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Defenders of the Doctrine of Deification

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In the Holy Scriptures, where God himself speaks, we read of a unique call directed to us. God speaks to us human beings clearly and directly: ‘I said, “You are gods, sons of the Most High—all of you”’ (Ps. 82:6; John 10:34). Do we hear that voice? Do we understand the meaning of this calling? . . . In other words, we are each destined to become a god, to be like God himself, to be united with him. . . . This is the purpose of life: that we be participants, sharers in the nature of God . . . to become just like God, true Gods.”^[1]

This striking passage is not from one of the Prophet Joseph Smith’s Nauvoo sermons, although it seems to ring with that type of familiarity. Neither is the passage taken from the discourses of, say, Brigham Young or Lorenzo Snow, although it also seems to resonate with their writings. No, this passage comes from a book written in 1976 by Christoforos Stavropoulos, a Greek Orthodox scholar and ordained priest. And Professor Stavropoulos is by no means some theological maverick. His straightforward call for theosis—human deification—matches the prominence given to that doctrine in all of Eastern Orthodox thought.

This belief in humanity’s potential to become gods has recently been called Orthodoxy’s “ruling principle or mode of understanding salvation in Christ since at least the late 2nd [century].”^[2] It is a theme that was dominant in St. Irenaeus’s classic formula—“The Word of God, our Lord Jesus Christ, who did, through His transcendent love, become what we are, that He might bring us to be even what He is Himself”^[3]—as well as in Vladimir Lossky’s twentieth-century paraphrase—“God made Himself man, that man might become God”;^[4] in the writings of St. Athanasius—“The Word of God Himself . . . assumed humanity that we might become God”;^[5]—as well as in those of Timothy (Bishop Kallistos of Diokleia) Ware, a British convert to Orthodoxy—“God became human that we might be made god.”^[6] For Eastern Orthodox Christians, this emphasis on theosis is “like a continuous golden thread running throughout the centuries of Orthodoxy’s ancient theological tapestry.”^[7] Another twentieth-century writer concluded that the “chief idea of. . . all of Eastern theology, [was] the idea of deification.”^[8]

For centuries, Orthodox theologians have faithfully defended this tenet again and again. Yet their defense has largely gone unnoticed and unheralded, perhaps because the Eastern Orthodox Church itself is often overlooked or misunderstood.^[9] But when the topic of deification *does* draw attention from outside observers, many Christians are

taken aback.^[10] Daniel Clendenin, an evangelical Protestant scholar who has been a visiting professor at several Eastern European universities, could not help but concede that the doctrine of deification “sounds very strange indeed to

[the] ears” of most Western Christians.^[11] To Latter-day Saint ears, however, Orthodoxy’s approach to human deification sounds refreshingly familiar. Like Eastern Orthodox Christians, Latter-day Saints equate human salvation, in its fullest sense, with human deification—that is, we also believe that humans can become gods. Often, because of that belief, Latter-day Saint doctrine has been portrayed as unique, baffling, and even blasphemous by some observers. Such portrayals should make the equally straightforward assertions of the Eastern Orthodox Church about humans becoming gods especially intriguing for Latter-day Saints. While Eastern Orthodox Christians and Latter-day Saints amenable part company at several critical theological junctures, there is often a strong and remarkable correspondence.

The potential for doctrinal parallels that these verbal affinities suggest has caused several Latter-day Saint writers to take an appreciative notice of Eastern Orthodoxy’s position on theosis.^[12] Those Latter-day Saint authors who have cited references to theosis in the works of early Christian Fathers or Eastern Orthodox theologians seem to have done so with a common purpose in mind, and that is to demonstrate that other Christians—and especially some very prominent Christians—have spoken and do speak very plainly about humans becoming gods.^[13] However, such comparisons have drawn criticism from some outside observers who question the appropriateness of suggesting a Latter-day Saint and Eastern Christian correspondence on this topic.^[14] Stephen Robinson’s experience seems representative: “When I read Clement or Irenaeus or C. S. Lewis and say, There! That’s *exactly* what I believe,” a typical response has been ““No, that’s not what you believe at all”” because, he has frequently been told, “these authors used the term *gods* differently from the way the LDS do.”^[15] It is my belief that modern Eastern Orthodox thinkers essentially do *not* use the term *gods* differently from the way that Latter-day Saints do.

And yet Eastern Orthodox Christians do understand the nature of *God* differently from the way Latter-day Saints understand it—Eastern Orthodox Christians believe in the credal formulations of God the Trinity^[16]—and that difference must not be minimized. But the Latter-day Saint understanding of the nature of *gods*—deified humans—shares a basic commonality with the Orthodox understanding of gods. Those observers who differentiate between Latter-day Saint and Orthodox views on theosis should therefore focus on the contrasting positions concerning the nature of God and not the nature of deified humanity, since on that topic there is often a real agreement.

The position of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints concerning humans becoming gods may sound strange to many Christians, but it should sound no stranger than the Eastern Orthodox position, because Latter-day Saints essentially do not say anything more about the topic than Eastern Christians do. True, Latter-day Saints are more explicit in their beliefs about the perpetuity of marriage relationships as well as humanity’s premortal existence.^[17] But with those basic exceptions in mind, contemporary Eastern Orthodox Christians seem to be as bold and straightforward in their explanations of human deification as are the Latter-day Saints. Both traditions speak of deified humanity’s enjoyment of divine life, of their future eternality, and of their progressive attainment of the fulness of divine attributes and power. Therefore, the discovery that another major, worldwide Christian denomination teaches many of the same things that Latter-day Saints teach about human deification speaks to the criticism that the Latter-day Saint plan of salvation is not authentically Christian, especially considering what Eastern Christians believe their church to be and what they believe their church has faithfully defended for nearly two thousand years.

The Eastern Orthodox Position—”The One, Holy, Catholic, Apostolic Church”

Eastern Orthodoxy has been called both the “forgotten family” of Christianity and the “great unknown among American religious denominations,” even though the Eastern Orthodox Church—that is, the communion of over a dozen regional or national, auto-cephalous (self-governing) sister churches linked together by loyalty to Eastern Orthodox doctrine and

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ritual practice—has a worldwide membership of some 200 to 250 million adherents. Thanks to the foundation laid by early immigrants (especially Greek and Russian) and their descendants, Orthodox Christians in the United States

alone number in the millions.^[19] This sizable church membership notwithstanding, many people in the West have mistakenly equated Eastern Orthodoxy with Roman Catholicism because of a sense of their shared sacramental and

priestly rites.^[20] The outward similarities that these two traditions share point to their common origins in the early Christian church of the Roman Empire. In reality, however, Orthodoxy’s unique history and beliefs come into focus only when viewed against the backdrop of the Eastern Church’s medieval split with Roman Catholicism, a division that deepened over the course of several centuries, mainly on the questions of papal supremacy and the doctrine of the Holy Ghost. Bishop Ware has observed that Western Christians usually see the Roman Catholic and Protestant positions as representing the two general, opposing approaches to Christianity. Eastern Orthodox Christians, however, consider

Roman Catholics and Protestants to be “two sides of the same coin.”^[21] The Orthodox see themselves as wholly distinct—distinct in their history and distinct in their theology.

The importance of this self-understood distinctiveness cannot be overstated. The East-West division (which most historians date to the fateful, mutual Rome-Constantinople excommunications of the year 1054) started the Eastern

Orthodox and Roman Catholic Churches on divergent paths a millennium ago.^[22] Eastern Orthodox Christians contend that the path they have followed—and the path from which Western Christianity has deviated—is the path marked by

the original Apostles.^[23] As one convert to Orthodoxy succinctly wrote, “The Orthodox Church in all humility believes itself to be the ‘one, holy, Catholic, and Apostolic Church,’ of which the Creed speaks.”^[24] Eastern Christians also

believe that the Orthodox Church is the exclusive path to salvation.^[25] In Orthodoxy, church members find what they believe is the faith of the original Apostles, a faith that has been entrusted to the guardianship of the Eastern Orthodox Church.

