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DIFFERENTIATING HUMAN PERFECTION, DEIFICATION, SALVATION AND SANCTIFICATION IN ORTHODOX THEOLOGY

This article briefly discusses the related, but distinct, topics of human perfection, deification (theosis), salvation, and sanctification as they relate to Orthodox Christianity. All of these concepts describe humanity's transformative journey toward divine union, but highlight different portions of that process. The first is the state of deification (theosis), which is at the heart of Orthodox theology; it refers to the ultimate status of human beings who through divine grace participate in the uncreated divine energies while at the same time not losing their distinct status as human beings. This process is not self-initiated but is given through Christ and the Holy Spirit. Human perfection, in close association with the concept of theosis, means that one's will as well as one's reason is in accord with the divine will, is conformed to the sacrifice of Christ, and requires the cooperation of the human mind and the human will to the divine grace. In Orthodox theology, salvation is not simply prospective or forensic; salvation is ontological, which involves redemption, healing and restoration to communion with God. It is a dynamic and synergistic process requiring faith and repentance in God, sacramental participation, and ascetic discipline. The Trinity is the foundation of salvation, which makes deification and human perfection possible. Sanctification – an intermediate stage – is about human purification through grace and human effort to remove sin and develop virtue. Though sanctification is process, deification signifies its eschatological telos. By separating these theological concepts, this article rediscovers their interrelated roles in Orthodox soteriology. Salvation begins the journey as it tackles the fallen state of humanity, sanctification leads a person to a place of ongoing moral and spiritual growth, human perfection is the model of a life resembling that of Christ, and finally deification is the consummate participation in that divine life. In return, however, the Orthodox theology presents a consistent view of salvation, integrating these elements into a holistic project that foretells a transformative and participatory journey toward union with God.

Actuality. *In the present day, many scholars are interested in the spirituality of the Eastern Christians which has led to the increase in relevance of studying Orthodox theological concepts in today's religious discussions. Orthodox soteriology is based on the relationship that exists between four key elements: human perfection, deification (theosis), salvation, and sanctification, all of which have continued to attract interest from different individuals worldwide but most especially from the West. Although vitally important in its own right, particularly within certain religious contexts, we still remain unsure how we can distinguish human perfection. For what reason did God create us? How can I become like Jesus? What does it mean to be saved? How do we work out our salvation? Even among those who identify themselves as Orthodox Christian, there is much debate on this topic. Hence the study intends to analyze their meanings and relationships systematically across the four topics.*

Aim. *This paper aims to study and differentiate four principal issues in Orthodox theology of human being: human perfection, deification (theosis), salvation, and sanctification. It intends to show the reader how these elements are related to each other within the broader context of Orthodox soteriology while highlighting their separate attributes. In engaging in so, it hopes that readers will come away with more sophisticated views concerning both the nature of humanity as depicted in Orthodoxy and how humans are meant to achieve their ultimate goal.*

Tasks:

- to examine and define the concept of deification (theosis) in Orthodox theology, exploring its nature as a transformative process and its relationship to divine grace;*
- to analyze the concept of human perfection and its Christocentric nature, distinguishing it from other related theological concepts;*

- to investigate the Orthodox understanding of salvation as an ontological process rather than merely a forensic declaration;
- to explore the role of sanctification as an intermediate stage in the spiritual journey;
- to establish the interconnections and distinctions between these four concepts within Orthodox theological framework;
- to demonstrate how these concepts collectively contribute to Orthodox soteriology's holistic vision of human transformation.

Research Methods. The following research methods were used:

1. *Theological analysis.* This involved going through a range of Orthodox theological books and patristic writings to establish the literal importance and applications of these concepts.

2. *Comparative approach.* An investigation into both similar and dissimilar points among the four concepts aimed at determining unique attributes inherent in each one while acknowledging their interconnections.

3. *Historical–critical method.* This looked into how these concepts have been understood throughout history within Orthodox theology.

4. *Conceptual analysis.* A close study was done on important terms and the meaning they carry in Orthodox theological discourse.

5. *Synthetic approach.* The research combines different theological standpoints to offer a clear view on the role of these terms in Orthodox Christian teaching.

