

Research Notes on the Eastern Churches

Information compiled by Craig White

What became of the Church Jesus built and the congregations scattered throughout the East, particularly in Asia Minor and Syria?

Did they remain faithful to the Truth and correct doctrines longer than the Churches in the West?

Are residues of their beliefs still extant to this day within the mainstream churches?

Has early Christianity fallen from a higher understanding of scripture?

History Research Projects

Version 1.0

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"Only knowledge, then, is power and freedom; and the only permanent happiness is the pursuit of knowledge and the joy of understanding." -- Will Durant

"While the Church in the **East** was being held together through Pella and Antioch, the Roman Church - with most of its leading members martyred - became the prey of false teachers ... the apostasy was developing rapidly - especially in the West." (Dr H L Hoeh, *A True History of the True Church*, page 14) (emphasis mine)

"In the large **eastern** city of Antioch, Syria, traditions preserve Ignatius as the second successor to Peter in that region ... By this time, the western Christian churches at Rome were also gaining strength and authority ... Basically Christianity divided into two areas of theology [one in] the West, headquartered at Rome ... Polycarp and the churches in the East maintained the tradition of the early Church regarding the seventh-day Sabbath, the Holy Days and the laws of clean and unclean meats. In other words, Christians in the **East** strove to do what Jesus and the early apostles did" (Ronald D Kelly, "Struggle for the Truth", *The Good News*, Sept-Oct 1990, page 24) (emphasis mine)

"The church at Rome far over-shadowed the smaller groups in the **East** which strove to remain faithful to the doctrines of the first apostles" (Ronald D Kelly, "A Little Flock in the Wilderness", *Good News*, Nov-Dec 1990, page 21) (emphasis mine)

Introductory Remarks

The Church of God had scattered for a time in AD33 according to Acts 8:1. Later, after the Roman sacking of Jerusalem AD69-70, the Church at Jerusalem known as the Nazarenes, fled to Pella (or Petra as some suggest) and remnants were left in Britain and others may have scattered to become all sorts of sects. A certain number continued in the eastern congregations in Asia Minor and Syria, which observed the Sabbath, Holy Days and Torah Law. Later some of them continued alongside Sunday-observers in the same churches, for an extended period.

History records that the eastern churches in Asia Minor and Syria maintained the following beliefs for a long time, even after going into apostasy after leaving off Torah law observance:

- water baptism,
- the bodily resurrection,
- mortality of the soul (eg Arnobius),
- showing concern about the infiltration of paganism via icons and crosses etc into the church,
- knowledge about the evil works of Simon Magus,
- the 1,000 year reign of the Messiah (see for example the extra-biblical *Epistle of Barnabas*; the writings of Ireneaus, Hippolytus, Justin Martyr etc),
- and the new birth at the time of the resurrection

All of this would have been reminiscent of the doctrines of an earlier primitive Christianity and the traditions of the Church of Jerusalem (under the auspices of James) and their spiritual descendants, the Nazarenes and others.

Centuries later, the apostate eastern churches participated in the first seven ecumenical councils which ended with the Second Council of Nicaea in AD787. Their differences with Rome mounted after that time with the official split eventuating in AD1054.

In actual fact, the date of AD1054 was when letters of excommunication were issued between Rome and Constantinople (the New Rome as it was termed since the Council of Constantinople in AD381).

The causes for the split were apparently two-fold: papal primacy and the filioque clause (ie the Catholic claim that the Holy Spirit proceeded from the Father and Son, instead of only the Father).

But in reality it was a split waiting to happen, with differences seething beneath the surface for centuries.

In any event, there were attempts at reunion at the Council of Lyons in AD 1274 and Council of Ferrara-Florence in AD1438-39. Since the 1960s, some healing has transpired and moves toward unity or at least close cooperation are underway.

One point that irks Rome is the Eastern Orthodox belief that they claim a direct, unbroken descent from the churches founded by the early apostles. Also, each local congregation has a certain amount of internal autonomy, but under the overall primacy of the Patriarchate of Constantinople. He is also the “first among equals”.

Today the primary differences include the Papal infallibility and purgatory. The Eastern Church was initially without icons, great liturgies and canonical regulations for governing the church's life which took hundreds of years to develop and be accepted.

But in contrast with Rome, the Eastern Churches permit their ministry to marry, reject the primacy of the Papacy (their approach is more collegial), do not accept transubstantiation and believe that they are the true church. They originally believed in the 7,000 year plan and that man is mortal, without an immortal soul.

With the above information in mind, let us explore some of the major beliefs of the early church in Asia Minor and Syria (the eastern churches).

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The Sabbath in the Eastern Church

Given that the original Eastern Churches of Asia Minor and Syria were founded by the Apostles, it follows that they observed the seventh-day Sabbath and Holy Days.

Of these Eastern sabbath-observing Christians in the second century it was written:

"The primitive Christians had a great veneration for the Sabbath, and spent the day in devotion and sermons. And it is not to be doubted but they derived this practice from the Apostles themselves, as appears by several scriptures to that purpose." (*Dialogue on the Lord's Day*, p.189 by Dr. T.H. Morer).

In the third and fourth centuries we have this witness:

"The ancient Christians were very careful in the observation of Saturday, or the seventh day ... It is plain that all the **Oriental [Eastern] Churches**, and the greatest part of the world, observed the Sabbath as a festival ... Athanasius likewise tells us that they held religious assemblies on the Sabbath, not because they were infected with Judaism, but to worship Jesus, the Lord of the Sabbath; Epiphanius says the same." (*Antiquities of the Christian Church*, Vol. II. Book XX, chap 3, Sec. 1 66.1137, 1138.) (emphasis mine)

"The observance of the Sabbath among the Jewish Christians gradually ceased. **Yet the Eastern Church to this day marks the seventh day of the week** (excepting only the Easter Sabbath) by omitting fasting, and standing in prayer; the Latin Church, in direct opposition to Judaism, made Saturday a fast day. The controversy on this point began as early as the end of the second century" (*History of the Church*, p.372, 1864 edition; p.205 1952 edition. Quoted in *A History of the Sabbath & Sunday* by John Kiesz, page 17). (emphasis mine)

Concerning the Council of Laodicea:

"From the apostles' time until the council of Laodicea, which was about the year 364, the holy observation of the Jews' Sabbath continued [**this was primarily in the East**], as may be proved out of many authors; yea, notwithstanding the decree of the council against it." (*Sunday a Sabbath*, John Ley, p. 163) (emphasis mine)

This is what the Council of Laodicea actually stated:

"Christians must not judaize by resting on the Sabbath, but most work on that day, rather honouring the Lord's Day; and if they can, resting then as Christians. But if any shall be found to be judaizers, let them be anathema from Christ" (Canon 29).