It is true that other religious institutions consider themselves to be the “guardians” or “custodians” of true Christianity, or at least the possessors of a more perfect understanding of some aspect of Christianity; it is this very belief that gives

life to each diverse tradition. However, both Orthodox and non-Orthodox observers^[26] concur with the following assertion made by Daniel Clendenin: “To an extent matched by no other Christian communion, Orthodoxy claims that it alone has maintained an unbroken continuity with the apostolic faith of the New Testament, that it alone is the true

visible church, and that salvation outside of the Orthodox church is a questionable assumption.”^[27]

Latter-day Saints take careful notice of statements such as these, because Latter-day Saints make similar-sounding claims. In that same vein, the importance of dispelling Orthodoxy’s anonymity takes on something of a greater urgency for Latter-day Saints when we hear Eastern Orthodox Christians speak of carefully guarding and fiercely defending the

apostolic faith, and then we find that the doctrine of deification is so dominant in that very defense.^[28] Latter-day Saints cannot help but ask these questions: To what extent do Eastern Christians mean what they say when they talk about humans becoming gods? Does the Eastern Orthodox doctrine of deification correspond with the Latter-day Saint doctrine of exaltation?

Those observers who insist that the respective doctrines of the two traditions do *not* correspond define the distinction by pointing to the tenet in Eastern Orthodoxy that explains that a deified human participates in the divine *energies*, but not the divine *essence*. This paper proposes that a correct understanding of what Eastern Orthodox Christians mean by technical theological terms like *divine energies* and *divine essence* and *person* reveals that the doctrinal distinction between deification and exaltation is not as pronounced as has been suggested. In fact, the doctrinal agreement is often striking. Perhaps the best way to define those terms and to highlight that agreement is to trace the defense of the

doctrine of deification through three defining moments in the history of the Eastern Orthodox Church: the *filioque* controversy that hastened the Eastern Orthodox break with Roman Catholicism, the iconoclast controversy of the eighth and ninth centuries, and the hesychast controversy of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries.

The *Filioque* Controversy

In strict chronological terms, the *filioque* controversy did not come to its dramatic head until after the iconoclast controversy. But because Eastern Orthodox Christians feel that the *filioque* doctrine challenged the very definition of God as set forth by the earliest Ecumenical Council of Nicaea, and because it dealt with the most fundamental issues of the nature of the Trinity involved in later deification discussions, it seems appropriate to begin there.

The Latin word *filioque* (“from the Son”) was added to the Nicene Creed in the sixth century, probably by church leaders in Spain.^[29] Other Latin Western churches gradually adopted this modified creed, so that by the year 1014 the church in Rome accepted the *filioque* phrase as part of the formulaic discussion of the procession of the Holy Ghost.

Whereas the original fourth-century Creed had stated that the Spirit proceeded only from the Father,^[30] the Roman Catholic Church began to teach, by inserting *filioque*, that the Spirit also proceeded “from the Son.” Eastern Orthodox theologians fiercely opposed the *filioque* addition as early as 850. This doctrinal disagreement became inflammatory to the point that it significantly precipitated the Great Schism between the Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox Churches.

Orthodox Christians have resisted the *filioque* for centuries because, for them, the so-called “double procession of the Holy Ghost” doctrine confuses the important diversity-in-unity of the Trinity. Like Roman Catholics and most Protestants, Eastern Orthodox Christians align themselves with the creeds that emerged from the ecumenical councils of the fourth and fifth centuries, affirming that the Father and the Son and the Holy Ghost are “one in essence” or “consubstantial.” Yet the Orthodox also confess—with an emphasis that seems stronger than that of Roman Catholics or

Protestants^[31]—that the Father and the Son and the Holy Ghost are Three Persons. Their faith is that “there is in God genuine diversity as well as true unity. The Christian God is not just a unit but a union, not just unity but

community.”^[32] Because, in the Orthodox mind, the *filioque* doctrine blurs that crucial distinctiveness, the three-in-one nature of the Trinity is compromised.

This description of “three persons in one essence” creates a feeling of paradox that even Orthodox theologians admit,

and the mystery of the Trinity is not easily verbalized.^[33] Roughly, it seems possible to associate “essence” (*ousia* in Greek) with that quality of being that makes a species uniquely what it is, its ultimate otherness of nature. At the same time, this crude analogy must be qualified by acknowledging that God, in Orthodoxy, is not merely some other “species,” but rather an incomparable “Other”—meaning that there will always be an “ontological gap”—a gap of

“being” between Creator and creature—because of the differences in their respective natures or essences.^[34] In turn, each individual of the “species” brings to life the shared “essence” by becoming a unique “person” or *hypostasis*.

Bishop Ware cites what he calls “a favourite analogy for the Trinity . . . that of three torches burning with a single flame.”^[35] Christos Yannaras proposes that “schematically: God is a Nature and three Persons; man is a nature and ‘innumerable’ persons. God is consubstantial and in three hypostases, man is consubstantial and in innumerable

hypostases.”^[36] Essence could thus be characterized as that nature which, for the Trinity, is divinity, and that nature which, for humans, is humanity.^[37]

And so, in the *filioque* controversy, the “Orthodox suspect that . . . Western Trinitarian thinking . . . overstressed the unity of the divine essence at the expense of the diversity of the persons.”^[38] If the Holy Ghost proceeded from both the Father and the Son, they ask, in what ways are the Father and the Son distinct? Orthodox fear that the *filioque* phrase suggests that the Father and the Son are really one Person (who acts alternately as Father or Son) from whom the Spirit proceeds. For Eastern Christians then and now, it is only by maintaining that the Father is the unique source of the Holy Ghost that the diversity of the Three Persons can be safeguarded.^[39]

Both diversity and unity were thus reaffirmed by rejecting the *filioque*. Importantly, the Trinity also becomes for the Orthodox a model for theosis: Humans can be united with divinity without being absorbed into the divine essence or losing their individual natures—their diversity. As prominent Romanian theologian Dumitru Staniloae wrote, “man’s deification” means the “greatest possible union with God wherein *the fullness of God* is stamped upon man yet without man thereby being *dissolved* into God.”^[40]

The Iconoclast Controversy

Diversity in Personhood, yet unity in essence, is also critical for an understanding of the intensity of the iconoclast struggle. While the *filioque* question demanded an Orthodox response in defense of their understanding of the nature of God the Trinity, iconoclasm called into question specifically the Person of the Son. What did it mean for Jesus Christ to assume humanity? And what does it mean for humans to be created in the image of God?

