

DEIFICATION IN THE BAPTIST TRADITION:
CHRISTIFICATION OF THE HUMAN NATURE THROUGH
ADOPTED AND PARTICIPATORY SONSHIP WITHOUT
BECOMING ANOTHER CHRIST

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ABSTRACT. Some contemporary Baptists (Medley and Kharlamov) argue that the conservative Baptists in North America need to incorporate the concept of deification into their traditional soteriology because they failed to present the continual and transforming nature of salvation. However, many leading conservative Baptist systematians (Garrett, Erickson, Demarest, and Keathley) demonstrate their concern about a possible pantheistic connotation of the doctrine of deification. Unlike the conservative Baptists, I argue for the necessity of working with the concept of deification in the traditional Baptist soteriology. The concept of deification is not something foreign to the Baptist tradition because Keach, Gill, Spurgeon, and Maclaren already demonstrated the patristic exchange formula ‘God became man so that man may become like God’. They considered the hypostatic union of two natures in Christ as the source and model of becoming like God or Christ, the true Image of God. Christians are called to be united with the glorified humanity of Christ by their adopted sonship and participation in the divine nature. Christification speaks of the real transformation of Christians in terms of a change in the mode of existence, not in nature. The four Baptists taught that Christian could participate in the communicable attributes of God, but not in the essence or incommunicable attributes of God. Therefore, Christification never produces another God-Man. Conservative Baptists do not have to compromise their traditional commitment to *sola scriptura* and the forensic nature of justification in their employment of the theme of deification. This paper concludes with four suggestions for contemporary Baptist discussions on deification.

KEYWORDS: Deification, the Baptist tradition, Christification, Keach, Gill, Spurgeon, Maclaren, justification, and the Palamite distinction

Why do Baptists need the theology of deification?

The theology of deification (man becoming a god, or rather man becoming like God) has been flourishing in almost all major Protestant bodies since the late twentieth century. Lutherans, Reformed, Anglicans, and Wesleyans

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publish articles, monographs, and dissertations on how their own traditions have understood deification (Olson 2007:186-200). Baptists are no exception. Medley evaluates how the four Baptist theologians—Clarke Pinnock, Stanley Grenz, Paul Fiddes, and Douglas Harink—challenged the traditional Baptist tradition on salvation in light of deification (Medley 2011: 205-46). The primary concern of Pinnock, Grenz, and Fiddes, however, is not to exposit the nature of the doctrine of deification but to show how the concept of deification could enrich their theological agenda (Pinnock 1996: 149-57; Grenz 2001: 323-28; Fiddes 2006: 375-91). Consequently, their discussions on deification *per se* are relatively brief and deal with deification more or less indirectly. In contrast, Harink provides his theological commentary on the concept of participation in the divine nature (2 Peter 1:4). He urges his audience to read the uneasy biblical concept for Protestants in light of the Orthodox doctrine of deification with a necessary caution not to blur the ontological boundary between God and man (Harink 2009: 22). One can find more comprehensive theological analyses of deification from Carl Mosser, James Gifford, and Vladimir Kharlamov (Mosser 2015; Gifford 2011; and Kharlamov 2015).

Among those Baptists who address the issue of deification, Medley and Kharlamov, Russian Baptist, discuss the theology of deification specifically for their fellow Baptists to adopt it in their soteriology so that they might have a deeper and more comprehensive understanding of the purpose of the incarnation and the cross. They have a specific target group among Baptists. According to Medley and Kharlamov, North American conservative Baptist theologians have separated justification from sanctification and failed to grasp the progressive, transformative, and ecclesial nature of salvation:

[T]his specific experience of regeneration diminishes the journey or story of salvation to a transactional, decisive, voluntary, punctiliar, individual moment which provides immediate salvation, once and for all. The negative effect of such a foreshortening of the drama of salvation for Baptists in the American South has resulted in, first, an overemphasis on justification, understood in almost exclusively forensic terms, and, secondly, an increasing divide between justification and sanctification (Medley, 2011: 206)

I would argue, enriched the traditional Baptist approach to salvation as simply a transactional, immediate, voluntary, individual moment of conversion. If in North American Baptist theology, for the most part, salvation has been understood in such a way as to overemphasise justification, where justification is merely conceptualised as a legal-forensic remedying of the defective human condition through the atoning death of Christ (Kharlamov 2015: 73).

For Medley the overall contribution that the four Baptists made is their challenges for evangelicals and Baptists so that their fellow Baptists would 'correct' some soteriological 'deficiencies and liabilities' in terms of 'an over-emphasis on justification' and unwarranted separation between justification and sanctification (Medley 2011: 240). Unlike the traditional North American Baptists, the Baptists, who appropriate the theology of deification, could present a holistic approach to the progressive and transformative nature of salvation and a communal and eschatological nature of union with God (Kharlamov 2015: 73). Therefore, Medley and Kharlamov encourage other Baptists to be more actively engaged with the theology of deification not because Baptists need to renew their forgotten heritage but because it is a Patristic, not the Eastern Orthodox, heritage for all Christian denominations to enjoy.

Unfortunately, Medley and Kharlamov's challenge for Baptists to integrate the concept of deification into their soteriology is based on their serious misunderstanding of the conservative North American Baptists. As a matter of fact, most conservative Baptists in North America emphasize that justification is a once-and-for-all judicial and punctiliar declaration. However, they never present justification as the only element of salvation or imply any possible separation between justification and sanctification at all. Millard J. Erickson, Bruce A. Demarest, James Leo Garrett, and Kenneth Keathley present the vital and inseparable relationship between justification and sanctification. Their systematic theology works speak of the progressive, communal, and eschatological dimension of salvation in terms of adoption, regeneration, sanctification, and especially union with Christ.

