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Abstract Review of *Deification and Grace* (2007), by Daniel A. Keating.

Deification: Fulness and Remnant

Tom Rosson

Review of Daniel A. Keating. *Deification and Grace*. Naples, FL: Sapientia Press, 2007. ix + 142 pp., with bibliography, index, and scripture index. $25.95.

> While often misunderstood in or eclipsed by various theological traditions of modern provenance, deification stands at the very center of the Christian faith and constitutes the surpassing goal toward which the Christian life is directed.[1]

One of the most controversial aspects of the restoration of the gospel was the bold declaration by Joseph Smith and numerous later prophets that human beings may eventually become gods. President John Taylor grounded this amazing truth in the incarnation and atonement of our Savior Jesus Christ:

> A man, as a man, could arrive at all the dignity that a man was capable of obtaining or receiving; but it needed a God to raise him to the dignity of a God. For this cause it is written, "Now are we the sons of God; and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that when he shall appear we shall be like him" [1 John 3:2]. And how and why like Him? Because, through the instrumentality of the atonement and the adoption, it is made possible for us to become of the family of God, and joint heirs

1. Reinhard Hütter, quoted in Keating, *Deification and Grace*, back cover.

> with Jesus Christ; and that as He, the potential instrument, through the oneness that existed between Him and His Father, by reason of obedience to divine law, overcame death, hell and the grave, and sat down upon His Father's throne, so shall we be able to sit down with Him, even upon His throne. Thus, as it is taught in the Book of Mormon, it must needs be that there be an infinite atonement [2 Nephi 9:7]; and hence of Him, and by Him, and through Him are all things; and through Him do we obtain every blessing, power, right, immunity, salvation and exaltation. He is our God, our Redeemer, our Savior, to whom, with the Father and the Holy Spirit, be eternal and everlasting praises worlds without end.[2]

Daniel Keating, an associate professor of theology at Sacred Heart Major Seminary in Michigan, offers a comprehensive presentation of deification based on the Bible and the views of the early church fathers. He discusses the most overt references to deification in the Bible and does an excellent job of tying together Christ's incarnation with deification. This linkage, vital to the proper understanding of deification, is present throughout the Bible and in the words of the early church fathers and numerous Latter-day Saint leaders. Keating argues that historic Christianity simply must include the fundamental truth expressed so cogently by Irenaeus, a late-second-century bishop: "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] Keating then sets out the clear implications of this teaching.

Evidences from the Bible and Early Church Fathers

After setting the stage for his topic, Keating begins making his case for deification with a chapter entitled "The Graced Exchange:

2. John Taylor, *The Mediation and Atonement of Jesus Christ* (1882; repr., Heber City, UT: Archive Publishers, 2000), 145–46.

3. Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* 5, preface, in *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, ed. Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1994), 1:526; quoted in Keating, *Deification and Grace*, 12. Unless noted otherwise, the capitalization in patristic quotations follows *Ante-Nicene Fathers* and *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*.

Redeemed Humanity in Christ." Some of the most clear and earliest expressions of what Keating calls the "exchange formula" are from Irenaeus—for example, "For it was for this end that the Word of God was made man, and He who was the Son of God became the Son of man, that man, having been taken into the Word, and receiving the adoption, might become the son of God."[4] In the third century, Clement of Alexandria wrote that "the Word of God became man, that you may learn from man how man may become God."[5] Keating offers numerous other examples of this exchange formula as found in patristic writings.[6]

The exchange formula has its roots, however, in Paul's second letter to the Corinthians: "For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that for your sake he became poor, though being rich, so that by his poverty you may become rich" (8:9).[7] Keating goes on to explain that

> the Fathers justifiably read this text in the light of Philippians 2:5–11. On this reading, "being rich" (2 Cor 8:9) is equivalent to "being in the form of God" (Phil 2:6)—and the present tense of the participle in both verses underscored for the Fathers that the

4. Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* 3.19.1, in *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, 1:448; quoted in Keating, *Deification and Grace*, 11.

5. Irenaeus, *Exhortation to the Heathen* 1, in *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, 2:174; quoted in Keating, *Deification and Grace*, 12.

