

# Theosis Through Gnosis Gnostic Considerations on Deification

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*Theosis* is a term employed largely by the Eastern Orthodox church to describe the divinization of Man (i.e. humanity). This doctrine of divinization or deification is derived from the *Second Epistle of Peter*, chapter 1, verse 4, which exhorts us to "become partakers of the divine nature." Within Eastern Orthodoxy this doctrine is of such vital and central importance that it is often equated with salvation, and the very purpose of life itself. We, as Gnostic Christians, of course have no quarrel with this worthy pursuit. In fact, in this regard the ultimate aims of the Gnostic and Orthodox Christian are fundamentally identical. This is not to say that our theological doctrines are identical, but our approaches to theology are similar in that they derive from mystical revelation rather than the pure rational speculation of Catholic Scholasticism. Let us, therefore, look at this process known as theosis through the lens of Gnosticism, as well as its scriptural sources and means of attainment.

According to the doctrine of theosis, deification is attained through a three-stage process: Catharsis (καθαρσις) or Purification; Theoria (θεωρία) or Illumination; and Theosis (θεοσις), which term thus describes the process as a whole, as well as the final stage of that process. This final stage represents the regeneration of humanity to its primitive estate, which is divine. This, however, poses some challenges to Orthodox theology, for they hold that God is transcendent and that His essence is unknowable. But the genuine mystical experience proves to the participant empirically that there is a divinity immanent in Man. In order to reconcile these seemingly contradictory views, theologians such as Gregory Palamas have posited that there is a distinction between the "essence" of God - which remains unknowable, and the "energies" or "operations" of God, through which it is possible to obtain an experiential knowledge of God. This is not an altogether bad explanation, as it is easily relatable to the principles of the *fixed* and the *volatile* as in the alchemical Sulphur & Mercury. In the Orthodox schema, the "essence" would be the Sulphuric or *fixed* aspect of God; that is, it remains within Himself, unchangeable and immovable. The "energies" would be the Mercurial or *volatile* aspect, with which we may participate and ultimately unite our consciousness. Many western theologians, however - especially those who adhere to the school of Scholasticism - have viewed this as an irreconcilable division within God.

The Gnostic, on the other hand, asserts the fundamental unity of God. One may still use the words "essence" and "energies" as semantic conventions if it seems helpful, but the doctrines of Gnosticism show that there is a solution that is both simple and elegant. Most branches of modern Gnosticism, while having very little dogma to speak of, mostly agree on two fundamental doctrines: the doctrine of emanation; and salvation through gnosis. We will address the second doctrine a little further on. But let us now look briefly at the doctrine of emanation.

*Emanation* means a pouring or issuing forth as a means of generation, as opposed to *creation* which is the forming and fashioning of a thing using some outside medium. The concept of creation works fine on the lower planes. For example, humans create by fashioning things of a material nature, utilizing the elements of the material universe. Even seemingly incorporeal things, such as music, consist of generating particular vibratory patterns within the medium of air. If there were no air, liquid, or solid medium through which these vibrations could be generated, then it would be impossible to create sound or music. We may even extend this analogy to the astral or psychic realm wherein the Demiurge and his archons create worlds using substances of which they themselves are not the source.

But this theory becomes problematic once we have worked our way back to the source, i.e. God Himself. God, as the ultimate Source of all, cannot have created in the sense of the manipulation of some outside material, since He must necessarily be the very source of any such material. This paradox is resolved in creation doctrine by the introduction of the concept of *creatio ex nihilo*, creation from nothing.

Emanation on the other hand, posits a process of the issuing forth of the Aeons - the whole of the Pleroma. In Gnostic thought, God - who is sometimes called the One - reflects upon itself, resulting in the emanation of Thought, or First Thought (Protennoia). This is the Holy Spirit of the Trinity. Through this Thought, the One then issues forth the Logos. The Logos, just as the Thought, was pre-existent in the Father (Propator), and is in fact the creative power of the Father. The Logos, therefore, is seen to issue forth of its own accord, and is thus not only Monogenes (alone-born, or only begotten), but also Autogenes (self-generated). It is by means of the Logos, then, that all subsequent realities or hypostases are brought forth. The Trinity, therefore, existed in union with the Father, or the One, for all eternity; and their emanation or issuing forth makes them no less substantively or essentially divine, but it does make that divinity accessible, as we shall attempt to explain.

