarifies, the many distinct virtues can all be seen to ‘name’ God’s own self; God’s own activities are shared in by the one undergoing deification. There is no risk of contaminating the inexhaustible Spirit in creaturely participation firstly because that is not how participation works; that is not what it means for God to be God. Created virtues therefore consist of naming God’s presence within the material world, so that creation speaks analogically of the Divine only by already participating within God’s self-gift. These possibilities shift Thomas by centering the progress of deification in the ever-giving, participable Spirit whose self-gift extends across the boundaries of life and death.

Pneumatic divine action reorients the Thomist insistence that in this life, beatitude consists solely of created virtues and grace that in the resurrection will entail full union with God. By conceiving of the Spirit received in the virtues imprinting upon the person God’s own likeness, Didymus identifies the creature’s goal as beginning before death. Rather, the virtuous transformation within one’s mortal life builds to the eventual completion and culmination of the resurrection. The Spirit’s presence does not have to be considered antithetical to or ontologically distinct from the virtues that animate human beings and allow them to contemplate the source of their being. Even stronger: the one being made holy actually receives and perceives the Spirit in the development of her

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791 Didymus thus also offers qualifications to the Thomist vision that full communion with God only occurs after death, which I will handle below in the creaturely capacity section.
virtuous relations in the world. The Spirit as undiminished giver suggests that continuity through such changes is not best rendered a property of the one being deified, but rather of the Spirit who after death continues the work the Spirit’s indwelling power within creation has already begun. The participatory nature of all beings demands just such a correction.

Once more, if the two traditions choose to explore this route, they may find even more common grounds within their existing sources at the same time that they find themselves walking in company with Protestants. As Castelo suggests, creation “already charged by and primed for the Spirit” makes sanctification not “considered over and against the created realm but in and through it.”792 Two recent engagements with Scripture intriguingly offer correlative material. First, Marc Cortez investigates the language of the image and likeness of God in Genesis 1 to claim that humanity does not just imitate God but also represents and even mediates the divine presence. The Hebrew words translated as image (tselem) and likeness (demut) often refer to cult statues or other objects used for worship. As Cortez notes, in the context of the Ancient Near East, “an idol was far more than a mere symbol; it was a real manifestation of divine presence” consecrated by rituals of ‘washing’ or ‘opening of the mouth’ to share out the presence of its sponsoring divine being.793 The divine being in question poured into the idol such that any actions undertaken against the idol were considered to blaspheme or desecrate the

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792 Castelo, Pneumatology, 82.
god. Such functionality itself is not wrong, Cortez argues; rather, the negative attributions of idols often made by Hebrew Bible authors stem from the fact that the idols in question belong to a false god.794

The *imago Dei* thus comprises not just a physical reminder or representation of God but “the physical means through which he [sic] would manifest [the] divine presence in the world.”795 Thus, we are led to identify the image of God not as capacities (such as relationship or dominion). As some idols were “mere lumps of rock,” the idol’s own capacities do not set the terms for the divine being to mediate its presence. Rather, God’s image remains “inherently pneumatological because of the intimate link between God’s presence and the Spirit throughout the Old Testament.”796

Second, recent works demonstrating how Pauline texts employ Stoic conceptions of *pneuma* also stress the compatibility (rather than equation or opposition) between Spirit and flesh. Paul Robertson argues that modern notions of the Spirit import anachronistic frameworks onto Paul.797 For Robertson, recapturing the significance of

796 Cortez, *ReSourcing Theological Anthropology*, 112. John R. Levison gives a somewhat parallel recommendation when he traces how modern Western pneumatology has tended to contrast the supernatural power of the Spirit with the indwelling spirit of a person (see “Assessing the Origins of Modern Pneumatology,” *Christian Body, Christian Self: Concepts of Early Christian Personhood*, eds. Clare K. Rothschild and Trevor W. Thompson, with Robert S. Kinney [Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2011], 313-331). In Levison’s view, this pattern obscures “the worth that Israelite literature accords to the Spirit-breath of creation” (323). While arguing against collapsing the Spirit into an inferior physical reality, Levison promotes understanding instead that “the human spirit is a Holy Spirit, that God’s inbreathing at birth is no less divine than the Spirit which prompts speaking in tongues, that the pulse of life-breath which rolls over human tongues in occasional wisdom and consistent virtue is the Spirit of God that broods over the abyss of human confusion and chaos” (331).
797 See Paul Robertson, “De-Spiritualizing *Pneuma*: Modernity, Religion, and Anachronism in the Study of Paul,” *Method and Theory in the Study of Religion* 26 (2014): 365-83, especially 365-70. My thanks to David Burnett for pointing me in this direction. Robertson focuses on views that religion is a matter of private activity rather than publicly enacted, that ontological gaps persist between the human and the divine arenas rather than becoming blurred in anthropomorphized notions of the gods, and that *pneuma* denotes a clearly supernatural, disembodied force imprinted upon subjective experiences.
pneuma in the agricultural, medical, and philosophical treatises of Paul’s time denotes a sort of physiological and cosmological substance underpinning and suffusing all of creation. Pneuma for these developers of Stoicism was understood “as an active, life-giving, physical force present both in the individual’s body (brain, eyes, blood) and in the surrounding environment, specifically the air.” Pneuma could enter the body through respiration and proceed to the heart, although opinions differed on the various roles of the bloodstream, heart, and brain.

