

St Gregory Palamas

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"2. If anyone declares that perfect union with God is accomplished simply in an imitative and relative fashion, without the deifying grace of the Spirit and merely in a manner of persons who share the same disposition and who love one another, and that the deifying grace of God is a state of our intellectual nature acquired by imitation alone, but is not a supernatural illumination and an ineffable and divine energy beheld invisibly and conceived inconceivably by those privileged to partake in it, then he must know that he has fallen unawares into delusion of the Messalians. For if deification is accomplished according to a capacity inherent in human nature and if it is encompassed within the bounds of nature, then of necessity the person deified is by nature God. Whoever thinks like this should not attempt, therefore, to foist his own delusion upon those who stand on sure ground and to impose a defiled creed upon those whose faith is undefiled, rather he should lay aside his presumption and learn from persons of experience or from their disciples that the grace of deification is entirely unconditional, and there is no faculty whatever in nature capable of achieving it since, if there were, this grace would no longer be grace but merely the manifestation of the operation of a natural capacity. Nor, if deification were in accord with a natural capacity, would there be anything miraculous in it; for then deification would truly be the work of nature, not the gift of God, and a man would be able to be called a God by nature in the full sense of the words. For the natural capacity of every being is nothing other than the undeviating and natural disposition for active accomplishment. It is, indeed, incomprehensible how deification can raise the person deified outside or beyond himself if it is encompassed within the bounds of nature.

The grace of deification is, therefore, above nature, virtue and knowledge and, according to Saint Maximos, all such things infinitely fall short of it. For all the virtue we can attain and such imitation of God as lies in our power does no more than fit us union with the Deity, but it is through grace that this ineffable union is actually accomplished. Through grace God in His entirety penetrates the saints in their entirety, and the saints in their entirety penetrate God entirely, exchanging the whole of Him for themselves, and acquiring Him alone as the reward of their ascent towards Him; for He embraces them as the soul embraces the body, enabling them to be in Him as His own members.

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