Adam was made a "living soul" through the infusion of *pneuma*, or spirit - the very essence of the divine. And it is only because of the immanence of the divine essence in Man that we may hope to gain an experiential knowledge (gnosis) of the transcendent Father. If, therefore, we see God as both transcendent and immanent, we no longer need to draw any substantive distinction between the "essence" and "energies" of God, except as semantic conveniences to help better explain our relative and conditional experience of God in contrast to the fullness of God in His boundlessness.

Before we get ahead of ourselves, let us return to an examination of the three stages of Theosis: Catharsis, Theoria, and Theosis proper. Catharsis, as previously stated, is a stage of purification. Orthodox theology holds that this purification is most importantly the purification of consciousness. This purification is effected through various means of asceticism. Among the advanced initiates of the Mystery Traditions, this purification through asceticism constitutes a phase of spiritual alchemy. Among the Orthodox, this purification is brought about chiefly through the practice of Hesychasm. In both instances the practitioner seeks to cultivate "ceaseless prayer" (cf. *1 Thess. 5:17*), which is also known as "Prayer of the Heart." This contemplative prayer arises from a state of perpetual watchfulness, or *nepsis* (Gr. *νεψις*).

The basis of Hesychasm, from the Greek *ἡσυχία* (quiet, silent), is found in *Matthew 6:6*, "Whenever you pray, go into your hidden room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret." This is understood to mean that one is to retire unto oneself, the heart being that "hidden room." This doctrine is not at odds with the *Gnostic Gospel of Philip* which states, "He said, 'Go into your room, shut the door behind you, and pray to your Father who is in secret,' that is, the one who is innermost. What is innermost is the Fullness, and there is nothing further within. And this is what they call the uppermost."

Hesychasm involves asceticism and repetitive prayer, usually the so-called Jesus Prayer: "Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner." Through the repeated recitation of the Jesus Prayer, one may be brought to the awareness and experience of the true inner prayer, or Prayer of the Heart. Another prayer utilized since antiquity is the one given by St. John Cassian (c. 360-435): "O God, make speed to save me. O Lord, make haste to help me." Hesychasm also involves adopting certain postures and breathing techniques. Students of the ACP formation program - all initiates in fact - should appreciate the use of breathing, posture, and intonation as a means toward inner illumination. These practices, of course, do not actually cause the state of inner illumination. They are merely part of the preparatory and purgative process that allows for the eventual lib-

eration of conscience from the fetters of the temporal passions. The actual inner illumination is known as *theoria*, which we shall now discuss.

*Theoria* is the word from which our word "theory" is derived. It is from the verb *theorein*, meaning "to look at, consider, speculate, contemplate." Its meaning in Orthodox theology, however, as well as within Neoplatonism, is closer to the Latin *contemplatio* than *speculatio*. That is, it is understood to refer to the inner, contemplative, *primary* experiential knowledge that leads to divine union, rather than the speculative, secondary or tertiary knowledge that arises through rational inquiry. The theological conception of *theoria* moves even beyond its use by the Neoplatonists, from whom it was borrowed. According to Thomas Keating, the Church Fathers viewed *theoria* as being akin to the Hebrew word *da'ath* implying an experiential knowledge not of the mind alone, but of the mind united with the heart, involving the whole being. In short, *theoria* should be understood to have the sense of "beholding" rather than merely "thinking of."

One of the chief proponents and defenders of Hesychasm and the doctrine of theosis in general was St. Gregory Palamas (1296-1359), who taught that *theoria* is the state of beholding the uncreated Light of God, the "Tabor Light." This doctrine states that the light that shone at the transfiguration of Jesus on Mount Tabor (Mt. 17, Mk. 9, Lk. 9:28-), identified also with the "light seen by St. Paul at his conversion, is that very uncreated Light of God which is not the essence of God, but emanates perpetually from that essence, and is inseparable from the divine essence itself. Palamas went to great lengths to emphasize the distinction between the essence of God, which is eternal and uncreated and transcendent, and the energies of God, which are also eternal and uncreated and, as we have seen, inseparable from the essence, but accessible. Furthermore, Palamas theorized that the Tabor Light is one and the same as the promised Kingdom of Heaven. In fact, this is one of the theses of Palamas that was canonized by the Orthodox church.