The leading conservative Baptist theologians hold their reservation against the concept of deification and are suspicious about its positive role in evangelical soteriology. Garrett indicates his strong suspicion that the Greek patristic form of deification is 'very closely related to absorptive mysticism' (Garrett 2001: 364). Demarest associates the concept of deification with the mysticism that argues for the loss of the self in the deity (Demarest 2005: 315-16, 325). Keathley does not make a clear distinction between the Eastern Orthodoxy and mysticism (Keathley 2007: 691). While acknowledging the value of deification language when carefully modified, Erickson also argues that to use the terminology deification is harmful in the contemporary New Age cultural setting. His recommendation for Evangelicals is not to use deification language at all but to present the doctrine of union with Christ more clearly because this is 'the biblical idea' of Christians' spiritual share in the life of Christ (Erickson, 2013: 904). Unlike Medley and Kharlamov, the conservative Baptists do not have any intention to promote the idea of deification although they are aware that the Eastern Orthodoxy does not teach human's becoming God in the divine essence. Instead, Gar-

rett, Erickson, Demarest, and Keathley seem to consider union with Christ, not deification, as a reliable biblical theme that could sufficiently explain all biblical descriptions of our real communion with the triune God.

However, I agree with Medley and Kharlamov that deification is a concept that could deepen our understanding of salvation. But I disagree with Medley and Kharlamov about the reason for us to integrate the theme of deification more into our Baptist theology. I present three reasons why Baptists need to interact with the theology of deification. First, our critical appropriation of the concept of deification will help us to develop a more comprehensive theology which integrates other biblical themes of creation, Christ, the Spirit, the church, and eschatology with various themes of salvation. The theology of deification will not add any new content to a traditional Baptist soteriology but could expand its perspectives on our eternal union with Christ, participation in the Trinitarian fellowship of God, the nature of transformed humanity that will be glorified at eschaton. Compared with the contemporary conservative Baptists' soteriology, from my perspective, patristic writers' theologies of deification are not bound with the modern obsession with scientific exegetical descriptions of biblical passages; the patristic writers draw richer theological implications of salvation from the texts. Second, a proper and active theological engagement with the theme of deification will be beneficial to conservative Baptists when they evangelize Mormons and other groups promoting a heretical concept of deification according to which human will be essentially God or become another God-man exactly like Jesus Christ, the only begotten Son of God. Avoidance or ignorance of the theme of deification will not help the biblical Baptists who want to understand their audience with the worldview formulated in the framework of deification. Third, the concept of deification has been part of the Baptist tradition. The works of Benjamin Keach (1640-1704), John Gill (1697-1771), Charles Spurgeon (1834-92), and Alexander Maclaren (1826-1910) will show the historical root of deification in Baptist heritage. Therefore, Baptists are not importing something totally new or alien to their tradition but are renewing their forgotten heritage when they try to find a way to present the mystery of salvation in light of deification. To study the theme of deification, then, does not compromise one's Baptist identity or commitment to *sola scriptura* or Reformational understanding of justification.

My thesis is that Baptists have already had their own understandings of deification before the twentieth century, and their presentations of deification could be summarized with the term 'Christification' rather than deification. Christification means that a believer's humanity will be united with the glorified humanity of Christ through adopted and participatory sonship by grace without becoming identical with or equal to the only begotten Son of

God or the Father in nature or essence. The Christification of a believer's humanity refers not only to their moral likeness to Christ but also to the real transformation of one's entire humanity as far as possible for a creature-man in degree, not in kind. Deification as the real transformation of humanity does not speak of a change of human species but of the maximized improvement of humanity as God originally intended for man created after His perfect image, Christ. I do not argue that Christification is the exclusive term to be adopted in evaluating the Baptist forerunners' views on deification. Nor do I believe that Christification is the term to explain fully the unlimited richness of salvation. Nonetheless, the phrase 'Christification' has some benefits than the term deification. The term Christification well captures the crucial points that early Baptists made about deification. Since this is a Pauline word, furthermore, contemporary conservative Baptists, who want to be biblical not only in theological content but also in theological formulation, would have no difficulty in appropriating the biblically coined term. Lastly, Christification could avoid unnecessary misunderstandings that deification could convey to the Christians who are not familiar with the patristic tradition on deification.

Three Methodological Presuppositions in a Discussion on Deification

There are three methodological presuppositions for us to recognize in order to attest the historical root of deification in the Baptist tradition.

The first methodological presupposition is that the theology of deification is 'not necessarily dependent upon *theosis* language, nor, alternatively, is the latter necessarily connected to the former' (Hallonsten, 2007: 283). No Eastern Orthodox or Catholic theologian, who have worked on deification, would argue that there is a more important source than the New Testament. But the New Testament itself does not use the term 'θέωσις' or 'θεοποίησις' for the theme of deification. Irenaeus, generally considered as the founder of this doctrine, 'never used the terminology of deification' but spoke of deification through his comprehensive understandings of creation, the human nature, the incarnation, salvation, and union with God (Keating 2015: 274). Augustine, the representative theologian on deification in the Latin patristic tradition, used the Latin term *deificare* for deification only eighteen times in his massive corpus. We will definitely miss his profound theology of deification if we must conduct our research on his understanding of deification based on his usage of that term. '[A] more comprehensive understanding' of deification in his theology comes from a thematic approach to that subject (Meconi, 2013: xv-xviii). Augustine speaks of deification through various metaphors of union with Christ, participation in the divine nature, adopted sonship, exchange between God and man in the incarnation. The essence of deification is 'the union of the human with the

