

Christian Deification and the Early Testimonia

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It is a curiosity to note the large place occupied by the concept of salvation as deification in the theology of the Greek fathers and at the same time how little attention western scholarship has given to this idea.¹ Even modern scientific treatments of the development of doctrine have largely passed over this topic with little concern.² But the neglect of the concept of deification in western scholarship accurately reflects the historically small role that the idea of deification played in Latin theology. For the Augustinian west appears to have been willing to do no more than make use of the catch-word phrases of the East such as the well-known Athanasian phrase, “He became man, that we might become god.”³ But for Athanasius himself, deification is a regular and unquestioned description of salvation as redemption from guilt and mortality.⁴ Moreover, this concept of deification is closely related to the Bishop of Alexandria’s theology of Christ and the incarnation.⁵ So much so, that he used the description of salvation as “becoming god” as a logical proof for the divine nature of Christ.⁶

The little attention that Christian deification has received from western scholarship has generally been in the form of works concerning the theology of specific fathers such as Clement of Alexandria, Athanasius, or Cyril of Alexandria.⁷ These, on the other hand, are written against a backdrop of more general works that outline the broad Roman or Greek concepts of deification that were part of the Hellenistic milieu in which the early fathers dwelt.⁸ But little concern has been given to the specific question of the origin of this important part of the theology of the east and the assumption that it was simply in some way absorbed from the culture of Late Antiquity

seems generally to dominate. However, this author contends that it is demonstrable that the origin of this concept among the early fathers is largely to be found in the church's Christological use of Psalm 82 in the east and west as early as the late first century. This can be demonstrated by observing that Psalm 82:1, 6-7 were regularly used as Christological proof texts in the early collections of testimonia against the Jews, and further, that the use of these texts required that all believers in some way be considered "gods."

The description of salvation as deification is at first glance an unlikely development in early Christian theology. In the case of worshiping the pagan gods or honoring deified rulers, the earliest Christian authors explicitly and vehemently reject the idea of any creature being considered a god as this was contrary to the church's monotheistic confession. Pagan deification is roundly decried as deriving from the serpent's temptation of Adam and Eve in Paradise that "you will be like gods", which event is even pinpointed as the original source of pagan polytheism. In addition to disobedience, it was the belief in other gods and the desire that Adam and Eve "themselves could become gods" which burdened "the soul of man like a disease."⁹ This activity of the early fathers reflects their conflict with the surrounding culture. On account of this refusal to venerate the gods and worship the emperor, the church in places suffered persecution.¹⁰ And the rejection of such pagan ideas of deification earned the early Christians the label "atheists" (*ἀθεοί*).¹¹ Clement of Alexandria simply follows the tradition before him when he completely rejects the pagan deification of the heavens, of people, of passions, and of bodily shapes and calls it all "the manufacturing of gods."¹² The idea and language of deification, therefore, would seem unlikely to find a positive use in Christian doctrine. Nevertheless, a well-known and deeply traditional description of salvation as deification in the early fourth century is explainable as a natural development of the church's theological use of Psalm 82 in the late first and early second centuries.

The use of Psalm 82 as a proof text for deification in the later fathers of the East is well known. Verses 1 and 6-7 of the Psalm should be quoted here:

- ¹God stands in the congregation of gods; he judges among the gods.
- ⁶I said, You are gods; and are all sons of the most High.
- ⁷But you die like men, and fall like one of the princes.

Verse 6 of this Psalm is quoted time and again in the later fathers of the East as showing the ultimate goal of salvation as “becoming god.” This use of Psalm 82 has been ignored by scholarship as little more than a late attempt at biblical justification for a traditional doctrine with no real biblical foundation. But a more careful examination of the use of this idea of “becoming god” in the earliest fathers indicates otherwise. As has often been pointed out, technical deification terminology such as θεοποιέω, θειάζω, ἐκθειάζω, ἐκθειέω is not used before Clement of Alexandria to refer to Christian deification, though it is well attested afterwards.¹³ And significantly, the terminology of believers being “deified” is unknown among the Latin fathers, as far as I am aware, until considerably later. This is true even though these terms find no lack of use in the early authors for the purpose of rejecting pagan deification of creatures in place of worshiping the creator. However, the less technical phrase of “becoming god” to describe salvation occurs in many of the earliest authors such as Justin, Irenaeus, Theophilus, Tertullian, Cyprian and Clement of Alexandria. When these occurrences are examined, it becomes apparent that a high percentage of them are related to the use of Psalm 82 as a traditional Christological proof text, which was found by these authors in their collections of testimonia against the Jews.

