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"You Adore a God Who Makes You Gods": Augustine's Doctrine of Deification

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Twentieth-century theologians advanced a consensus position that the doctrine of deification was alien to Augustine's theology—even impossible to square with his other commitments—and that even if traces of the doctrine could be detected, they were, at best, of marginal importance to his intellectual topography. This position, however, has been persuasively challenged by several investigations during the past three decades. This article builds upon these latter investigations to demonstrate how the notion of deification is prevalent throughout his corpus—whether linguistically evident by his use of technical terms such as deificare *and cognates, or more often, conceptually in his reflections upon anthropology, Christology, and ecclesiology. The article concludes by noting two of Augustine's distinctive contributions to the post-Nicene development of deification—that is, an emphasis upon the sacramental and ecclesiological contours of the doctrine.*

Keywords: deification, *deificare*, *theosis*, Augustine, *totus Christus*, anthropology, Christology

Introduction

Western theology bears an indelibly Augustinian mark. Whether in relation to predestination or original sin, notions of divine grace or portrayals of the immanent and economic aspects of the Trinity, sacramentology or just war theory, Augustine's legacy continues to form and inform theological discussion and doctrinal commitments

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both in Roman Catholic and Protestant circles. It is thus all the more surprising that a near-ubiquitously affirmed soteriological trope of the patristic era that has since experienced a resurgence of interest in modern scholarship—θέωσις (*theosis* or deification)—was often set aside or outright rejected in examinations of the *Doctor gratiae*. The consensus of twentieth-century theologians, with few exceptions, was that the doctrine simply could not exist within Augustine's theological outlook.

A 1925 study by Joseph Mausbach entitled *Thomas von Aquin als Meister christlicher Sittenlehre. Unter Besonderer Berücksichtigung seiner Willenslehre* (*Thomas Aquinas as Master of Christian Moral Teaching: With Special Consideration of His Doctrine of the Will*) is emblematic of this impulse. Mausbach labels Augustine as the "sole antagonist" to the Greeks, insofar as the bishop's prioritization of alternative salvific metaphors led to the Latin West's dismissal of deification.[1] Philip Sherrard raised a similar concern in his 1959 monograph *The Greek East and Latin West: A Study in Christian Tradition*. Here, Sherrard argues that Western theology, as spurred by Augustine and further developed and systematized by Aquinas, obscures "certain fundamental aspects of the full Christian doctrine" such as participation and deification.[2] More striking is the following quote from Myrrha Lot-Borodine's magisterial 1970 volume on deification:

> Ever drawn by the weight of its desire—*amor meus, pondus meum*—the Augustinian spirit tends with all the force of its wings to the grace of the *beatific vision*, which alone can afford it the "light of glory." It functions and knows itself directed to *beatitude*, but not to *deification*; this remains for it forbidden, since there cannot be for Augustine consubstantiality, thereby co-penetration, of the divine nature and the human nature.[3]

For Lot-Borodine, Augustine's theology creates such a significant barrier between Creator and creature, God and the rational human soul, that he is simply unable to conceptualize or articulate union with the divine, that is, "co-penetration, of the divine nature and human nature." And thus, she renders

[1] Joseph Mausbach, *Thomas von Aquin als Meister christlicher Sittenlehre. Uunter Besonderer Berücksichtigung seiner Willenslehre* (Munich: Theatiner Verlag, 1925), 30–40.

[2] Philip Sherrard, *The Greek East and the Latin West: A Study in the Christian Tradition*. (Limni: Denise Harvey, 1992 [1959]), 153, 141–45. Sherrard contends that Augustine incorrectly assumes the independence of the rational soul from the body and rejects the classical Eastern essence/energies distinction, which taken together, result in the absence of deification in Augustine's theology.

[3] Myrrha Lot-Borodine, *La déification de l'homme selon la doctrine des Pères grecs* (Paris: Editions Du Cerf, 1970), 39–40; italics in original. Unless otherwise noted, all italics are in the original.

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her final judgment: deification is not *and cannot be* present in Augustine's theology.[4] Patric Ranson advances a similar portrayal of the bishop in his 1988 volume, *Saint Augustin*. Ranson emphatically contends that Augustine's theology "actually forbids the wedding of the created and the uncreated, the union with God, which is the aim and the main meaning of Christianity."[5] This sentiment is more plainly articulated by eminent Orthodox theologian John Rōmanidēs: "In the theological tradition of the Franks, beginning with Augustine, there is no doctrine of deification."[6] And in case this overview fails to persuade readers of this past scholarly consensus, we note that such statements are merely illustrative, not exhaustive, of past portrayals of Augustine's theology.[7]

This negative assessment of Augustine's contribution to deification, however, has not remained unchallenged. As early as 1954, Victorino Capanaga pushed back against this majority reading of Augustine in his provocatively named article "La deificacion en la soteriologia agustiniana" ("Deification in Augustinian Soteriology").[8] It was not until twenty-two years later, however, when a similar contention was raised in the English-speaking academy by Patricia Wilson-Kastner, that a deiform reinterpretation of Augustine garnered increased attention.[9] For Wilson-Kastner, Augustine "was, to a substantial degree, the inheritor of the Greek fathers' notion about grace, yet he also

[4] Lot-Borodine, *La déification de l'homme selon la doctrine des Pères grecs*, 40.

[5] Patric Ranson, *Saint Augustin* (Paris: l'Age d'homme, 1988), 33.

[6] John S. Rōmanidēs, *An Outline of Orthodox Patristic Dogmatics*, ed. George Dion Dragas (Rollinsford, NH: Orthodox Research Institute, 2004), 39. Rōmanidēs offers two supports for his claim: (1) Augustine's rejection of the Palamite essence/energies distinction, which is central to Eastern conceptions of *theosis* and (2) the incorporation of pagan philosophical presuppositions in place of apophatic theology.

[7] In the West, Ben Drewry's 1975 article "Deification" argues that Augustine had no deification theology due to adhering to "the old Greek errors" of philosophy (58) and the "medley of half-digested concepts and popular catch-words" of early Latin Christian authors (54); Ben Drewry, "Deification," in *Christian Spirituality: Essays in Honour of Gordon Rupp*, ed. Peter Brooks (London: SCM, 1975). In the East, Seraphim Rose and Vladimir Lossky, though not entirely dismissive of Augustine, are deeply suspicious of his ability to conceive of a theology of deification; Seraphim Rose, *The Place of Blessed Augustine in the Orthodox Church* (Platina, CA: St. Herman of Alaska Brotherhood, 2007), and Vladamir Lossky, "Elements of 'Negative Theology' in the Thought of St. Augustine," SVTQ 21 (1977): 67–75.

[8] Victorino Capanaga, "La deificacion en la soteriologia agustiniana," *Augustinus Magister* 2 (1954): 745–54.

[9] Patricia Wilson-Kastner, "Grace as Participation in the Divine Life in the Theology of Augustine of Hippo," *Augustinian Studies* 7 (1976): 135–52.

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substantially modified their theology."[10] This inherited understanding of grace included "divinization" and "the same basic definition of grace as participation in the divine life" that the Greek fathers held to; Augustine's modifications, per Wilson-Kastner, were limited to matters of "predestination, original sin, and free will."[11] Indeed, she goes on to lucidly articulate how Augustine connects deification to creation, Christ's human nature, and the church as "the extension of Christ in space and time," before concluding with how he differs from the Greeks: namely, that in response to the Pelagian debates, he conceived of the mechanics of deifying grace as fully dependent upon God and not upon humankind's efforts.[12]

Gerald Bonner's 1986 article in the *Journal of Theological Studies*, "Augustine's Conception of Deification," was another crucial landmark in terms of moving beyond the past consensus about Augustine and *theosis*.[13] Bonner's examination introduced several key issues related to Augustine's notion of deification that are expanded upon in this article: the apparent paucity of *deificare/deificatus* and associated cognates in his corpus;[14] his comments about deification in his scriptural exegesis; the relationship he posited between deification and adoption;[15] the Christocentric portrayal of deification articulation in his writings;[16] and both the ecclesial and sacramental nature (or per Bonner, "process") of deification.[17] In the ensuing decades, a plethora of studies have followed in the footsteps of Bonner's investigation to reexamine Augustine's varied uses of *deificare*,[18] various portrayals

[10] Wilson-Kastner, "Grace as Participation in the Divine Life in the Theology of Augustine of Hippo," 135. Wilson-Kastner rightly notes that Augustine's command of Greek was tenuous at best. She posits, however, that he had access to Greek theology via: (1) Jerome's translation of Didymus of Alexandria and Gregory of Nazianzus; (2) Ambrose's sermons and writings; and (3) engagement with Latin theologians such as Hilary of Poitiers who were heavily influenced by fourth-century Greek theologians (page 142).

[11] Wilson-Kastner, "Grace as Participation in the Divine Life in the Theology of Augustine of Hippo," 136.

[12] Wilson-Kastner, "Grace as Participation in the Divine Life in the Theology of Augustine of Hippo," 149.

[13] Gerald Bonner, "Augustine's Conception of Deification," *Journal of Theological Studies* 37 (1986): 369–86.