divine', and this union is 'in its essence, is the meaning of *theosis*' (Stavropoulos 1995:184). But the union of the human with the divine could be expressed even in a traditional doctrine of union with Christ. Then how could one differentiate a traditional doctrine of union with Christ or God from a theology of deification? Deification as a categorized theological theme has not only soteriological but also anthropological and Christological connotations. Union with God is for not simply the moral perfection but also 'real ontological change in one's *mode of existence*' (Blackwell 2016: xxii). By this ontological change of mode, the patristic writers mean that the deified Christians will exist differently in a heavenly mode but still as humans [Blackwell 2016: xxiii, 212, 247. Blackwell calls this transformation of the mode of existence attributive deification as opposed to essential deification that argues for change of human creaturely nature into God's uncreated divine nature]. Therefore, we should not read our Baptist forerunners in a rigid way. Instead, we need to hear them carefully whether they talk about a change of mode of existence when they discuss our union with Christ, participation in the divine nature, adopted sonship.

The second methodological presupposition is that there was no homogeneous form of deification. The language of deification varied in the Patristic era: 'union, participation, partaking, communion/partnership, recreation, intertwined or influx with the divine, attainment of similitude with God, imparting, transformation, elevation, transmutation, commingling, assimilation, reintegration, intermingling, rebirth, regeneration, transmigration' (Kharlamov 2015: 75). Each Patristic writer had his own preference of one term over others and in most cases used a group of favorable terms together. Due to 'both the elusive and creative fluidity of this concept as it is expressed in Patristic theology', we should not take either contemporary Eastern Orthodoxy or any Catholic or any Reformer as the standard in developing the theology of deification (Kharlamov 2015: 74). Furthermore, deification was not a fully developed doctrine yet even to the church fathers. When Augustine spoke of deification in the fifth century, the bishop did not make deification a central element in his doctrine of grace although he left many insights on our deified nature. Therefore, we should not demand that a Baptist must present all themes related to the concept of deification in one place systematically. We should be careful not to ignore the presence of the theme of deification even when we cannot find it as a form of categorized doctrine.

The third methodological presupposition is that we construct a theology of deification with theological independence or sovereignty. A Baptist way of doing a theology of deification is not to be uncritically dependent upon a particular tradition. Baptists have a very strong commitment to *sola Scriptura* as *suprema Scriptura*. If any discussion on deification has no biblical war-

rant, then, Baptists have a right to refuse the theological implications suggested by other traditions. Medley vividly advocates the sacramental role of baptism and the Lord's Supper in the process of deification [Medley 2011: 211. For Pinnock's and Fiddes' sacramentalism, see Pinnock 1996: 126 and Fiddes 2003: 108, 124, 145, 157-92]. Medley also praises Pinnock's pneumatologically-centered soteriology as a theological correction for a traditional Baptist soteriology in order to develop a theology of deification (Medley 2011: 245-46). However, sacramentalism and pneumatological inclusivism are not viable approaches to deification in the Baptist tradition. Commenting on Fowler's collection of British Baptist pre-1900 references to baptismal regeneration, Garrett aptly sums up the historical and methodological problems of Sacramental Baptists: 'the relative silence of the seventeenth-century confessions and the fact that only three authors offer strong evidence of instrumental sacramentalism would seem to fall short of proof that <the dominant strain of early Baptist thought> looked on baptism as mediating <the conscious experience of entrance into a state of grace>' [Garrett 2009: 543. For a response to the argument that early English Baptist confessions support sacramentalism, see Lloyd Harsch 2009]. There is theological compatibility between other sacramental traditions and Baptists on the nature of deification in principle. But to accept sacramentalism as a biblical and Baptist approach to our subject is another matter. On the other hand, Pinnock's pneumatologically—centered soteriology does not require personal faith in Jesus Christ for salvation. Union with God is possible in another religion because of the Holy Spirit who works in creation with the prevenient grace for all humans (Pinnock 1996: 154-55). The 2000 statement of *The Baptist Faith and Message* rejects such pneumatological inclusivism: 'There is no salvation apart from personal faith in Jesus Christ as Lord'. Pinnock's inclusivism betrays the New Testament pneumatology which teaches no independent work of the Spirit apart from the person and ministry of Christ (John 14-16). As we will see below, Keach, Gill, Spurgeon, and Maclaren all emphasized the role of the Holy Spirit in our union with Christ and, therefore, made our participation be a fellowship with the Trinity, not a particular Person alone, but without falling into the error of pneumatological inclusivism.

Historical Root of Deification in the Baptist Tradition

Benjamin Keach (1640-1704)

Irenaeus does not use the language of deification. Instead, he stresses on the purpose of the incarnation and redemption. The incarnation is to make us 'to be even what He [Christ] is Himself' (Irenaeus 2004: 526). Athanasius uses a more direct language of deification: 'He was made man that we might be made God' (Athanasius 1907: 65). Keach's understanding of the

incarnation and redemption for our union with God resembles the Irenae-an, rather than Athanasian, approach. One of the prominent aspects of Keach's concept of deification is the hypostatic union of humanity and deity in Christ. The hypostatic union in Christ 'opened' 'a door' for our union with God (Keach 1858a: 192). Christ's hypostatic union of humanity and deity elevated the nature of man over that of holy angels since Christ made humanity united with the Godhead:

Christ... must take our Nature into Union with his Godhead, and that (1.) we might mystically be united to God, or draw near to God, and so be raised up into a glorious and happy State; for the Spring or Foundation of our Happiness riseth from the Hypostatical Union of the two Natures in the Person of Christ; we had never been able to have drawn near to God, nor have been united mystically to God, had not there been such an Hypostatical Union of our Nature to the Divine Nature in Christ's Person; for that was the Spring, I say, and Foundation of our Union (Keach 1698: 43).