In the fifth century it was written:

"Likewise some meet both upon the Sabbath and upon the day after the Sabbath, as at **Constantinople [ie the Eastern Church]**, and among almost all others. At Rome and Alexandria they do not" (*Ecclesiastical History*, in *The Nicene and Post Nicene Fathers*, Book 7, Chapter 19). (emphasis mine)

"Alexandrian Christianity, too, had early adopted Sunday observance. However, in harmony with **Eastern Christianity**, it had also kept the Sabbath as a day of worship and a festival" (*The Sabbath in Scripture and History*, pages 171-2). (emphasis mine)

One final quote:

"The **Eastern Orthodox Church** is perhaps the best example of this evolution in the practice of Sabbath observance. Even as late as the seventeenth century Samuel Purchas (c. 1577-1626), listing the beliefs and practices of the Greek Church of the Constantinople patriarchate, states that "they solemnize Saturday (the old Sabbath) festively" " (*The Sabbath in Scripture and History*, page 152). (emphasis mine)

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Non-trinitarianism

What did the eastern churches teach concerning the trinity? According to Rubenstein's *When Jesus Became God*:

"The "subordinationist" idea that Jesus was in some respects inferior to God was accepted by many Christians in the **Eastern Empire**, although Western churchmen generally rejected it." (p. 54) (emphasis mine)

One of these eastern churchmen was Arius who taught that "Before Christ, God was not yet a Father" and "There was when he [Jesus] was not". To this day Unitarianism is known as Arianism, named after him. Some eastern clergy were Unitarian and some Binitarian.

He did accept, however, that Christ was preexistent and that God had conceived him and created the universe via him. Whether he believed in that literally or allegorically is still a matter of debate, although the former clearly holds sway among theologians (*When Jesus Became God*, p. 55)

"Arius could claim the support of almost all the **Eastern** bishops, including most of those with substantial reputations as theologians." (*When Jesus Became God*, p. 61) (emphasis mine)

"... most of the **Eastern** bishops were inclined to accept the Arian view, which was that while the Father and the Son were "in agreement" on everything, they were two distinct realities that could not and should not be merged". (p.99) "The Arian controversy took the form of a religious **struggle between East and West**." (p. 150) (emphasis mine)

Thus, it seems that the Eastern tradition represented in its understanding of the nature of God and Christology, a small residue of its original non-trinitarian belief (some were unitarian while others were binitarian) because, unlike the Roman Catholic definition of the Trinity which emphasises God's oneness, the Eastern tradition speaks of the Son as being eternally generated by the Father and the Spirit eternally proceeding from the Father - here we seem to have a faint glimpse of their ancient non-trinitarian doctrine (subordination – whether Unitarian or Binitarian). In this teaching the distinctness of the personalities within the unity of the Godhead are emphasised as opposed to the mystical unity of God which is emphasised

by Rome. In turn, the Protestants even further define the personages of the trinitarian Godhead as separate entities.

"The Orthodox put the primary stress on the persons of the Godhead, **and tend to regard the Father as the hypostatization of the divine essence.** He is the unique fountainhead of Deity ..., which explains why the Orthodox cannot accept that the Holy Spirit derives his being from the Son as well as from the Father [as taught by Rome] ... The believer is called to a life of deification, which means transfiguration into the image and likeness of God ... Deification is based on the statement in Gn. 1:26, that man and woman are created in the image and likeness of God ..." but who after the fall lost this likeness. The holy spirit assists us in redemption by communicating to us "the energies of God himself, so that we may become partakers of the divine nature (2Pet. 1:4). The energies of God radiate from his essence and share its nature; but it must be understood that the deified person retains his personal identity and is not absorbed into the essence of God" (*New Dictionary of Theology*, pages 217-218, 189). (emphasis mine)

" ... In Orthodox theology, the Holy Spirit who proceeds from the Father rests on the Son and becomes his energies. We who are called to the imitation of Christ are likewise called to manifest the energies of the Holy Spirit ... those redeemed by Christ will be like gods (*cf. e.g. Ps. 82:6*)" (page 189).

Residues of the view that the Bible expresses primarily the centrality of God the Father rather than the Son Who is in His image, may be seen forthrightly in the Orthodox doctrine.

In contrast the Roman Catholic or Western tradition's explanation of the trinity places more emphasis on the relationships between the persons within the Trinity. While the East speaks in such terms as the Father, being perfect, His self concept must also be perfect: the Son. As such, the Son is begotten by the Father in an act of Divine, perfect, intelligent generation.

Finally, from the above we might deduce the following: the early eastern church was non-trinitarian – the trinity doctrine was enforced by the Emperors of Rome (many studies have proven this, including mainstream Encyclopedias – discussion of this point is beyond the terms of this paper). The further they moved from Torah observance, the further into heresy they traveled.

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The Born Again Doctrine and the Eastern Church

Let us now turn to the history of the born again doctrine.

Beside the Bible, the earliest references or inferences to a new birth at the resurrection may be found in literature in the first few centuries after Christ. Note the following quoted from Lampe's *A Patristic Greek Lexicon* concerning the new birth:

"**3.** the Nativity; **a** ... generation, engendering, also birth ... parallel with eternal generation ... threefold birth of Christ (Nativity, Baptism, **Resurrection**) dist. by Jo.Nic.*nativ.*(M.96.1440a)... **4.** spiritual birth, regeneration ... through practice of virtue ... through baptism ... ; hence of man's threefold birth, physical, baptismal, **and in resurrection.** Gr.Nyss. *Eun.4* (2 p.64.21;M.45.636c); Max.*ambig.*(M.91.1325B); **5.** = ... creation, Hipp.*haer.*5.25(p.126.27; M.16.3194B); ...Ath.*exp.in* Ps.109:3(M.27.46ID); Gr.Nyss.*Eun.4* (2 p.58.3; M.45.628D); *ib.*8(p.185.10,22; 780A,B)."

It would appear from this reference that John of Nicosia or Nicea (**in Asia Minor**) and Gregory, Bishop of Nyssa in the 4th century (a group of early Church theologians are known

as the "Cappadocian Fathers" – this shows his birthplace was in **Asia Minor**), in his work *Eunomius* reflected knowledge, albeit a knowledge that had almost died out completely in the non-sabbatarian churches, that the resurrection is likened to a birth. One wonders how much material was destroyed on this teaching over the previous 200 years. Hippolytus (c170-236AD), in *Philos. X.34* stated:

"thy body shall be immortal and incorruptible as well as they soul. **For thou hast become God.** All the things that follow upon the divine nature God has promised to supply to thee, for thou was deified **in being born to immortality**".

Here he seems to make the new birth current rather than future, and may be indicative of the gradual process of corruption of the truth.