The research primarily draws from patristic sources, Orthodox theological texts, and contemporary scholarly works in the field of Orthodox theology. This methodological framework enables a comprehensive examination of these concepts while maintaining fidelity to Orthodox theological tradition and thought.

Results. The article talks about human perfection, deification (theosis), salvation and sanctification in Orthodox theology, which are interconnected but dissimilar. In Christ – centered Orthodoxy, deification is portrayed as humanity's ultimate transformation which signifies the human participation in divine energies while maintaining their identities. Also, human perfection is about aligning human will with divine will. Salvation is ontological healing and requiring and restoration of the soul and body. It is not simply a forensic justification. Moreover, salvation requires unique synergy of divine grace (energy) and human freedom (determination). Being sanctified is an intermediate stage involved in being purified from sin and developing virtue, which gets one ready for the final goal of deification. These ideas put together make a whole picture of Orthodox soteriology that shows the way through which man reaches God.

Key words: God, divine grace, humanity, human perfection, deification, salvation, sanctification, synergy, orthodox theology.

Introduction. The discourse in the Orthodox theology is complex and all- involving as it tries to explain how human being changes while moving towards God. Some of these concepts include human perfection, deification (theosis), salvation, and sanctification which are seen as independent but related key factors in changing spiritually. It is therefore not surprising that these theological issues have continued to attract much debate among the members of the Orthodox Church, particularly considering their close connection and apparent differences.

Results and discussions. In Orthodox theology, one encounters the ideas of human perfection, deification (theosis), salvation, and sanctification as some of the most fundamental pillars of the transformative journey of humanity towards God. Though these ideas are inextricably linked, and often overlap, they comprise different aspects of the Orthodox soteriological vision. On the one hand, as Maican notes, deification constitutes one of the greatest pillars of Orthodox Christianity [13, p. 6] and its worldview, while on the other, human perfection, salvation and sanctification are three aspects of humanity's restoration and ultimate destiny. The following article will endeavour to explain the essential distinctions between the concept of human perfection and the concepts of deification, salvation and sanctification. Orthodox Christianity has parts that are distinct – such as deification (theosis) and human perfection while being intertwined at the same time.

Distinct yet Intertwined Deification, or theosis, is understood as a transformative process–human beings who come into union with Christ partake of the divine nature [14, p. 31]. This is not the ascent of self- initiation but a divine gift of grace from God [15, p. 5], obtained not through the heroic

striving of humanity but through divine condescension. Pseudo–Dionysius expresses deification as becoming as much as possible like and in union with God [9, p. 9] This metamorphic movement is the participation of rational creatures in the divinity that has its source in the Father, through the Son, and in the Holy Spirit [15, p. 4]. One essential principle is that only God has the capability of deifying, because one cannot give what one does not intrinsically have [18, p. 43].

There are several key features of deification.

To begin with, it is properly implemented in participation in Christ [18, p. 43], which resonates with the patristic expression that Christ became man so that man may become God [2, p. 48]. Secondly, deified humans share in the uncreated divine energies, without partaking of the divine essence (thus preserving the ontological distinction of creator and creature) [18, p. 47].