Thanks to our union with Christ who made our humanity united with his deity, Christians could come to God nearer than the pre-fall Adam and the holy angels. In Christ Christians enjoy their union with God in a way that is not allowed to the innocent Adam and the holy angels. We could participate in the most intimate fellowship with God since we belong to 'Christ's mystical Body' (Keach 1698: 64).

The hypostatic union of Christ as the source of our union with the Godhead is also found in Augustine's and Maximus the Confessor's teachings on deification. Augustine states that the flow of deifying grace from the Head to the body is possible because of Christ's hypostatic union (Augustine 1999: 174-75). Deifying grace is conferred upon Christ's humanity from His divinity and then extends into the humanity of His individual members who are united with Him as one person. Like Augustine, Maximus also contends that the economy of God is for 'the purpose of man being made a god' through the hypostatic union of Christ (Maximus 1991: 128-29).

Keach wants to maximize the real communication of the same life between Christ and Christians who are united with him. Christians' union with Christ is more than psychological union between two intimate friends or moral imitation. In John 15, Jesus addresses the real transaction of the divine life from himself to Christians rather than the necessity of metaphorical imitation of Christ on their part (Keach 1858a: 421). The Begetter and the begotten sons share the same nature. For Augustine and Cyril of Alexandria the image of the vine tree and its branches in John 15 is also one of key analogies of the mystery of union with God in Christ. However, Augustine and Cyril are primarily concerned about the ontological difference between Christ and Christians, rather than the same nature that Christ and

believers share, due to their Arian opponents. The heretics claimed their ontological equality with Christ and them by appealing to the literal interpretation of the vine and its branches. For Augustine, the Christians, who should eternally receive nourishment from Christ, cannot be equal to him who is the eternally self-sufficient God (Augustine 1983: 345). Cyril reminds his readers that the vine analogy is an illustration (Cyril 1885: 375). Therefore, the same nature assumed in that analogy is not the perfect identity of nature between Christ and Christians. Rather, the analogy of the vine connotes 'a kinship' (συγγένειαν), not identity, of nature between Christ and Christians (Cyril 1885: 536).

Likewise, Keach denies the ontological equality between Christ and Christians. Christians are not going to be another Christ or God-man, although they receive the spiritual sap flowing from Christ. They participate in the real and communicable divine graces of God himself but not in the incommunicable essence of God (Keach 1858 a: 577). By the dwelling of the Holy Spirit in Christ and us, all communicable blessings that belong to the Godhead are transferred to Christians. In 2 Peter 1:4, the apostle speaks of 'not a communication of the essence of God to us, but an infusion of divine qualities and dispositions, i.e., knowledge of God with righteousness and true holiness' into our human nature (Keach 1858a: 606). This infusion of the divine qualities or communicable graces occurs 'not by essential transmutation, but by a mystical [spiritual] union' (Keach 1858b: 73, 332). This spiritual union is also what Paul means in 1 Corinthians 6:17 'He that is joined to the Lord is one spirit'. The soul is 'not essentially, but mystically[spiritually]' united with Christ (Keach 1856b: 81). Participation in the divine nature does not make us Christ who is essentially God (Keach 1694: 228). Keach does not use the exact Palamite distinction between the divine essence and the divine energies. But Keach made a theological distinction between the communicable graces and the divine essence not communicable to us.

Again, Keach expounds participation in the divine nature in light of the hypostatic union of Christ. Christ's assumption of our nature did not bring out 'any change of his [Christ's] own nature or essence (as some heretics assert) or 'any transubstantiation of the divine nature into the human' (Keach 1858a: 189). Even Christ's humanity, if absolutely perfect, cannot communicate the uncreated 'grace and spiritual blessings' to us. Therefore, our union with the glorified Christ does not lead to any transmutation of either our humanity or his deity.

The transformation of our humanity is a work of the Trinity: 'God is the fountain of this union, Christ is the conduit-pipe as Mediator; the Spirit and the grace thereof is the stream' (Keach 1858b: 555). Keach's explicit Christocentric format of union with Christ does not ignore the work of the Holy

Spirit. The Holy Spirit is the divine Person who supplied grace to the humanity of Christ and now does the same ministry to our humanity (Keach 1694: 222, 226-27, 232). Keach warns those who believe that they are united with Christ because of their formal profession without genuine faith or participation in sacraments (Keach 1694: 399).

Unlike Irenaeus and Athanasius, Keach does not associate participation with incorruptibility and immortality. Rather, Keach relates immortality and incorruptibility with regeneration and adopted sonship. Since our begetter (God) is immortal and incorruptible, the baby begotten from him by grace must be also immortal and incorruptible in his nature (Keach 1694: 214).

John Gill (1697-1771)

Due to the pagan notion that man could be a god essentially, Gill actually uses the deification expressions negatively, such as ‘to deify man’ or ‘deifying man’ or ‘to be deified’ (Gill 1837a: 2; 1837b: 82, 111; 1980b: 853). Like Keach, Gill expresses the concept of the patristic doctrine of deification with the exchange formula.