EARLY CHRISTIAN TESTIMONIA

The existence of early Christian collections of testimonia, consisting of collections of Old Testament quotations organized according to themes for the purpose of providing answers to questions of controversy with the Jews, has been postulated since the late 19th century. Harnack

referred to Hatch's Essays in Biblical Greek where such collections were suggested, saying, "Hatch has taken up again the hypothesis of earlier scholars, that there were very probably in the first and second centuries systematized extracts from the Old Testament. The hypothesis is not yet quite established, but yet is hardly to be rejected."¹⁴ Scholars of this century have established the validity of this theory. In 1916, Rendel Harris published his two-volume study, Testimonies, which thoroughly discussed the evidence for these collections of Old Testament quotations.¹⁵ Even if at points he goes too far, Harris was able to demonstrate the antiquity of such collections, claiming that there were even very early collections, which served as sources for the authors of the New Testament.¹⁶ More recently, Jean Daniélou has shown that the earliest Latin Christian authors too made use of such testimonia.¹⁷

These scholars have identified many pieces of these collections through comparisons of Old Testament quotations in the second and third century fathers. From this data it has been concluded that the main characteristics of these primitive books were: the organization of Old Testament prophecies interpreted in a specifically Christological / Christian fashion under titles consisting of brief explanations or even questions; a large freedom in quoting a biblical text even to the point of altering it from the known Hebrew and Greek LXX; the compounding of more than one quotation from multiple authors into one quotation with only one author cited; and the occasional use of Christian agrapha or non scriptural texts quoted as scripture.¹⁸ These primitive collections consisted, therefore, of Old Testament proof texts interpreted and gathered together according to the analogia fidei. And such collections likely were used for catechetical training as well as for writing polemics. It is for this reason that, although the quality and integrity of quotations is often questionable, the early fathers clung to these collections so closely and used them so often.¹⁹

Many of the themes or issues treated by the testimonia were Christological in nature. And several of these dealt with proofs of the church's confession of Jesus' divinity. The theme in the early testimonia under which Psalm 82 appeared was probably titled by the phrase "That Jesus is God". It would appear that later development of the collections led to geographical differences in the use of Psalm 82 in order to provide the proof required by the catechetical title.

LATIN AFRICA'S TESTIMONIA AND PSALM 82

In Africa, Tertullian and Cyprian apparently followed a tradition that used the Psalm in a manner analogous to John 10. This traditional argument was concerned to show that the title "deus" itself could be ascribed to Jesus. And, apparently, one way to do this was to demonstrate that the title had been ascribed to various individuals who were mere mortals and then to argue that it was, therefore, much more appropriate in the case of Jesus who was the Son of God. Psalm 82:1, 6-7 demonstrated such a designation of mortals and thus provided justification for the application of the title "God" to Christ.²⁰

Harris has taken note of the Christological use of Psalm 82 in John 10:32-36 where an exchange is recorded between the Jews and Jesus as the latter was about to be stoned.²¹ This passage reads:

³²Jesus answered them: "I have shown you many good deeds from the Father. On account of which of these do you stone me?"

³³ The Jews answered: "It is not on account of any good deed that we stone you but on account of blasphemy, because you, being a man, make yourself God."

³⁴ Jesus answered them: "Is it not written in your law that 'I said, You are gods.'"

³⁵ If he called them gods to whom the word of God came, and the scripture can not be broken,

³⁶ do you say to me, whom the Father appointed and sent into the world, “You blaspheme,” because I said, “I am the Son of God”?

The use of Psalm 82:6 in this text to justify the application of the title “Son of God” to Jesus is curious. Yet Tertullian made use of this verse in precisely the same manner in order to show that the title “God” is appropriately applied to Christ. In *Adversus Praxeam*, 13, he argues that scripture demonstrates there are a plurality of persons in the godhead, contrary to the heretical ideas of his opponent. As part of his argument, Tertullian took advantage of a traditional Christological proof:

Quodsi ex illis es qui tunc dominum non sustinebant dei se filium ostendentem, ne eum deum crederent, recordare tu cum illis scriptum esse: ego dixi, vos dii estis, et filii altissimi, et stetit deus in ecclesia deorum, ut si homines, per fidem filios dei factos, deos scriptura pronuntiare non timuit, scias illam multo magis vero et unico dei filio id dei nomen iure contulisse.²²

If, indeed, you follow those who did not at the time endure the Lord when showing Himself to be the Son of God, so that they would not believe him to be God, then (I ask you) call to mind along with them the passage where it is written, “I have said, You are gods, and you are children of the Most High;” and again, “God stands in the congregation of gods;” in order that, if the scripture has not been afraid to designate as gods human beings, who have become sons of God by faith, you may be sure that the same scripture has with greater propriety conferred the name of the Lord on the true and one-only Son of God.