[14] Bonner, "Augustine's Conception of Deification," 369n6.

[15] Bonner, "Augustine's Conception of Deification," 377–78, 384.

[16] Bonner, "Augustine's Conception of Deification," 373–75.

[17] Bonner, "Augustine's Concept of Deification," 383, 375–76.

[18] Roland Teske, "Augustine's Epistula X: Another Look at Deificari in Otio," *Augustinianum* 32 (1992): 289–99.

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of deification in Scripture,[19] and the relationship of deification to the *totus Christus*.[20]

This article builds upon many of the insights and trajectories from these foregoing investigations to further extend the line of inquiry pertaining to Augustine's doctrine of deification. We begin with a cursory overview of Augustine's use of *deificare*, which provides a methodological framework for our ensuing discussing. We then move to examine Augustine's notion of deification in relation to his anthropology, Christology, and ecclesiology. The final section synthesizes these findings, illuminates the distinctive contribution of Augustine to the post-Nicene development of deification, and proposes future areas of research.

Augustine's Use of *Deificare*

While recent Augustinian scholarship has persuasively argued that deification plays a supporting role in Augustine's theology, "supporting" is often considered to be a necessary modifier. This is because he seldom used *deificare* in his writings—exactly eighteen times in a corpus of more than five million words, with seven instances completely unrelated to the theological notion of deification.[21] Three issues, however, are crucial to determining how this ostensible paucity of usage informs the relative importance of deification in Augustine's theological outlook. First, he used *deificare* and its cognates more than any other Latin father.[22] The eighteen usages of *deificare* that seem insignificant in comparison to his massive literary output are, in fact, gratuitous when compared to a mere handful of uses in Tertullian, Victorinus, and others.[23]

[19] Mary Noreen Rita Marrocco, *Participation in the Divine Life in St. Augustine's De Trinitate and Selected Contemporary Homiletic Discourses* (PhD diss., University of St. Michael's College [Toronto], 2000); Augustine Casiday, "St. Augustine on Deification: His Homily on Psalm 81," *Sobernost* 23 (2001): 23–44; Darren Sarisky, "Augustine and Participation: Some Reflections on His Exegesis of Romans," in *"In Christ" in Paul*, ed. Michael J. Thate, Kevin J. Vanhoozer, et al. (Tubingen: Mohr Sibebeck, 2014), 357–74; portions of Ron Haflidson, "We Shall Be That Seventh Day: Deification in Augustine," in *Deification in the Latin Patristic Tradition*, ed. Jared Ortiz (Washington DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 2019), 169–89.

[20] Christopher Iacovetti, "Filioque, Theosis, and Ecclesia: Augustine in Dialogue with Modern Orthodox Theology," *Modern Theology* 34, no. 1 (January 2018): 70–81.

[21] Robert Puchniak, "Augustine's Conception of Deification, Revisited," *Theosis: Deification in Christian Theology*, ed. Stephen Finland and Vladimir Kharlamov (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2006), 122–33.

[22] Paul M. Collins, *Partaking in the Divine Nature: Deification and Communion* (London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2010), 69.

[23] Marrocco, *Participation in the Divine Life in St. Augustine's De Trinitate and Selected Contemporary Homiletic Discourses*, 56–76.

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The second issue is perhaps expressed in response to a question: *if* deification was central to Augustine's theology, *why* did he employ technical terms such as *deificare* so sparingly? When examining any thinker, it is important to recognize that commitments are not promulgated nor articulated within a vacuum. It is thus equally important to consider the content of their corpus as well as the interlocutors they are engaging. For Martin Luther, it would be careless to neglect Johann Eck; for John Calvin, the Enthusiasts; and for Augustine, his limited use of *deificare* must be understood within the context of his debates with two of his most prominent antagonists: the Pelagians and the pagans.

The Pelagians, named for British monk Pelagius (354–420/440), did not believe in original sin—that is, the contamination of human nature after the Fall. Pelagius contended, rather, that human beings are able to freely choose between good and evil, and thus could attain to a state of sinless perfection through the unencumbered exercise of their human will. For Augustine, this portrayal of human capacities was inconceivable. Any possibility of humans attaining to sinlessness could not be predicated upon any innate human attribute, but rather only received as a gift from God, and moreover, wholly dependent upon continual participation in God.[24] The possibility of this conflict influencing Augustine's theological emphases was first noted in a 1948 study by Henri Rondet. Rondet argued that Augustine, despite possessing a theological outlook consonant with the Greek Fathers, was forced by the Pelagian debate to stress liberating grace over human transformation.[25] More recently, Robert Puchniak and Norman Russell explicitly argued that Augustine's aversion to using any language that could be coopted by Pelagius and his followers led him to restrict or qualify his deiform vocabulary.[26]

Two passages from *De gestis Pelagii* (45, 62) corroborate Rondet's, Puchniak's, and Russell's account of Augustine's decision-making in relation to the Pelagian debate. In both passages, Augustine references Coelestius—a disciple of Pelagius—who regularly used 2 Peter 1:4—"Thus he has given us, through these things, his precious and very great promises, so that through them you may escape from the corruption that is in the world because of lust and may become *participants of the divine nature*" (NRSV, emphasis added)—as a proof-text in support of his position that individuals could not

[24] Augustine, *De civitate Dei*, 22.30. From Augustine, *The City of God*, ed. Vernon J. Bourke (New York: Image Publishing, 1950).

[25] Henri Rondet, *The Grace of Christ: A Brief History of the Theology of Grace*, trans. Tad W. Guzie (Westminster, MD: Newman, 1948), 91–95.

[26] Puchniak, "Augustine's Conception of Deification, Revisited," 131; Norman Russell, *The Doctrine of Deification in the Greek Patristic Tradition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 331.

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be sons of God without being entirely freed from sin. Due to this "poisoning of the well," Augustine explicitly refrained from citing this verse—despite his plentiful usage of *participatio* and *consortes diuinae naturae* when describing Christian salvation in various portions of his corpus—and instead relied upon verses such as Psalms 82:6: "You are gods, children of the Most High, all of you" (which to be sure, is one of the most frequently cited passages by patristic authors in their portrayals of deification), to discuss transformative or deiform aspects of his soteriology.[27]

Turning to Augustine's polemics with pagans, it is important to realize that he was an "occasional theologian" (that is, a theologian who responds to issues, concerns, and situations that arise in a social context).[28] In other words, his primary concern, beyond articulating novel or creative theological positions, was primarily pastoral—that is, to utilize "all rhetorical and didactic resources at his disposal to keep the Christian congregation from being absorbed back into a world in which Christianity had by no means captured the cultural high ground."[29] An example of this pastoral sensitivity is found in a sermon he delivered during the *Kalends* feast of January 1, 404. Here, Augustine warns against partaking of "the joys of the world and the flesh, with the din of silly and disgraceful songs,"[30] giving oneself over to "bodily allurements,"[31] and from mixing with non-Christians, which he deems as "not safe and sound."[32]

His anxiety about the possibility of pagans influencing believers is clearly linked to Augustine's use (or disuse) of *deificare* in *De civitate Dei* 18. Here, Augustine disapprovingly notes how the pagans deify and worship men by specifically mentioning instances of false deifications, such as what occurred

[27] Russell, *The Doctrine of Deification in the Greek Patristic Tradition*, 332. Notably, this holds true for many other Latin-speaking thinkers—that is, they affirm the idea of deification without employing the technical language of *deificare/deificatus*.

[28] Michael Jinkins, *The Church Faces Death: Ecclesiology in a Post-Modern Context* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 90. Eugene TeSelle uses the same phrase, "occasional theologian," to describe Augustine's pastoral response to controversies of his day in *Augustine the Theologian* (London: Burns & Oates, 1970), 346–47.

[29] Peter Brown, *Augustine of Hippo: A Biography*, new ed. (London: Faber & Faber, 2000), 457.

[30] Augustine, "Sermon 198.1," From *Sermons: Newly Discovered Sermons*, ed. John E. Rotelle, OSA, trans. Edmund Hill, OP, The Works of Saint Augustine: A Translation for the 21st Century, part 3, vol. 11 (Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 1997).

[31] Augustine, "Sermon 198.1." From *Sermons: Newly Discovered Sermons*.

[32] Augustine, "Sermon 198.2." From *Sermons: Newly Discovered Sermons*.

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with two kings of Latium, Æneas and Aventinus.[33] In fact, the Greco-Roman world was replete with non-Christian notions of divinization. In his seminal treatise *The Divinization of the Christian According to the Greek Fathers,* Jules Gross delineates how *theosis* was integral to Hellenic literature and Greek mystery cults,[34] and in *The Doctrine of Deification in the Greek Patristic Tradition*, Russell describes both the Imperial cult's practice of apotheosis (i.e., deifying emperors as objects of worship) and numerous other pagan conceptions of deification such as that held by the Egyptian Hermetists.[35] Of course, Platonic and Neoplatonic thinkers such as Plotinus and Porphyry affirmed their own versions of deification in their philosophical outlooks.[36] Augustine was well aware of these multitudinous pagan usages of *deificare*—whether politically, religiously, or philosophically—not least due to his intimate acquaintance with the writings of Plotinus and Porphyry.[37] In light of these realities, Puchniak appropriately notes that "given the eagerness of the ancient Greeks and Romans to deify and worship their own, we can suppose that Augustine was especially cautious in using the language of deification in the Christian church, lest he mislead some into imagining that Christians themselves become equals of God Almighty."[38] Indeed, for Augustine, human salvation, transformation, and as we discuss, deification, can never effect a change in human beings where they lose their human nature, nor where they become, *tout court*, God. Rather, deification is limited to becoming gods "by adoption," "by grace," and through continual participation in God's divinity.