Thirdly, to transform the image of God in men into the likeness of God is a work that needs ascetic effort, the love of God and the keeping of His holy commandments [13, p. 14; 20, p. 37]. Deification is not only a social adjunct to salvation but also the latter's ultimate end, mending humanity to integrity and wholeness through participation in Christ by way of the Holy Spirit, and through union with the Father in the divine economy [17, p. 15, 17, 29]. There are many ways to get to deification, including participation in divine nature (2 Peter 1:4), knowledge of God as logos and nous, and virtue, to be gained in love and obedience to divine commandments [20, p. 37]. Thus, while human perfection in Orthodox theology is anchored in an ideal of humanity embodied uniquely in Jesus Christ [18, p. 32], this is not merely some ethical schema as it is integrally related to Christology and the Incarnation [18, p. 32]. For its part, human perfection is inextricably Christocentric, grasped through the individuality of the Saviour of humanity, the Son of man, who both exemplifies and is the source of perfection [18, p. 32, 38]. It is the work of restoring the image and likeness of God in everyone. The image is thus presumed to be intrinsic; the likeness requires wilful purposeful effort [13, p. 15]. The return to God, according to the patristic tradition, is both moral and intellectual perfection [9, p. 13]. It is important to know, that theosis is deemed to comprise a facet of human perfection alone, namely the final stage of the gradual transition from imperfection to perfection [3, p. 92]. Achieving likeness to God necessitates ethical imitation through virtue and asceticism [16, p. 7]. However, there are some significant differences between deification and human perfection, even as they go together. In other words, on the one hand, deification is a transformation of being, whereby men become partakers of the divine nature without losing either their human nature or their personal uniqueness [13, p. 13, 87]. In contrast, human perfection focuses on moral and intellectual perfection, aligning human life with the divine will as manifested by Christ [9, p. 13]. Secondly, with regard to emphasis, deification stresses union with God and communion in divine energies leading to being gods by grace [13, p. 13, 87]. The ideal of humanity, instead, refers to adorning itself with the perfect and full humanity of Christ and emphasizes holiness [18, p. 32, 56].

Thirdly, in terms of scope, deification includes the whole economy of salvation, thus having a structural significance in Orthodox theology [17, p. 15]. Notably, human perfection is mainly about the human ideal and how to achieve it through Christ, which has a strong impact on theological anthropology [18, p. 32, 35].

Fourthly, the means to bring these states about are different. Deification is realized through sacramental participation, asceticism, and synergy with divine grace [20, p. 25] while human perfection is attained by abiding in Christ's Ecclesial Body, becoming truly human and divine–humanized [18, p. 38].

Lastly, regarding the relationship to Christ, while Christ is the source and archetype of deification, who unites believers to the body of His church via the Holy Spirit [18, p. 43], He is also the pattern or the norm of human perfection [18, p. 38, 50].

The idea of salvation is a part of the essence of Orthodox theology, as it is perceived as the master framework for understanding God's redemptive work in Christ [1, p. 193]. The term salvation refers to reunion with God in Christ, which includes both redemption and justification [1, p. 193]. It is presented as a process of healing and restoration, addressing humanity's inherently diseased nature and need for a life – giver [1, p. 193]. Salvation in the Orthodox tradition is a theanthropic

process, the divine gift that involves the entirety of the person [18, p. 30, 38]. It requires synergy, the cooperation of divine grace and human freedom, [21, p. 134]. Salvation is not simply a legalistic pronouncement, but is an ontological change, an actual alteration of human existence [21, p. 134]. The whole of Christ's life becomes sacrificial in meaning by divine kenosis, which stresses salvation through humiliation and life through death [1, p. 193]. The end of salvation is theosis or deification, in which humans participate in the divine nature and share in complete union with God [6, p. 369–370]. The means of salvation include faith and obedience, which require an outpouring of heart and will to accept God's grace [7, p. 77, 78], sacramental life and worship, which is essential to the experience of salvation [1, p. 193], and Christ's sacrifice, which was made possible by God's grace [7, p. 77, 78].

Compared with human perfection, the scope of salvation has substantive differences. That involves redemption from sin and death, being reconciled to God in Christ, and a restoration to wholeness [19, p. 66]. In contrast, human perfection deals with reaching the ideal state of being thoroughly human and reflective of God's image, and achieving moral and spiritual excellence as well [18, p. 22, 32]. In terms of the nature of transformation, salvation is primarily occupied with the healing and repair of human nature, dealing with the consequences of sin and offering forgiveness and reconciliation [11, p. 70]. Human perfection stresses the gradual realization of human potential, achieving moral and intellectual perfection aligned with the divine will as Christ exemplifies [10, p. 17]. Contrasting process and ideal, salvation describes the dynamic process of being saved, this involves faith, repentance and participation in the sacraments [21, p. 134]. In human perfection, it all represents the ultimate ideal of what people should strive for, a state with full virtue, love and unity with God [18, p. 22, 30]. In relation to Christ, in salvation, it is Christ who is the Savior, through whom reconciliation is achieved, granting redemption from sin and death [11, p. 74]. In human perfection, Christ is the model of perfect humanity, showing the path to achieving human potential [18, p. 22, 38]. Finally, there is a strong emphasis on God's side of the equation in salvation. This regards the grace of redemption and Christ's work on the cross [1, p. 193]. Whereas in human perfection it focuses on the human response to God's grace, namely it means actively involved with spiritual and moral growth [18, p. 22, 30].