Theodore of Mopsuestia (in **Cilicia, Asia Minor**), born in Antioch and thus also known as Theodore of Cilicia (c 350-428AD) wrote in terms of baptistry as a womb preparing Christians for birth; he describes the baptismal water as the water of second birth, itself typed by the fluid surrounding the foetus in the mother's womb (*Commentary of Theodore of Mopsuestia on the Lord's Prayer and on the Sacraments of Baptism and the Eucharist*, pages 53-54). While Dionysus Exiguus (5th century AD, Scythian by birth and a Catholic) stated the following in reference to baptismal candidates:

"They have not received an inspired existence in the divine birth, but areas yet being incubated by the paternal scriptures ... It is just as when children of the flesh arrive before their proper incubation. They are unready and unshaped like still-born fetuses".

This could be a reference to a vague understanding or residue of the truth of the conception process which was still extant in some form in the eastern churches and is no longer taught by the Eastern Orthodox Church to my knowledge.

But what is the purpose of such a birth? Perhaps some early 'Christian' writings reflect beliefs of primitive Christianity in terms of Christian destiny and human purpose upon the earth as we shall discover in the following section.

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The Divinisation/Deification/Theosis belief in the Early Church

It seems fairly certain that some early 'Christian' writings reflect beliefs of primitive true sabbatarian Christianity in terms of Christian destiny and human purpose upon the earth.

``The definition of the salvation of man as his deification was a standard element of **Eastern** theology" (Pelikan, Vol. 2, p46). (emphasis mine)

Note: once again it is the Eastern Church that has remained faithful to some Biblical Truths.

[Symeon the Theologian](#) (10th century, **Eastern** Church):

"As it [the Holy Spirit] regenerates you, it changes you from corruptible to incorruptible, from mortal to immortal, **from sons of men into sons of God and gods** by adoption and grace."

While not exactly what the Churches of God teaches, nevertheless he is 'getting there' as we say. In effect though, his understanding is a watered-down understanding of what was once understood in earlier generations.

Here are what some of the early 'fathers' (both Eastern and Western) taught concerning human destiny:

St Augustine of Hippo (AD 354-430):

"Let us rejoice then and give thanks that we have become not only Christians, but Christ himself. Do you understand and grasp, brethren, God's grace toward us? Marvel and rejoice: **we have become Christ**. For if he is the head, we are the members; he and we together are the whole man ..." (Book: In Jo. ev. 21, 8: PL 35, 1568)

Augustine is referring to this life. The Christian is deified by God in this life. In an echo of Irenaeus and Athanasius:

"The Son of God was made a partaker of mortality, so that **mortal man might partake of divinity**" (Underhill *Op Cited* page 251 Hom on Ps 52:6 36:646).

Clement of Alexandria (AD 155-220) wrote:

"the Logos of God had become man so that you might learn from a man how a **man may become God**" (*Prot* 1.8.4).

"Christians, with whom has been mingled the regal gold, the Holy Spirit ... Accordingly, as wine is blended with water, so is the Spirit with man" and for man to inherit immortality: "to be imperishable is **to share in Divinity**" (*Strom.* V.10.63).

Origen of Alexandria (cAD 185-254):

"From Him [Christ] there began the union of the divine with the human nature, in order that the human, by communion with the divine, **might rise to be divine** not in Jesus only, but in all those who believe, but enter on the life that Jesus taught " (*Cels* 3.28). (see also *Orat* 27.13; *Against Celsius* s 3.28).

Athanasius (AD 290-373):

This Bishop of Alexandria taught that

"For the Son of God became man **so that we might become God**." (St. Athanasius, Book: *De inc.*, 54, 3:PG 25, 192B)

"For man had not been deified if joined to a creature, or unless the Son were very God" (*Orat* 2.70)

"The Word was made flesh in order to offer up this body for all, **that we might be deified**" (*De Dec.* para.14).

"He was God, and then became man, and **that to deify us**" (*Orat.I.* para.39).

Christians could even be called God according to him:

"There is none other called God by the Scriptures except the Father of all, and the Son, and those who possess the adoption" (*Against Heresies*, book IV, preface, section 4; AnteNicene Fathers 1:463). At the beginning of our existence we are human in but "at length gods" (IV 38.4; ANF 1:522). We are raised up "to the life of God" (V 9.2; ANF 1:535).

“To become as the Father is impossible for us creatures.” “There be one Son by nature...we too become sons, not as He in nature and truth, but according to the grace of Him that calleth, and though we are men from the earth, and yet called gods, not as the True God or His Word....We are sons, not as the Son, as gods, not as He Himself. ” (*Orat* 3.19-20; Robertson 404-405). We are similar to the Son “not in essence but in sonship, which we shall partake from Him” (*De Syn* 53; Robertson 479).

“We are as God by imitation, not by nature” (*Orat* 3.20; Robertson 405). Jesus did not mean “that we might be as God,” but that we should imitate him (*Orat* 3.19; Robertson 404). “Albeit we cannot become like God in essence, yet by progress in virtue imitate God” (*Ad Afros* 7; Robertson 492).

In fact, he connects divinization and immortality in various places in his writings:

“As the Lord, putting on the body, became man, so we men are deified by the Word...and henceforth inherit life everlasting” (*Orat* 3.34; Robertson 413). Because we partake of the divine nature, we will “reign everlastingly” (*Orat* 3.40; Robertson 415). After Christ's resurrection from the dead, his “flesh had risen and put off its mortality and been deified” (*Orat* 3.48; Robertson 420). “Whereas what is human comes to an end, what is divine does not. For which reason also when we are dead...he raises us up” (Easter letter 29, fragment 2; Robertson 550).

Our union with the Godhead is through Christ by the Holy Spirit:

“The Word became flesh in order...that we, participating in His Spirit, might be deified” (*De Decret* 14; Kelly 377). “We are divinized by intimate union with the Holy Spirit, who unites us to the Son of God” (Pelikan 1:379, citing *Orat* 2.59 and *Ad Serap* 1.23-24). “By participation of the Spirit, we are knit into the Godhead” (*Orat* 3.24; Pelikan 1:216). “... of the Son with us ... By a partakability of the Spirit we shall become partakers of the divine nature” (*Ad Serap* 1.24; Egan 161-162). Due to the Holy Spirit “the Word makes divine these originated things” (*Ad Serap* 1.25; Egan 166). This starts at baptism when we become united with the Godhead – at that time we become His child (*Orat* 2.41; 1.34).

“The Word became man so that we might be deified” (*De inc* 54.3; Kelly 378). “The Word became flesh in order...that we, participating in His Spirit, might be deified” (*De Decret* 14; Kelly 377). “The Word of God...took a human body for the salvation and well-being of man, that having shared in human birth He might make man partake in the divine and spiritual nature” (*Vita Ant* 74; Robertson 215). “He himself has made us sons to the Father, and deified man, having become man himself ... Being God, he later became man, that instead he might deify us” (*Orat* 1.38-39; Rusch 101-102). “Being God, He [the Son] has taken to Him the flesh, and being in the flesh deifies the flesh ... If that He might redeem mankind, the Word did come among us; and that He might hallow and deify them, the Word became flesh” (*Orat* 3.38-39; Robertson 414-415). “The Son of God became man so as to deify us in Himself” (*Ad Adelph* 4; Kelly 378; Letter 60.4).