For much of the eighth and ninth centuries, various ecclesiastical leaders questioned—and even attacked—the practice of using sacred paintings or icons (Greek for “images”) in worship.^[41] The principal accusation was that the icons contributed to idolatry. Led by some persuasive defenders, especially St. John of Damascus, the iconodules (the “venerators of icons”) preserved victory over the iconoclasts (“destroyers of icons”) when icons received the final approbation of Empress Theodora in 843. Her decree, now celebrated in the Orthodox Church as the “Triumph of Orthodoxy,” safeguarded the icons’ place of prominence in communal and personal worship, a prominence that has become one of the distinguishing features of Eastern Christianity.^[42]

Yet this victory meant so much more than securing the right to display paintings; it was the victory of two central, related doctrines of Orthodox Christianity: first, that humans are divine icons, as Genesis 1:26–27 teaches; and second, that Jesus Christ is *the* Divine Icon.^[43] By denying the propriety of icons in the churches, the iconoclasts seemed to repudiate the full implications of these two doctrines by striking at the possibility that the holy and the divine could be portrayed through, and *connected with*, material images. This apparent disparaging of the material, physical elements pointedly threatened the Orthodox understanding of the Incarnation of the Lord Jesus Christ, as well as their understanding of what it means for men and women to be created in the image of God, since Orthodox Christians believe that the divine image is in both the spirit *and* body of humans.^[44]

That belief concerning the divine image in both spirit and body deserves some qualification. Orthodox Christians do not believe in a corporeal God the Father in the way that Latter-day Saints do, but they do say some remarkable things about the *image* of God as it relates to physical form—especially the human form of Jesus Christ. They also believe that because of the Incarnation, “deification is something that involves the body.”^[45] This was central to John of Damascus’s defense of icons. After affirming that God “made man after His own image and likeness,” John turned to the witness of the Old Testament prophets: “Jacob saw and struggled with God, for it is evident that God *appeared* to

him as a man. Moses saw, as it were, the back of a man; Isaiah saw Him as a man sitting upon a throne.” Then, returning to the important Orthodox tenet that God in His *essence* is eternally different from—and incomprehensible to—humans, John emphasized that “no one saw the divine *nature*, but the image and figure of *what was yet to come*. For the invisible Son and Word of God was to become truly man.”^[46] This connection between Old Testament anthropomorphisms and the foreshadowed Incarnation highlights the Orthodox belief that because of Jesus’ assumption of a human, material body, “all men are created according to the image of God,” or, most precisely, “according to the image of the Logos,” Jesus Christ.^[47] John went on to say that “the invisible Son and Word of God was to become truly man, that He might be united to our nature, and be seen on earth.” This unifying of the heavenly and the earthly was the ultimate meaning behind the icons: “God . . . became a man by nature and in truth.”^[48] Thus, “a bridge is formed between God and humanity” because Jesus Christ is “both fully God and fully human.”^[49]

This idea of a “bridge” also underlies Orthodoxy’s designation of Jesus Christ as “*the Divine Icon*.” He becomes the Archetype, the Way. Orthodox Christians believe that the divine image in all humans endows them with the potential to progress incrementally from that seminal *image* toward an increasing *likeness* with God.^[50] The model for this full likeness is Jesus Christ, and thus the Apostle John’s charge to strive so that “we shall be like him” (1 John 3:2) takes on added meaning.^[51] For Orthodox Christians, the doctrines behind the use of icons speak to the reality of the Incarnation, to the importance of the physical bodies of humans, and to the potential for divine likeness—all three of these beliefs meet in the Resurrection. The Orthodox are adamant that Jesus, *the Divine Icon*, resurrected with His glorified, physical body, a body which He deified, in that He united that body with divinity.^[52] It follows in their doctrinal system that because the image of God in humans involves the whole person, soul and body, and because every human can follow the archetypal image of God, Jesus Christ, in growing toward *full* likeness, which is deification, humans can also receive glorified bodies that are “the kind that the body of our Master Christ was after the Resurrection.”^[53] As John of Damascus wrote, “He has deified *our flesh* forever, and has sanctified us.”^[54]

To the iconodules, if there were no hope that material, physical images could be connected with divinity and consequently sanctified—which Orthodox Christians insist was the fallacy of the iconoclasts—then there would be no hope for the sanctification/ deification of the material, physical bodies of humans, who are themselves divine icons because they are created in the image of God.^[55] For that reason, the defeat of the iconoclasts is celebrated as nothing less than the “Triumph of Orthodoxy.” It reminds Eastern Orthodox Christians that because the Son fully entered humanity, He opened the way for humans to fully enter divinity. “It is the possibility of every Christian to *imitate* Jesus in his entrance to the heavenly,” so that in theosis, humans become “as much a real god as Christ became a real man.”^[56]

The Hesychast Controversy

If the *filioque* controversy centered on Eastern Orthodoxy’s view of Deity, and the iconoclast controversy on their view of humanity, the hesychast controversy focused on Eastern Orthodox beliefs about the possibilities for union between the two.

In the fourteenth century, a debate raged among Eastern Orthodox theologians over hesychasm—the ritual practice, especially by monks, of pursuing a mystical communion with the divine, often through repeated prayers. A hesychast is

someone who pursues “inward stillness” and “continual prayer.”^[57] These medieval mystics maintained that Christians who conformed their lives to the influence of the Spirit and who sought for continual communion with God could approach divine likeness to such a degree that they could literally experience the same radiance of heavenly light that Peter, James, and John experienced on the Mount of Transfiguration. That radiance became the goal of their Christian living.

The hesychasts’ claims were disputed, principally by an Italian named Barlaam, who saw in hesychasm a blasphemous reduction of God’s transcendence. Hesychasm was defended by St. Gregory Palamas in the 1300s, and his eloquent defense, upheld by two councils at Constantinople, has become an integral part of Orthodox theology.^[58]

Palamas centered his explanation of divine light on the distinction between God’s essence and His energies. Following Palamas’s reasoning, Eastern Orthodox theologians today qualify their statements about human deification by

consistently repeating that humans become gods by *grace*—divine energies—and not by *nature*—divine essence.^[59] In Eastern Orthodox Christianity, Creator and creature will always be infinitely different in nature. That is the first tenet of faith when the Eastern Orthodox approach discussions of deification. When humans become gods, they do not become *ontologically*—by nature—what God is. God, in His essence, is eternally unknowable, incomparably other. Because humans are *created* beings, they never lose their humanity, nor do they take on the divine *ousia* or “inner being,” the

essence of God’s uncreatedness and self-existence.^[60] Theosis does not imply for Eastern Orthodox Christians the dissolution of this natural uncreated/created distinction between God and humans.

However, deified humans participate in every way in the divine *energies*. The full import of “divine energies” is difficult to verbalize. They are alternately equated with God’s grace, with His know-able “activities,” and with His

“operations or acts of power.”^[61] But the significance of the energies runs even deeper than this. Divine energies are more than divine attributes: “they are God Himself,” uncreated as He is uncreated, the manifestations by which humans

experience and know Him.^[62] Therefore, in the energies are combined the *totality* of His attributes, minus His essence. And those humans who experience theosis will enjoy full communion and share in those same realities and attributes of

divine energy—activities, acts of power, “divinity, goodness, grace, light, and others.”^[63]

This real possibility for illumination through the “light” of the divine energies was central to Gregory Palamas’s defense of hesychasm—and deification. “How then do we know this light is also deification?” he asked. “Listen to [the Eastern Father, Maximus]. Having explained as far as possible the way in which deified men are united to God—a union akin to that of the soul and the body, so that the whole man should be entirely deified, divinised by the grace of the incarnate God—he concludes: ‘He remains entirely man by nature in his soul and body, and becomes entirely God in his soul and body through grace, and through the divine radiance of the blessed glory with which he is made entirely resplendent.’” After quoting Maximus, Palamas asked another, concluding question: “Do you note that this light is the radiance of God?”^[64]

By validating the hesychasts’ strivings for an experience with this radiance, Gregory Palamas also forcefully advocated this tenet of Orthodoxy: Deified humans unite with and participate *fully* in the divine energies because their human energies have been changed to perfectly conform to divinity. The “participant is transformed into the nature of that which it participates in,” so that “the participant (man) becomes what God is,” according to a contemporary Orthodox

scholar.^[65] By this, Orthodox Christians do not mean to say that humans become what God is *in essence*—that is, humans will always be created beings; they will always be *humans*. But, through grace, humans *can* become gods, and share in *all* of the divine attributes and energies. Or, as Georgios Mantzaridis recently wrote in summarizing Palamas

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works, “The deified man is made *god in all things*, but he neither is identified with the divine essence nor shares it.” Deification through Christ is, and for two millennia has been, the glorious message of the Eastern Orthodox Church.