Another significant notion, one often discussed as a process, is sanctification, a key concept in Orthodox theology. Sanctification is essentially understood in relation to the extreme goal of human life, deification, and is seen as the act of God removing sin and other elements that hinder the love of God and providing a mode of life that conforms to divine standards [5, p. 158, 159, 70]. It is worked out cooperatively between God and human beings, who consent to God's will [21, p. 75] through faith, obedience to Christ, and grace of the Holy Spirit [4, p. 68; 17, p. 106, 107; 18, p. 21]. Sanctification is a process of reforming through morals and intellect back to God, necessitating human work but yet is, at the same time, a grace from God [12, p. 8]. It includes purification and virtue, as self-denial relies on purity of heart and subjugation of passions by asceticism to realize union with the divine [8, p. 11]. Human perfection, as deification, becomes more than moral improvement: it is partaking in the divine nature as through this grace we become, as far as possible, analogous to, and in union with, God [9, p. 5]. Not a self-deification but a gift made possible through Christ's incarnation and realized through the Holy Spirit [12, p. 9; 15, p. 4; 18, p. 21], God cooperating with men in synergy [21, p. 75]. As theosis human perfection is union with God in the Church [13, p. 87], transformation by grace that engrafts Christians into Christ's deified humanity without exchanging human nature for divine nature [18, p. 34], as well as participation in divine energies, life of God [18, p. 38] given to the saints. The distinction between sanctification and human perfection is largely a matter of emphasis and scope [15, p. 4]. The essence of transformation in the case of sanctification concerns moral and ethical cleaning while theosis is an ontological transformation; participation in God's divine nature [15, p. 4; 12, p. 8]. The particulars regarding the scope of change for sanctification are sins and imperfections, but theosis aims for a comprehensive union with God, affecting the entire human being [9, p. 7; 15, p. 4]. With respect to agency, sanctification entails both human effort and divine grace; theosis is, primarily, a gift of divine grace, with human effort as a preparation for receiving it [15, p. 4; 12, p. 9].

From the standpoint of sanctification (and also from that of salvation, as it turns out,) the analogy with sculpture seems apt. Finally, in terms of timing, sanctification is an ongoing process throughout life, while human perfection (theosis) is often looked upon as an eschatological goal to be realized in the age to come, with some of its beneficial results being now experienced [8, p. 8; 18, p. 36]. Deification, Salvation, Sanctification, and Human Perfection, while distinct, are deeply interconnected within Orthodox theology. While Salvation provides the basic structure, addressing man's fallen state and effecting the process of healing and reconstruction as well as the direction towards fulfilment, Sanctification becomes progressively a process of cleansing and moral transformation leading to ever-greater conformity with God's will. Human perfection evolves as the goal, Christ's manhood defining it, reflecting God's image and likeness, operating both as a process and final goal. Deification, then, is understood as the end of this progress. It is mankind's finest level – the ultimate in human perfection. For by grace God and man are joined as one: humanity is lifted to join in the divine nature, thus fulfilling its deepest longing for God's presence.

Conclusions:

1. In Orthodox theology the concepts of human perfection, deification (theosis), salvation, and sanctification—while different—are profoundly interconnected forming a complete view of humanity's transformation and final merger with God. Each of these lines of theological thought lends itself to the overall soteriological format, highlighting various aspects of divine–human cooperation and spiritual ascent. Deification (theosis) is the final result of this transformative process: union with God through grace, humans partake of uncreated divine energy in their humanity while maintaining their distinct human nature. Theosis is not something achieved by human effort alone but rather is a gift of grace carried sores tabbed out with support from Christ's incarnation and through the Holy Spirit. It represents the highest fulfilment of mankind's divine vocation, changing believers into "gods by grace".

2. Human perfection is closely related to deification, but it is more about bringing back into effect and achieving an ideal human state like that of Jesus Christ.