Luke 17:20b-21 states: "The Kingdom of God is not coming with that which can be observed; nor will they say 'Behold, here it is!' or 'There it is!' For behold, the Kingdom of God is within you!" If, therefore, the Tabor Light is one and the same as the Kingdom (as affirmed by Orthodox canon), and if the Kingdom is within, that is, immanent (as affirmed by the very words of Jesus), then it follows that that uncreated Light which shone forth from Jesus at the Transfiguration is in fact immanent within every human.

Orthodoxy, while allowing for the possibility of a "true gnosis," most often likes to distance itself from the term "gnosis" or at least to accord it a rank lower than *theoria*. The following passage from the "Palamism" entry in Wikipedia describes this pretty well:

Gnosis and all knowledge are created, as they are derived or created from experience, self-awareness and spiritual knowledge. *Theoria*, here, is the experience of the uncreated in various degrees, i.e. the vision of God or to see God. The experience of God in the eighth day or outside of time therefore transcends the self and the experiential knowledge or gnosis. Gnosis is most importantly understood as a knowledge of oneself; *theoria* is the experience of God, transcending the knowledge of oneself.

This idea is summed up succinctly in the Wiki for "*Theoria*" which states: "Knowledge is derived from experience, but experience is not derived from knowledge." In other words, *theoria*, or experience of God, is seen as the primary or causative event, and gnosis - however genuine and pure it may be - can only be a secondary event; an effect of the experience. This is a very clever argument, and one that initially appears quite convincing. But this definition of gnosis is rather limiting, not only according to a Gnostic interpretation, but even within orthodox circles, such as the statements by Thomas Keating previously mentioned which readily equate *theoria* with *da'ath* (knowledge). The problem is that the term gnosis is used by the theologians to mean different things at different times.

In one instance it may mean the intellectual knowledge gained through rational inquiry; in another case it may refer to the knowledge of oneself; and yet again it may be used to refer to spiritual knowledge, but which is separate from and subsequent to the spiritual experience itself. But Gnosis, to the Gnostic, is a revelatory knowledge which is indistinguishable from the experience itself. Gnosis, therefore, to the Gnostic, is in fact the same phenomenon as that called theoria by the Orthodox.

Of the three types of knowledge referred to above, the first is dealing with a mundane form of knowledge. The third form refers only to the memory of an experience. But the second type referred to - knowledge of oneself - comes closer to what we, as Gnostics, mean by the term gnosis. Gnostics often distinguish, however, between personal gnosis and divine gnosis. It is generally held that personal gnosis is but a step toward the divine gnosis. We have already shown that theoria, or divine gnosis, is the vision or realization of the immanence of the divine. So, if God is immanent, or "innermost" as stated in the *Gospel of Philip*, then the knowledge of oneself, through maturation and cultivation, may lead to the experience of God - divine gnosis/theoria, which in turn leads ultimately to theosis, or union with God.

While we feel that we have successfully argued in favor of equating gnosis with theoria, it will be better to offer additional scriptural support for our assertions. Let us turn, then, to 2 Peter - the very scripture on which the entire doctrine of theosis is based. This epistle is a particularly mystical text in which references to gnosis are found throughout. In fact, gnosis is one of the very first things mentioned, and one of the very last things mentioned. And sandwiched in between among these three short chapters are a number of mystical treasures.

As early as the 2nd verse of the first chapter, we read: "May grace and peace be multiplied unto you in knowledge of God and Jesus our Lord." So, right from the start we are reading of the "knowledge of God." The text continues in verse 3:

All things for life and godliness have been given to us by His divine power through the knowledge of the One Who called us to His own glory and virtue.

We see here, then, that lest there be any mistake concerning the value of the knowledge mentioned in verse 2, it is nothing less than the "divine power" that comes to us "through knowledge." And this divine power enables us to receive life (ζωή - zoe; not mere *bios*) and godliness. We therefore now see the context in which the following verse occurs - the verse, as stated previously, which constitutes the scriptural basis for the doctrine of theosis:

Through which things he has given us the precious and great promises, that through these you may become participants of the divine nature, having escaped the cosmos which has been corrupted by lust.