[H]e set him up as the pattern of their sonship, that as he partook of their nature, they should be partakers of the divine nature; and that as he was a Son and Heir of all things, they should be likewise; and which will more manifestly be seen when they shall appear to be what they are, as sons, and be like unto him (Romans 8:29; 1 John 3:2) (Gill 1837b: 97).

For Gill the concept of ‘likeness to Christ’ appears as the primary element of deification. The concept of participation is associated with bearing likeness to the image of Christ (Gill 1980b: 853). ‘Likeness to Christ’ in the theology of Gill is a comprehensive phrase that works with other related ones such as the image of God, participation, sonship, communion, beatific vision in describing the transformation of redeemed humanity:

The highest blessing of Christians ‘lies in likeness to him’; ...when newly born souls are made partakers of the divine nature, is increased by sights of the glory of God in Christ, and will be perfected in the future state, when they shall awake in his likeness, and bear his image in a more perfect manner: and also it lies in communion with God; ...of the ultimate glory the saints shall then have, everlasting and uninterrupted communion with Father, Son, and Spirit, and partake of endless pleasures in the divine presence: and it will, moreover, lie in the vision of God; which, because of the happiness of it, is usually called the beatific vision; when they shall ‘see God for themselves, and not another’ (Gill 1837b:179).

Christians are called sons of God by the grace of adoption, not by nature or merits. Sonship by adoption and regeneration makes Christians be partakers of the divine nature and co-heirs of God’s inheritance (Gill 1837b: 290).

Therefore, the grace of adoption is ‘a privilege that exceeds all others [other graces]’ because ‘it is more to be a son than to be a saint’ or even ‘angels’ and ‘than to be redeemed, pardoned, and justified’ [Galatians 4:6] (Gill 1980b: 391). As the adopted sons of God, their body will be ‘in immortality and incorruption, in power, in glory, and spirituality, in a freedom from all imperfections, sorrows, afflictions, and death’, and their soul ‘will lie in perfect knowledge of divine things, and in complete holiness’ [1 John 3:2] (Gill 1980b: 893). This becoming ‘like’ Christ is a Gill’s key phrase to avoid the error of blurring the ontological boundary between God and man. Gill uses the term ‘likeness’ as opposed to the term ‘equality’ or ‘identity’. The oneness that Jesus prayed for his disciples in John 17:21 is ‘a likeness’ but not equal to the Trinitarian perichoretic oneness of the Trinity [John 17:21] (Gill 1980a: 759).

There are two things in which God’s sons by grace cannot participate. First, they cannot participate in ‘the divine perfections’ which are ‘utterly incommunicable’ such as ‘eternity, immensity, &c’ or the very Godhead in the sense that Christ, ‘God’s own Son, his proper Son, the Son of himself’, shares with the Father and the Spirit in the Trinity (Gill 1837a: 214). Second, the adopted sons cannot be united with God in the same sense of the hypostatic union that Christ has. The hypostatic union only exists in Christ because the fullness of the Godhead is in Christ by nature, not by participation. No matter how much the adopted sons become assimilated to God, they are not going to be equal to the only begotten Son of God. The Son personally assumed humanity as his nature, but our human nature is not hypostatically or personally assumed by the Godhead of Christ [2 Peter 1:4] (Gill 1980b: 853). Instead, a regenerate and adopted son ‘bears a resemblance to the divine nature in spirituality, holiness, goodness, kindness’ (Gill 1837b: 111). Man created in the image of God could have some resemblance to the divine nature such as immortality (Gill 1837b: 187).

However, even participation in the communicable attributes of God cannot be absolute because God alone ‘is essentially, originally, underderivatively, perfectly, and infinitely good, holy, just, and wise’ and, therefore, Christians can participate in those communicable attributes only in a relative sense (Gill 1837a: 51). 2 Peter 1:4 shows that participation in the divine nature restores the damaged image of God in Christians, and the restored image is better than the original image of the pre-fall Adam. Nevertheless, this good news still does not mean that Christians can participate in the [incommunicable] nature and the essence of God. What Christians experience by their relative participation in the communicable attributes of God is like ‘some faint shadows’ of the essential and absolute nature that the triune God alone enjoys in himself. Christians could have only whatever is ‘wrought in them,

and impressed on them, which bears some resemblance to the divine nature' by the grace of participation (Gill 1837a: 392).

Like Keach, Gill does not have the Palamite distinction between essence and energies. But his way of explanation of the qualitative difference between the incommunicable and inaccessible essence or nature of God is theologically much in agreement with the Palamite distinction. Gill provides some examples of this distinction. The righteousness that Christ imparts to believers for their justification is qualitatively different from the righteousness that Christ has as his own inherent and uncreated divine attribute. Christ's own personal righteousness is what eternally constitutes him as God. The righteousness that he imparts to believers is the result of his ministry as our mediator in the economy. Gill calls Christ's personal and divine righteousness 'essential righteousness' and blames Osiander for arguing that believers participate in the essential righteousness of Christ, and therefore, making justified believers Gods in essence (Gill 1837b:82-83). Hebrews 12:10 depicts us as partakers of the holiness of God. The holiness that Christians have by participation begins in regeneration, grows in sanctification, will come to its perfection in heaven. But Christ's own holiness is what God has by nature (Gill 1980b: 762). Palamas and his theological students would not oppose Gill's theological exegesis on the inaccessible essence of God *ad intra* ontological different from the grace of God *ad extra*.