6. Among the early Christian fathers cited by Keating are Athanasius of Alexandria, *Of the Incarnation of the Word*, sec. 54, in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, ed. Philip Schaff, 2nd ser. (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1994); Gregory of Nazianzus, *Oration* 1.5, in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, 2nd ser., 7:203; Gregory of Nyssa, *Against Apollinaris* 11; John Chrysostom, *Homily* 11.1, in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, ed. Philip Schaff, 1st ser. (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1994), 14:38; Hilary of Poitiers, *On the Trinity* 10.7, in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, 2nd ser., 9:183–84; Ambrose of Milan, *Of the Holy Spirit* 1.9.107, in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, 2nd ser., 10:107; and Augustine of Hippo, *On the Gospel of St. John* 12.8. Keating also draws on Norman Russell, *The Doctrine of Deification in the Greek Patristic Tradition* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), and on the original French edition (1942) of Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Presence and Thought: Essay on the Religious Philosophy of Gregory of Nyssa*, trans. Mark Sebanc (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1995), in his discussion of the fundamental nature of the exchange formula in the conception of deification.

7. This is Keating's translation. It is worth noting that Mark the Ascetic and Gregory of Nazianzus specifically use this verse and the idea of being rich vs. poor in connection with human deification.

> Son of God *remained* God and *retained* his riches, even in the act of emptying himself and becoming poor. Indeed, the exchange at the heart of both these texts makes no sense if Christ, in his condescension, loses the very thing he came to bring us. In the same way, "he became poor" is equivalent to "emptied himself . . . was born . . . and became obedient to death" (Phil 2:7–8). It is shorthand for Christ's Incarnation, passion, and death. But the key difference between the two texts appears at this point. In Philippians 2, the climax reached is the exaltation of the Son himself in his resurrection and enthronement as Lord above all creatures. In 2 Corinthians 8, the climactic result is *our* enrichment. By means of the Son's humbling of himself, we are enriched with his own riches.[8]

Keating cites many biblical verses that point less directly to the exchange formula. "But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born from woman, born under the Law, to redeem those under the Law, so that we might receive adoption as sons" (Galatians 4:4–5). Keating points out that one of Augustine's exchange formula statements, "The Son of God made Son of man, that He might make the sons of men the sons of God,"[9] is quite similar to that passage from Galatians.

Keating also cites Romans 8:14–17, 29 and links these verses to Galatians 4. He discusses the role of the Holy Spirit in "sonship/adoption." Also highlighted is the significance of the familiar term *Abba* ("Daddy") used to refer to our Father in Heaven in both Romans 8:15 and Galatians 4:6. Keating stresses Romans 8:29:

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8. Keating, *Deification and Grace*, 16–17. Two points here seem important. First, the Book of Mormon, paralleling Keating, makes it clear that Christ's "emptying" does not result in lack of divinity. See John Taylor's use of 2 Nephi 9:7 in the text above. Alma 34:12 also supports this view. Second, Latter-day Saints do not embrace the two-nature Christology of Chalcedon, as Keating does. Instead, the incarnation was a "kenotic emptying" illustrated by the passage referenced here (Philippians 2:5–11); but as some Latter-day Saints point out, this emptying was not such that Christ did not possess divinity during the incarnation.

9. Augustine of Hippo, *On the Gospel of St. John* 21.1; quoted in Keating, *Deification and Grace*, 14.

> The conclusion to this section (Rom 8:29–30) points to the goal of our sonship in Christ: we are to be "conformed to the image of his Son" [Romans 8:29]. God's purpose in sending the Son is that we be made like the Son. This notion is reinforced in 2 Corinthians 3:18, where Paul speaks about our being transformed into his "image" from one degree of glory to another. How, then, has Christ enriched us? By assuming our humanity and redeeming us in and through that humanity, he has given us adoption as sons of God through the Holy Spirit, for the purpose of transforming us to be made progressively into the image of the Son himself. (p. 18)

Unmentioned here, but significant, is that elsewhere Paul uses the same word translated as "image" (*eikon*) to describe the Son: "lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them" (2 Corinthians 4:4). If Christ, the image of his Father, is embraced as divine and not as a weak copy of God, would men remade into the "image of Christ" likewise not be weak copies?

First John 3:1–2 illustrates an important aspect of our progression to deification. Keating tells us that Christians are in this life sons of God but that upon resurrection we will be more. "We are to be sons and daughters who are like the Son. But here, the fullness of transformation is reserved for the age to come. We are God's children now, but we will (somehow) become 'like' the Son in a much more profound way when the Son appears in his glory" (p. 18).