Hence, when these proper limitations to what deification means are put in place, Augustine does not shy away from deification language, and indeed, elevates it to serve his pastoral aims—for example, when such imagery offers support for theological formulations and polemical tirades against pagan

[33] Augustine, *De civitate Dei*, 18.21. As a note, although newer (and often considered, better) translations of Augustine's works are in circulation, *NPNF* (*Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*; Christian writings) volumes are often quoted/referenced because they are the most accessible volumes for both scholars and laypersons. Newer translations of Augustine's texts (notably, translations from the *Works of Augustine* New City Press series) are referenced if they significantly improve upon the *NPNF* series or, of course, if works are not part of the *NPNF* collection.

[34] Jules Gross, *The Divinization of the Christian According to the Greek Fathers*, trans. Paul A. Onica (Anaheim, CA: A&C Press, 2002), 1–29.

[35] Russell, *The Doctrine of Deification in the Greek Patristic Tradition*, 16–50.

[36] Marrocco, *Participation in the Divine Life in St. Augustine's De Trinitate and Selected Contemporary Homiletic Discourses*, 41–42.

[37] For example, see Augustine, *De civitate Dei*, 10, esp. 10.22–32. Scholars such as Ben Drewry, in "Deification," who note the presence of deification language in Augustine have argued for its Neoplatonic roots.

[38] Puchniak, "Augustine's Conception of Deification, Revisited," 131.

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practices. A sublime example of this rhetorical maneuver is found in three passages from his homily on Psalm 82 [81]:[39]

> [A] *For God not only wishes to make us live: he even wishes to make us gods.* How could human infirmity dare to hope this, unless divine truth had promised it? It was not enough for our God to set before us divinity in himself, unless he also bore our infirmity, just as though he were saying "Do you know how much I love you, how certain you should be that I will give you my divinity? I have taken your mortal [nature]." It ought not seem incredible to us, brethren, for men to become gods, that is, that those who were men become gods . . . *For the maker of man became man, so that man might become the receiver of God*.[40]

> [B] Our God, the true God, the one God "stood in the assembly of gods," that is of many gods, not by nature, but by adoption, by grace. There is a great difference between on the one hand the God who is, the God who is always God, the true God, not the only God, but *indeed the god-making God, so to speak, the deifying God, the unmade God who makes gods*, and on the other hand gods who become such—but not by a craftsman.[41]

> [C] And since everyone who makes is better than that which he makes, look now what gods the pagans adore and which God you adore. *You adore a God who makes you gods. But they adore gods by the making and the adoring of whom they spoil the hope that they themselves should become gods.* By making false gods, they fall from the true one. And indeed it is not possible for those they make to be gods, so they are called what they are not. *The pagans spoil what they themselves could be, and fail to give their gods what they cannot be.* Anyone who makes a false god offends the true God, and by making what he cannot, he himself does not become what he could. For he could, if he wanted, become a god—not the kind he worships, but the kind he makes whom he worships. What then do people want: to become gods or to make gods?[42]

[39] This is one of twenty-six sermons rediscovered by Francis Dolbeau in the Stadtbibliotek in Mainz in the 1990s. They were all published in *Augustin d'Hippone: Vingt-six sermons au peuple d'Afrique* (Paris, 1996). This particular homily was translated by Augustine Casiday and published with a brief introduction in Casiday, "St. Augustine on Deification."

[40] Augustine, *Homilia in Psalmum* 81.1. From Casiday, "St. Augustine on Deification: His Homily on Psalm 81," 28; emphasis added.

[41] Augustine, *Homilia in Psalmum* 81.2. From Casiday, "St. Augustine on Deification: His Homily on Psalm 81," 29; emphasis added.

[42] Augustine, *Homilia in Psalmum* 81.3. From Casiday, "St. Augustine on Deification: His Homily on Psalm 81," 29; emphasis added.

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These passages illumine four key insights. First, in passage [A] Augustine argues that God's wish is not merely to give human beings life, but to deify them. This assertion links the *telos* of human existence to deification—a claim that will be further examined in the section discussing the relationship of the doctrine to anthropology. The second insight, also related to passage [A], is that Augustine explicitly links God's wish to deify human beings to Christ's becoming flesh: "For the maker of man became man, so that man might become the receiver of God." This posited relationship is explored in the section on the Incarnation.

The next two insights are more interesting, as they exemplify Augustine's use of deification language extending beyond soteriological imagery. In passage [B], the possibility of human deification defines the "true God" as "the god-making God,"[43] "the deifying God," and "the unmade God who makes gods." There is a distinct difference between *this* God and those who are gods "not by nature" but rather "by adoption, by grace." In drawing this distinction, Augustine guards against the notion that deified humans could attain equality with the one true God—an important move that maintains a Creator/creature distinction and guards the transcendent deity of Godself. The fourth insight is the logical result of the first three. In passage [C] Augustine states his central claim: the Christian God who is the "god-making God" is altogether different and superior to the gods of the pagans' own "making." In sum, Augustine employs four uses of deification language in this homily: (1) to describe the proper *telos* of humankind; (2) to infuse rich soteriological meaning into the Incarnation; (3) to reinforce God's unique claim to transcendent deity; and (4) to sharply distinguish between the Christian God and pagan deities.

The third issue related to Augustine's sparse usage of *deificare* answers the following questions: (1) Is Augustine's notion of deification limited only to the technical language of *deificare* or is it relevant to or embedded in other soteriological images? (2) How does deification relate to the rest of his theological project? To address the first question, we can examine four passages in which Augustine links deification to other soteriological metaphors—passages [D] and [E] refer to adoptive sonship, passage [F] to participation in God's divinity, and passage [G] to union with God:

> [D] Moreover he who justifies is the same as he who deifies, because by justifying he made us sons and daughters of God; *he gave them power to become children of God* (Jn. 1:12). If we have been made children of God, we have been made into gods; but we are such by the grace of him who adopts us, not because we are the same nature as the one who begets. Our Lord

[43] This is a common term used in reference to God during the patristic era.

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> and Savior Jesus Christ is the unique Son of God . . . Others, who become gods, become so by his grace. They are not born of God's very being in such a way that they are what he is; it is through a gracious gift that they come to him and become with Christ his coheirs.[44]

> [E] Because you are sons of men, you are liars, if you are not sons of the Most High, because every man is a liar. If you are sons of God, if redeemed by the grace of the Savior, if bought by his precious blood, if born again by water and the Spirit, if predestined to the heavenly inheritance*, then of course you are sons of God. So you are already gods.*[45]

> [F] Look at what participation in him means: we have been promised a share in his divinity, but he would be deceiving us if he had not first become a sharer in our mortality. The Son of God was a made a sharer in our mortal nature so that mortals might become sharers in his godhead. Having promised to communicate his goodness to you, he first communicated with you in your badness; he who promised you divinity first showed your charity.[46]

> [G] As you know, our Lord Jesus speaks through the prophets sometimes in his own voice and at other times with ours, *because he makes himself one with us*; as scripture says, *They will be two in one flesh* . . . One flesh, because Christ took flesh from our mortal stock, but not one godhead, because he is the creator and we are creatures . . . Let us believe in his Godhead and understand, to the best of our ability, that he is equal to the Father. But that divine person, equal to the Father, became a sharer in our mortality, a mortality that belonged not to him but to us, so that we might share the divine nature that belongs not to us but to him.[47]

The fluid interchangeability of salvation imagery exhibited by Augustine is consonant both with the New Testament corpus (i.e., Pauline: "in Christ" language; Pauline and Johannine "sons of God" imagery; Petrine: "partakers

[44] Augustine, *Enarratio in Psalmum* 49.2. From Augustine, *Expositions of the Psalms 33–50*, trans. Maria Boulding, The Works of Saint Augustine: A Translation for the 21st Century, part 3, vol. 16 (Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 2000).

[45] Augustine, "Sermon 81.6." From *Sermons 51-94*, ed. John E. Rotelle, OSA, trans. Edmund Hill, OP, *The Works of Saint Augustine: A Translation for the 21st Century*, part 3, vol. 3 (Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 1991).

[46] Augustine, *Enarratio in Psalmum* 52.6. From Augustine, *Expositions of the Psalms 51–72*, trans. Maria Boulding, *The Works of Saint Augustine: A Translation for the 21st Century*, part 3, vol. 17 (Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 2001).

[47] Augustine, *Enarratio in Psalmum* 138. From Augustine, *Expositions of the Psalms 121–150*, trans. Maria Boulding, *The Works of Saint Augustine: A Translation for the 21st Century*, part 3, vol. 20 (Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 2004).