Here the Christological use of the psalm is at the forefront. The scripture calls righteous men “gods”, the argument goes, therefore how much more so should the Son of God receive the title “God.” The requirement, as it were, of this argument, as also in the Gospel, is the minor premise that righteous men or believers are called “gods.” But Tertullian says nothing of what this might mean.

The Psalm is next used in the west in Cyprian’s work *Ad Quirinum*. This work in particular has been recognized as forming “a most important element in the history of testimonia. . . (It) marks the culmination of a process which began with the first generation of Christians.”²³ The

second book of this work consists of messianic prophecies, which are explicitly gathered under headings to which they apply. The quotations and categories follow primitive patterns found in earlier authors to such an extent that Daniélou traced some of them to the earliest days of Christianity. Chapter six of the second book is headed by the title: "Quod Deus Christus". Among the quotations which follow and apply to this title, the following testimonium and comment appears:

Item in Psalmo LXXX: Deus stetit in synagoga deorum in medio autem deos discernens. Et iterum illic: Ego dixi: dii estis et filii altissimi omnes, vos autem sicut homines moriemini. Quod si iusti qui fuerint et praeceptis divinis obtemperaverint, dii dici possunt, quanto magis Christus Deus Dei Filius?²⁴

Also in the eighty-first Psalm: "God stood in the congregation of gods, and judging gods in the midst." And again in the same place: "I have said, You are gods; and you are all the children of the Highest: but you will die like men." But if they who have been righteous, and have obeyed the divine precepts, may be called gods, how much more is Christ, the Son of God, God!

Thus the two African authors made use of precisely the same logical conclusion drawn from Psalm 82 in order to justify the application of the title "Deus" to Christ, the Son of God. Yet Cyprian does not appear to be dependent upon Tertullian's text, since the forms of the scriptural quotations are quite different, as are the words which express the conclusion. It can be cautiously concluded, therefore, that this use of Psalm 82 appeared in traditional African sources of testimonia and that this Christological argument was indicated there. Further, the Psalm continued to perform this function well into the third century. And although this argument required the minor premise that believers are called "gods" in the Psalm, neither Tertullian nor Cyprian was concerned about explaining such a detail. This was not the case, however, among the Greek fathers.

THE EARLY GREEK AUTHORS AND PSALM 82

Justin's Dialogus cum Tryphone Judaeo is another work which draws heavily from the early Christian testimonia in order to present a defense of the Christian faith against the Jews. In chapter 55 of the work, Trypho responds to Justin's previous assertion that Jesus was not a mere man but God by asking: "show us that the Spirit of prophecy admits another God besides the Maker of all things." Justin then promises to fulfill this request and proceeds to present chapter after chapter of argument and counter argument to this end. He does not complete his task until chapter 124. Just previous, at the end of chapter 123, Justin claimed that Christians, who are "from Christ, who begot us unto God, like Jacob, and Israel, and Judah, and Joseph, and David, are called and are the true sons of God". This, it is said, disturbed Justin's audience. So Justin finishes off his Christological presentation with an exposition of Psalm 82, saying:

And when I saw that they were perturbed because I said that we are the sons of God, I anticipated their questioning, and said, "Listen, sirs, how the Holy Ghost speaks of this people, saying that they are all sons of the Highest; and how this very Christ will be present in their assembly, rendering judgment to all men."²⁵

Justin then proceeds to quote the psalm. But here the use of Psalm 82 is different from Tertullian and Cyprian. The text is still used to demonstrate the divinity of Christ but, instead of following the logic of John 10 concerning the title "God", the text "God standing in the assembly of the gods" is applied directly to Christ. Then, after quoting Psalm 82:1-7, Justin continues in a new direction by explaining the phrase "you will die like men" as referring to the downfall of Adam, Eve, and the serpent in the garden. Perhaps there were other competing explanations of this phrase known to Justin because he allows that his explanation is not certain, concluding as follows:

let the interpretation of the Psalm be held just as you wish, yet thereby it is demonstrated that all men are deemed worthy of becoming gods, and of having power to become sons of the Highest.