Ireneaus (AD c125-203):

He was born in **Proconsular Asia**, a Roman province which encompassed the seven churches of Rev. 2 & 3).

“For we cast blame on Him, because we have not been made gods from the beginning, but at first merely men, **then at length gods**” (*Against Heresies*, Book IV, Chapter XXXVIII; ANF, Vol. I, pg 522).

“For this is why the Word became man, and the Son of God became the Son of man: so that **man, by entering into communion with the Word and thus**

receiving divine sonship, might become a son of God." (St. Irenaeus, Bishop of Lyons, Book: *Adversus haereses*, worked with Pope Victor in about AD191 or 192)

Irenaeus further said that we are empty receptacles designed to be filled by God for

"God shall be glorified in His handiwork ... for the perfect man consists in the comingling and the union of the soul receiving the spirit of the Father ... For this is why the Word became flesh, and the Son of God became the Son of man: so that man, by entering into communion with the Word and thus receiving divine sonship, might become a son of God."

Hippolytus of Rome (date of birth unknown; died c236):

"And thou shalt be a companion of Deity, and a co-heir with Christ, no longer enslaved by disease., For thou hast become God ... For the Deity (by condescension,) does not diminish aught from the dignity of His divine perfection; **having made thee even God unto His glory!** - Hippolytus, *The Refutation Of All Heresies*, chapter XXX; ANF, Vol. V, pg 153)

"**If, therefore, man has become immortal, he will also be God.** And if he is made God by water and the Holy Spirit after the regeneration of the laver he is found to be also joint-heir with Christ after the resurrection of the dead" - Hippolytus, *Discourse On The Holy Theiphany*, (section) 8; ANF, Vol. V. pg 237).

"thy body shall be immortal and incorruptible as well as they soul. **For thou hast become God.** All the things that follow upon the divine nature God has promised to supply to thee, for thou was deified in being born to immortality" (Hippolytus, *Philos.* X.34).

Cyprian (AD 200-260):

"He is the power of God, He is the reason, He is His wisdom and glory; He enters into a virgin; being the Holy Spirit, He is endued with the flesh; God is mingled with man. This is our God, this is Christ, who, as the mediator of the two, puts on man that He may lead them to the Father. What man is, Christ was willing to be, that **man also may be what Christ is.**"

Gregory of Nyssa (AD 335-395):

He stated: that Christ's fleshly presence on the earth

"**deified** everything kindred and related to mankind".

"There is nothing remarkable in man being the image and likeness of the universe: for the earth passes away, the sky changes, and all that is contained therein is as transient as that which contained it." (quoted in Lossky, *Orthodox Theology*, page70)

Pseudo-Dionysus (Dionysus of Areopagite) (5th/6th centuries):

stated that salvation "can only happen with divinization of the saved. **And divinization consists of being as much as possible like God**"... as much as possible in union with God. (ibid. page 198 *Ecclesiastical Hierarchy*, chapter 1:3)

Eusebius of Pamphili (cAD 267-339):

"The Word of God [Christ] is now God as He had been man, **in order to deify mankind together with himself**" (*Demonstratio Evangelica* iv.14).

Eusebius was Bishop of Cæsarea in Palestine.

Chrysostom (AD 347-407):

"Christ came to us, and took upon him our nature and **deified** it"

He was born at Antioch and died at Pontus (ie another **eastern** 'Father').

Theophilus (cAD 115-181):

"... a man, by keeping the directions of God, may receive from him immortality as a reward and **become God**" (*ad Autol.* 11.27).

Theophilus was Bishop of Antioch.

Athanasius, John Chrysostom, Gregory of Nyssa were amongst those that laid the foundations of the **Eastern Church**.

The concept of divinisation continued in a limited undercurrent over the centuries. For instance the *New Dictionary of Theology* states that Calvin (AD1509-1564) taught that

"Christians are admitted, through the Holy Spirit, **to participation in the inner life of the Godhead**" (page 694).

Similarly Thomas Aquinas (AD 1225-1274) wrote:

"The only-begotten Son of God, wanting to make us sharers in his divinity, assumed our nature, **so that he, made man, might make men gods.**" (St. Thomas Aquinas, Philosopher, Theologian, Angelicus Doctor, Book: *Opusculum contra errores graecorum*, by order of Pope Urban IV 1261-64)

"For Dionysus teaches that the height of understanding is for man to become conjoined to God as the wholly unknown. He agrees but limits it and qualifies it. Although he uses not the term energy, he says that he can't see God's essence." (Aquinas, Thomas *Summa Theologiae* Black Friars/ Mc Graw Hill Gilby, Thomas O.P. translator vol.16 page 83 from question 3 article 8 "What Happiness is.")

In 1899 an academic book appeared on deification as salvation by WR Inge, *Christian Mysticism*. In it he quotes from the church historian, Professor Harnack:

"After Theophilus, Irenaeus, Hippolytus, and Origen, the idea of deification is found in all the Fathers of the ancient Church, and that in a primary position. We have it in Athanasius, the Cappadocians, Apollinaris, Ephraem Syrus, and others, as also in Cyril, Sophronius, and later Greek and Russian theologians. In proof of it, Ps 82:6 ("I said, Ye are gods") is very often quoted" (Inge, p. 358).

To this day, the Eastern Orthodox Church still teaches divinisation or deification. What is the Eastern Orthodox Church that it should still retain a semblance of the truth about divinization – unless it still harbours remnants of Truth from the earliest sabbatarian congregations that later evolved into the Eastern Orthodox Church?:

"Eastern Orthodox theological thought regarding humanity, sin, and redemption has always revolved around the concept of theosis. The doctrine is also called

deification or divinization Simply put, theosis means being deified or becoming like God. Theosis connotes participation in God's nature while maintaining a distinct human nature ... Theosis is held by the Orthodox to be the chief end of Humanity. Humans were created for deification" (Clendenin, Daniel B. "The Deification of Humanity: Theosis", *Eastern Orthodox Christianity: A Western Perspective*, p120).

The Orthodox view is that the gospel is not primarily the solution to man's problem with personal sin. It is God's provision of divine life in Christ, the beginning of theosis. A residual benefit of beginning the process of deification is the remission of sins. Baptism is the means by which the believer enters into this new life. John Meyendorff summarizes the idea of redemption in Eastern Orthodox theology well. He says:

"Communion in the risen body of Christ; participation in divine life; sanctification through the energy of God, which penetrates the humanity and restores it to its "natural" state, rather than justification, or remission of inherited guilt - these are at the center of Byzantine understanding of the Christian Gospel" (Meyendorff, John. "Man", *Byzantine Theology Historical Trends and Doctrinal Themes*, pp145-146).