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of the divine nature") and Eastern portrayals of *theosis*. According to A. N. Williams, the Greek Fathers, though not defining deification outright, present a "well-defined set of images" to describe it, including adoptive sonship, participation, and union with God.[48] In the words of Pseudo-Dionysius, *theosis* is best defined as "the attaining of likeness to God and union with him so far as is possible."[49] And strikingly, the well-known Athanasian maxim—"For He was incarnate that we might be made god"[50]—is echoed by Augustine in near-identical imagery: "In order to make gods of those who were merely human, one who was God made himself human."[51]

Concerning the second question of relationality, Augustine's homily on Psalm 81 illustrates that deification language within Augustine's theological project need not be limited to salvation alone. Rather, Mary Marrocco rightly notes that "*deificatio* is an integral aspect of Augustine's theology, illuminating his soteriology, anthropology, Christology, eschatology, and ecclesiology."[52] Similarly, Gerald Bonner argues that "the notion of deification occurs in A.'s theology, not as something added to his system as an afterthought, but as an integral part of the whole."[53] Yet such sweeping statements, while helpful in establishing the *presence* of a relationship between deification and Augustine's broader theological project, fail to answer *how* the doctrine actually relates to his outlook. The next three sections address this remaining issue. To guide our exploration, three additional questions are answered: (1) How is it possible for human beings to be deified? (2) What are the *means* by which human beings can be deified? (3) What is the *telos* of the deification of human beings? Each of these questions, respectively, is intrinsically tied to Augustine's anthropology, Christology, and ecclesiology.

[48] A. N. Williams, "Deification in the *Summa Theologicae*: A Structural Interpretation of the *Prima Pars*," *Thomist* 61 (1997): 221.

[49] Pseudo-Dionysus, *Ecclesiastical Hierarchy* 1.3; quoted in Russell, *The Doctrine of Deification in the Greek Patristic Tradition*, 1. Here, "so far as is possible" crucially places a limitation upon the deification of human beings. This is in agreement with Augustine, who desires to maintain the creaturely distinction of divinized human beings from the uncreated divinity of Godself.

[50] Athanasius. *De Incarnatione*, §54. From *On the Incarnation*, trans. John Behr. (Yonkers, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2011).

[51] Augustine, "Sermon 192.1." This imagery is also present in Augustine's *Homilia in Psalmum* (see Casiday, "St. Augustine on Deification: His Homily on Psalm 81").

[52] Marrocco, *Participation in the Divine Life in St. Augustine's De Trinitate and Selected Contemporary Homiletic Discourses*, 3.

[53] Gerald Bonner, "Deificare," in *Augustinus-Lexikon*, vol. 2 (Basel: Schwabe, 1996), 265.

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Anthropology: Humankind's Creation in the *Imago Dei*

As previously mentioned, Lot-Borodine correctly discerns a strong Creator/creature distinction in Augustine's theology.[54] Based upon this, she, alongside many others, argued that deification is irreconcilable with Augustine's theology. What this past generation of scholars failed to fully appreciate, however, is the intimate and reflective relationship between God and creation that is articulated throughout his corpus. This relationship is alluded to by Augustine in *Confessions*: "I asked the whole frame of the world concerning my God and it replied to me: 'I am not He, but He has made me.'"[55] Here, the fundamental characteristic of creation is evident: it reveals the identity of God as Creator. Yet, there exists an even closer relationship between the two entities based upon the contingent nature of creation. Consider the following passage from *De Genesi ad litteram*:

> Or is that when the unformed basic material, whether of spiritual or bodily being, was first being made, it was not appropriate to say *God said, Let it be made*, because it is by the Word, always adhering to the Father, that God eternally says everything, not with the sound of a voice nor with thoughts running through time which sound take, but with the light, coeternal with himself, of the Wisdom he has begotten; and imperfection or incompleteness does not imitate the form of this Word, being unlike that which supremely and originally is, and tending by its very want of form toward nothing? *Rather, it is when it turns, everything in the way suited to its kind, to that which truly and always is, to the creator, that is to say of its own being, that it really imitates the form of the Word which always and unchangeably adheres to the Father, and receives its own form, and becomes a perfect, complete creature.*[56]

For Augustine, the eternal turning and adherence of the Son to the Father must be matched by created beings/objects so that they receive their proper *form*. This is true for "spiritual" or "bodily" beings; elsewhere in the same work, Augustine asserts that even light itself must "turn from its own formlessness towards the creator [to be] formed."[57] This is a crucial move by Augustine in relation to deification, as it implies a type of deiform *mimesis* between all of creation and the transcendent, yet nevertheless immanent, Creator.

[54] Lot-Borodine, *La déification de l'homme selon la doctrine des Pères grecs*, 39–40.

[55] Augustine, *Confessions*, ed. R. J. Deferrari, trans. Vernon J. Bourke (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 1953), 271.

[56] Augustine, *De Genesi ad litteram* 1.4. From *On Genesis*, trans. Edmund Hill, OP, The Works of Saint Augustine: A Translation for the 21st Century, part 1, vol. 13 (Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 2002).

[57] Augustine, *De Genesi ad itteram* 4.22.39. From *On Genesis*.

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Still, Augustine distinguishes between creation generally, which bears some affinity to God—to the point that all creatures must return to God, "as it has been given to each thing in his kind"[58]—and humanity specifically, which bears the *imago Dei*. This is because of the supreme significance and depth of meaning that he attaches to the term *imago*.[59] For Augustine, *imago* necessarily carries the sense of some degree of *similitudo* between the image and object being reflected. This is evidenced in a comment he makes in *Confessions*: "I shudder inasmuch as I am unlike it, yet I burn inasmuch as I am like it."[60] In light of this relationship between *imago* and *similitudo*, he spends several books (9–12) of *De Trinitate* discerning the triadic nature of humankind—for if God is triune (books 1–8), humankind must also have a triadic nature to be a fitting image. Eventually, he determines that human beings comprise *memoria Dei, intelligentia Dei*, and *amor Dei* to properly reflect the Trinity.[61]

Conceiving of human beings in this tripartite manner is especially notable in our present discussion, as Augustine articulates these capacities relationally in reference to God as opposed to innate capacities apart from the Creator. This relationality illuminates an additional aspect of how he conceptualizes what an *imago* actually is. An *imago* does not merely incorporate the resemblance or likeness of an object. Rather, it includes an internal impetus on the part of the image to *become* the object it reflects. Consider the following discussion in *Soliloquies* between Augustine and personified Reason:

[58] Augustine, *Confessions*, 12.28.38. From *NPNF*, ed. Philip Schaff, trans. M. Dods, vol. 1, (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Company, 1887; reprinted in 1978).

[59] Additionally, Augustine draws a distinction between the terms *imago, aequalitas*, and *similitudo* (image, equality, and likeness). In question 74 of *De diversis Quaestionibus*, he argues the following: "Image and equality and likeness must be differentiated, because where there is an image there is necessarily a likeness but not necessarily equality; where there is equality there is necessarily a likeness but not necessarily an image; where there is a likeness there is not necessarily an image and not necessarily equality. Where there is an image, there is necessarily a likeness but not necessarily equality, as in a person's image in a mirror: because it is a reflection of him it must also be a likeness, but there is no equality because many things are lacking to the image that are in the thing whose reflection it is. Where there is equality there is necessarily a likeness but not necessarily an image, as is the case of two of the same eggs: because there is equality there is also a likeness, for whatever properties one of them has the other has as well, but there is no image because neither of them is a reflection of the other" (Raymond Canning, ed., *Responses to Miscellaneous Questions*, trans. Roland Teske, The Works of Saint Augustine: A Translation for the 21st Century, part 1, vol. 12 (Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 2008), 137).

[60] Augustine, *Confessions*, 11.9.11. From *NPNF,* vol. 1.

[61] Augustine, *De Trinitate* 12.11.16. From *NPNF*, ed. Philip Schaff, trans. M. Dods, vol. 3 (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Company, 1887).

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> R. Is it not evident to you that your image in a mirror desires, so to speak, to be you, and yet is false precisely because it is not you?
>
> A. Truly, that seems to be so.
>
> R. Do not all pictures and portraits and all things of that kind produced by artists strive to be that in whose likeness they are made?
>
> A. I am entirely convinced that they do.[62]

Thus, while Augustine affirms that all of creation must imitate Christ by continually turning to the Father to receive *form*, human beings, by virtue of being made in God's image, inwardly "strive to be that in whose likeness they are made."