Thus Justin concluded his long Christological argument with a text he claimed refers to Christ as “God”. But he also attempted to provide an explanation of other parts of the Psalm, especially the phrase, “you will die like men.” Ultimately, Justin concluded that the “sons of god” are also worthy of becoming “gods.” And this is apparently what he referred to in his first Apology when he states that that “those only are deified who have lived near to God in holiness and virtue.”²⁶

Irenaeus too makes regular use of traditional testimonia, often instead of carefully checking Old Testament quotations for accuracy.²⁷ In particular, Irenaeus is quite similar to Justin in his use of Psalm 82. In three distinct places he quotes and comments on this text. The first occurrence is in haer. 3.6.1 in the middle of a Christological proof that “neither would the Lord, nor the Holy Spirit, nor the apostles, have ever named as God, definitely and absolutely, him who was not God, unless he were truly God.” Showing that Christ is called God along with the Father and is, therefore, truly God, Irenaeus states that,

And again: “God stood in the congregation of god, He judges among the gods.” He [here] refers to the Father and the Son, and those who have received the adoption; but these are the Church. For it is the synagogue of God, which God - that is, the Son Himself - has gathered by Himself. ... But of what gods [does he speak]? [Of those] to whom He says, ‘I have said, You are gods, and all sons of the most High.’ To those, no doubt, who have received the grace of the “adoption, by which we cry, Abba Father.”²⁸

This passage demonstrates again the Christological use of Psalm 82 observed in Justin, namely, proof is taken from the text by applying verse 1 directly to Christ.²⁹ But Irenaeus also explicitly asks for the explanation of who the secondary “gods” of the text are. In answer, Irenaeus refers to the adoption of sons through the Spirit, by which Christians cry out Abba,

Father. But immediately he continues on with his Christological argument and leaves the idea undeveloped at this point.

The second occurrence of Psalm 82 occurs in haer. 3.19.1. Here Irenaeus again considers the meaning of the beginning of verse 7, “You will die like men.” He interprets this in light of verse 6.

He speaks undoubtedly these words to those who have not received the gift of adoption, but who despise the incarnation of the pure generation of the Word of God, defraud human nature of promotion into God, and prove themselves ungrateful to the Word of God, who became flesh for them. For it was for this end that the Word of God was made man and He who was the Son of God became the Son of man, that man, having been taken into the Word, and receiving the adoption, might become the son of God. For by no other means could we have attained to incorruptibility and immortality, unless we had been united to incorruptibility and immortality. But how could we be joined to incorruptibility and immortality, unless, first, incorruptibility and immortality had become that which we also are, so that the corruptible might be swallowed up by the incorruptibility, and the mortal by immortality, that we might receive the adoption of sons?³⁰

Irenaeus again launches from this text into a Christological argument proving that Christ was true God, born of Mary of true flesh. So Psalm 82 finds its place yet another time within the boundaries of a Christological presentation. But here Irenaeus has given a more extended explanation of how the incarnation makes possible the adoption of sons, by immortality absorbing mortality and incorruption corruption. He speaks of the “gift of adoption” (πρὸς τοῦς μη’ δεξαμένους δωρεάν τῆς υἰοθεσίας, qui non percipiunt munus adoptionis). But instead of “becoming god” Irenaeus here opted to express the result of the adoption as “becoming the son of God” which follows from the later part of Psalm 82:6. But this is intimately related to “becoming god.” For the despising of the incarnation has the result that such people “defraud human nature of the ascent unto God (τῆς εἰς Θεοῦ ἀνόδου, ab ea ascensione quae est ad Dominum)” made possible by the “Word of God become flesh”. This ascent relates again to the Holy Spirit who is the “ladder of ascent to God (haer 3.24.1 scala ascensionis ad Deum).” For it is by the Spirit that

one “ascends to that which is perfect (haer 4.39.2).” And for Irenaeus, salvation is the ascent by which Christians become perfect in likeness to God through the Spirit and the Son. And to become perfect in likeness to God is to “become god.”