Even the Roman Catholic Church appears to recall a little of this great truth. In the most up-to-date version of the official *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, released in 1992, Article 460 addresses the question: 'Why did the Word become flesh?' In response, the *Catechism* uses the quotes from Irenaeus and Athanasius above, as well as this from Saint Thomas Aquinas:

"The word became flesh to make us 'partakers of the divine nature' (2Peter 1:4). 'For this is why the Word became man , and the Son of God became the son of man; so that man, by entering into communion with the Word and thus receiving divine sonship might become a son of God' (Irenaeus Adv. haeres. 3,19, 1 PG 7/1,939) 'For the Son of God became man so that we might become God' (Athanasius, De Inc 54, 3:PG 25, 1923. The only-begotten Son of God, wanting to make us sharers in his divinity, assumed our nature, so that he, made man, might make men gods."

Although it seems to say little about divinisation these days, and its own members do not seem to be taught much about it, nevertheless it lurks there deep within its theology. For further information refer to the *Appendix The RCC and Divinisation*.

To the Eastern Orthodox theologians, salvation and redemption, baptism and the life of Christ were not events brought about by God as a result of a need to save man as such. Rather, salvation and associated concepts were subject to God's plan to incorporate man into the Godhead! While in contrast, the Western (Roman and Protestant) view is that salvation is involved with the remission of sins and heaven as the reward of the saved. The evangelicals in particular, are heavily into the idea of salvation is God saving man from a fallen state and being reconciled to God via loving Jesus.

But the Eastern Church radically differs with the belief that the Gospel is not focused solely upon man's sins being expunged, but rather that Christ's mission was to grant us divine life or theosis. The Orthodox view is that the gospel is not primarily the solution to man's problem with personal sin. It is God's provision of divine life in Christ, the beginning of theosis, because God's Spirit mingles with humans. The remission of sins - salvation - is residual to the true plan for man: man was created to be made divine (Clendenin, "The Deification of Humanity: Theosis," 120). Remission of sins is to purify man to make him like his Creator.

The following is written by John Meyendorff, providing a further explanation of this Eastern Orthodox concept:

"Communion in the risen body of Christ; **participation in divine life**; sanctification through the energy of God, which penetrates the humanity and restores it to its "natural" state, rather than justification, or remission of inherited guilt--these are at the center of Byzantine understanding of the Christian Gospel." (Myendorff, "Man," 145-146.) (emphasis mine)

This doctrine is called theosis, deification or divinisation: it is shrouded in mystery and their theologians are very cautious about entering into great examination or analysis of the true depth of this teaching. Perhaps they are a little embarrassed by the teaching as human destiny is far greater than ending up in a heaven somewhere. But observers state that the teaching simply means to become very much like God - participating in God's nature whilst remaining distinct.

In addition their version of the Fall of man is quite different from the Protestant version: Adam and Eve's sin brought universal mortality to mankind, not guilt, because each and every one of us are responsible for our own sins. We make the choice whether to sin or not; our sin is not the direct result of Adam's choice (Clendenin, "The Deification of Humanity: Theosis," 132-133., 120-123).

In their *Catechism* they state:

“Q. How do the Churches differ respecting the Dogma of the fall of man?

A.

- a) The Orthodox, Anglican, and Papal Churches accept that the nature of man has suffered from sin, i.e. the image of God in him has been corrupted and the "in His likeness" has not been attained, and all men are responsible before God for the original sin.
- b) The Protestant Churches accept that the nature of man, i.e. that "in His image", was lost wholly, and replaced with a nature wholly corrupt and ethically dead.
- b1) But some of them, as the so-called **Church of God**, do not accept that all men are responsible before God for the original sin.” [emphasis mine]

Whether the ‘Church of God’ referred to above refers to the Sabbatarian groups, I know not. If it does, they may have mistaken our belief that few are now called while the majority are not. As such, they are not responsible for their sinful state – Satan is.

It should also be explained here that their idea of man being divinised is not associated with the 'universal bliss' idea found amongst so much of eastern Asian religious thought and New Age thought. In such socialistic thinking, you would lose your identity and individuality and become part of the universal love - some say you will be conscious and others say unconscious forever. They may explain it like this: when a drop of water falls into a pool, the drop becomes part of the water, absorbed into it and part of it, yet remaining conscious - so it will be with humans. Their immortal souls supposedly become absorbed into god which is the universal consciousness. Such a perversion of the truth!

Lossky comments:

" ... instead of becoming ‘disindividualized’ to become ‘cosmic’ and to merge thus in a divine impersonal ... God allows him to ‘personalize’ the world" (Lossky, *Orthodox Theology*, pp 70-71)

Certainly the knowledge of some of the early ‘Christian’ writers on such subjects as man’s destiny, eternal bliss or the future age of bliss (somewhat different to the ‘bliss’ taught by Buddhists), the nature of God (in some cases), divinisation, God as the ground of being or the source of all that exists and so on has been well documented per the above.

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Wednesday Crucifixion – Saturday Resurrection Doctrine and the Eastern Churches

Chronology of the Crucifixion and Resurrection According to Ancient Texts
(the Wednesday Crucifixion - Saturday Resurrection proven by history)

By Blaine Newmann

In the Christian world today, the predominant view concerning the chronology of Christ's last days, is that He celebrated the Last Supper on Thursday evening, was arrested that same night, crucified on Friday, and rose on Sunday morning. In the early Church, however, one finds evidence of a widespread view that Christ held His Last Supper on Tuesday evening. There is also evidence, to a certain extent, that there were early Christians who believed in a midweek crucifixion and a Saturday (Sabbath) resurrection.

To support the theory of a Tuesday night Last Supper tradition, the earliest source where I have found evidence is the *Didascalia Apostolorum*, a church order which is supposed to have been composed *circa* A.D. 200. **[this was in northern Syria, near Asia Minor -ed]** It states, "For while He was yet with us before He suffered as we were eating the Passover with Him, He said to us, 'Today, in this night, one of you will betray Me' . . . And Judas came with the scribes and with the priests of the people and betrayed our Lord Jesus. And so in the night when the fourth day of the week drew on, betrayed our Lord to them. But they made payment to Judas. . . on the second day of the week . . . For when we had eaten the Passover on the third day of the week at even, we went forth to the Mount of Olives, and in the night they seized our Lord Jesus."¹

By the end of the third century a fast was celebrated on Wednesday (until 3:00 p.m.) to commemorate Christ's arrest. Victorinus, Bishop of Petau (martyred in A.D. 304) explains, "Now is manifested the reason of the truth why the fourth day is called the Tetras, why we fast even to the ninth hour . . . The man Christ . . . was taken prisoner by wicked hands, by a quarternoon, on account of the majesty of His works . . . therefore, we make a station or a supernumerary fast."²

Epiphanius, Bishop of Salamis (367-403 A.D.) **[he was based in Cyprus and influential in the eastern Church - ed]**, says, "Wednesday and Friday are days of fasting up to the ninth hour because, as Wednesday began the Lord was arrested and on Friday he was crucified."³

Even though at this time Friday was believed to be the day of the crucifixion, Wednesday was still known as the day of Christ's arrest. The early *Pseudopigraphal Book of Adam and Eve* (composed approximately A.D. 400) states the same. It says, "Then the Word of God said to Adam: 'Adam, you have determined in advance the days when sufferings will come upon me when I shall have become flesh; for those days are Wednesday and Friday'."⁴ (The literal reading is actually the "fourth" instead of "Wednesday" and "the preparation" in place of "Friday.")