As well-established throughout Augustine's corpus, desire may be rightly or wrongly directed. The desire of an *imago* to become the object it resembles is no different. In fact, Augustine asserts that the wrongly formed desire of the *imago* (Adam) to become the likeness he was made in (God) was the cause of humankind's original sin. He states that "neither could our first parents be persuaded to sin unless it had been said, '*Ye shall be as gods.*'"[63] He expands upon this assertion in *De civitate Dei*:

> The conclusion, then, is that the Devil would not have begun by an open and obvious sin to tempt man into doing something which God had forbidden, had not man already begun to seek satisfaction in himself and, consequently, to take pleasure in the words: "You shall be as gods." The promise of these words, however, would much more truly have come to pass if, by obedience, Adam and Eve had kept close to the ultimate and true Source of their being and had not, by pride, imagined that they were themselves the source of their being. *For, created gods are gods not in virtue of their own being but by a participation in the being of the true God.*[64]

This passage, beyond tying original sin to a desire to be deified, underscores two important elements in Augustine's theology. First, Augustine argues that Adam's and Eve's desire to be deified would have been realized had they remained obedient to God. This means there is a real possibility for humankind to be deified by virtue of being created in the *imago Dei*. He revisits this proposal in *De Trinitate* when suggesting that "it is His image in this

[62] Augustine, *Soliloquies* 2.9.17. From *The Fathers of the Church*, ed. L. Schopp, D. J. Kavanagh, R. P. Russell, et al., trans. L. Schopp, The Happy Life and Answer to Skeptics and Divine Providence and the Problem of Evil and Soliloquies, vol. 5 (New York: CIMA Publishing Co., 1952), 400.

[63] Augustine, *De Trinitate* 11.5.8. From *NPNF*, ed. Philip Schaff, trans. M. Dods, vol. 3 (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Company, 1887; reprinted in 1978).

[64] Augustine, *De civitate Dei*, 14.13; emphasis added.

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very point, that it is capable of Him, and can be a partaker of Him; which so great good is only made possible by its being His image."[65] Second, he carefully maintains the Creator/creature distinction between humans and God, as humans become *created gods* only by virtue of "participation in the being of the true God." Deification is thus possible due to being a gift of God through grace and is not an innate divinity within oneself, as Augustine's Neoplatonist contemporaries would have suggested.

The capacity *to participate* in God's being is a great matter. Marrocco notes that, for Augustine, "the true greatness of the soul"—a characteristic that is permanent but not always lived properly—"lies in its capacity for God."[66] Indeed, Augustine affirms this sentiment in two passages from *De Trinitate* book 14. First, he asserts that the "noblest part of the human mind" is to know and participate in God.[67] Second, he exalts the great (yet, not greatest) nature of the human soul due to its capacity to participate in God's nature:

> For although the nature of the soul is great, yet it can be corrupted because it is not the highest; and although it can be corrupted, because it is not the highest, yet because it is capable and can be partaker of the highest nature, it is a great nature.[68]

A final item that has not been addressed is the relationship between human beings, who are created in the *imago Dei*, and the Son of God, who is the uncreated *imago Dei*. For this, we turn to *De Trinitate* 7.3.5:

> And with the example of this Image before us, let us also not depart from God. For we are, likewise, the image of God, not indeed an equal image, since it was made by the Father through the Son, not born of the Father as that is. And we are so, because we are enlightened by the light, but He is the light that enlightens. And, therefore, this image is an example for us without itself having an example. For He does not imitate anyone who comes before Him in respect to the Father, from whom He is wholly inseparable, since He has the same essence with Him from whom He is. But by our striving we imitate Him who remains and follow Him who stands; when we walk in Him, we tend towards Him, because by His humility He has been made a road for us in time, in order that by His divinity He might be for us a mansion in eternity.[69]

[65] Augustine, *De Trinitate* 14.8. This concept of *capax Dei* is central to Augustine's thought and survives well into medieval scholasticism.

[66] Marrocco, *Participation in the Divine Life in St. Augustine's De Trinitate and Selected Contemporary Homiletic Discourses*, 90.

[67] Augustine, *De Trinitate* 14.8.11. From *NPNF*, vol. 3.

[68] Augustine, *De Trinitate* 14.4.6. From *NPNF*, vol. 3.

[69] Augustine, *De Trinitate* 7.3.5. From *The Fathers of the Church: A New Translation*, trans. Stephen McKenna, vol. 45 (Washington DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 1963).

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Here we are reminded of the aforementioned discussion concerning the relationship of creation to God. Just as the rest of creation must imitate the Son's turn to the Father to receive *form*, human beings, the unequal (i.e., inferior) *imago Dei*, are afforded with a perfect example, the *Imago* who is equal with the Father, to imitate. Through imitation, human creatures with a desire to match the object whom they reflect are brought onward to the *telos* of their creation: a movement toward becoming that object—that is, to the extent that is possible while still maintaining the transcendent deity of Godself—a process otherwise known as deification.

Summary

This discussion answers the first of our three guiding questions: *How* is it possible for humans to be deified? For Augustine, the fact that humankind is created in the *imago Dei* means that their anthropology is tripartite, defined relationally with the Trinity, and possesses an innate desire to attain to divinity. Moreover, being created in the *imago Dei* grants humans the capacity to participate in God's being, and by doing so, become *created gods*. To be clear, this is not an innate divinity or ability to be divinized apart from God. In fact, a concupiscent desire for deified humanity was the main culprit behind humankind's original sin. For Augustine, divinely ordered deification is made possible only through participation in God's being, which is purely a gift of God through grace.

A perfect example, the *Imago* equal with God, has been given to humankind as a model to follow and imitate. By doing so, human creatures are enabled to move from their innate desire—to match the object they were created in the likeness of—to the fulfillment of that desire, that is, their deification. Now, the final passage examined in this section from *De Trinitate* 7.3.5, in addition to answering *how* it is possible for human creatures to be deified, contains nascent elements needed to respond to the second of our guiding questions: What are the *means* by which human beings are deified? For Augustine, it is the God-made-human who has opened the way for there to be humans-made-gods.

God-Made-Human for Humans-Made-Gods: The Incarnation

Unlike Neoplatonic and pagan conceptions of deification, Augustine's theology is predicated upon a clear Creator/creature distinction. As noted, while human beings are created in the *imago Dei*, they are utterly impotent to transcend the creaturely realm without the direct action or intervention of God. For Augustine, the Incarnation—the God-made-human—*is* this

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necessary intervention. This outlook is entirely consistent with the Greek Fathers who similarly anchored notions of deification to the enfleshment of the divine *Logos*.[70] The Incarnation functions for Augustine as the *means* for human beings to be deified by providing neither a philosophy nor an innate ability, but rather a person—the God-man Jesus Christ, who by virtue of possessing both divinity and humanity is qualified to be the mediator between God and man.[71] This is argued in the following passage:

> Therefore our physician said this: "In the last times, the sick one will be more strongly and more powerfully convulsed; and so that he might take his medicine, it is necessary that I myself come at that time; I myself will restore the believer, I will console him, I will exhort him, I will assure him, I will heal him." Thus it will be done. *He came, he was made human, participant of our mortality, so that we might be able to become participants of his immortality*.[72]

In addition to showcasing the *Christus medicus* imagery that Augustine is renowned for,[73] this passage exemplifies a key claim: human beings can become "participants of his [Christ's] immortality" due to the incarnation of the Word. This claim is more forcefully presented in Exposition 16 of Psalms 118:

> For we *could have never become* sharers in his divinity if he himself had not become a sharer in our mortality.[74]

Given the inextricable link posited between the potentiality of humans being deified and the incarnate Word, Wilson-Kastner, Bonner, Puchniak, and Russell all contend that Augustine, in complete agreement with the Greek Fathers, conceptualizes the Incarnation as a *locus* of all deification-language—inclusive of adoption, participation, and "union with God" imagery.[75]

[70] Casiday, "St. Augustine's on Deification: His Homily on Psalm 81," 26.

[71] Bonner, "Augustine's Conception of Deification," 372.

[72] Augustine, "Sermon 114B," another of the twenty-six sermons rediscovered by Francis Dolbeau in the Stadtbibliotek in Mainz in the 1990s. Italics added for emphasis.

[73] In his classic study, Rudolph Arbesmann states that "Augustine easily holds the first place among the patristic writers of the West who made use of the *Christus medicus* figure"; Rudolph Arbesmann, "The Concept of *Christus Medicus* in St. Augustine," *Traditio* 10 (1954): 1–28, esp. 2.

[74] Augustine, *Enarratio in Psalmum* 118 *Sermo* 16. From *Expositions of the Psalms 99–120*, trans. Maria Boulding, The Works of Saint Augustine: A Translation for the 21st Century, part 3, vol. 19 (Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 2003); emphasis added.

[75] Wilson-Kastner, "Grace as Participation in the Divine Life in the Theology of Augustine of Hippo," 144; Bonner, "Augustine's Conception of Deification," 373; Puchniak,

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Apart from this foundational matter, there are four other ways that Augustine conceives of and utilizes the relationship between deification and the Incarnation. First, he argues that deification provides a *purpose* or *rationale* for the Incarnation. Consider the following three passages, which are illustrative, not exhaustive, of this sentiment:

> [H] In order to make gods of those who were merely human, one who was God made himself human.[76]

> [I] God wants to make you a god, not by nature, of course, like the one whom he begot, but by his gift and by his adoption. For just as he was made a participant in your mortality through humanity, so through his exalting you he makes you a sharer in his immortality.[77]

> [J] It ought not seem incredible to us, brethren, for men to become gods, that is, those who were men to become gods. More incredible is what we have already presupposed, that he who was God became man. And we believe that indeed is accomplished, but we anticipate the other will be. The Son of God became the son of man, so that he might make the sons of men, sons of God . . . For the maker of man became man, so that man might become the receiver of God.[78]

In addition to providing a *rationale* for the Incarnation, passage [J] unveils a second relationship between deification and the enfleshment of the Word—the Incarnation serves as an *assurance* to human creatures that deification will occur. This is because Augustine does not deem it to be particularly "incredible" that human beings should be deified when compared to what Christians "have already presupposed"—a far "more incredible" reality that "God became man." Since *this* miraculous occurrence has already transpired, it is entirely reasonable for human creatures to anticipate their future deification.