It now becomes clear that the "things he has given us" that allow us to "become participants of the divine nature" are the "knowledge of God" and the "divine power" that comes through that knowledge. Therefore, if theosis is participation in the divine nature, and if theoria is the means by which theosis is attained, then we must conclude that theoria consists of the knowledge of God and the divine power that comes through this knowledge. But let us continue with our study of the text.

The next verses show us that knowledge does not operate in a vacuum. Rather, it is part of a process that culminates in deification, the crowning virtue of which is agape. Thus we read in verses 5-7:

And for this very reason, you must with due diligence support faith with virtue, and virtue with knowledge, and knowledge with self-control, and self-control with endurance, and endurance with godliness, and godliness

with brotherly love (φιλαδελφια - philadelphia), and brotherly love with agape (αγαπη).

We must therefore always remember that gnosis, however precious it may be, is not an end unto itself, but a part of the process toward divinization. We do posit, however, that it is the central and key experience of the divinization process. And our scripture seems to bear this out, for we read in the very next verses (8-9):

For these things being in you and multiplying keep you from becoming unproductive and unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. For anyone in whom these things are not present is shortsighted and blind, having forgotten the purification [καθαρισμου] of his past shortcomings [αμαρτιων].

We have thus once again returned to our central theme of knowledge, which comes after a period of purification or catharsis. This gives us even further evidence to identify gnosis as the principal experience of theoria. Now, we will not here provide an exegesis of every verse of this epistle, but let us continue on for a while, for the next two verses (10-11) offer continued support to our thesis:

Therefore, brothers, be diligent to confirm your calling and election, for in doing these things you will not ever fall. For thus will be richly provided for you the entrance into the eternal kingdom [αιωνιον βασιλειαν] of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

There are a number of interesting points contained in these verses. First, in verse 10 we see reference to the "calling and election." We don't wish to go too far into this here, but these terms are significant to Gnostic theology, as they are seen to represent the psychic church and the pneumatic church, sometimes referred to as the Church Suffering and the Church Triumphant. In verse 11, though, we find concepts directly pertinent to our study. Here the text speaks of entry into the eternal kingdom. You will recall that the Kingdom has already been identified with the uncreated Light of God (according to Orthodox canon), and that the Kingdom is immanent (according to Luke 17:20-21). If we look at the Greek words which we translate as "eternal kingdom" - αιωνιον βασιλειαν - we could also read this as "the Kingdom of the Aeons." In other words, through gnosis we may access the Pleroma. Recall the previously quoted text from the Gospel of Philip: "What is innermost is the Fullness [i.e. Pleroma], and there is nothing further within. And this is what they call the uppermost."

As if to reaffirm the correctness of this doctrine, verses 17-18 tell us:

He [Jesus] received honor and glory from God the Father when that voice was conveyed to him by the Majestic Glory, saying, "This is my Son, my Beloved, with whom I am well pleased." We ourselves heard this voice come from heaven, while we were with him on the holy mountain.

The text, in recalling here the Tabor event, does indeed seem to confirm the whole doctrine of theosis, in both its Orthodox and Gnostic aspects. But it is within the next verse (19) that we find the summation of this process so beautifully expressed:

So we have the prophetic message more fully confirmed. You will do well to be attentive to this as a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the Morning Star rises in your hearts.

We have written elsewhere concerning this passage and the meaning of the Morning Star. In our treatise, "Morning Star Rising" from the *Apostolic Church of the Pleroma Clergy Handbook*, we have stated that the "rising of the Morning Star...in one's heart is a reference to the emergence of the Light of Gnosis within the individual." Let us expand on this concept a bit further by offering

a longer excerpt from the treatise:

The grace that comes from Christ's sacrifice is accessible through *faith*. But the Morning Star is obtainable only through *gnosis*, to those who conquer their lower natures by a concerted act of Will, and who accomplish the Work of Jesus, as we read in the *Revelation of St. John*:

To everyone who conquers and continues to do my works to the end, I will give authority over the nations...even as I also received authority from my Father. To the one who conquers I will also give the Morning Star. Let anyone who has an ear listen to what the Spirit is saying to the churches, (Rev. 2:26, 28-29).