Another pseudepigraphal work called *The Narrative of Joseph* (originally believed to have been composed in the fourth century, but which copy we have only from the twelfth century) states, "Jesus also was taken on the third day before the Passover, in the evening. And on the following day, the fourth day of the week, they brought Him at the ninth hour into the hall of Caiaphas."⁵

In most modern liturgical churches today, the reason for the Wednesday fast is largely forgotten, however, the Wednesday fast is very much alive in **Eastern Orthodox Churches**. **[emphasis mine – ed]** Even today in the Coptic Church **[ie Egyptian Christian Church -**

ed] the reason for fasting on Wednesday echoes the exact reason why the primitive Christian church fasted on Wednesday. The *Coptic Encyclopedia* states, "The Coptic Church ordains that Wednesday and Friday be observed as fast days, the former being the day on which Jesus Christ was condemned to be crucified, and the latter being the day on which his crucifixion took place."⁶

Though the above quoted references show that a Friday crucifixion was endorsed alongside a Tuesday last supper belief, in the *Acts of Pilate* (a pseudepigraphal work originally composed in the fourth century) a midweek crucifixion seems to be indicated. According to the *Acts of Pilate*, Karinus and Leucius, two saints who were supposedly resurrected at the time of Christ's resurrection, were reported to have been told by Christ to stay at Jerusalem for three more days to complete the observation of Passover.⁷

One Greek version says, "Thereafter we went unto Jerusalem also and accomplished the Passover." One Latin version states, "For three days only were allowed unto us who rose from the dead, to keep the Passover of the Lord in Jerusalem with our kindred (parents) that are living for a testimony of the resurrection of Christ the Lord. And after three days, when we had kept the Passover of the Lord, all they were caught up in the clouds which had risen with us and were taken over Jordan and were no more seen of any man."⁸

Since Christ was killed on the preparation day of the Passover, seven days of unleavened bread followed and then the Passover festival was completed. The statement that only three days were left to accomplish the Passover after Christ's resurrection would indicate that Christ spent a full three days and three nights in the grave, and not only parts of three days. Thus the *Acts of Pilate* seem to promote a midweek crucifixion.

If one assumes the Last Supper took place on a Tuesday evening and Christ was crucified on a Wednesday, then Thursday would have to be a Sabbath day, since the scriptures state that Christ was crucified on the preparation day before the Sabbath.

Luke 23:54 says, "And that day was the preparation, and the Sabbath drew on." **John 19:31** says, "The Jews therefore, because it was the preparation, that the bodies should not remain upon the cross on the Sabbath day, (for that Sabbath day was an high day) besought Pilate that their legs might be broken and that they might be taken away."

Rabbi Samuel Lacks states, "The day of preparation (Greek *paraskeue*) equals Friday or the day before a holiday."⁹ Since the day of preparation can mean a day before any holy day, the preparation day Christ was crucified on could well have been on a Wednesday and the Passover Sabbath on a weekday (i.e., Thursday). With this scenario, the Passover meal would have been on a Tuesday. According to **Leviticus 23:5-8** the fourteenth of the first month is the day of the Passover meal and the day following, the fifteenth, is a Passover Sabbath. It reads, "In the fourteenth day of the first month at even is the Lord's Passover. And on the fifteenth day of the same month is the feast of unleavened bread unto the Lord. Seven days ye must eat unleavened bread. In the first day ye shall have an holy convocation: ye shall do no servile work therein." Therefore the Passover Sabbath could be on a weekday.

Christ died on the preparation day at the ninth hour (3:00 p.m.) and was buried before sunset. If that day were a Wednesday, then three full days and three full nights later would be Saturday at 3:00 p.m., or just before sunset.

According to this chronology, Christ would have to be resurrected on Saturday after 3:00 p.m., yet before sunset. He would have been resurrected on the Sabbath day. This is evidently what some early Christians believed. In the early Christian church there were many who believed that the resurrection of Christ took place on the Sabbath, which is Saturday, the seventh day of the week. By the fifth century A.D., Easter Sunday celebrations of Christ's

resurrection were widespread in Christianity. However, the Church historian Socrates (ca. 440 A.D.) in a section of his history entitled, "Differences of usage in regard to Easter," reveals that in the East there were Christians who celebrated Easter on Sabbath instead of Sunday. He stated, "Others in the East kept that feast on the Sabbath indeed."¹⁰

Bishop Gregory of Tours (A.D. 538-594) tells us that many in France believed Christ arose on the seventh day of the week, even though he himself defended a Sunday resurrection belief. He stated, "Now in our belief the resurrection of the Lord was on the first day, and not on the seventh as many deem."¹¹

Alexander Ross (A.D. 1590-1654) tells us the Armenians [**near to Asia Minor – ed**] believed in a Saturday resurrection, though he disagrees with them. He stated, "The Armenii taught . . . that Christ rose from the dead on the Sabbath day, whereas the Scripture tells us plainly that He arose on the third day."¹²

Though the belief that Christ rose on the Sabbath has appeared to be long forgotten and abandoned by most Christians today, vestiges of this belief appear to have survived in an indirect way through certain ceremonies in the **eastern church [emphasis mine – ed]**. For example, in the Coptic Church, on Holy Saturday "following the ninth hour (i.e., 3:00 p.m.), the Divine Liturgy is celebrated."¹³ As early as 400 A.D., both Socrates and Sozomen state that in Egypt there was a Sabbath evening celebration of the communion.¹⁴ In the Nestorian Church in India the communion (Qurbana) is still celebrated to this day at sunset on Holy Saturday in honor of Christ's resurrection. Mar Aprem says, "On Holy Saturday it is stated that Qurbana should be at sunset. Because it is believed that Jesus rose from the tomb at that time."¹⁵

Since Christ died at the ninth hour (3:00 p.m.) on the day of preparation, and if this day was a Wednesday, then a full three days and three nights later would bring one to 3:00 p.m., Saturday. Since Christ was buried before sunset, then Christ would have been raised before sunset. The time of Christ's Saturday resurrection would have been between 3:00 p.m. and sunset — no later.