The next two relationships between deification and the Incarnation are akin to how Augustine used deification as a proof both for the divinity of God

"Augustine's Conception of Deification, Revisited"; Russell, *The Doctrine of Deification in the Greek Patristic Tradition*, 329–32.

[76] Augustine, "Sermon 192.1." From *Sermons 184-229Z*, ed. John E. Rotelle, OSA, trans. Edmund Hill, OP, *The Works of Saint Augustine: A Translation for the 21st Century*, part 3, vol. 6 (Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 1993).

[77] Augustine, "Sermon 166.4." From *Sermons 95-183*, ed. John E. Rotell, OSA, trans. Edmund Hill, OP, The Works of Saint Augustine: A Translation for the 21st Century, part 3, vol. 5 (Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 1993).

[78] Augustine, *Homilia in Psalmum* 81.1. From Casiday, "St. Augustine on Deification: His Homily on Psalm 81," 28.

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and His otherness in his homily on Psalm 82 [81].[79] The third way he relates the Incarnation to deification is by suggesting that the deification of human beings proves that the incarnated Word is God:

> If the Word of God came to men that they might be called gods, how can the very Word of God, who is with God, be otherwise than God? If by the Word of God men become gods, if by fellowship they become gods, can he of whom they have fellowship not be God?. . . If then the Word of God makes you gods, how can the Word of God be otherwise than God?. . . The prerogative of the Lord is equality with the Father; the privilege of the servant is fellowship with the Savior.[80]

The fourth relationship is tied to the third. That is, Augustine relates deification to the Incarnation in order to maintain a clear distinction between Christ as the unique Son of God and human beings as the many adopted children of God:

> [K] God is Father to Christ in this coequal *form*, Father to his only-begotten Son who is born from his substance. But the only-begotten Son became a participant in our mortality, as I have reminded you, in order that we might be created anew and be made participants in his divinity, being restored to eternal life.[81]

> [L] A far, far more brilliant hope has lit up the earth; the promise to earthlings of life in heaven. To help us believe in this hope something much more unbelievable has been paid us in advance; in order to make gods of those who were merely human, one who was God made himself human; *without forfeiting what he was, he wished to become what he himself had made. He himself made what he would become, because what he did was add man to God, not lose God in man*.[82]

> [M] We too are made by His grace what we were not, that is, sons of God. Yet we were something else, and this much inferior, that is, sons of men. Therefore He descended that we might ascend, and *remaining in his nature was made a partaker of our nature, that we remaining in our nature might become partakers of His nature*. But not simply this; for His participation

[79] For further reading, see Casiday, "St. Augustine on Deification: His Homily on Psalm 81."

[80] Augustine, *Tractates on the Gospel of John* 48.9-10. From *NPNF*, ed. Philip Schaff, trans. M. Dods, vol. 7 (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Company, 1888; reprinted in 1978).

[81] Augustine, *Enarratio in Psalmum* 138. From *Expositions of the Psalms 121–150*, trans. Maria Boulding, The Works of Saint Augustine: A Translation for the 21st Century, part 3, vol. 20 (New York: New City Press, 2004).

[82] Augustine, "Sermon 192." From *Sermons 184-229Z*; emphasis added.

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> in our nature did not make Him worse, while participating in His nature makes us better.[83]

In passage [K], Augustine asserts that Christ possesses equality with the Father, a status as the *unigenitus* and a begetting according to substance (not adoption). All of this is crucial to support Christ's claim to particular and unique Deity that is unobtainable by human beings, whether presently or eschatologically. Passages [L] and [M] are masterful in their presentation of the matter of "participating" or "partaking" of various natures. In passage [L], Augustine lucidly explicates that God, despite partaking of the human nature, did not "forfeit what he was"—in other words, Christ remained fully God. This relationship is logically extended in passage [M] to illustrate how human beings participate in divinity. Though they partake of God's divine nature (according to God's desire and solely through the gift of grace), they continue to retain their human nature—they remain creatures.

Summary

The discussion in this section answers the second of our three guiding questions: What are the *means* by which human beings can be deified? Despite humankind being created in the *imago Dei*, and thus, having the *possibility* of being deified, Augustine maintains that they are entirely unable to do so without God's direct intervention. For Augustine, this is due to two degrees of separation: (1) the chasm that separates the Creator from creature by virtue of the former being uncreated, and the latter, created, and (2) an additional distance that creatures have from God by virtue of the Fall and subsequent transmission of sin. The Incarnation is God's direct intervention into the human condition, whereby the enfleshed Word domiciles among humankind and serves as a bridge (i.e., a mediator) between humankind and God. Regarding the respective roles of Christ and humans, Augustine states:

> For this reason he has become their *means* to salvation, not that he has become anything which he was not before, but because they, when they believed in him, became what they were not before, and then, not for himself for them, he began to be salvation for those who turned towards him, which he was not to those turned away from himself. It is a mighty thing to exalt the humble, *to deify the mortal*, to bring perfection out of weakness, glory out of subjection, victory out of suffering, to give help, to raise out of trouble . . . *Humanity did not exalt itself, humanity did not perfect itself,*

[83] Augustine, *Epistle* 140.4.10; quoted in, Gerald Bonner *Freedom and Necessity: St. Augustine's Teaching on Divine Power and Human Freedom* (Washington DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 2007), 114; emphasis added.

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> *humanity did not give itself the glory, humanity did not conquer, humanity was not salvation to itself*; the right hand of the Lord has brought this mighty thing to pass.[84]

This passage ties together several items in Augustine's thoughts. The incarnate Word is the means of salvation, and this salvation includes the deifying of frail, mortal humans. Human beings cannot effect their own salvation, nor could they carry out any of the mighty things that might enable them to ascend to the divine. All of this, rather, was carried out by Christ, the God-made-human.

Augustine conceives of the Incarnation as the *means* of deification, and importantly, suggests that four other relationships exist between the two doctrines. First, he argues that the deification provides a *rationale* for the Incarnation—God became a man *in order that* humans could become gods. Second, he argues that the Incarnation provides the *assurance* of deification. For Augustine, the "incredible" matter is not that human beings would become gods, but rather, that the infinite God could be domiciled within finite humanity. Because the latter is affirmed by Scripture, the former can be reasonably anticipated. Third, he argues that the possibility of human beings being deified is "proof" of the unique deity of the Word—this is to say that if the Word can produce gods, then the Word must be none other than Godself. Lastly, Augustine uses the mechanics of the Incarnation to underscore the fact that human beings never lose their creatureliness, just as Christ, though becoming human, never forsook His divinity.

Corporate Deification: The *Totus Christus*

If we concluded our investigation with the aforementioned elements, it might appear that human beings, irrespective of community, have the potential of becoming partakers of the divine nature by virtue of their created nature (*imago Dei*) and the direct intervention of God vis-à-vis the Incarnation. For Augustine, this proposition would be anathema, as he promulgated his theology within the bounds of the church universal. Bonner insightfully notes that Augustine conceives of deification as "an ecclesial process [taking] place within the communion of the Church to which the Christian is admitted by baptism. For this reason it can be called a sacramental process in that the Christian grows in grace by being nourished by the Eucharist, which he receives as part of the worship of the Church."[85] In line with this sentiment, Russell emphatically states that Augustine's conception of deification is "firmly

[84] Augustine, *Enarratio in Psalmum* 118 *Sermo* 1. From *A Library of Fathers of the Holy Catholic Church, Anterior to the Division of the East and West* (London: Oxford University Press, 1858); emphasis added.

[85] Bonner, "Augustine's Conception of Deification," 383.

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incarnational *and* sacramental."[86] The following discussion builds upon these premises.

In an essay entitled "The 'Christus Totus Idea: A Forgotten Aspect of Augustine's Spirituality," Tarsicius van Bavel notes that "the Pauline text that made the strongest impression on Augustine is found in 1 Cor 12:12-27."[87] This passage, which identifies the church as both the "Body of Christ" (verse 27) and even "Christ" (verse 12), underlies Augustine's conception of the church as being the *totus Christus* (whole Christ). Importantly, this ecclesiological orientation is distinctively Augustinian,[88] "the heart of Augustine's ecclesiology,"[89] and "the true and ultimate locus of all deification" in Augustine's corpus.[90] We may thus rightly assert that the explicitly ecclesial nature of Augustine's doctrine of deification is a significant contribution to the post-Nicene development of the doctrine.