This understanding of Irenaeus’ presentation is confirmed by the third occurrence of Psalm 82 in Irenaeus, which must be considered in detail. Toward the end of book 4, Irenaeus presents his argument that mankind has been given a free will and is not coerced by God in the matter of salvation. This argument is made in the interest of maintaining mankind’s responsibility over against God’s judgment of sin. Here for the first time Psalm 82 is found in a purely anthropological and soteriological context apart from any Christological argument. In chapter 38, Irenaeus took up the question of why mankind wasn’t just created perfect in the beginning rather than leaving him to his own weak nature. Irenaeus could only answer that for God “all things are possible” and he could have done so, but that in fact he did not. Only God is uncreated; everything created is inferior to him. “Inasmuch as they are not uncreated, for this very reason do they come short of the perfect.” (4.38.1). Since mankind was not uncreated and therefore not perfect, a process leading to perfection was required. God thus determined

all things beforehand for the bringing of man to perfection, for his edification and for the revelation of His dispensations, that goodness may both be made apparent, and righteousness perfected, and that the Church may be fashioned after the image of His Son, and that man may finally be brought to maturity at some future time, becoming ripe through such privileges to see and comprehend God. (4.37.7)

The Lord came not in his natural glory but in a humble state in which mankind could behold him.³¹ By this economy of salvation, which includes the work of the Son and of the Spirit, mankind is brought toward perfection. Man can not become uncreated but through ascension and eternal progress he can gain immortality and likeness to God.³² Immediately following these statements, Irenaeus rebukes those who think that God should have created man perfect in the beginning and “ascribe to God the infirmity of their nature.” Before “they become men they wish

to be even now like God their Creator.” (haer 4.38.4). “We cast blame upon Him, because we have not been made gods from the beginning, but at first indeed men, then at length gods.”³³ But what does it mean that we at length become gods? Here Irenaeus introduces Psalm 82:6-7 and says that the phrase “you will die like men” indicates that God knew the weakness of created human nature. But

Oportuerat autem primo naturam apparere, post deinde vinci et absorbi mortale ab immortalitate, et corruptibile ab incorruptibilitate, et fieri hominem secundum imaginem et similitudinem Dei ... Quemadmodum igitur erit deus, qui nondum factus est homo? quomodo autem perfectus, nuper effectus? quomodo autem immortalis, qui in natura mortali non obaudivit Factori? Oportet enim te primo quidem ordinem hominis custodire, tunc deinde participari gloriae Dei.³⁴

it was necessary, at first, that nature should be exhibited; then, after that, that what was mortal should be conquered and swallowed up by immortality, and the corruptible by incorruptibility, and that man should be made after the image and likeness of God. ... How, then, will he be a god, who has not as yet been made a man? Or how can he be perfect who was but lately created? How, again, can he be immortal, who in his mortal nature did not obey his Maker? For it must be that you, at the outset, should hold the rank of a man, and then afterwards partake of the glory of God. (haer 4.38.4 - 4.39.2)

The above evidence from Justin and Irenaeus confirms that Psalm 82 had its first and earliest use as a Christological proof text and appeared in the collections of testimonia used by both authors. But beyond this, both authors contain attempts at exegesis of the phrases, “I said, ‘You are gods’”, and, “You will die like men.” These discussions are explicit evidence of a debate that was ongoing in the second century on the meaning of this text, a discussion that does not appear in Latin North Africa.

The answer, as to what exactly might be meant by calling believers “gods”, could be given in a more hellenized form. While Irenaeus relates “becoming god” to the adoption of sons and the reception of the Holy Spirit, Theophilus, Bishop of Antioch (d. 181), equated it directly with becoming immortal with no Christological or other biblical argument given.³⁵ This coordination of becoming divine and salvation as immortality is related to pagan Greek thought. For to the

Greek mind “immortality meant divinization, and things immortal were called θεον” (god).”³⁶ Thus to become “immortal” was in a sense to be deified. Further, what had been expressed in the New Testament as resurrection from the dead, life, and eternal life (ἡ αἰώνιος ζωή) quickly became signified with a term from Greek religion and philosophy, “immortality” (ἀθανασία).³⁷ By the late first or early second century “immortality” had become an accepted shorthand expression of Christian salvation in the Greek churches.³⁸ It would not be surprising then if this resonance with Greek thought and the already established vocabulary of “immortality” interacted with the debate over the meaning of Psalm 82 such as to provide a ready answer simply with reference to the fundamental Christian hope of eternal life or becoming immortal.

The question must be considered as to whether the terminology of immortality itself might have first given rise to the terminology of “becoming god” rather than Psalm 82. In this way, the general opinion that the Christian idea of deification as a direct borrowing of a pagan concept later proven by reference to the scriptures would be correct. But the evidence of the Latin authors, who know of “becoming god” only in the context of the Christological argument of Psalm 82, and the explicit evidence of a debate over the meaning of Psalm 82:6-7, indicates that the theology of Christian deification, while drawing upon Hellenistic ideas, arose chiefly out of the exegetical debate over Psalm 82. Further, explicit attempts by later authors to reconcile the second century doctrine of becoming god with the wisdom of the Greek poets and philosophers can be shown.³⁹ This would hardly have been so obviously awkward if the doctrine had earlier simply been drawn from Greek authority.