Latter-Day Saint Reflections

Elder B. H. Roberts felt that “perhaps no passage in the Prophets [King Follett] discourse has given more offense than [this] one”: “You have got to learn how to be Gods . . . by going from one small degree to another, and from a small capacity to a great one; from grace to grace.”^[67] While this striking statement might surprise some readers because of what seems to them to be the strange talk of humans becoming gods, it is a call that corresponds well with what has been labeled the “central concept and emblem of Greek [Orthodox] Christian theology,” the doctrine of human

deification.^[68] With something of the same spirit of the Prophet Joseph Smith’s invitation, Bishop Ware issued this challenge: “If someone asks, ‘How can I become god?’ the answer is very simple: go to church, receive the sacraments regularly, pray to God ‘in spirit and in truth,’ read the Gospels, follow the commandments. The last of these items — ‘follow the commandments’ — must never be forgotten. Orthodoxy, no less than Western Christianity, firmly rejects the kind of mysticism that seeks to dispense with moral rules.”^[69]

The consistency and clarity of these kinds of Orthodox teachings seem to speak to the very criticism of Latter-day Saint doctrine that Elder Roberts was describing. True, questions about “icono-clasm,” or the “double procession of the Holy Ghost,” or “mystical communion with divine energies” are foreign to the Latter-day Saint experience. But the underlying doctrine at issue in those medieval controversies—the issue of whether or not humans can really become gods through the saving grace of Jesus Christ—is the very fabric of faith for Latter-day Saints. It is also true that Latter-day Saints do not make the technical distinctions between divine essence and person and energies that Orthodox Christians make, since the Latter-day Saint understanding of the nature of God is that God the Father is an exalted Man with a glorified, perfect, radiant body of flesh and bones. The Prophet Joseph Smith taught: “God himself was once as we are now, and is an exalted man. . . . If the veil were rent today, . . . if you were to see him today, you would see him

like a man in form—like yourselves in all the person, image and very form as a man.”^[70] But Latter-day Saints are careful to emphasize that we believe, with Eastern Orthodox Christians, that God is all-powerful, all-knowing, and perfect in every attribute, and that our scriptures repeatedly teach the same (2 Nephi 9:20; Mosiah 4:9; Alma 26:35; Doctrine and Covenants 88:41). We also maintain that neither God’s past nor His corporeal form limit His divinity in

any way.^[71] Latter-day Saint writers have noted that the Incarnation—and especially the Resurrection—of Jesus Christ guides the Latter-day Saint belief that *corporeal* and *infinite* need not be mutually exclusive descriptions of Deity,^[72] a belief that resonates with the twentieth-century Eastern Orthodox writer Vladimir Lossky’s estimation of Christ’s

mutual corporeality and infinity: “After the Resurrection, *the very body of Christ mocks spatial limitations.*,”^[73]

Still, because of the unique Latter-day Saint doctrine that God is now an exalted Man and that all humans are His spirit children, Latter-day Saints differ from Eastern Orthodox Christians in that we believe that humans are presently and significantly different in degree from God’s perfect nature, but not radically different in kind.^[74] There is no corresponding Latter-day Saint doctrine of divine “otherness” of essence because we believe that humans and the Father are of the same species, such that Latter-day Saints see no theological need to qualify “all that the Father hath” with the

Orthodox exception concerning the divine essence of self-existence and uncreatedness.^[75] Yet because of this “same species” belief, Latter-day Saints are very comfortable with the Orthodox contention that deified humans never lose their human nature or essence. We too believe that deified humans—gods—will be just that: human.

Likewise, Latter-day Saints stand with Orthodox Christians in asserting that deification/exaltation never implies a replacing or usurping of God. The presiding councils of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints have stated officially that “though [exalted humans] be gods, they are still subject to Jesus Christ as their Father in this exalted

relationship.”^[76] They then cited Doctrine and Covenants 76:59 as scriptural support for this aspect of the doctrine of exaltation: “They [exalted humans] are Christ’s, and Christ is God’s.” And even more recently President Gordon B. Hinckley has explained that “this lofty concept in no way diminishes God the Eternal Father. He is the Almighty. He is the Creator and Governor of the universe. He is the greatest of all *and will always be so*. But just as any earthly father wishes for his sons and daughters every success in life, so I believe our Father in Heaven wishes for his children that they might approach him in stature and stand beside him resplendent in godly strength and wisdom.”^[77]

The Eastern Orthodox Church claims derivation from, and continuity with, the most ancient of Christian traditions; Latter-day Saints claim modern restoration of ancient truths and authority. While we base our beliefs about deification/exaltation on the foundation of the revelatory experiences of the Prophet Joseph Smith and the scriptural witness of several passages in the Doctrine and Covenants, the remarkable survival of the doctrine of deification in Orthodoxy and its persistence as a central tenet of Orthodox theology bolster our assertion that this is both an ancient and an authentic Christian teaching, as well as one reasonable interpretation of pertinent biblical texts.

In spite of this apparent doctrinal connection, Richard and Joan Ostling have recently written that “support for the Mormon doctrines of a corporeal and limited God, eternal progress, and deification cannot be found in Eastern Orthodoxy.”^[78] But their interpretation of cited sources suggests a misunderstanding of the canonical Latter-day Saint

doctrine of human deification.^[79] The assertion that Eastern Orthodox Christians do not believe in a corporeal God *the Father* seems fair (we would take exception with the Ostlings’ characterization of God as “limited” in Latter-day Saint theology). However, the Ostlings’ conclusions concerning Orthodoxy’s beliefs concerning eternal progression and

human deification seem more precarious,^[80] for while the respective views of Latter-day Saints and Eastern Orthodox Christians regarding the nature of God differ, their views about the potential deification of humanity consistently correspond. Even those Orthodox scholars quoted by the Ostlings repeatedly cited the “otherness” of God, not the status of godhood for sanctified humans, as the fundamental difference between Eastern Christian theosis and Latter-day Saint

exaltation.^[81] That is where the deification contrasts should center.

Eastern Orthodox Christians believe that because of Christ’s victory, deified humans will receive their physical bodies in a glorious resurrection; Latter-day Saints believe the same. Eastern Orthodox Christians believe that they will

“participate in the grace, power, and glory of God”^[82]; Latter-day Saints believe the same. Eastern Orthodox Christians

believe that humans enter the realm of infinity, “becoming eternal like God,” without losing their humanity^[83]; Latter-day Saints believe the same. Eastern Orthodox Christians believe that even though they may become “gods,” they will never cease to worship God, nor somehow replace Him as their God, because they will be gods by grace; Latter-day

Saints believe the same.^[84] As cited earlier, Eastern Orthodox Christians use terms like “fullness” and “all things” and “becoming what God is” when speaking of deification; Latter-day Saints use that same language (see D&C 76:55, 58, 94; 84:38). Eastern Orthodox Christians see the Son of God as the perfect model for understanding human deification: as Jesus Christ became like “us, in all ways except sin, . . . he will also fulfill the mystical act of man’s theosis by

making man like himself *in all ways* except the divine essence” of eternal uncreatedness.^[85] And Eastern Orthodox Christians believe that “if the saints are heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, they will also share in the divine *glory*

and *dominion*”^[86]; Latter-day Saints believe the same, in that they also see in Paul’s teachings concerning “joint-heirs

with Christ” (Romans 8:17) the promise of deification.^[87] The revered Eastern writers Macarius and John Chrysostom spoke of *the full* participation in the divine life that deification represents when they compared theosis to a marriage relationship, and their words make for a wonderful summation: “Just as two people are joined together in one flesh yet all the while maintain the integrity of their separate identities, just as they share a single existence and *hold all things in common*, so the believer is joined to God in an ‘ineffable communion’ (see 1 Corinthians 6:15–17).”^[88]