Charles Spurgeon (1834-1892)

Spurgeon continuously developed the concept of Christification that Keach and Gill presented. Keach, Gill, and Spurgeon pastored the same church. Spurgeon was well aware of the teachings of the other two pastors. Spurgeon frequently employs the Athanasian expressions 'being made like God' or 'becoming like God' by grace. The incarnation was to elevate humanity to God: 'Man became royal when Christ became human. Man was exalted when Christ was humiliated. Man may go up to God now that God has come down to man. This is a great mystery, is it not? A mystery, certainly, but great in every way' (Spurgeon's *Christ's Incarnation, the Foundation of Christianity*). For Spurgeon 'participation in the divine life' is interchangeable with 'becoming like God'. He also uses another phrase 'to become God' by nature. Like Gill, Spurgeon utilizes 'likeness' as a theological means to preserve the ontological difference between God and Christians. 'To become God' is an unbiblical phrase implying a change of humanity into deity in essence. Spurgeon tries to make a theological balance between the explicit denial of a human being's becoming God and the biblical affirmation of a human's real transformation in some divine sense by the grace of participation in God [2 Peter 1:4]:

To be a partaker of the divine nature is not, of course, to become God. That cannot be. The essence of Deity is not to be participated in by the creature. Between the creature and the Creator there must ever be a gulf fixed in respect of essence; but as the first man Adam was made in the image of God, so we, by the renewal of the Holy Spirit, are in a yet diviner sense made in the image of the Most High, and are partakers of the divine nature... ye are like God, and not like ordinary men; that ye are different now from what flesh and blood would make you, having been made participators of the nature of God (Spurgeon 1969b: 59).

Like Keach, Spurgeon is very emphatic about the same nature that Christians and Christ share. The new life given by the energy of the Holy Spirit has 'a Divine origin' and is 'the life of God', and, therefore, they 'are made partakers of the divine nature' which is 'incorruptible' [1 Peter 1:3-5] (Spurgeon 1969: 484-85). The adoption of Christians as the sons of God is not merely legal but also transformative. Unlike a legal process of adoption in the world, God implements 'a nature like His well-beloved Son' in his adopted sons by the Spirit of the Son. Ultimately, the adopted sons through participation will be become his children who are 'actually and really like Himself' [Ephesians 5:1] (Spurgeon 1969a: 101).

How could they become actually and really like God? It is by participation in the life of God by grace. In this gracious participation Christians receive 'some measure of the nature of God' [1 John 3:1] (Spurgeon 1886: 681). To receive some measure of the divine nature is to become like God in his moral, communicable attributes such as holiness, love and righteousness, not in the unique and incommunicable attributes of God such as omnipotence, omniscience, self-sufficiency, sovereignty, and worthiness of worship (Spurgeon 1969d: 121).

For Spurgeon, however, believers' becoming like God is more than moral assimilation to God and is to be understood 'in even a higher sense than this [moral assimilation to God]—in fact, in any sense, anything short of our being absolutely divine' (Spurgeon 1969b :59). Here Spurgeon discloses his realistic approach to deification with a clarification of no pantheism. And this realistic understanding of participation is a patristic concept of deification. Augustine already declared that participation in the divine nature lead us 'to be transformed into God in a nonliteral yet real way' (Meconi 2013: xvi). Spurgeon's emphasis on the real transformation of humanity reflects Keach's concept of participation in the mystical body that Christ and Christians constitute. The only difference between Keach and Spurgeon is that the latter points to the Church as partakers of the divine nature more specifically than the former. Our union with Christ through spiritual marriage also strengthens the non-literal but real transformation of humanity through participation in the life of Christ:

Do we not become members of the body of the divine person of Christ? And what sort of union is this—‘members of his body, of his flesh, and of his bones?’ The same blood which flows in the head flows in the hand, and the same life which quickens Christ, quickens his people; ... Nay, as if this were not enough, we are married into Christ. He hath betrothed us unto himself in righteousness and in faithfulness; and as the spouse must, in the nature of things, be a partaker of the same nature as the husband, so Jesus Christ first became partaker of flesh and blood that they twain might be one flesh; and then he makes his Church partakers of the same spirit, that they twain may be one spirit; for he who is joined unto the Lord is one spirit. Oh, marvellous mystery! (Spurgeon 1969b: 59).

Nevertheless, we cannot participate in the uncommunicable attributes of God. No matter how real our sharing in Christ is, we cannot be absolutely like Christ in essence or in the divine nature. When God calls Christians his sons, he does not mean that they become equal to his only begotten Son in terms of the Godhead (Spurgeon 1886: 678). Like Keach and Gill, Spurgeon holds a distinction between the communicable and incommunicable attributes of God in relation to participation. His distinction between the divine essence and the communicable attributes is almost identical with the concept of the Palamite distinction between essence and energies although Spurgeon does not make the incomprehensibility of the essence of God a central idea to his understanding of becoming like God in the way that Palamas made.