3. This refers to the process in which human beings, through cooperation with God's grace, following Jesus Christ's example, and struggling in asceticism, are able to make their natural faculties (moral, intellectual, and spiritual) become congruent with the divine will again.

4. Human perfection is not same as deification since the latter is about the nature of a person while the former involves being morally and intellectually upright so as to be better placed in taking part of the divine nature. Salvation as the all-encompassing term sets the context for both deification and human perfection. It refers to a continuous process of being saved, healed, and brought back to unity with God.

5. In contrast with a shallow legal or court-room model of salvation, Orthodox soteriology teaches that salvation is nothing else but a real change requiring man's work together with God's grace. This occurs by way of faith, repentance, receiving the sacraments, living in the Church, with all areas aiming at uniting them with God in Jesus Christ to become like Him.

6. While sanctification is perceived as continuous cleansing from sin; it readies for perfect human glory and also precedes deification. It is an act of eliminating sins and developing virtues through hard work which is achieved with the help of prayer and divine assistance.

7. The process of sanctification continues during one's lifetime, but theosis is its final stage when believers will see God "face to face" in the next world. However, separate they may appear, these four doctrines paint a cohesive picture of how Orthodox Christians should live out their faith. Salvation begins humanity's restoration and return to God by uniting them with Him.

8. In this way, sanctification keeps leading individuals closer to the image of God through continuous purification of morals and spirit. Human perfection is the ideal human nature seen in the person of Christ.

9. Deification, being the highest point, goes over and above everything else letting believers enjoy being sons of God but still retain their human identity. In sum, these ideas represent the dynamic course of salvation leading towards theosis, proving that man has a special place in God's eternal plan of creation.

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РОЗРІЗНЕННЯ ДОСКОНАЛОСТІ ЛЮДИНИ, ОБОЖЕННЯ, СПАСІННЯ ТА ОСВЯЧЕННЯ У ПРАВОСЛАВНІЙ ТЕОЛОГІЇ

У цій статті коротко обговорюються пов'язані але різні між собою концепції людської досконалості, обоження (теозису), спасіння і освячення, як вони стосуються православного християнства. Всі ці поняття описують трансформаційний шлях людини до божественного єднання, але висвітлюють різні частини цього процесу. Перша – це стан обоження (теозис), який лежить в основі православного богослов'я; він відноситься до найвищого статусу людських істот, які завдяки божественній благодаті беруть участь у нестворених божественних енергіях, водночас не втрачаючи свого окремого статусу людських істот. Цей процес не є самоініційованим, але дається через Христа і Святого Духа. Людська досконалисть, у тісному зв'язку з поняттям теозису, означає, що воля і розум людини узгоджуються з божественною волею, відповідають жертові Христа і вимагають співпраці людського розуму і людської волі з божественною благодаттю. У православному богослов'ї спасіння не є просто перспективним чи формальним; спасіння є онтологічним,

яке включає в себе відкуплення, зцілення і відновлення до спілкування з Богом. Це динамічний і синергетичний процес, що вимагає віри і покаяння в Бога, участі в таїнствах і аскетичної дисципліни. Трійця є основою спасіння, яка уможлиблює обоження і людську досконалість. Освячення – проміжний етап – полягає в очищенні людини через благодать і людські зусилля, спрямовані на усунення гріха і розвиток чеснот. Хоча освячення є процесом, обоження означає його есхатологічний зміст. Розділяючи ці богословські поняття, ця стаття наново відкриває їхні взаємопов'язані ролі у православній сотеріології. Спасіння розпочинає подорож, коли долає падіння людства, освячення веде людину до місця постійного морального і духовного зростання, людська досконалість є моделлю життя, подібного до життя Христа, і, нарешті, обоження є повною участю в цьому божественному житті. Натомість православне богослов'я представляє послідовний погляд на спасіння, інтегруючи ці елементи в цілісну єдність, яка зображує трансформаційний і партисипативний шлях до єднання з Богом.