Footnotes

1. *Didascalia Apostolarum*, (translated by R. High Connolly), Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1929, p. 181.
2. *The Writing of Quintus Sept. Flor. Tertullianus with the extant works of Victorinus and Commodianus*, vol. 3, Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1895, pp. 388, 389.
3. Annie Jaubert, *The Date of the Last Supper*, N.Y., Alba House, 1965, p. 77.
4. *Supra*. n. 3. p. 79.
5. *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, Vol. 8, Michigan. Wm. B. Eerdmans. 1956, p. 468.
6. *The Coptic Encyclopedia*, Vol. 4, N.Y.: MacMillian Publishing Company, 1991, p. 1096.
7. Montague Rhodes James, *The Apocryphal Mew Testament*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1960, pp. 142, 143.
8. *Ibid.*
9. Samuel Tobias Lachs, *A Rabbinic Commentary of the New Testament*, New Jersey: Ktav Publishing House, Inc. 1987, p. 437.
10. *Nicene and Post Nicene Fathers*, Vol. 2, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans's, 1952, p. 131.
11. Gregory of Tours, *The History of the Franks*, Vol. 2, (trans. by D.M. Dalton), Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1927, p. 24.
12. Alexander Ross, *Pansebeia: or A View of All the Religions of the World*, London, John Saywell, 1658, p. 219.
13. *Supra*, n. 6, p. 1252.
14. *The Sabbath in Scripture and History*, (ed. Kenneth A. Strand), Washington D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1982, p. 171.
15. Mar Aprem, *Sacraments of the Church of the East*, India: Mar Narsai Press, 1978, p. 112.

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[published in *Giving & Sharing* newsletter, June 1998, No. 47, pages 14-16]

[NB: A recent work which traces the history of the Wednesday crucifixion doctrine since the mid-1800s is *A History of the Saturday Resurrection Doctrine*, by George Dellinger – ed]

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Concluding Remarks

This paper demonstrates that the influences of the early Church of God established in Asia Minor, although waning, still had an impact on the apostate Babylonian Church which was arising. In fact, the Great False Church in both East and West (particularly in the East) continued with some of God's Truth for centuries after the Apostles.

Due to the influence of our arch enemy, Satan, gradually the Sabbath and other truths were lost, but divinisation continued in the East and has been a component of their theology for a very long time. To early eastern Christians, being given immortality was equivalent to being ascribed or granted godhead or a relationship with God that is so close and so akin to the life He experiences, that it is divine or godly: we become deified or divinized – partakers of the Divine life.

Over time these doctrines receded and gradually disappeared in the non-Sabbatarian churches. Although a small residue of the truths seemed to remain in the Eastern churches. It should be noted here that more and more historians confess that the Jerusalem Church was a sabbatarian community which kept the Holy Days, clean & unclean foods, had a close affinity to Israel and so forth; they admit that the Jerusalem Church actually gave rise to the Nazarenes. Who were these Nazarenes?

As we shall see in a future paper, they were the very line continuing the existence of the True Church of God which existed alongside the assemblies – particularly those of the East - which became the Great False Church - Mystery Babylon - mother of many whores, which were borne in bloody protest.

Despite it being watered-down, one doctrine has continued:

“After Theophilus, Ireneæus, Hippolytus, and Origen, it [divinisation] is found in all the Fathers of the ancient Church" (Harnack 3:164 note 2, which also cites passages from Ephraem, Gregory of Nyssa, Gregory of Nazianzus, Apollonarius, Macarius, Pseudo-hippolytus, Dionysus the Areopagite, Sophronius, Leo of Russia, and Gennadius. Lampe (631) includes most of the above and Maxentius, Basil, Cyril, and Epiphanius. (Jaroslav Pelikan, *The Christian Tradition: A History of the Development of Doctrine. Volume 1: The Emergence of the Catholic Tradition (100-600).*)

“Baptism...is the sacrament of regeneration by which the divine image is renewed. The participant becomes an heir of eternal life, and the Father's adoptive son" (J Davidson. *Early Christian Doctrines.*)

“The final goal and result of this saving knowledge, this forgiveness, and this rescue from death was `deification' (*the_osis*)" (J Pelikan vol. 1, p155).

“Jesus can make us like God, which means, for Athanasius, make us immortal and give us eternal knowledge” (W Rusch., *The Trinitarian Controversy. Sources of Early Christian Thought.*)

“As the immortality that we have lost consisted in existence according to the Image of God, and was therefore an existence similar to that of God, the salvation that we now need is a sort of divinization (*theopoi_sis*)” (Justo L González. *A History of Christian Thought, Volume 1: From the Beginnings to the Council of Chalcedon.*)

So, scholars note that divinization was a common doctrine in the East; but had only a small influence in the West.

Although some scholars seem to think that this deification belief came via pagan ideas that ancient gods became men and such like, I have seen no proof for this, but only surmisings and *extremely* loose ‘linkages’ between the two concepts. IF any such linkages truly exist, is it not feasible that the Devil has his counterfeits? Indeed! For all of the doctrines of the Bible have been counterfeited by him.

Finally, we have seen that the earliest churches that emerged in the East out of the True Congregations established by the Apostles and their successors, still contained doctrinal influences within their belief systems, whether adhering to certain Truths or watered-down versions of them: eg Christology in some way; born again at the resurrection; divinization (in particular); and knowledge of the Wednesday Crucifixion.

They started at a high level of Truth and gradually lost it. This waning from a position of strength to weakness and eventual loss proves that the basic Truths held by the various Churches of God and Torah-observing groups (eg Messianics, Hebrew Roots, Sabbatarians) represent the earliest, most ‘primitive’ form of Christianity – the true Way of God.

And if we understand the above, then we understand what some fundamental Truths of God are and how so much has been lost by Christendom.

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Appendix: The RCC and Divinisation

Startling Official Doctrine

<http://www.geocities.com/Heartland/2964/divinization.html>

Could you help me??

I have been studying The Catechism of the Catholic Church 1992 and The Holy Bible for many months off and on. I'm 'wishing to deepen my knowledge of the unfathomable riches of salvation', as the Holy Father desires on page 6 of the Catechism. :-)

It's my understanding that The Catechism is Official Church Doctrine and it includes as references throughout, from The Holy Bible, and excerpts of books/writings from saints, as well as over 2000 years worth of Ex-Cathedra (infallible in faith and morals) statements/speeches/declarations/teachings from all of our past (true, not false) Popes dating back to Peter himself. :-)

I have stumbled upon some startling (because of my ignorance?) official Church doctrine, from the Catechism, that does not make sense to me, which I hope I can get your thoughts

about, please ? :-) I'll make it short and to the point. I will make the parts I'm confused about in larger, bold type. :-)

Pages 128 - 129, paragraph # 460:

The word became flesh to make us "partakers of the divine nature" (2 Peter 1:4)

"For this is why the Word became man, and the Son of God became the Son of man: so that man, by entering into communion with the Word and thus receiving divine sonship, might become a son of God." (St. Irenaeus, Bishop of Lyons, BOOK: Adversus haereses, worked with Pope Victor in about 191 or 192)

"For the Son of God became man so that we might become God." (St. Athanasius, Bishop of Alexandria, BOOK: De Decretis, about 325?)