The final biblical concept used by Keating to illustrate the exchange formula is the idea of Christ as the Second Adam. The concept of image is again used to illustrate what we are and what we will become. "The first man is of the earth, earthy: the second man is the Lord from heaven. As is the earthy, such are they also that are earthy: and as is the heavenly, such are they also that are heavenly. And as we have borne the image of the earthy, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly" (1 Corinthians 15:47–49). Like John, Paul sees our final transformation as occurring in the resurrection (vv. 51–52). This biblical concept of our post-resurrection divinity being more than our

mortal sonship supports the idea that our final, deified state is more than we can see even as devoted, but mortal, followers of Christ.

This passage from Keating nicely summarizes the above points:

> Though other biblical texts could be called upon for support, the key texts on exchange and sonship (2 Cor 8:9; Gal 4:4–6; Rom 8:14–17, 29; 1 Jn 3:1–2), in conjunction with Christ as the New Adam and our transformation into his image (Rom 5:12–21; 1 Cor 15:44–49; 2 Cor 3:18; Eph 1:10), provide the primary biblical foundation and framework for the formula that the Son of God became as we are so that we might become as he is. (p. 20)

In the next section, "Redeemed Humanity in Christ," we read these words from Cyril of Alexandria:

> It was not otherwise possible for man, being of a nature which perishes, to escape death, unless he recovered that ancient grace, and partook once more of God who holds all things together in being and preserves them in life through the Son in the Spirit. Therefore his only-begotten Word has become a partaker of flesh and blood (Heb 2:14), that is, he has become man, though being Life by nature, and begotten of the Life that is by nature, that is, of God the Father, so that, having united himself with the flesh which perishes according to the law of its own nature . . . he might restore it to his own life and render it through himself a partaker of God the Father. . . . And he wears our nature, refashioning it to his own life. And he himself is also in us, for we have all become partakers of him, and have him in ourselves through the Spirit. For this reason we have become "partakers of the divine nature" (2 Pet 1:4), and are reckoned as sons, and so too have in ourselves the Father himself through the Son.[10]

10. Keating, *Deification and Grace*, 21. Keating bases his translation of Cyril of Alexandria, *Commentary on John* 14:20, on P. E. Pusey, ed., *Sancti patris nostri Cyrilli archiepiscopi Alexandrini in e. Joannis evangelium* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1872), 2:485–86.

The parallels between Cyril's words here and John Taylor's are striking. It is in and through Christ that we are deified to a form of oneness with God the Father and his Son. Less explicit for Cyril and more explicit for John Taylor is that when the exchange formula speaks of Christ becoming man, it really refers to the totality of Christ's mortal ministry: incarnation, atonement, and resurrection.

In Keating's chapter "Christ as Both Human and Divine," the Latter-day Saint reader should recognize that through the decisions of the first four councils culminating in Chalcedon, the Roman Catholics defined Jesus Christ as a possessor of two natures hypostatically united into one person. For those who reject the distinction between God nature and human nature in Jesus of Nazareth, this section of Keating's book will be less directly significant. Still, Keating's conclusion on this point is powerful:

> We are now in a position to return to the formula of exchange with greater clarity about what this expression means. By asserting that "the Son of God became the Son of Man, so that the sons of men might become the sons of God," the Fathers were attempting to sum up the scriptural testimony concerning our redemption. Christ, by virtue of his divine-human constitution and by means of his saving actions, is the center and locus of that redemption. He is the Second Adam who renews our nature in himself, thus inaugurating a new humanity, and breathes his Spirit into us, causing us to be adopted as sons and daughters of the Father. By means of the indwelling of God, we are set on a course in which we freely cooperate, to be conformed to the image of the Son (Rom 8:29). It is only in the life of the age to come that this transformation will be completed, and we shall see him as he is (1 Jn 3:2). This account of our redemption embraces the full expanse of the biblical narrative, from Adam to Christ, and the glory that awaits us in the new creation. It incorporates the victory of Christ over the enemies and ills that beset the human race: the power of indwelling sin, the slavery of the devil, and the curse of death on our nature. And it is both Christocentric and Trinitarian: The Father sends

> his Son in our fallen humanity, to redeem the human race and to win for us adoptive sonship through the Spirit. (p. 28)

Keating makes a case for the God-man Christ lifting the faithful to become man-gods like Christ. I will later examine a short excerpt from the Council of Chalcedon that would seem to suggest that even while embracing a dual-nature Christology, the witness of the Bible and the early church fathers points us to some form of dual-natured, deified man.