We are told near the end of Revelation that the Morning Star is in fact Jesus Christ himself:

It is I, Jesus, who sent my angel to you with this testimony for the churches. I am the root and the descendant of David, the bright and Morning Star, (Rev. 22:16).

This is a most intriguing statement, and one that requires comment on a couple of fronts. First, as we have just said, it definitively identifies the Morning Star with Jesus himself. But we must look at this title as more than a mere epithet of Christ. Given its other canonical usage in 2 Peter, wherein it is described as something to arise within, and in the second chapter of Revelation wherein it is something that is granted from on high to "the one who conquers," we must conclude that this title refers to a state of being, of existence, which may be attained by the initiate who overcomes the trials and Ordeals. Indeed, we must conclude that the Morning Star refers to the very state of Christhood. To put this into a Qabalistic context, it is the consciousness that has ascended to Tiphareth, and furthermore has attained the Knowledge and Conversation of the Holy Guardian Angel. This is not to say that the consciousness has achieved reintegration into the Pleroma, but that reintegration is now possible. In other words, the arising of the Morning Star is that Gnostic illumination sought by every initiate of the Mysteries; true Salvation.

Certainly, more could be said on this verse alone (2 Peter 1:19), but we need to move along with the study of our topic. The second chapter of 2 Peter is devoted largely to admonishments to stay upon the true path and warning of the dire consequences of straying. But the profundity of this chapter reaches its climax toward the final verses. Before examining these verses, though, let us turn to Luke 12:10, wherein we read of the enigmatic "blaspheme of the Holy Spirit":

Everyone who speaks a word against the Son of Man will be forgiven, but whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven.

You may wonder why, in the midst of our study of theosis, we would turn to such an obscure and puzzling topic as the blaspheme of the Holy Spirit, or the "unforgivable sin." But it is in fact directly related to our topic, and is explained in 2 Peter 2:20-21, thus:

If, after they have escaped the defilements of the cosmos through knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, they are again entangled in them and defeated, for them the last state has become worse than the first. For it was better for them not to have known the way of righteousness than, having known it, to turn away from the holy commandment that was passed on to them.

We see, therefore, the singular importance placed on the attainment and retention of the "knowledge of our Lord." So central is it to the process of salvation (deification) that to obtain it and then reject it puts the soul in a mortal danger worse than its original spiritual ignorance. The Gnostics of old held

this precise view, for we read in the *Secret Book of John*:

I said, "Lord, where will the souls go of people who had knowledge but turned away?"

He said to me, "They will be taken to the place where the angels of misery go, where there is no repentance. They will be kept there until the day when those who have blasphemed against the Spirit will be tortured and punished eternally."

This passage shows us that the ancients viewed this phenomenon as being identical to the blaspheme of the Holy Spirit. The *Pistis Sophia* also addresses this:

All men who shall receive the mysteries of the Ineffable - blessed indeed are the souls which shall receive of those mysteries; but if they turn and transgress and come out of the body before they have repented, the judgment of those men is sorer than all the judgments, and it is exceedingly violent... they will be cast into the outer darkness and perish and be non-existent forever.

Truly, it is difficult to imagine how such a transgression could even occur; to attain to such limitless heights only to be dragged back into a state of willful ignorance. But the emphasis given to this phenomenon in both canonical and Gnostic scriptures assures us that this is a very real condition, and that we must maintain our watchfulness diligently. This is the same watchfulness, or sobriety - *nepsis* - spoken of previously that leads to the contemplative "Prayer of the Heart."

The third chapter of 2 *Peter* deals mainly with the dawning of the awaited illumination. It speaks of the burning away of the temporal, or elemental things of the world, and the coming of the "day of the Lord" and the "new heavens and new earth." These are terms used to refer to the coming of the Kingdom of God which, of course, does not refer to the destruction of the physical cosmos, but to the transformation of consciousness brought about by beholding the Light of Christ. Again, we are not going to give an exegesis of this final chapter, but we do want to draw your attention to the final verse of the text:

Grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To him be the glory both now and to the day of eternity. Amen.