The church being the *totus Christus* is a totalizing union between believers—the "Body of Christ"—and Christ—the "Head" of the Body—in which the aggregate of believers is, in a real sense, Christ *as the Body* or the "Body-Christ." This position is fleshed out in *Sermon* 133:

> Now, however, I wonder if we shouldn't have a look at ourselves, if we shouldn't think about his body, *because he is also us*. After all, if we weren't him, this wouldn't be true: *When you did it for one of the least of mine, you did it for me* (Matt 25:40). If we weren't him, this wouldn't be true: *Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?* (Acts 9:4). So we too are him, because we are his organs, because we are his body, because he is our head, because *the whole Christ is both head and body*.[91]

Here Augustine makes a key move in his use of *totus Christus* imagery: he does not merely posit an ethereal, metaphorical relationship between the head and body, but rather a totalizing mystical union that gives rise to a singular, ontological identification between Christians and Christ:

[86] Russell, *The Doctrine of Deification in the Greek Patristic Tradition*, 331.

[87] Tarsicius Jan van Bavel, "The 'Christus Totus Idea: A Forgotten Aspect of Augustine's Spirituality" in *Studies in Patristic Christology*, ed. Thomas Finan and Vincent Twomey (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 1998), 84.

[88] Sarisky, "Augustine and Participation," 363.

[89] Johannes Quasten, *Patrology: The Golden Age of Latin Patristic Literature from the Council of Nicaea to the Council of Chalcedon*, vol. 4 (Westminster: Christian Classics, 1986), 447.

[90] Iacovetti, "Filioque, Theosis, and Ecclesia," 78.

[91] Augustine, "Sermon 133.8." From *Sermons 94A–147A*, trans. Edmund Hill. In Works of Saint Augustine: A Translation for the 21st Century, part 3, vol. 4 (Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 1992).

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> Therefore, let us rejoice and give thanks, not only that we have been made Christians, but that we have been made Christ. Do you understand, brothers, do you comprehend the grace of God upon us? Be in awe. Rejoice. We have been made Christ. For if he is the head, we are the members—a whole man, he and we . . . What does it mean, head and members? Christ and the Church. For we would proudly claim this for ourselves if he had not deigned to promise this who says through the same Apostle, "Now you are the body and members of Christ." Therefore, when the Father shows to the members of Christ, he shows to Christ. There occurs a kind of miracle, great, but still true; there is shown to Christ what Christ knew and it is shown to Christ through Christ.. . .[92]

In other words, believers do not merely inhabit a vaguely construed corporate personality, but rather are assimilated into Christ to the point that the Father's revelation of Christ to believers is in fact the revelation of Christ to Himself.

Past scholars have noted that this conception of the church as composed of Christ the head *and* the body is used by Augustine in his scriptural exegesis, particularly of the Psalms.[93] In multiple expositions, he argues that Christ may speak either as the head or *as the body*. Per Matthew Drever, the clearest example of this proposed relationship can be found in Augustine's sixteenth sermon on Psalm 118:[94]

> This is the teaching of the Letter to the Hebrews: *He who sanctifies and those who are sanctified are all of one stock; that is why he is not ashamed to call them his brothers*; and, a little further on, *since "children" share in the same flesh and blood, he too just as truly shared in them*. (Heb 2:11, 14) This plainly declares that Christ was made a participant in our nature. We could not have become sharers in his godhead if he had not become a sharer in our mortality. The gospel teaches that we have indeed become sharers in his divinity: *He gave them power to become children of God; those, that is, who believe in his name, who are born not of blood, nor by the will of the flesh, nor by the will of man, but of God*. But it goes on to show how this became possible through Christ's coming to share in our mortality: *The Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us* (Jn 1:12-14). Through his becoming one with us, grace is dispensed to us, so that we may fear God with pure hearts and keep his commandments. Most surely Jesus himself is speaking in this prophecy. But he says certain things in the person of his members, in the unity of his body, *as though in the voice of a single human being* diffused

[92] Augustine, *Tractates on the Gospel of John*, 21.8–9. From *The Fathers of the Church: A New Translation*, trans, John W. Rettig, vol. 79 (Washington DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 1968).

[93] Iacovetti, "Filioque, Theosis, and Ecclesia," 79.

[94] Matthew Drever, "Deification in Augustine: Plotinian or Trinitarian?," in *The Holy Trinity in the Life of the Church*, ed. Khaled Anatolios (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2014), 109–10.

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> throughout the whole world and continually growing as the ages roll on; and other things he says in his own voice, *as our head*.[95]

Here, Augustine begins with a familiar deification maxim: "We would not have become sharers in his godhead if he had not become a sharer in our mortality."[96] Thereafter, he methodically uses the reality of deification to assert that, by virtue of the Body of Christ being deified, Christ may speak through the members of the *totus Christus*: "But he says certain things in the person of his members, in the unity of his body, as though in the voice of a single human.. . ."[97] In light of this dynamic intimacy posited among the church, deification, Christ's identity, and Christ's speaking, we may rightly conclude that for Augustine there exists no separation among ecclesiology, soteriology, and Christology, for the deified church is nothing less or more than Christ himself.[98]

A second contribution of Augustine to post-Nicene development of the doctrine of deification is the relationship he posits among the transformative process of members being incorporated into the *totus Christus*, the worthy reception of the sacraments, and participation in the life of the Trinity. Regarding the sacraments, the following two passages are instructive:

> [N] I promised to deliver a sermon to instruct you, who have just been baptized, on the Sacrament of the Lord's table, which you now see and of which you now became partakers last night. You ought to know what you have received, what you are going to receive, and what you ought to receive daily. That bread which you see on the altar, sanctified by the word of God, is the Body of Christ. That chalice, or rather, what the chalice holds, sanctified by the word of God, is the blood of Christ. Through those, Christ the Lord wished to entrust his body and the blood which he poured out for us for the remission of sins. *If you have received worthily, you are what you have received.*[99]

> [O] So if it's you that are at the body of Christ and its members, it's the mystery meaning you that has been placed on the Lord's table; what you

[95] Augustine, *Enarratio in Psalmum* 118, *Sermo* 16. From *Expositions of the Psalms 99–120*.

[96] Augustine, *Enarratio in Psalmum* 118, *Sermo* 16. From *Expositions of the Psalms 99–120*.

[97] In this context, Augustine ultimately argues that Christ speaking as the body vis-à-vis the *totus Christus* is what took place in the composition of Psalm 118.

[98] Adam Ployd, *Augustine, the Trinity, and the Church: A Reading of the Anti-Donatist Sermons* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), 142; compare Iacovetti, "Filioque, Theosis, and Ecclesia," 79.

[99] Augustine, "Sermon 227." From *Sermons 184–229Z*, trans. Edmund Hill, The Works of Saint Augustine: A Translation for the 21st Century, part 3, vol. 7 (Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 1994); emphasis added.

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> receive is the mystery that means you. It is to what you are that you reply *Amen*, and by so replying you express your assent. What you hear, you see, is *the Body of Christ*, and you answer, *Amen*. So be a member of the body of Christ, in order to make that *Amen* true.[100]

In passage [N], Augustine delineates the significance of the Eucharist—the bread as the Body of Christ and the chalice (and more specifically, what it holds) as the Blood of Christ—to relate their mysterious significances to deification. For those in the church—the supreme *sacramentum*—the worthy reception of both elements causes them to become what they have received, that is, Christ himself. Passage [O] links deification not only to the sacraments themselves, but also to the liturgy. Here, Augustine deems it appropriate to expressly state three times that the mystery (i.e., sacrament) is "you" and one time that it is "the Body of Christ." Thereafter, he argues that the proclamation of "Amen" is an expression of assent and affirmation of veracity by those who truly are the Body of Christ.

Concerning the church's relationship with the life of the Trinity, Iacovetti asserts that "inasmuch as the Spirit is *by nature* a unifying principle of *caritas* between persons, the Spirit is the one who bestows unity upon the *totus Christus*."[101] In support of this claim, he cites *In Johannis evangelicum tractatus* 39:

> If therefore, "the love of God [which] has been poured forth in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who has been given to us" makes many souls one soul and many hearts one heart, how much more does [the Spirit] make the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit one God, one light, one *principium*?[102]

The implications of this posited parallel between the Trinity and the constituents of the church are extensive. Throughout Augustine's corpus, the Spirit is conceptualized as the *caritas* between the Father and the Son, the unifying *Persona* who binds the Trinity as love. Yet, here the Spirit as love unifies the constituents of the church. For this reason, Ployd rightly suggests that "the fact that the church . . . receives the very love that is God points to a way in which the life of the church, united in love, shares in the life of the Trinity."[103] It should be noted, however, that this is not limited to the unification of the members of

[100] Augustine, "Sermon 272." From *Sermons 230–272*, trans. Edmund Hill, The Works of Saint Augustine: A Translation for the 21st Century, part 3, vol. 7 (Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 1993).

[101] Iacovetti, "Filioque, Theosis, and Ecclesia," 79.

[102] Augustine, *Tractates on the Gospel of John* 39.5. Here, Augustine is referencing Romans 5:5.

[103] Ployd, *Augustine, the Trinity, and the Church*, 82.

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the Body among themselves. Rather, Iacovetti insightfully notes that the Spirit also unifies "the *body of Christ* to *Christ its head*, such that each member of the *totus Christus* can affirm, speaking both individually and in unison with her co-members, that *she has been made Christ*."[104] To be sure, this should not be understood as entirely collapsing any distinction between the "the Body of Christ" and "Christ its head." The individual God-man Jesus Christ forever remains the unique head and exhibits his continual charity to the Body, both by deifying its constituents and through speaking in the person of his Body.