Two possible small pieces of evidence can be given from yet earlier authors to indicate that even in the earliest years of the second century there was some type of concern in the Greek churches over the meaning of “becoming god” and, further, that this did not necessarily focus on the idea of immortality. The two earliest references to becoming god are found in the Epistle to

Diognetus and in Ignatius. While they are certainly not without ambiguity, it seems possible to infer from the foregoing that even these early authors were aware of a question over the meaning of Psalm 82:6 because the Psalm was current in the contemporary theological life of the church as a Christological proof text.

Many early patristic authors, and the New Testament itself, draw upon the Hellenistic idea of imitation as the basis for moral admonition. The author of the Epistle to Diognetus uses this idea and in the process states that by such imitation of God, the Christian becomes “god” to the person that is served:

He who takes upon himself the burden of his neighbour; he who, in whatsoever respect he may be superior, is ready to benefit another who is deficient; he who, whatsoever things he has received from God, by distributing these to the needy, becomes a god to those who receive [his benefits]: he is an imitator of God.⁴⁰

While it is difficult to draw too much from this incidental remark, it certainly seems possible to view it as an attempt to explain a controversial point as to how a believer might be said to “become god.” And as it does not have anything to do directly with immortality, it must be noted that at the time there may not have been any exclusively strong association with immortality and the Christian becoming god.

Ignatius’ Epistle to the Ephesians has a more theological statement. This epistle is full of mystical language of the believer being in God and God in the believer. Christians are “God-bearers and temple-bearers, Christ-bearers” and, according to Ignatius, we know that the Lord “dwells in us, to the end that we may be his temples and he himself may be in us as our God.”⁴¹ For Ignatius, faith and love together bring the Christian to union with God. The connection is so intense in Ignatius’ mind that it brings him to a striking expression:

None of these things is hidden from you, if you are perfect in your faith and love toward Jesus Christ, for these are the beginning and end of life - faith is the beginning and love is the end - and the two being found in unity are God while all things else follow in their train unto true nobility.⁴²

Again, although the text is short and not without ambiguity, it seems probable that Ignatius uses such unusual language because he was aware of scriptural language that spoke of Christians becoming god. If so, “immortality” not being the main issue in focus here would suggest again that there was no exclusive association of immortality and the language of the Psalm.

SUMMARY

In summary, the multiple quotations and discussions of Psalm 82:1, 6-7 in the fathers of the second and third centuries show that the Psalm had a very early use in the life of the church. It was used first and primarily as a proof text for the divinity of Christ. This use of the Psalm dates back at least into the first part of the second century and possibly predates the Gospel of John itself. Its use in the east and west probably points to common ancestor in the very early collections of testimonia.

Secondly, an echo of another debate can be heard in Justin and Irenaeus when they discuss the contrast between the Psalm’s “I said, ‘You are gods.’” and its “You will die like men.” This debate arose because of the primary use of the text. It concerns which people are called gods and in what sense, on the contrary, that some die “like men.” It is this debate over the meaning of Psalm 82 that gave impetus to the development of a doctrine of Christian deification. This doctrine was thus carved out of a text used for both Christological and soteriological purposes and led to the very close association of the idea of the incarnation and deification. So Irenaeus was largely producing an exegetical summary when he produced the catchy phrase that the Lord Jesus Christ “became what we are, that He might bring us to be even what He is himself.”⁴³ And with

only slight polishing, Athanasius generated a topos for centuries to come when he stated that “He became man, that we might become god.”⁴⁴

¹NOTES:

¹ This article is a reworking of my thesis written for the degree of Master of Arts at the University of Nebraska. Citation of Latin works follows the method of A Glossary of Later Latin to 600 AD (Oxford, 1949). Greek works are cited according to the conventions adopted in G.W.H. Lampe, A Patristic Greek Lexicon (Oxford, 1961-8), xi-xlv. Abbreviations used for editions cited are:

- ANF Ante Nicene Fathers, The Writings of the Fathers down to A.D. 325, Grand Rapids, MI.
CCSL Corpus Christianorum, Series Latina, Turnhout.
CSEL Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum, Wien.
SC Sources Chrétiennes, Paris.

² For example Harnack takes note of its widespread existence in the early authors but praises Augustine for bringing it to an end. Adolph Harnack, History of Dogma, trans. Neil Buchanan, (Translated from the third edition of the Lehrbuch der Dogmengeschichte. NY: Dover Publications, 1961), 3:165 n.2. An exception to this is Jaroslav Pelikan's The Emergence of the Catholic Tradition (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1971) and The Spirit of Eastern Christendom (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1974).