With all this, it seems difficult to argue that Eastern Orthodox Christians do not mean what they repeatedly say or to argue that Latter-day Saints and Eastern Orthodox Christians do not *believe* similar things about deification when they frequently *profess* similar ideas about deification. It does not seem at all unreasonable, then, to suggest that “support” (in the sense that parallel doctrines are taught by another worldwide Christian church) “for the Mormon [doctrine] of . . . deification” *is* found in Eastern Orthodoxy.^[89]

Those who defend theosis, whether Latter-day Saints in Moscow, Idaho, or Eastern Orthodox Christians in Moscow, Russia, see in this doctrine the real possibility which the saving work of Jesus Christ opens to all humans; it is the opportunity that humans have inherited because they have been created in God’s own image—created with the potential to “be like Him” (1 John 3:2; Moroni 7:48). With Christoforos Stavropoulos, we ask, “Do we understand the meaning of this calling?”^[90]

[1] Christoforos Stavropoulos, “Partakers of Divine Nature,” in *Eastern Orthodox Theology: A Contemporary Reader*, ed. Daniel B. Clendenin (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Books, 1995), 184.

[2] Michael Prokurat, Alexander Golitzin, and Michael D. Peterson, *Historical Dictionary of the Orthodox Church* (Lanham, Md.: Scarecrow, 1996), s.v. “theosis.”

[3] Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* V, preface, as cited in *The Apostolic Fathers—Justin Martyr—Irenaeus*, vol. 1 of Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson, eds., *The Ante-Nicene Fathers: Translations of the Writings of the Fathers down to A.D. 325*, comp. A. Cleveland Coxe (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1899), 526. Irenaeus lived between 130 and 200. For the dates of his life, as well as for the dates of the other church fathers cited here, I am relying on Timothy (Bishop Kallistos of Diokleia) Ware, *The Orthodox Way* (Crestwood, N.Y.: St. Vladimir’s Seminary, 1980), in his section “Authors and Sources,” 186–94.

[4] Vladimir Lossky, *In the Image and Likeness of God*, ed. John H. Erickson and Thomas E. Bird (Crestwood, N.Y.: St. Vladimir’s Seminary, 1974), 97. See also Sister Marta Ryk, “The Holy Spirit’s Role in the Deification of Man According to Contemporary Orthodox Theology,” *Diakonia* 10, nos. 1–2 (1975): 119.

[5] Athanasius, *On the Incarnation: The Treatise De Incarnatione Verbi Dei*, trans. A. Religious of C.S.M.V., with an introduction by C. S. Lewis (Crestwood, N.Y.: St. Vladimir’s Orthodox Theological Seminary, 1953; reprint, 1982), 93.

[6] Timothy (Bishop Kallistos of Diokleia) Ware, *The Orthodox Church*, new and rev. ed. (London and New York: Penguin Books, 1997), 21. Here Bishop Ware is quoting Athanasius.

[7] Daniel B. Clendenin, *Eastern Orthodox Christianity: A Western Perspective* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Books, 1994), 120.

[8] S. L. Epinanovic, as cited in Jaroslav Pelikan, *The Spirit of Eastern Christendom (600–1700)*, vol. 2 of *The Christian Tradition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1974), 10.

[9]

Daniel Clendenin argues for this point, that Orthodoxy is frequently overlooked and misunderstood. See his *Eastern Orthodox Christianity*, 17–18, as well as 14, where Clendenin notes that the “Pelican History of the Church series, for example, contains no volume on Eastern Christianity.” Clendenin also argues that not only does “the West [lack] any developed notion of theosis,” but Western theologians have also “given only scant attention to the central importance of theosis in Orthodox thought” (*Eastern Orthodox Christianity*, 125, 121). Orthodox theologians worry that this “scant attention” comes at the expense of a fundamental—and ancient—Christian tenet that was consistently taught by early church fathers. Craig Blomberg, another Protestant scholar, agrees: “The early church, like Eastern Orthodoxy throughout its history, felt much freer than Protestantism or Catholicism has felt to speak of believers’ deification, divinization or even of their becoming gods or godlike” (Craig J. Blomberg and Stephen E. Robinson, *How Wide the Divide? A Mormon and an Evangelical in Conversation* [Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 1997], 100).

[10] See F. L. Cross and E. A. Livingstone, eds., *Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*, 3d ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), s.v. “deification”: “In the W[est] such language [Athanasius, Irenaeus, etc.] became less popular. It was retained in the E[ast].” See also Richard P. McBrien, ed., *The HarperCollins Encyclopedia of Catholicism* (New York: HarperCollins, 1995), s.v. “deification.”

[11] Clendenin, *Eastern Orthodox Christianity*, 119. Consistent with most literature that deals with the Eastern Orthodox Church, the designations “the West” and “Western Christians” refer here to those Christians whose traditions reflect an inheritance of either Roman Catholicism or Protestantism. The designations “the East” and “Eastern Christians” will be used in referring to those Christians who belong to the Eastern Orthodox Church. See Ware, *Orthodox Church*, 3–7, for a discussion of these terms. It should be noted that other Christian denominations—primarily the Syrian Church, the Coptic Church, and the Ethiopian Church—often use some form of the titles “Eastern” and “Orthodox” in describing their churches. However, these churches rejected the fifth-century Council of Chalcedon and are therefore grouped together as “non-Chalcedonian Orthodox Churches.” This study will focus on the much larger *Chalcedonian* Eastern Orthodox Church, the churches “in communion with Constantinople” (John Binns, *An Introduction to the Christian Orthodox Churches* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002], vii–viii; see also Ware, *Orthodox Church*, 7).

[12] See, for example, Daniel C. Peterson and Stephen D. Ricks, “Comparing LDS Beliefs with First-Century Christianity,” *Ensign*, March 1988, 6–11; Robert L. Millet and Noel B. Reynolds, eds., *Latter-day Christianity: Ten Basic Issues* (Provo, Utah: FARMS, 1998), 26–28; Keith E. Norman, “Deification, Early Christian,” in *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, ed. Daniel H. Ludlow (New York: Macmillan, 1992), 369–70; Stephen E. Robinson, *Are Mormons Christians?* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1991), 60–65; Blomberg and Robinson, *How Wide the Divide?* 80–81; Keith E. Norman, “Divinization: The Forgotten Teaching of Early Christianity,” *Sunstone* 1 (Winter 1975): 15–19; Philip L. Barlow, “Unorthodox Orthodoxy: The Idea of Deification in Christian History,” *Sunstone* 8, no. 5 (September-October 1983): 13–18.

[13] See Millet and Reynolds, *Latter-day Christianity*, 26–28: “The doctrine of deification of man is not an exclusive teaching of the restored Church of Jesus Christ. Rather, it can be found in early Christian history. . . . All five of the above writers [who spoke of human deification] were not just orthodox Christians, but also in time became revered as saints. . . . This doctrine was a part of historical Christianity until relatively recent times, and it is still an important doctrine in some Eastern Orthodox churches.” See also Blomberg and Robinson, *How Wide the Divide?* 209 n. 16.

[14] See Richard N. Ostling and Joan K. Ostling, *Mormon America: The Power and the Promise* (New York and San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1999), 309–10: “[Mormon] writers. . . often express a kinship to Eastern Orthodoxy in that branch of Christendom’s use of the term ‘deification.’ . . . The embrace, however, is one way.” See also Blomberg and Robinson, *How Wide the Divide?* 100–102, 212 n. 18.