We really only want to make a couple of comments on this verse. First, we find the concept of gnosis reiterated once again. The text really could not be more clear on the matter. It opens in the first chapter with a discussion of knowledge as the means by which we receive divine power and partake in the divine nature. The theme of the knowledge of God is then reiterated throughout the whole text. And then we find it emphasized once again in the concluding verse, as if to remind us that it is the beginning and ending of all spiritual works. As a secondary comment on this verse, it is interesting to note that the phrase translated as "day of eternity" or "day of the age" is more appropriately rendered as the "day of the Aeon" (Gr. *ἡμεραν αἰωνος*).

We have nearly exhausted our study of *theoria*, but before moving on let us examine another aspect. Up to this point we have mentioned the path of asceticism, or the Prayer of the Heart, as a means toward *theoria* or illumination. But there is also the sacramental path, which is equally important to the attainment of illumination and eventual deification. Referring once again to the "Theoria" Wiki, it states:

While *theoria* is possible through prayer, it is attained in a perfect way through the Eucharist. Perfect vision of the deity, perceptible in its uncreated light, is the "mystery of the eighth day." The eighth day is the day of the Eucharist but it also has an eschatological dimension as it is the day outside of the week i.e. beyond time. It is the start of a new eon

of human history. Through the Eucharist people experience the eternity of God who transcends time and space.

This is also a doctrine held by many modern Gnostics. Robert Ambelain (Tau Jean III), late Patriarch of the Eglise Gnostique Apostolique (Gnostic Apostolic Church), states in his work *Spiritual Alchemy*:

With the Eucharist, we absorb an occult and mystic "charge," a *philter of immortality* which, if we impregnate ourselves with it sufficiently and often enough during the course of our terrestrial life, could transmute us little by little, year by year. For this "charge," assimilated by our organism like all regular nourishment, nevertheless passes from the physiological plane to the psyche, and from the psyche into the *nous*, or spirit.

We see, therefore, that the sacramental life is not supplanted by the ascetic life, but neither does it supplant the ascetic life. But through adherence to both ascetic and sacramental practices, one may hope to obtain the perfect vision of God. And it is this vision, this beholding of the Tabor Light, that leads one into full theosis - the regenerated Man.

So what is meant, precisely, by *deification* or *divinization*? A simple answer would be that it is to become one with God. This answer would not be disputed by either the Orthodox or the Gnostic. It does, however, have certain implications that could suggest an incompatibility with Orthodox dogma. For example, Orthodoxy emphasizes that becoming divine through theosis is not the same as the doctrine of apotheosis, or becoming "a God" such as may be found within Mormonism and some forms of Satanism (e.g. Setianism - not to be confused with Sethianism!). Apotheosis is considered as a heresy in the Orthodox church, and I am inclined to agree with that position. The goal of every true mystic is to achieve union with the divine. The erroneous doctrine of apotheosis asserts that the individual may be raised, or may raise oneself, to such a stature that he becomes for all intents and purposes co-eternal and co-omnipotent with God, or the divine essence, yet remaining as an utterly unique hypostasis, divorced from the influences of the supreme creative principle. Hence, in this doctrine any union with the divine is merely a stepping stone by which one may increase his or her power and knowledge in order to ultimately break free of the natural order. This doctrine is precisely (if over-simplified) that of the Temple of Set, an off-shoot of the Church of Satan.

Many Gnostics, if not most (certainly those who have been educated and trained in the mystical orders and societies traditionally associated with the Gnostic Church) will recognize immediately the fallacies contained within the above doctrine. This Satanic philosophy mistakenly holds that if one surrenders his will to the will of God, then that one would become a mere automaton, devoid of any self-awareness. But the exact opposite is in fact true. Through willfully uniting with God, one attains the supreme self-realization. In order to understand this, it is first necessary to understand the divisions of Man, i.e. the hylic, or physical; the psychic, or soul; and the pneumatic, or spiritual. When we speak of salvation, or divinization, we are really talking about the spiritualization of the soul. The pneumatic essence in Man is that pure, uncreated light. But only that which is pneumatic can behold the pneumatic. It is therefore through the gradual purification of the soul - the spiritualization of the psychic substance - that the pneumatic is realized, and that regeneration and reintegration can occur.