"The only-begotten Son of God, wanting to make us sharers in his divinity, assumed our nature, so that he, made man, might make men gods." (St. Thomas Aquinas, Philosopher, Theologian, Angelicus Doctor, BOOK: Opusculum contra errores graecorum, by order of Pope Urban IV 1261-64)

Pages 228 - 229, paragraph # 795:

Christ and his Church thus together make up the "whole Christ" (Christus totus). The Church is one with Christ. The saints are acutely aware of this unity:

Let us rejoice then and give thanks that we have become not only Christians, but Christ himself. Do you understand and grasp, brethren, God's grace toward us? Marvel and rejoice: we have become Christ. For if he is the head, we are the members; he and we together are the whole man..... (St. Augustine, Bishop of Hippo 354 -430, BOOK: In Jo. ev. 21, 8: PL 35, 1568) Can you help me understand? I've been a Roman Catholic my whole life (33 yrs) and I'd like to understand.

~~Michelle Peerboom

Dear Michelle,

Thank you for your email and the wonderful quotes from the Catechism. Your understanding of the Catechism is correct. The quote from 2 Peter about "participating in the divine nature" and those from the Catechism about man becoming God are indeed startling. I am glad they made you stop and wonder because they do the same for me. First of all, the distance between myself and God seems so enormous. I can barely hold a few coherent ideas in my mind and He created the universe effortlessly with a single word. But second - and most humbling - is that so often I seem to run away from God, to want anything but Him. I sometimes think how great it would be to have as much money as Bill Gates, but less often do I reflect on what it would be (will be) to possess everything of value. Do you see what I am saying, Michelle?

The Orthodox Christians have focused more on "divinization" than we have in the West. Still, as the Catechism indicates, it is part of our tradition as well. The great Church Father, Irenaeus of Lyons, wrote beautifully about it. Have you read any of his writings? One of the quotes you sent is from him.

Perhaps in the West we have shied from talking about divinization because we so easily can fall into a pantheistic or even pagan idea. Joseph Smith did this when he founded Mormonism. If I understand them correctly, they have the idea of that faithful Mormon (males) will be raised to a divine status, each one ruling his own separate world. The doctrine

has been stated famously: 'As man is, God once was; as God is, man may become.'" That of course is not Christianity but the old polytheism. What the Catechism teaches is not that we will become separate gods, but that through Christ we will become totally united with the one God and in that sense be divinized.

I hope this is of some help, Michelle, but I fear I may have confused you even more. Please keep praying, reading the Bible and Catechism. And say a prayer for me. What matters is not that we figure out all these mysteries now, but that we arrive at our destiny - eternal union with the Trinity in the Communion of Saints.

God bless,
Fr. Bloom

Gospel Commentary: Becoming God

<http://www.catholicherald.com/gospel/02gc/gc020110.htm>

By Fr. Paul Scalia
HERALD Columnist
(From the Issue of 1/10/02)

Our Lord was not baptized for the same reasons we are. For us, Baptism washes away original sin and gives us new birth as children of God. Christ, the Son of God from all eternity has no need of cleansing or rebirth. When Jesus came forward for baptism, therefore, "John tried to prevent him, saying 'I need to be baptized by you, and yet you are coming to me?'" Jesus receives baptism from John nonetheless, not because He needs it, but for our sake: to reveal Himself as the Christ and to institute the sacrament of Baptism. A prayer from the Mass of St. John the Baptist declares that John "Baptized Christ, the giver of baptism, in waters made holy by the one who was baptized." We best understand the mystery of the Lord's Baptism, however, when we view it within the context of Christmas.

Mother Church celebrates Christmas from Dec. 25 through the Baptism of the Lord. These two events, our Lord's birth and baptism, stand on either end of the Christmas season to reveal the purpose of God's coming as man. On Christmas Day, He is born of the Virgin Mary: God becomes a "Son of man." **This Sunday He is baptized to give us the sacrament of Baptism: man becomes a son of God. St. Augustine summarizes this beautifully: God became man so that man might become God.**

"So that man might become God." God became man for this reason, and He gave us the sacrament of Baptism to accomplish it. Of course, this means not that we become little gods, but that we share in the one divine nature. St. Augustine's phrase shocks us, however, because we seldom realize the purpose of our faith: to become God.

Our culture has a sadly truncated view of religion. Some see religion as simply a code of ethics or a system of morality. According to this thinking, all religions are basically the same: just a way of keeping people well behaved. The elements of religion then become mere sociological realities. Faith is just optimism, a creed just opinion. Baptism (and every sacrament for that matter) becomes only a ceremony of welcome or a rite of passage. Morality would be merely a way of behaving in this world and prayer just an exercise in self-reflection. The Baptism of the Lord reminds us that the Catholic faith is not just a matter of "doing good," but of being good and, even more, of becoming God.

"So that man might become God." Everything in our faith has this goal. The Christian life consists in allowing the Holy Spirit **to transform us gradually into Christ.** Baptism places

divine life in our souls. **We need to allow this divine life to grow to its fullness. Mother Church gives us the Creed, therefore, so that we can think with God. The sacraments nourish, heal and increase God's life within us.** By Christian morality, we live in the world as God Himself would — and did. By prayer, we enter into conversation with God and, even more amazing, into the conversation of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

Cardinal John Henry Newman, the great English convert of the 19th century, describes well the complete transformation that must occur:

Your whole nature must be re-born, your passions, and your affections, and your aims, and your conscience, and your will, must all be bathed in a new element, and reconsecrated to your Maker, and, the last not the least, your intellect.

The process of divinization, as its is sometimes called, never ends and must extend to every aspect of our being. All of us, not just part, must become God.

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A Note on Writing Style

The author has employed a style that is neither scholarly (designed for high end scholastic journals and unintelligible to many) nor chatty and journalistic (styles used in novels and newspapers).

Instead, he prefers one that straddles both areas to ensure that the

Moreover, he also prefers to write succinctly rather than in a verbose manner. Life is too short to write 20,000 words when the same message could expressed in 5,000. This will lessen the time needed by the already time-consumed reader.

In addition, almost everything he writes is from a new perspective, building upon the Church of God teachings – not undoing them. In other words, he prefers to value add to them with new research and thinking.

If a subject has already been written and researched, he prefers to avoid duplicating efforts, even if there might be some differences of opinion between him and the research, booklet or book. It is only if he can add value to the subject that he ventures into the particular area and writes on it.

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