Alexander Maclaren (1826-1910)

For Maclaren the principal meaning of the incarnation is that the divine becomes partaker of the human in order that the human may partake of the divine. Salvation is more than redemption from the divine punishment and guilt but the transformation of the human nature in order to be ‘fitted and adapted for’ the divine inheritance (Maclaren 1974b: 150). The Son of God became man so that we may become ‘sons by adoption’, not by nature and ‘share in the possession of God’ (Maclaren 1974c: 134-35). 2 Corinthians 8:9—exchange of Christ’s poverty and our richness—is a key passage in Maclaren’s concept of partaker of the divine:

We, in the human poverty which is like His poverty, may become rich with wealth that is like His riches, and that as He stooped to earth veiling the Divine with the human, we may rise to heaven, clothing the human with the Divine. For surely there is nothing more plainly taught in Scriptures... than the fact that Christ became like unto us, that each of us may become like unto Him... That grand thought that Jesus has shared our human poverty that we may share His divine riches is the very apex of the New Testament teaching, and of the Christian hope. We have within us, notwithstanding all our transgressions, what the

old divines used to call a 'deiform nature', capable of being lifted up into the participation of divinity, capable of being cleansed from all the spots and stains which make us so unlike Him in whose likeness we were made... if He would lift us to His; to live our life and die our death, if He would make us partakers of His immortal life, and deliver us from death (Maclaren 1974c: 33-34).

Since there was no insurmountable hindrance for God to be made a human, there is no insurmountable hindrance for a human to be elevated into a union with the Godhead. This union with God is only possible through Jesus Christ in whom humanity and deity are united with one another. Maclaren pays attention to the word 'become' of 2 Peter 1:4. Christians need to receive 'continual derivation of life from God' eternally because they cannot be the possessors of the divine life but will forever be partakers of the divine nature (Maclaren 1974e: 193).

Like the other Baptists, Maclaren sees the hypostatic union of Christ as the source, the final destiny, and the model of participation in the divine nature. First, the hypostatic union of Christ makes our humanity participate in the divine life when man is united with Christ by the Holy Spirit. Second, the hypostatic union of Christ is the final destiny of our participation in the divine nature in that we seek our 'attaining' of 'Christ's glorified manhood through the real transformation of humanity' (Maclaren 1974c: 351). In another place, Maclaren states the eschatological aspect of deification as participation in the glory of Christ's 'triumphant manhood' [Philippians 4:1]:

[T]he Master Himself is coming to the succour of His servants, and that when He comes, He will perfect the incomplete work which has been begun in them by their faith and steadfastness, and will change their whole humanity so that it shall become participant of, and conformed to, the glory of His own triumphant manhood (Maclaren 1974d: 8-9).

Third, the hypostatic union of Christ is the ideal model for our continual deification. The humanity of Christ was glorified by the personal presence of the Godhead in his hypostatic union. As a result, the glorified man Jesus Christ also glorified the Godhead present in himself. In a like manner of the mutual and reciprocal glorification between God and the man Jesus Christ, 'so is the Christian with Christ, glorified in Him and therefore glorifying Him' (Maclaren 1973d: 250).

It is not only a Christian that is glorified in his participation in Christ. It is also Christ that is glorified by the glorification of the Christian. This mutual glorification of Christians and Christ based on his hypostatic union is a unique aspect of Maclaren's understanding of becoming a partaker of Christ. This triumphant and glorified 'Christlikeness to which we shall at-

tain' may be too lofty, but we will reach our destiny with 'the indwelling Lord who fills us with His own Spirit' [2 Thessalonians 1:10] (Maclaren 1973d: 250).

But participation in the triumphant and glorified humanity of Christ does not obliterate a believer's personal identity distinct from Christ. If there is no 'I' and 'thou' distinction in such divine union, there is no real blessing, nor worship, nor blessedness, nor joy. We could participate in the divine nature since the ontological 'bounds between the bestowing God and the partaking man shall never be broken down' (Maclaren 1974e: 193). Therefore, the real participation in the divine life does not produce the mixture between humanity and deity. In our union with the divine our humanity is 'remaining undisturbed', and the Godhead is 'remaining unintruded upon' [1 Timothy 1:17] (Maclaren 1974d: 350).

This argument was also one of Maximus' crucial points in his views on deification: 'nothing at all changes its [a human's creaturely] nature by being deified' (Maximus 2005: 157). In 2 Peter 1:4 the apostle never implies any absorption of humanity into the Godhead. What the apostle means is our moral likeness to God. Whether someone is becoming more participating in Christlikeness or not will be manifested mainly in 'moral likeness' (Maclaren 1974e: 192). By participating in the life of God, 'a seed of Divine life which will unfold itself there in all purity of holiness, in all tenderness and gentleness of love' 'may pass into' 'every human spirit' (Maclaren 1974e: 193).

Maclaren does not deny the real ontological change of humanity in terms of a change in the mode of existence, not nature, since participating in the glorified manhood of Christ will change our current humanity into its glorification. However, Maclaren as a pastor-theologian is wise to emphasize moral assimilation as the visible mark of being a partaker of God. In his exposition of John 12:36, Maclaren also points out that '[f]aith and obedience turn a man into the likeness of that in which he trusts', and, therefore, Christians will become like Christ by their faith and obedience which mould us, by their natural effect, into the resemblance of that on which we lean' (Maclaren 1974a: 169).

Through faith and obedience, Christians may participate in the 'transforming power' of the divine light and will be 'saturated with the glory of the light' which will lead us to see God as He is at eschaton (Maclaren 1974a: 170). Maclaren presents not only the Holy Spirit but also human response of faith and obedience as the efficacious means for joining the glorified manhood of Christ although the latter is always derivative from and subordinate to the former. Therefore, he could keep his audience from falling into a pantheistic myth of becoming actually a God. Unlike Keach, Gill, and Spurgeon, however, Maclaren show no explicit discussion on the dis-

inction between the incommunicable attributes of God and the communicable attributes of God.