Amazingly, though, there is at least one fairly well-known so-called Christian Gnostic church that adheres to the childish and unenlightened Setian/Satanic philosophy. It is childish because it is based on the primal childhood fear of the dark, of death, of non-being. It is unenlightened because every true student of the Mysteries knows that to be initiated is to learn how to die. Those who yet hold to this fear have not yet received the Wisdom of initiation. This doctrine

of the unenlightened is lacking because it stagnates at the rational, unable to grasp the trans-rational, or mystical. The church I have referred to, which shall remain unnamed, seems in its outer manifestations to adhere to the ancient and traditional doctrines of the gnosis. But within the teachings of the highest level of its inner order are found the erroneous doctrines we have mentioned. I know this to be true because I myself was admitted into its highest ranks and served for a time in an administrative position. While I will not quote directly from the documents of this church, you can find the general doctrine discussed throughout Stephen Flowers' *Lords of the Left-Hand Path*.

This idea of possibly losing one's identity is terrifying not only to Satanists and Setian-derived Gnostic churches, but to the Roman Catholic church as well. There has long been an aversion in the West to the mysticism of the Eastern church. And even though Catholicism has been slowly warming up to the Eastern doctrines and practices, the cloud of rational scholasticism still looms large. While the Eastern Orthodox church fears the heresy of apotheosis, the Catholic fears tend toward the other direction. A recent article in the Catholic magazine "Inside the Vatican" states:

The true Christian understanding of *Theosis* rejects any form of pantheism and any idea that all individuals cease, becoming fused into one single identity, or swallowed up (as some Eastern religions hold) into the deity. Rather, the individual remains a person in integrity, in fact, truly becoming [the] person [he] is created to be.

This sounds suspiciously similar to the Satanic philosophy previously mentioned, and is tending toward a view that is inconsistent with the experience of mystics throughout history. As Gnostics, theosis consists of the reintegration of the Pleroma, as explained in Ambelain's *Spiritual Alchemy*:

*Reintegration*, or the reconstitution of the pleroma, consists of the slow and progressive working out of the Preexistent Church dispersed by the Fall. Now, this Church is the Mystic Body of Christ.

This concept of the reuniting of the divine fragments dispersed by the Fall is central to both ancient and modern Gnostic theology. While Gnosticism may not hold much in the way of dogma, there are nevertheless a number of doctrines which are held almost universally. Reintegration into the divine Fullness is one such doctrine. It is therefore our opinion that the Gnostic character of any individual or church who expounds a doctrine contrary to this traditional teaching must be considered suspect at least.

In summary, we can say that the Orthodox doctrine of theosis may be shared in almost every respect by the Gnostic. The practical methods of attaining illumination and theosis - asceticism and sacramental participation - are substantially the same for the Orthodox and the Gnostic. Gnosticism's doctrine of emanation, however, allows for the natural immanence of God, which is validated through the genuine mystical experience. Orthodox doctrine suffers in part from having to try to reconcile the mystical experience with codified dogma. The Orthodox, therefore, must create complicated definitions and clever word play in order to justify the undeniable experience of the mystics while escaping the label of "heretic" - i.e. Gnostic, Bogomil, etc. The Gnostic merely states plainly what is understood by the mystic who has attained to the Vision. To be sure, the Gnostic is not without a set of relatively complicated doctrines and definitions, but there is no need for him to rationalize his experience in a way that is not seen to violate dogma.

It is only because of the immanence of divinity that we are able to participate fully in the divine nature. For divinization represents a sort of spiritual evolution. And nothing can evolve which was not already *involved*. This process of spiritual evolution is effected through gnosis, by which the veils of obscurity may be lifted, revealing the divine inner light. And it is through this

immanent light that we are connected to the unknowable and transcendent Father.

I would encourage all of our Gnostic brothers and sisters to thoroughly acquaint themselves with the doctrines and practices of theosis, including the Hesychastic method. Even though the ancient Gnostics were suppressed long ago, the gnosis itself can never be extinguished. We can learn much from our Orthodox brethren, and even those in the Roman church who have developed such worthy methods as the *lectio divina* system of contemplative scripture reading. By learning about and utilizing those ideas and methods which are good from Orthodox and Catholic sources, we will do much to further the Great Work of the reintegration of the Preexistent Church.

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