³ inc. 54.11f.

⁴ Athanasius viewed the fall of Genesis 1 as consisting of two parts. The first is the guilt incurred by the disobedience to the divine command. The second part of the fall was the curse of God set upon man that "you will surely die." Salvation then is redemption from both guilt and mortality: "Repentance gives no exemption from the consequences of nature, but merely looses sins. If, therefore, there had been only sin and not its consequence of corruption, repentance would have been very well. But if, since transgression had overtaken them, men were now prisoners to natural corruption, and they had been deprived of the grace of being in the image, what else should have happened?" inc. 7.

⁵ Thus "the crucial fact of the Incarnation, for Athanasius, is that the Logos united to Himself the flesh of mankind, thereby raising it up to his level, that of godhood." Keith Edward Norman, Deification: The Content of Athanasian Soteriology (Ph.D. Dissertation, Duke University, 1980), 98.

⁶ Ar. 1.38f.

⁷ Several works of this type are: Charles T. Rines, The Concept of Deification in Clement of Alexandria (1964). Keith Edward Norman, Deification: The Content of Athanasian Soteriology, (Ph.D. Dissertation. Duke University, 1980). Laurence Rand, Flesh and Spirit: A Study of Eucharistic Deification in Cyril of Alexandria, (Berkeley, 1983).

⁸ For example: Gross, Jules. La Divinisation du chrétien d' après les pères grecs, (Paris, 1938).

⁹ Just. coh. Gr. 21. "ὅτι οἱ ἄνθρωποι ... ἑαυτοῦς δύνασθαι γενέσθαι θεοῦς πιστεύσωσι."

¹⁰ Pliny, writing to emperor Trajan in c. 113 AD, reported that he was dealing with those accused of being Christians by demanding they worship the image of the emperor with wine and incense. See P.R. Coleman-Norton, Roman State & Christian Church. A Collection of Legal Documents to A.D. 535. (London: 1966), 2. In the document The Martyrdom of Polycarp, written in the mid-second century, it is stated that the oath, "Caesar is Lord" (Κύριος Καῖσαρ) was demanded of the Christians, who were thereafter to offer incense and to denounce Christ. (c. 8). Notice this was directly antithetical to the early confession of the church: Kuvrio" jhsou".

¹¹ M. Polyc. 9. See also Joseph J. Walsh, "On Christian Atheism", Vigiliae Christianae 45 (1991):255-277.

¹² Clem. prot. 26.6. "θεῶν περιποιητικός".

¹³ The apparent exception to this statement is one occurrence in Justin Martyr. In the context of rejecting the deification of the emperors "who die" and live immoral lives that he goes on to claim that "those only are deified who have lived near to God in holiness and virtue." Just. 1 apol. 21. (ANF I, 170).

¹⁴ Harnack. History of Dogma, 175.

¹⁵ Harris, Testimonies (Cambridge, 1916).

¹⁶ “We shall, then, say that the Testimony Book is one of the earliest Christian documents, and that the earliest books of the New Testament must be interpreted in the light of such a document as we have shown, by so many considerations, to exist.” Harris, Testimonies, 1:25.

¹⁷ Jean Daniélou, The Origins of Latin Christianity (The Westminster Press, 1977).

¹⁸ Harris, 1:55-56. Also see Daniélou, 275.

¹⁹ The classic case is Psalm 95 and Justin Martyr’s accusation that the Jews had removed “from the wood” from verse 10. Justin claims that it originally read “the Lord reigned from the wood” rather than just “the LORD reigns” as present Hebrew and Greek texts have it. This verse, as Justin records it, was a favorite among the early fathers. Apparently it was inserted in this corrupted form into the testimonia and used unquestioned for several generations.

²⁰ Compare this to the use of Exodus 7:1: “And the LORD said unto Moses, “See, I have made you a god to Pharaoh: and Aaron your brother will be your prophet.” cf. Novatian, De Trinitate, 20.7-8.

²¹ Harris, 2:72-74.

²² Prax. 13. (CSEL 47:248). Compare also Marc. 1,7, where an interesting contrary conclusion from Psalm 82 is put into Marcion’s mouth by Tertullian. There Marcion is made to argue that since mere humans are called “gods” the name is ambiguous when applied to greater beings, namely, Marcion’s Creator God.

²³ Daniélou. 288.