Summary

This section's discussion answers our third guiding question: What is the *telos* of deification? Given that Augustine's entire theological project is bound up with his ecclesiology, it is unsurprising that deification would find a similar orientation toward the *totus Christus*. Scholars note this ecclesiological orientation is distinctively Augustinian,[105] "the heart of Augustine's ecclesiology,"[106] and "the true and ultimate locus of all deification" in Augustine's corpus.[107] For these reasons, it is evident that the ecclesial structure of Augustinian deification is a significant contribution to the doctrine's post-Nicene development.

What is particularly noteworthy is how Augustine conceives of the relationship between deification and the *totus Christus*. For Augustine, members of the church are not "made Christians," but rather, have "been made Christ!" Moreover, Christ, who is both the head of the body *and* the body of the head, freely speaks either as *the head* or as *the Body*. There are two means within the church whereby believers are transformatively incorporated into the *totus Christus*. The first is through the sacraments. For Augustine, the entrance into the church is through baptism, and this is the means by which deification begins. The Eucharist, understood to be the Body and Blood of the risen Christ simultaneously represents the mystical *totus Christus* comprising Christ and the believers. When individuals worthily receive the elements of the Lord's table, they *become* what they have received. The second avenue by which individuals are incorporated into the *totus Christus* is through the uniting bond of the Spirit. As *caritas*, the Spirit binds the Trinity together, and as *caritas*, the Spirit unites the believers both with one another and with Christ as the head of the body. In this way, the ecclesial deification of believers allows them to participate in the life of the Trinity. In sum, the *telos* of the believers' deification

[104] Iacovetti, "Filioque, Theosis, and Ecclesia," 79.
[105] Sarisky, "Augustine and Participation," 363.
[106] Quasten, *Patrology*, vol 4, 447.
[107] Iacovetti, "Filioque, Theosis, and Ecclesia," 78.

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is to be mystically united with Christ to the extent that Christ becomes them, they become Christ, and in doing so, the *imago* becomes the object it adores and admires.

Conclusion

The primary aim of this article was to examine how Augustine situates deification within his overall theological project. As previously noted, this presupposition—that deification plays *any* role in Augustine's theology—has only picked up traction in the past few decades. On the surface, these negative appraisals of Augustine's contribution to deification appear valid: *deificare/deificatus* shows up in a corpus of 5.5 million words only a handful of times. Yet, one does well to note that these instances, while scant compared to his overall corpus, are disproportionate to the entirety of Christian Latin literature both prior and subsequent to Augustine's career. This is especially noteworthy, as Augustine's own admissions in *De Trinitate*[108] and the *Confessions*[109] indicate that his lack of facility with Greek likely rendered him unable to survey theological treatises from the Christian East on his own. Without substantive use of *deificare* in the Latin West and his inability to access alternate sources of deification language, it can be surmised that Augustine's employment of *deificare* was both intentional and integral to his theological enterprise. The supposition that deification is central to Augustine's theology is further bolstered by the fact that Augustine's opponents—the Pelagians and pagans—advanced false portrayals of deification, with pagan conceptions, in particular, wrongly ascribing godlike status to human beings as objects of worship. In light of the potentiality of being misunderstood, *any* instance where Augustine uses *deificare* should be considered an additional confirmation of the import of deification to his theology.

Additionally, Augustine employs several soteriological tropes interchangeably throughout his corpus—*deificare/deificatus*, adoptive sonship, "becoming gods," participation in God's divinity, union with Christ, and identification

[108] In Augustine *De Trinitate* 3.1, Augustine writes, "But if what we have read upon these subjects is either not sufficiently set forth, or is not to be found at all, or at any rate cannot easily be found by us, in the Latin tongue, while we are not so familiar with the Greek tongue as to be found in any way competent to read and understand therein the books that treat of such topics. . . ." From Marcus Dods, *The Works of Aurelius Augustine: A New Translation*, vol. 7 (Frankfurt: Verlag, 2023).

[109] In *Confessions*, 1.14, Augustine writes, "The difficulty, in truth, the difficulty of learning a foreign language mingled as it were with gall all the sweetness of those fabulous Grecian stories. For not a single word of it did I understand, and to make me do so, they vehemently urged me with cruel threatenings and punishments" (From *NPNF* vol. 1).

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as the *totus Christus*. According to A. N. Williams, such conceptual flexibility is entirely consistent with how the Greek Fathers spoke of deification—that is, not by strictly defining the doctrine, but employing a "well-defined set of images" to describe it, such as adoptive sonship, participation, and union with God.[110] We thus analyzed how Augustine related these soteriological metaphors to three pillars of his intellectual topography: (1) his anthropology, and specifically, humankind's creation in the *imago Dei*, (2) his Christology, and specifically, the Incarnation, and (3) his ecclesiology, and, in particular, his identification of the church as the *totus Christus*. We linked each of these doctrines, respectively, to a guiding question: (1) *How* is deification possible? (2) What are the *means* of deification?, and (3) What is the *telos* of deification?

Answers to these questions illuminated a robust portrayal of Augustinian deification, which: (a) is possible due to humankind being made in the *imago Dei*, a term rich with meaning, inclusive of the *imago* possessing an innate desire to be in the likeness of the object that it reflects; (b) is carried out by virtue of the Word being enfleshed with the human nature without setting aside any aspect of the divine nature—this is the *means* for humans to ascend in parabolic continuity to the initial descension of the Word from the Father; and (c) is consummated as the *totus Christus*—the supreme identity of the church, which describes the mystical union of Christ as the head to Christ as the Body—and actuated both by the worthy reception of the sacraments and the *caritas* of the Holy Spirit. This latter issue, the ecclesial sacramental nature of Augustinian deification—which to be sure, was a characterization advanced by Bonner, Russell, and others in past studies—is a key contribution of the present investigation insofar as we demonstrated that these are not merely window dressing for Augustine's outlook, but both the consummation of his salvific trajectory (and one might even argue, his entire theological project) and a distinctive contribution to the post-Nicene development of the doctrine. While many patristic interpreters conceived of the corporate dimensions of deification (which I have termed "ecclesial deification" elsewhere),[111] none articulated its effect as vividly as the Bishop of Hippo—that is, as resulting in a corporate identity in which the Body of Christ matches the head (by grace, not by nature) to the point of even speaking on behalf of the head.

[110] Williams, "Deification in the *Summa Theologicae*," 221.

[111] For further reading, see Michael Reardon, "The Church Is Christ: The *Wirkungsgeschichte* of Interpreting Pauline Soteriology as Ecclesial Deification," in *Transformed into the Same Image: Constructive Investigations into the Doctrine of Deification*, ed. Paul Copan and Michael M. C. Reardon (IVP Academic, forthcoming 2024).

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There remains much ground to explore in relation to Augustine and his theology of deification. For example, there have been no significant comparative studies examining Augustine's conception of deification against his Latin predecessors (e.g., Tertullian, Cyprian of Carthage, Novatian, and Ambrose of Milan) or later followers (e.g., Hilary of Poitiers).[112] This is especially surprising, given the superb overview of the doctrine in a host of Latin thinkers contained in Jared Ortiz's 2019 volume, *Deification in the Latin Patristic Tradition*.[113] Together with this volume, such comparative studies would help dispel centuries-old notions that Latin theology was inherently at odds with a theology of deification. Additionally, it would be beneficial to bring Augustine into conversation with his contemporaries from the Christian East, such as Gregory of Nyssa, Gregory of Nazianzus, or to perhaps the greatest exponent of deification in the seventh century, Maximus the Confessor.[114] As evidenced by studies cited in the opening pages of this article, Augustine has been demonized as the source of anti-deification theology that subsequently shaped the Christian West. While more recent studies have persuasively dispelled this notion, a successful study (or series of studies) paralleling Augustine's conception of deification with Eastern interlocutors might be especially fruitful for present and future ecumenical endeavors. A hope for this article is that it might inspire some or all of the above endeavors, so that perhaps one day Augustine may not only be the Doctor of Predestination and Grace, but even "the Doctor of Participation and Deification."[115] In the interim, may we adhere to the Bishop of Hippo's exhortations and adore the "God who makes you gods."

[112] Of the theologians listed, only Hilary of Poitiers was the subject of an extended study on deification—and this was more than seventy years ago. See Philip T. Wild, *The Divinization of Man According to Saint Hilary of Poitiers* (Mundelein, IL: Saint Mary of the Lake, 1950).

[113] Jared Ortiz, ed., *Deification in the Latin Patristic Tradition* (Washington DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2019).

[114] A likeminded 1999 study by A. N. Williams examined how deification functions in the theologies of Aquinas and Gregory Palamas. See A. N. Williams, *The Ground of Union: Deification in Aquinas and Palamas* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999).

[115] Gerald Bonner, "Christ, God and Man, in the Thought of St Augustine," *Augustinianum* 24 (1984); reprint, *God's Decree and Man's Destiny: Studies in the Thought of Augustine of Hippo* (London: Variorurn, 1987), 293.

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