Similarly, Troy W. Martin’s work examining ancient medical texts uncovers conceptions of pneuma as a nutrient capable of entering a person through skin pores, digestive passages, or the oro-nasal passages. Pneuma does not refer to emotive responses but rather denotes “a material force existing in the world” that one could take in through a variety of means, experience moving through one’s body by means of the vascular system, and thus prompt behavioral changes. Martin explicitly connects these views of pneuma’s reception with the sacraments: baptism, Eucharist, anointing, and hearing Scripture explicated are all ways by which Paul describes the Spirit as entering the believers. The Spirit provides rationality, health, and greater life and motivation for those who, partaking of the pneuma available to the Christ, receive the mind of Christ.

I also bear in mind Troels Engberg-Pedersen’s work on the Spirit in Pauline thought.

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transforming by dwelling within material bodies and generating mental cognition of God. The person’s reception allows the Spirit to fill her to an ever-greater extent, forming a union with God within her material body that will sustain her eventual resurrection. As Robertson clarifies, in Paul the perfection God gives by sharing out Christ’s pneuma with the person’s own pneuma “physically transform[s] and...concretely manifest[s] activity in line with piety...[as] not simply an emotional and intellectual state, but is concretely physical and manifests in proper action.”

Once more, these readings suggest affinities with Denys and Didymus as well as with the later traditions. In a stunning marriage of both Palamas’ depiction of the whole body being permeated by the energies of God and Thomas’ emphasis on the cascading ladder of one’s will, desires, and contemplative faculties becoming united to God, with the indwelling of this Pauline pneuma, the person’s body and cognition are conformed to Christ. And similarly to what we saw in Didymus’ undiminished giver, the person taking in the Spirit accesses eternal nutrition fitting her to participate in the divine life.

Such life is not oppositional to the person’s material realities, but rather fills them from the inside out. Such access is not restricted to after death, but remains available during this life. Pneumatic theosis concerns the upholding, intensifying, and expanding of the created capacity to shine with the illumining presence of God.

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3. An Unfinished Task

The liability of this project lies in its inability to more completely detail how turning to the Spirit can construct deification afresh. A more in-depth re-reading of both traditions’ views of creation via the Spirit remains outstanding. However, mutually plumbing new possibilities is now possible because the ground has been cleared for the traditions to ask a different question and adopt a different methodological approach in resourcing the remainder of their own histories. A pneumatological deification holds that humanity cannot be conceived apart from God’s always already-prior and already-given presence. It agrees with Palamas that deification fills the person’s body with God’s own glory. It contends that sin cannot eradicate the capacity for deification or change ‘nature’ such that deification becomes an imposition. It dovetails with Thomas’ focuses on the being, actions, desires, will, embodied virtues, and contemplation that make the person like God, although it does not rank these as Thomas does. Chastening Palamas, it suggests that the Spirit’s presence is capable of being discerned and expanded within ‘human’ processes. Revising Thomas, it relativizes the person’s specific capacities in favor of her becoming permeated by the Spirit to faithfully mediate God’s presence to all that is within and around her, no matter her circumstances or her challenges. In fact, as we have seen, the Spirit features in Aquinas as the indwelling agent whose interaction with the receptive person’s own *pneuma* prepares her for the beatific vision and in Palamas as the one whose power enables the receptive person to see God. The remaining work speaks to deification itself: the ongoing, unfolding work of the Spirit gathering up creation to intensify its irradiation with God’s own presence.
Theosis must not be jettisoned due to the difficulties of speaking it coherently. Instead, it provides the only way to keep both of Tanner’s rules for theological speech. In deification, God’s self-determined non-competitive action in the world gifts creation the capacity for being infinitely suffused by the always prior, always already enclosing Spirit. Theology must now press forward to reclaim the radical availability and sheer gratuity of this indwelling Spirit.