²⁴ Cypr. Quir. 2.6. (CCSL 3, 38).

²⁵ Just. dial. 124.

²⁶ Just. 1 apol. 21.

²⁷ Smith, Joseph P. St. Irenaeus, Proof of the Apostolic Preaching (Newman Press, 1952), 34.

²⁸ SC 211.2.67-69.

²⁹ Notice that the Greek text has Christ standing ἐν συναγωγῇ Θεοῦ whereas the Latin text of Irenaeus has the plural in synagoga deorum, as with Tertullian, Cyprian, Justin and the LXX. The singular, if original, would certainly indicate an independence of Irenaeus from Justin and, since it is closer to the Hebrew, could be an indication of just how early Psalm 82 started to appear in the collections of testimonia.

³⁰ SC 211.2.373-375. Also ANF 1, 448. Note that the index to volume 1 of the Ante-Nicene Fathers incorrectly omits this reference.

³¹ “He did this when He appeared as a man, that we, being nourished, as it were, from the breast of His flesh, and having, by such a course of milk-nourishment, become accustomed to eat and drink the Word of God, may be able also to contain in ourselves the Bread of immortality, which is the Spirit of the Father” (haer. 4.38.1).

³² haer. 4.38.3.

³³ SC 100.2.958. “Nos autem imputamus ei quoniam non ab initio dii facti sumus, sed primo quidem homines, tunc demum dii.”

³⁴ SC 100.2.960-6. The translation of this text is found in ANF 1, 522. The Ante-Nicene Fathers has the pivotal phrase of this quote as “How, then, shall he be a God, ...” with a capitalization of the divine title. This occurs in other deification texts as well. This practice has been noted by other scholars working on deification in the early fathers and denounced as incorrect. This author must concur in this judgment. Neither Irenaeus, nor the other early fathers, were trying to say that the believer becomes by nature Yahweh or Christ. Instead, it is better to say the believer becomes “god” or perhaps “divine” would be preferable.

³⁵ Autol. 2.27. Also Autol. 2.24.

³⁶J. Burnaby, Amor Dei (London, 1938). Quoted by John M. Rist, Platonism and its Christian Heritage. (London: Variorum Reprints, 1985), 216f. Also: Ivan M. Linforth, "If by any process, a mortal becomes *ajqavnato*" it is immaterial whether you call him immortal or divine." ("ΟΙ ΑΘΑΝΑΤΙΖΟΝΤΕΣ" Classical Philology 13 (1918): 23-33. Here at 26.

³⁷ In all of the New Testament this word appears in only one place in relation to salvation, 1 Cor. 15:51-54.

³⁸ Clement in c. 96 AD speaks of "Life in immortality" (35.2) Ignatius in c. 112 AD says that "For this end did the Lord suffer the ointment to be poured upon His head, that He might breathe immortality into His Church." (Eph. 17.1). cf. Magn. 6.2; Philad. 9.2; Polyc. 2.3. In the middle of the second century the martyr Polycarp is described as "now crowned with the wreath of immortality." (M. Polyc. 17.1) and as having "acquired the crown of immortality" (19.2). This word is quite common in Justin and later authors.

³⁹ For instance in Stromata 4.23 Clement writes:

"On this wise it is possible for the Gnostic already to have become God. "I said, Ye are gods, and sons of the highest." And Empedocles says that the souls of the wise become gods, writing as follows:--

"At last prophets, minstrels, and physicians,
And the foremost among mortal men, approach;
Whence spring gods supreme in honors."

Thus Clement makes use of the pagan author in order to show that men can indeed "become gods." In this way Clement puts into practice his claim that in places the pagan authors too have been inspired by the cosmic Logos. But the attempt is quite awkward to say the least.

⁴⁰ Diogn. 10.

⁴¹ Lightfoot: "θεοφόροι και' ναοφόροι, χριστοφόροι" Eph. 9.2. "πάντα οὖν ποιῶμεν, ὡς αὐτοῦ ἐν ἡμῖν κατοικοῦντος, ἵνα ὦμεν αὐτοῦ ναοί' και' αὐτοῦ ἡ ἐν ἡμῖν Θεός ἡμῶν." Eph. 15.3.

^{42c} τα' δε' δύο ἐν ἐνότητι γινόμενα θεός ἐστιν." Eph. 14.1.

⁴³ haer. 5.Pref.

⁴⁴ inc. 54.11f. "αὐτοῦ γὰρ ἐνηθρόπησεν, ἵνα ἡμεῖς θεοποιηθῶμεν"