Suggestions for Contemporary Baptist Discussions on Deification

I suggest four things for the Baptists who may want to develop a theology of deification in the contemporary context. The first two suggestions are primarily related to the Baptist tradition, and the other two are related to an ecumenical dialogue between evangelical Baptists and other traditions.

The first suggestion is that the term Christification—participation in the glorified manhood of Christ—is a viable term as I already discussed. Christification is a term that could connect the past with the future in the Baptist tradition and avoid unnecessary misunderstandings attached with deification. Without using the deification language, Keach, Gill, Spurgeon, and Maclaren effectively handled with the theme of deification with various themes related to the classical meaning of deification. However, all four pastors made the hypostatic union of Christ as the source and model for human participation in God, or more specifically the glorified manhood of Christ. Therefore, the term ‘Christification’ could help Baptists seek the real transformation of humanity and simultaneously preserve the transcendence of God who is present in creation. Christification could also strengthen the importance of moral sanctification in a Christian community that favors contemplative meditation over biblical Christian virtues.

The second suggestion is that contemporary conservative Baptists need to pay more attention to a real transformation of human nature in the process of Christification. In their expositions of 2 Peter 1:4, Craig Blomberg and Thomas Schreiner are content to argue that Peter speaks of moral likeness to God and does not imply any thought of becoming a God in the divine essence (Blomberg 1997:101-102, 110; Schreiner 2003: 295). However, are immortality and incorruptibility that are the fruits of participation purely moral issues? These blessings are related not only to moral perfection but also to the ontological reformulation of human beings but without implying ‘the change of our nature into something other than it is—it is not an ontological promotion’ (Keating 2007: 110). Blackwell’s distinction between a change in nature and a change in the mode of existence will help Baptists maintain the theological balance between a real change in the mode of human existence and the perpetuation of human identity as a creature. Spurgeon’s clear declaration that Christlikeness is ‘even a higher sense than this [moral assimilation to God]—in fact, in any sense, anything short of our being absolutely divine’ needs to be reheard among contemporary conservative Baptists. Spurgeon’s provoking concept of the maximized transformation of human nature is in harmony with Calvin’s exegesis of 2 Peter 1:4. We will be partakers of divine’ ‘as far as our capacities will allow... as far

as it will be necessary for our complete felicity' (Calvin 1963: 330-31). The maximized transformation of human nature without participating in the essence or the incommunicable attributes of God is also found in Chrysostom who was anxious to maintain the ontological distinction between Christ as the only begotten Son and Christians as the sons of God: 'Here [John 17:21, 'That they all may be one, as Thou, Father, art in Me and I in Thee] again the <as> doth not denote exact similarity in their case (for it was not possible for them in so great a degree), but only as far as was possible for men. Just as when He saith, <Be ye merciful, as your Father>' (Chrysostom 1994: 304). I hope Baptists will see more exegetically based and theologically construed presentations on Christification and its ontological effect on humanity that could be in harmony with the Christian orthodoxy on God and man.

The third suggestion is that Baptists do not have to choose either Palamas/Vladimir Lossky (participation in the divine energies) or John Zizioulas (participation in divine personhood). Olson urges the Protestants who work on deification to employ 'the Palamite distinction even if not apophatic or Hesychast mysticism' (Olson 2007: 199). Whether or not one would adopt the Palamite distinction should be a matter of personal choice. Like Palamas and Lossky, Keach, Gill, Spurgeon, and Maclaren had a categorical distinction between the incommunicable nature or essence and the communicable nature of God. But they did not make the incomprehensibility of the divine essence a key element in their discussions on Christification. Like Zizioulas, the Baptists were also convinced that Christians could participate in the living and personal God as much as God allows them to do although they could have only relative participation even in the incommunicable nature of God. Subsequently, contemporary Baptists could avoid too complex philosophical concepts involved in the Palamite-Zizioulas debate but protect the transcendence of God in his gracious union with man if they continue their forerunners' category.

The fourth suggestion is that Baptists should avoid identifying justification and deification as if they speak of the one reality with two different appellations. In the current discussions of justification, 'two closely related terms [covenant and righteousness] are merged and defined as if they say the same thing' (Schreiner 2015: 148). The same error occurs to a discussion on justification and deification. The Finnish Lutheran scholarship represented by Tuomo Mannermaa and some Lutherans such as Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen in America argue that Luther understood justification in light of deification. Therefore, justification is not only declarative but also participatory in the deity of Christ. However, that other soteriological themes related to deification—union with Christ, participation in the divine life, and so on—are closely related to justification does not mean that justification

could be or must be defined as deification. Trueman already responded well to this Finnish Lutheran thesis (Trueman 2006). If believers could be justified by participating in the essential properties of Christ in his deity, then Luther, Calvin, and Gill must be condemned, but the heretic Osiander must be vindicated biblically. Here the Baptist tradition could rightly guide contemporary Baptists in this debate on justification as deification. Keach, Gill, Spurgeon, and Maclaren associated the real transformation of the human nature by union with Christ or participation in the divine life with sanctification or more glorification, but not justification. Respectful orthodox Baptists have never severed justification from sanctification and glorification. Nor have they merged them all into one category which would obliterate a unique role of each concept in a biblical soteriology. Nor have they separated *sola fide* from union with Christ. With other Reformational traditions, Baptists must also continually proclaim that believers' Christlike glorification is only possible when they are united with Christ based on their forensic justification [1 Corinthians 15:56-57; 2 Timothy 1:10] (Horton 2001: 249).

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