Актуальність. У наш час багато науковців цікавляться духовністю східних християн, що зумовило зростання актуальності вивчення православних богословських концепцій у сучасних релігійних дискусіях. Православна сотеріологія ґрунтується на взаємозв'язку, який існує між чотирма ключовими елементами: людською досконалістю, обоженням (теозисом), спасінням і освяченням, які продовжують викликати інтерес у різних людей по всьому світу, але особливо на Заході. Хоча кожна з них є життєво важливою сама по собі, особливо в певних релігійних контекстах, ми все ще не знаємо, як ми можемо відрізнити людську досконалість. Для чого Бог створив нас? Як я можу стати схожим на Ісуса? Що означає бути спасеним? Як ми працюємо над своїм спасінням? Навіть серед тих, хто ідентифікує себе як православний християнин, існує багато дискусій на цю тему. Тому дослідження має на меті систематично проаналізувати їхнє значення та взаємозв'язок між цими чотирма темами.

Мета. Ця стаття має на меті вивчити і розрізнити чотири основні концепції православного богослов'я людини: людська досконалість, обоження (теозис), спасіння і освячення. Вона має на меті показати читачеві, як ці елементи пов'язані між собою в ширшому контексті православної сотеріології, виділяючи при цьому їхні окремі атрибути. Автор сподівається, що завдяки цьому читачі матимуть більш глибокі погляди на природу людини, як вона зображена у православ'ї, і на те, як людина має досягти своєї кінцевої мети.

Завдання:

- розглянути та визначити поняття обоження (теозису) у православному богослов'ї, дослідити його природу як трансформаційного процесу та його зв'язок з божественною благодаттю;
- проаналізувати концепцію людської досконалості та її христоцентричну природу, відмежувавши її від інших суміжних богословських концепцій;
- дослідити православне розуміння спасіння як онтологічного процесу, а не просто формальної декларації;
- дослідити роль освячення як проміжного етапу духовного шляху;
- встановити взаємозв'язки та відмінності між цими чотирма поняттями в рамках православного богослов'я;
- продемонструвати, як ці концепції в сукупності сприяють цілісному баченню православної сотеріології про преображення людини.

Методи дослідження. Були використані наступні методи дослідження:

1. Богословський аналіз. Це включало в себе вивчення низки православних богословських книг та святоотцівських творів, щоб встановити буквально значення та застосування цих концепцій.
 2. Порівняльний підхід. Дослідження подібних і відмінних моментів між чотирма концепціями, спрямоване на визначення унікальних атрибутів, притаманних кожній з них, а також на визнання їхнього взаємозв'язку.
 3. Історико-критичний метод. За допомогою цього методу було досліджено, як ці поняття розумілися протягом історії в православному богослов'ї.
 4. Концептуальний аналіз. Було проведено ретельне дослідження важливих термінів та значення, яке вони несуть у православному богословському дискурсі.
 5. Синтетичний підхід. Дослідження поєднує різні богословські точки зору, щоб запропонувати чіткий погляд на роль цих термінів у православному християнському вченні.
- Дослідження спирається насамперед на патристичні джерела, православні богословські тексти та сучасні наукові праці в галузі православного богослов'я. Така методологічна основа

дозволяє всебічно дослідити ці поняття, зберігаючи вірність православної богословській традиції та думці.

Результати. У статті йдеться про досконалість людини, обоження (теозис), спасіння та освячення у православному богослов'ї, які є взаємопов'язаними, але не схожими між собою. У христоцентричному православ'ї обоження зображується як остаточне перетворення людини, що означає участь людини в божественних енергіях при збереженні своєї ідентичності. Крім того, людська досконалість полягає в узгодженні людської волі з божественною волею. Спасіння – це онтологічне зцілення, яке вимагає і відновлює душу і тіло. Це не просто судове виправдання. Більше того, спасіння вимагає унікальної синергії божественної благодаті (енергії) і людської свободи (рішучості). Освячення є проміжним етапом очищення від гріха і розвитку чеснот, який готує людину до кінцевої мети – обоження. Ці ідеї разом складають цілісну картину православної сотеріології, яка показує шлях, через який людина досягає Бога.

Ключові слова: Бог, божественна благодать, людство, людська досконалість, обоження, спасіння, освячення, синергія, православна теологія.