[15] Blomberg and Robinson, *How Wide the Divide?* 209 n. 16.

[16] See Ware, *Orthodox Church*, 210.

[17] Latter-day Saints seem to be unique in their strong beliefs about eternal marriages (and thus eternal families) and human premortal existence. Because there are occasional references to both doctrines in modern Eastern Orthodoxy, however, even on these points it does not seem that the Latter-day Saint and Eastern Orthodox positions wholly diverge.

On marriage: Latter-day Saints directly tie human deification to marriage—exaltation is only possible for those who are faithful in an eternal marriage covenant (D&C 131:1–4; 132:19–20). This direct doctrinal tie between marriage and deification is not found in Orthodox-, but, interestingly, the idea that marriages might be perpetuated in the life to come does find expression in Orthodox thought. See Father John Meyendorff, *Byzantine Theology: Historical Trends and Doctrinal Themes* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1979), 197, where he writes that because marriage is a church sacrament, it must be “an eternal bond, which death itself does not destroy. In its sacramental nature, marriage transfigures and transcends both fleshly union and contractual legal association: human love is being projected into the eternal Kingdom of God.” Meyendorff’s position on marriage as an “eternal bond” resonates with the Latter-day Saint doctrine of eternal marriage, but see Christos Yannaras, *Elements of Faith: An Introduction to Orthodox Theology* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1991), 74, for an apparently opposing view concerning the perpetuation of marital vows in the next life: “The resurrection which abolishes the marital relationship, as it also abolishes death, is a resurrection ‘from the dead.’” Yannaras also suggests that those who entered the celibate monastic orders were thus making a preparatory “leap” toward the type of sociality which would exist in the future kingdom of God. Because in Orthodoxy there are contradictory opinions about either the future indissolubility or future abolition of the marital relationship, there seems to be no definitive Orthodox doctrine about the eternality of marriages. In this sense, the Latter-day Saint understanding of exaltation is distinct in that it is more definitive and explicit.

On premortal existence: Orthodox Christians are uncomfortable with suggestions about the preexistence of humanity insofar as they see those suggestions limiting the transcendence of God as Creator. Still, Orthodox theologians do give qualified suggestions of some form of human preexistence. The main Orthodox emphasis seems to be that all humans, because of the inherent divine image, possess some connection with God’s preexistence, as well as some uncreated and eternal component of the soul. See Ware, *Orthodox Church*, 243, where he is quoting nineteenth-century Russian theologian Alexis Khomiakov: “Those who are alive on earth, those who have finished their earthly course, those who, like the angels, were not created for a life on earth, *those in future generations who have not yet began their earthly course*, are all united together in one Church, in one and the same grace of God” (emphasis added). See also Panagiotes Chrestou, *Partakers of God* (Brookline, Mass.: Holy Cross Orthodox Press, 1984), 18–19: “The world was created according to an eternal plan that included the ‘substantive reasoning’ of beings. . . . Since the will of God is completely uncreated, the reason of human beings is also uncreated Every created being has been made according to a corresponding reason which defines both its origin and essence. Consequently, it has had a connection with the uncreated ever since its creation. And if all beings partake of divinity in proportion to their creation, this is much more true of rational beings and, especially, of man, who is part of God because of this: ‘Because of his reason, preexistence in God, man is called and is a part of God.’ On the basis of his reason, preexistence in God, the making of man constitutes the first foundation of his potentiality of being raised above his natural state and gives him a pledge of eternity ever since his genesis.” Therefore, even though Latter-day Saints differ from Orthodox Christians in their beliefs about the eternality of the elements (and thus their rejection of “ex nihilo” creation), they agree with Orthodox Christians that there is something uncreated about the soul and that God is rightfully worshipped as the Creator in that He organized the eternal elements and thus gave life to all humans.

[18] Clendenin, *Eastern Orthodox Christianity*, 29; Thomas Doulis, ed., *Journeys to Orthodoxy: A Collection of Essays by Converts to Orthodox Christianity* (Minneapolis: Light and Life, 1986), 7, as cited in Clendenin, *Eastern Orthodox Christianity*, 14. These statistics on Orthodox Christians—200 to 250 million worldwide, and 4 million in North America—are admittedly debatable, and are taken from Prokurat, Golitzin, and Peterson, *Historical Dictionary of the Orthodox Church*, 8. See also Clendenin, *Eastern Orthodox Christianity*, 17–18, where he gives an estimate of 185 million Orthodox Christians worldwide and 6 million in the United States. For an overview of the current makeup of the Orthodox Church, see Ware, *Orthodox Church*, 3–7. See also Binns, *Introduction to the Christian Orthodox Churches*, 10–26. On the bonds that keep the Orthodox churches together, see Ware, *Orthodox Church*, 7: “The Orthodox Church is . . . held together, not by a centralized organization, not by a single prelate wielding absolute power over the whole body but by the double bond of unity in the faith and communion in the sacraments. Each Church, while independent, is in full agreement with the rest on all matters of doctrine, and

between them all there is full sacramental communion.” It is important to note that while the patriarch of Constantinople is called the “ecumenical patriarch,” all Orthodox commentators stress that the patriarch’s position of “first among equals” in no way designates authoritative supremacy unlike the pope for Roman Catholics, since each church is self-governing. See Binns, *Introduction to the Christian Orthodox Churches*, 13–14, for a description of the powers of the ecumenical patriarch.

[19] For a history of Orthodoxy in the United States, see Father John Meyendorff, *The Orthodox Church: Its Past and Its Role in the World Today*, 4th ed., rev. (Crestwood, N.Y.: St. Vladimir’s Seminary, 1996), 167–69, 227–31; see also Ware, *Orthodox Church*, 178–87. Both Meyendorff and Ware note the Russian Orthodox Church’s eighteenth-century presence in Alaska as Orthodoxy’s first entrance into what is now the United States.

[20] See Clendenin, *Eastern Orthodox Christianity*, 15; Ware, *Orthodox Church*, 2.

[21] Ware, *Orthodox Church*, 2.

[22] For an excellent overview of the factors contributing to this “Great Schism,” see Timothy (Bishop Kallistos of Diokleia) Ware, “Eastern Christendom,” in *The Oxford History of Christianity*, ed. John McManners (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 151–54.

[23] See Ware, *Orthodox Church*, 1–2 and 314–21 for a discussion of Orthodoxy’s distinctiveness from Western Christianity as well as the Orthodox proposal that Christian unification depends largely on Roman Catholicism’s and Anglicanism’s return to doctrinal Orthodoxy.

[24] Ware, *Orthodox Church*, 307.

[25] See Sergius Bulgakov, *The Orthodox Church*, trans. Lydia Kesich (Crestwood, N.Y.: St. Vladimir’s Seminary, 1988), 1: “Orthodoxy is the Church of Christ on earth”; see also Ware, *Orthodox Church*, 247: “Orthodoxy also teaches that outside the Church there is no salvation.”

[26] Besides those whose observations have already been cited—Ware, Bulgakov, Meyendorff, and Clendenin—see Pelikan, *Spirit of Eastern Christendom*, 3, 8–9; see also the entry for “Orthodoxy” in Prokurat, Golitzin, and Peterson’s *Historical Dictionary of the Orthodox Church*, 248, as well as their introduction, 1, 3–4. Especially interesting is Clendenin’s inclusion of the account of Peter Gillquist and his formerly Protestant followers who converted to Orthodoxy precisely because they “longed for ‘a twentieth century expression of the first century church’” (Clendenin, *Eastern Orthodox Christianity*, 29–30).

[27] Clendenin, *Eastern Orthodox Christianity*, 30.