Figure 4: Towards a Pneumatic, Ecumenical Deification

IV. Provisional Conclusions: Where Can Pneumatic Deification Go Next?

In this final section, I now briefly summarize the scope of this project, recapitulate its core arguments, and suggest directions for where this line of inquiry can next advance. As with any ecumenical dialogue, much more work remains to be done, but for now, this project represents the opening of a door to a complicated nest of research topics, not the conclusion of a lifetime of work.
Recalling where we have been sets the stage for where the work can eventually be extended. I began this project by laying out the current state of the deification debates, identifying \textit{theosis} as a theologically rich but highly ecumenically-contested theme. I overviewed the status of deification claims within three major Christian traditions: Orthodox, Catholic, and Protestant. I noted that each of the two older ecclesial communi ons has produced its own unique model of how the person may seek and receive her ultimate goal, the union with God that perfects her as a human being. These two models struggle to generate a consistent philosophy of the deification paradox. God’s self-determination must be retained, but some account of the creature’s capacity for deification must also be given. I introduced the central image of a pendulum to visualize the various components any model of deification would need to include: divine self-determination, creaturely capacity, and divine action in creation. I also answered initial concerns with deification as ‘metaphor’ versus a more ‘literal’ description. I set out the structure of this project as an ecumenical dialogue and identified the body and the Spirit as the key loci that would set the terms for such engagement, which I tagged to cognitive linguistic descriptions of ways metaphors develop.

In chapters two and three, I laid out the two most developed \textit{theosis} trajectories. One trajectory, hesychasm, begins with the person’s observation of herself receiving what must be identified as divine glory inviting her to participate in God’s own actions; the other, Thomism, starts with the divine self-determination the person wishes to receive. Thomism’s ladder of virtues leads to the full contemplation of God achievable in the blessed afterlife while Palamas’ prayerful soul orients the full person to the indwelling energy of divine light available throughout her life. I showed that when both
versions attempt to hold together divine self-determination with creaturely capacity, they trip over the body. In hesychasm, the commitment to divine self-determination as the ground of all being, in which all creatures participate for their existence and perfection, comes with the essence-energies distinction in order to extend divine presence into bodies. Here, participation in divine actions bubbles up from within the creature to enable transformation of her material body, emotions, and creativity. But it must be restricted in scope to the energies, lest her body receive unfettered access to God’s essence. Thomas, beginning with divine self-determination, takes a ‘top down’ approach. The body and its desires, actions, and will prove insufficient to mediate to the person the God who as pure act transcends matter’s contingency. Therefore, a soul completely united with God serves as the benchmark of creaturely perfection, which becomes attainable only after death. God’s action in creation now takes the shape of the created grace habituating the person to an eventual full union with uncreated grace.

Chapter four moved deeper into dialogue by allowing the traditions to encounter one another. In the hesychast view, Thomas’ model restricts the life of God the person receives in this life to something holding a downgraded ontological status. Her status as creature blocks her from receiving God’s self. Thomism’s treatment of creaturely capacity risks contradicting its own model of divine self-determination while failing to acknowledge the person’s inability to define God. Meanwhile, hesychasm appears to divide God into an imparticipable essence and participable energies, also predicated on the inability of the creature to receive the divine. To Thomists, hesychasm seems to improperly mix categories of divine and human, created and uncreated. In the former model, divine transcendence appears to need to be protected by distinguishing between
who God is and what God does. In the latter, divine transcendence appears to need to be protected by restricting divine availability to the uncreated life of the soul available after death.

Receptivity to critiques by the other tradition enables each to understand what is missing in its own construction that benefits from the other’s unique gifts. Dialogue can be furthered once Thomism offers hesychasm its explication of divine simplicity and hesychasm brings into Thomism a commitment to the suffusion of divinity right within the person’s body. I teased out how each model reads the other as metaphysically wanting in order to identify ways they might be able to find common ground, particularly by focusing on the Spirit of divine action as the pendulum already relating both creaturely capacity and divine self-determination.

In this final chapter, I traced how that potential solution may better hold together the full deification pendulum. I argued for the Spirit, hinted at by both traditions and underdeveloped in Christian theology as a whole, to serve as a key metaphysical, linguistic, and ecumenical frame. I drew on contemporary theologians and biblical scholars in conversation with Didymus the Blind and Denys the Areopagite to explore how turning to the Spirit shifts understandings of God’s action in the world. I demonstrated how such a pneumatic theosis connects with major aspects of both current models and soothes their concerns with one another by more coherently interrelating divine transcendence and creaturehood. Finally, I suggested that this way of viewing divine action can also prove more hospitable to the Protestant traditions previously hesitant to accept theosis.
Additional questions remain to be raised and explored as the traditions on *theosis* now begin to move forward together. I close by mentioning only one. Chiefly, deification can be reclaimed as the central Christian doctrine. It alone holds together God and creation by articulating a model of divine action that corrects tendencies to oppose God from creation. Such tendencies wreak havoc on all other major theological tenets. If the three major ecclesial traditions establish a more common foundation, they shall together better construct theology as a whole. A broader ecumenical consensus on deification’s process pushes these ecclesial communities to mutually receive and then apply deification to energize multiple streams of theological investigation.
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