[28] See H. A. Hodges, *Anglicanism and Orthodoxy* (London: n.p., 1955), 46–47, as cited in Ware, *Orthodox Church*, 321. See also Aidan Nichols, *Light from the East: Authors and Themes in Orthodox Theology* (London: Sheed & Ward, 1995), 1–2.

[29] See Ware, *Orthodox Church*, 50–57, for a summary of the history behind the *filioque*. On page 50 he points out that the *filioque* was added by the local “third Council of Toledo (589), if not before.”

[30] While the creed which emerged from the first ecumenical council at Nicaea in 325 (the “Nicene Creed”) has served as the basis for all subsequent Orthodox creeds, Bishop Ware explains that the creed that actually explains the Orthodox doctrine of the procession of the Holy Ghost was the modified Nicene Creed that emerged from the second ecumenical council at Constantinople in 381 (see Ware, *Orthodox Church*, 22–23).

[31] See Meyendorff, *Byzantine Theology*, 184. Bishop Ware senses this same distinction in East-West philosophical approaches in the Latin addition of the *filioque* to the creeds: “This. . . has the effect of depersonalizing the Latin doctrine of the deity. God is conceived not so much in concrete and personal terms but as an essence in which various relations are distinguished” (*Orthodox Church*, 214–15). See Lossky, *In the Image and Likeness*, 71–96, for

a more detailed discussion of the East-West divergence. Lossky sees in Western thought “the general character of this triadology [that] may be described as a pre-eminence of natural unity over personal trinity, as an ontological primacy of the essence over the hypostases” (*In the Image and Likeness*, 77). See also Yannaras, *Elements of Faith*, 23, for a similar characterization of the “Roman” approach.

[32] Timothy (Bishop Kallistos of Diokleia) Ware, *Orthodox Way* (Crestwood, N.Y.: St. Vladimir’s Orthodox Theological Seminary, 1979), 33; see also Yannaras, *Elements of Faith*, 20; Meyendorff, *Byzantine Theology*, 182–83.

[33] See Ware, *Orthodox Way*, 39; see also 37: “God the Trinity is thus to be described as ‘three persons in one essence.’ There is eternally one true unity, combined with genuinely personal differentiation: the term ‘essence,’ ‘substance’ or ‘being’ (*ousia*) indicates the unity, and the term ‘person’ (*hypostasis, prosopon*) indicates the differentiation.”

[34] “Ontological gap” is the term used by Bishop Ware, as cited in Ostling and Ostling, *Mormon America*, 311.

[35] Ware, *Orthodox Way*, 35.

[36] Yannaras, *Elements of Faith*, 59.

[37] See Yannaras, *Elements of Faith*, 27.

[38] Ware, “Eastern Christendom,” 153.

[39] Meyendorff, *Byzantine Theology*, 91–92.

[40] Dumitru Staniloae, “Image, Likeness, and Deification in the Human Person,” trans. Ioan Ionita and Robert Barringer, *Communio* 13, no. 1 (Spring 1986): 73; emphasis added.

[41] For summaries of this debate, as well as definitions of terms like *iconodules*, see Ware, “Eastern Christendom,” in *The Orthodox History of Christianity*, 148–51; Bruce L. Shelley, *Church History in Plain Language*, 2d ed. (Dallas: Word Publishing, 1995), 148–49. See also Aurel Jivi, “The Relevance of the Seventh Ecumenical Synod,” *The Greek Orthodox Theological Review* 38, nos. 1–4 (1993): 291

[42] See Clendenin, *Eastern Orthodox Christianity*, 157: “The centrality of icons [is] quite foreign to Protestant theology.”

[43] These two doctrines are repeated over and over in Orthodox treatises. Representative of these are Chrestou, *Partakers of God*, 17; Georgios I. Mantzaridis, *The Deification of Man: St. Gregory Palamas and the Orthodox Tradition*, trans. Liadain Sherrard (Crestwood, N.Y.: St. Vladimir’s Seminary, 1984), 15–17; Ernst Benz, *The Eastern Orthodox Church: Its Thought and Life*, trans. Richard and Clara Winston (Garden City, N. Y.: Doubleday, 1963), 18–19. See especially Matti Sidoroff, “Man as the Icon of God,” *The Greek Orthodox Theological Review* 38, nos. 1–4 (1993): 24: “In our worship [icons] have a central place. We have a direct and close relation to them. They are dear to us Orthodox. But the icon is not just an object, external to us. It is that, too, but we should remember that we ourselves are called to be icons of God, because God created us in his own image and likeness.”

[44] See, for example, Mantzaridis, *Deification of Man*, 19; see also Ware, *Orthodox Church*, 220.

[45] Ware, *Orthodox Church*, 232.

[46] St. John of Damascus, *On the Divine Images: Three Apologies against Those Who Attack the Divine Images*, trans. David Anderson (Crestwood, N.Y.: St. Vladimir’s Seminary, 1980), 80–81; emphasis added.

[47] Meyendorff, *Byzantine Theology*, 159. See also Nichols, *Light from the East*, 172–73, 177, for a discussion of

God's foreknowledge and humanity's creation in the image of the Son, even though at the time of the Creation the Incarnation was still a future event.

[48] St. John of Damascus, *On the Divine Images*, 80–81.

[49] Ware, *Orthodox Church*, 21.

[50] See, for example, Ware, *Orthodox Church*, 219: “And if we make proper use of this faculty for communion with God, then we will become ‘like’ God, we will acquire the divine likeness; in the words of John Damascene, we will be ‘assimilated to God through virtue.’ To acquire the likeness is to deified.”

[51] See Meyendorff, *Byzantine Theology*, 159.

[52] See St. John of Damascus, *On the Divine Images*, 29–30: “He rose by the excellence of His power, keeping the immortal flesh by which He had saved us from corruption”; see also Ware, *Orthodox Way*, 111: “It is not sufficient to explain away the Resurrection by saying that Christ’s ‘spirit’ somehow lived on among his disciples . . . We Orthodox believe that there was a genuine resurrection from the dead, in the sense that Christ’s human body was reunited to his human soul, and that the tomb was found to be empty.” See also Prokurat, Golitzin, and Peterson, *Historical Dictionary of the Orthodox Church*, s.v. “Pascha—the Resurrection of Christ.”

[53] St. Symeon the New Theologian, as cited in Constantine Cavarnos, *The Future Life According to Orthodox Teaching*, trans. Hieromonk Auxentios and Archimandrite Chrysostomos (Etna, Calif.: Center for Traditionalist Orthodox Studies, 1986), 42. See also Ware, *Orthodox Church*, 225: “In His own person Christ showed what the true ‘likeness of God’ is, and through His redeeming and victorious sacrifice He set that likeness once again within our reach.”

[54] St. John of Damascus, *On the Divine Images*, 29; emphasis added.

[55] See Ware, *Orthodox Church*, 33–35, for this connection between the victory for icons, the Resurrection, and the sanctification of the physical bodies of humans.

[56] Prokurat, Golitzin, and Peterson, *Historical Dictionary of the Orthodox Church*, s.v. “Pascha—the Resurrection of Christ”; Chrestou, *Partakers of God*, 51.

[57] Mantzaridis, *Deification of Man*, 135.

[58] For a summary of the hesychast controversy, as well as Gregory Palamas’s defense, see Ware, *Orthodox Church*, 65–70; Mantzaridis, *Deification of Man*, 122–29.

[59] See Ware, *Orthodox Church*, 232; see also Meyendorff, *Byzantine Theology*, 164; Vladimir Lossky, *Orthodox Theology: An Introduction* (Crestwood, N.Y.: St. Vladimir’s Seminary, 1978), 130.

[60] See Ware, *Orthodox Way*, 27.

[61] Thomas Fitzgerald, “Orthodox Tradition,” in *Dictionary of Christianity in America*, ed. Daniel G. Reid (Downers Grove, 111: InterVarsity, 1990), 850; Ware, *Orthodox Way*, 27.

[62] See Ware, *Orthodox Church*, 68: “These energies are not something that exists apart from God, not a gift which God confers upon men: they are God Himself in His action and revelation to the world.” See also Chrestou, *Partakers of God*, 62.

[63] Chrestou, *Partakers of God*, 62.

[64]

St. Gregory Palamas, *The Triads*, ed. John Meyendorff, trans. Nicholas Gendle (New York: Paulist Press, 1983), III.iii.13 (pages 109–10).

- [65] Chrestou, *Partakers of God*, 62, based on the writings of Gregory of Nyssa; see also Fitzgerald, “Orthodox Tradition,” 850–51.
- [66] Mantzaridis, *Deification of Man*, 122; emphasis added.
- [67] Joseph Smith, *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, sel. Joseph Fielding Smith (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1976), 346–47. Elder B. H. Roberts’s comment is found on page 346, note 3.
- [68] Chrestou, *Partakers of God*, 35.
- [69] Ware, *Orthodox Church*, 236.
- [70] Smith, *Teachings*, 345. For additional commentary on Lorenzo Snow’s and Joseph Smith’s teachings, see also Stephen E. Robinson, “God the Father: Overview,” in *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, ed. Daniel H. Ludlow (New York: Macmillan, 1992), 2:549; Blomberg and Robinson, *How Wide the Divide?* 86.
- [71] For a concise explanation and reconciliation of Latter-day Saint beliefs about the Father’s mortal past and “the fact that he now has all power and all knowledge and possesses every virtue, grace, and godly attribute,” see Millet and Reynolds, eds., *Latter-day Christianity*, 32; see also 31–33.
- [72] See David L. Paulsen, “The Doctrine of Divine Embodiment: Restoration, Judeo-Christian, and Philosophical Perspectives,” *BYU Studies* 35 (1996): 84–94. See also Blomberg and Robinson, *How Wide the Divide?* 89, for Stephen Robinson’s view: “I would argue that if the full divinity of Christ was not impaired or limited by his incarnation, then . . . God *can* have a physical body and still be God, infinite and eternal. The incarnation of the Son proves this.” See also Robert L. Millet, “What We Believe,” *Brigham Young University 1997–98 Speeches* (Provo, Utah: Brigham Young University Publications and Graphics, 1998), 157.
- [73] Lossky, *Orthodox Theology*, 75; emphasis added. See also Prokurat, Golitzin, and Peterson, *Historical Dictionary of the Orthodox Church*, s.v. “Pascha—the Resurrection of Christ.”
- [74] See, for example, this recent summation by President Gordon B. Hinckley: “Two beings of substance were before [Joseph Smith]. He saw them. They were in form like men, *only much more glorious in their appearance*. . . . They were beings of flesh and bone whose nature was reaffirmed in later revelations which came to the Prophet” (“What Are People Asking about Us?” *Ensign*, November 1998, 71; emphasis added).
- [75] For an excellent summary of the doctrinal basis for exaltation in Latter-day Saint theology, especially that theology surrounding the idea of humans and God being of the same species, see Elder Boyd K. Packer, “The Pattern of Our Parentage,” *Ensign*, November 1984, 66–69. Because there is no Latter-day Saint belief about the “Otherness” of the divine *ousia*, there also is no corresponding Latter-day Saint doctrine regarding the “two natures in one person” in Christ. See Stephen E. Robinson, “LDS Doctrine Compared with Other Christian Doctrines,” in *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, ed. Daniel H. Ludlow (New York: Macmillan, 1992), 401: “Latter-day Saints are monophysite in their christology; that is, they believe Christ has only one nature, which is simultaneously both human and divine. This is possible because the human and the divine are not mutually exclusive categories in LDS thought, as in the duophysite christology of much orthodoxy.”
- [76] “The Father and the Son: A Doctrinal Exposition by The First Presidency and The Twelve,” in James E. Talmage, *Articles of Faith* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1984), 424.
- [77] Gordon B. Hinckley, “Don’t Drop the Ball,” *Ensign*, November 1994, 48; emphasis added. I am indebted to Professor Roger Keller for bringing this reference to my attention.

[78] Ostling and Ostling, *Mormon America*, 313.

[79] Stephen Robinson makes this same argument about the misrepresentation of the official Latter-day Saint doctrine of exaltation, and he calls for increased attention to canonical sources (Blomberg and Robinson, *How Wide the Divide?* 86–94).

[80] While Orthodox theologians are never explicit in their description of the activities in which deified humans will engage (after all, participation in the divine life is a mystery for mortals precisely because the divine life is presently a mystery), they affirm that such participation will be, in Bishop Ware’s words, of “an inexhaustible variety” and never “monotonous”; Bishop Ware also calls it an “unending progress” and a “neverceasing advance,” because “never, in all eternity, shall we reach a point where we have accomplished all that there is to do, or discovered all that there is to know” (Ware, *Orthodox Way*, 184–85). See also Chrestou, *Partakers of God*, 64, under the subheading “Infinite Progress”: “Gregory of Nyssa had earlier indicated that he recognized only one limitation in perfection, that it has no limit.” For additional statements on the Orthodox view of eternal progress, see Cavarinos, *Future Life According to Orthodox Thought*, 45–46: “St. John Klimakos, having in mind the righteous who have attained to spiritual love (the highest of virtues), says: ‘We shall never cease to advance in love, either in the present or in the future life, continually adding light to light. . . they will ever receive more and more glory, more and more knowledge.’ . . . The same thing is expressed by another great mystic of the Church, St. Gregory of Sinai, who writes: ‘It is said that in the future life the Angels and the Saints will never cease to progress in the increase of divine gifts.’”

[81] See Ostling and Ostling, *Mormon America*, 310–13. See especially the comments by Bishop Ware on page 311, Jaroslav Pelikan on 312, and Thomas Hopko on 313. For a similar argument about Orthodox and Latter-day Saint deification parallels, see Robinson, “LDS Doctrine Compared with Other Christian Doctrines,” 401.

[82] Ware, cited in Ostling and Ostling, *Mormon America*, 311.

[83] Chrestou, *Partakers of God*, 62.

[84] See Elder Boyd K. Packer, “The Pattern of Our Parentage,” 69, for this straightforward expression of faith: “The Father *is* the one true God. *This* thing is certain: no one will ever ascend above Him; no one will ever replace Him. Nor will anything ever change the relationship that we, His literal offspring, have with Him. He is Eloheim, the Father. He is God. Of Him there is only one. We revere our Father and our God; we *worship* Him.”

[85] Chrestou, *Partakers of God*, 53; emphasis added.

[86] St. John of Damascus, *On the Divine Images*, 28; emphasis added.

[87] See, for example, Millet and Reynolds, *Latter-day Christianity*, 25–26.

[88] Macarius and Chrysostom, as cited in Clendenin, *Eastern Orthodox Christianity*, 131; emphasis added.

[89] See Millet and Reynolds, *Latter-day Christianity*, 29, for this excellent summary: “Since the scriptures teach that those who gain eternal life will look like God, receive the inheritance of God, receive the glory of God, be one with God, sit upon the throne of God, and exercise the power and rule of God, then surely it cannot be un-Christian to conclude with C. S. Lewis and others that such beings as these can be *called* gods, as long as we remember that this use of the term *gods* does not in anyway reduce or limit the sovereignty of God our Father. That is how the early Christians used the term; it is how C. S. Lewis used the term; and it is how Latter-day Saints use the term and understand the doctrine.”

[90] Stavropoulos, “Partakers of Divine Nature,” in *Eastern Orthodox Theology*, ed. Daniel B. Clendenin, 184.