As Keating introduces three biblical passages with powerful deification language, he mentions the limits he will place upon man's final deified state as he envisions it within Catholic theology. Still, Keating makes a strong case with these passages. To the student of deification these are quite familiar:

> I have said, Ye are gods; and all of you are children of the most High. (Psalm 82:6)

> Jesus answered them, Is it not written in your law, I said, Ye are gods? If he called them gods, unto whom the word of God came, and the scripture cannot be broken. (John 10:34–35)

> Whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises: that by these ye might be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust. (2 Peter 1:4)

Keating observes that there is a "longstanding judgment that both the language and the concept of deification were foreign intrusions into the Christian faith from the world of Greek philosophy and the mystery religions of the ancient world" (p. 16). He rejects this opinion, demonstrating that the Christian fathers began with the language of exchange but moved to the biblical language of deification and other terms possibly chosen because they were not the common pagan terms.

Psalm 82:6 has an interesting place in the discussion of deification. Critics of deification frequently claim that this passage has interesting vocabulary but cannot be viewed as advocating deification. Keating links this passage to John 10:34–35 and concludes that the fathers

"believed themselves warranted to identify as 'gods' those who are 'the sons of God' through Christ" (p. 31). Keating also quotes Carl Mosser as arguing that "the patristic citation of Psalm 82:6 was not an ex post facto attempt to provide warrant for alien terminology imported into the Christian tradition by well-meaning Hellenizers."[11] He further agrees with Mosser that "it was precisely the Christian adaptation of this Psalm, very probably building on an earlier Jewish exegesis, that ushered in the practice of identifying Christians as 'gods'" (p. 33).

Keating then discusses 2 Peter 1:4 from a few different angles. He notes that the Christian fathers sometimes drew upon this verse while discussing deification but that this passage did not have a foundational role in forming the language of deification in the early church.

To conclude this chapter, Keating points out that he has shown that the "Graced Exchange" and deification language in general is "biblically grounded in key texts that point to our filial adoption in Christ through the Spirit (2 Cor 8:9; Gal 4:4–6; Rom 8:14–17, 29; 1 John 3:1–2)." He continues:

> I have argued that the terminology of deification is rooted in, and is confirmed by, key biblical texts that are interpreted in the Fathers, and in the subsequent tradition, exactly in accord with the account of our redemption summed up in the formula of exchange. The Fathers began to employ the vocabulary of deification not because of a flirtation with Greek thought and religion, but primarily in the interest of defending and explaining the biblical record against what they perceived to be distortions. It is noteworthy that—upon examination of the key texts—the terminology of deification is typically found in contexts where the Fathers are defending and explaining the full divinity of the Son and the Spirit (and so, the doctrine of the Trinity) and the Incarnation of the Son. (p. 38)

11. Carl Mosser, "The Earliest Patristic Interpretation of Psalm 82, Jewish Antecedents, and the Origins of Christian Deification," *Journal of Theological Studies*, n.s., 56 (2005): 58; quoted in Keating, *Deification and Grace*, 33.

Keating's next chapter, "Receiving the Divine Life," explores the link between three Roman Catholic sacraments (baptism, confirmation, and the Eucharist) and deification. Latter-day Saints have similar covenantal ordinances typically called baptism, the gift of the Holy Ghost, and the sacrament.[12] He begins his discussion by answering a question, "How do we receive divine life and become deified in Christ?"

> The shorthand answer often given by the Fathers of the Church is that we can be deified only through God's direct agency, and more specifically, through God himself dwelling actively and effectively within us. The argument they employ—used repeatedly to demonstrate the full divinity of the Son and the Spirit—is that only God can properly sanctify and deify. No creature can accomplish this. It is only through the effective *indwelling* of the Son and the Spirit that human beings are regenerated, sanctified, adopted as children of God, and deified. This is a most crucial point. If we fail to grasp it, we will misunderstand the heart of what deification is.[13]

It is interesting to note that the deification of men through Christ was used to defend the full divinity of Christ. Deification was often

12. Noel B. Reynolds, in his essay "The Decline of Covenant in Early Christian Thought," published in Noel B. Reynolds, ed., *Early Christians in Disarray: Contemporary LDS Perspectives on the Christian Apostasy* (Provo, UT: FARMS and BYU Press, 2005), 295–324, directly points to the similarities between (1) early church sacraments as a means for God's pouring out of grace upon men and (2) the Latter-day Saint, Jewish, and possibly the very early church practice of making two-way covenants. Although Latter-day Saint covenants are not devoid of God's graced gifts to men who imperfectly live up to their part of the agreement, and although Catholic sacraments are not devoid of a human component, the general distinction is worth noting.

13. Keating, *Deification and Grace*, 39–40. Keating's point about deification through uniting with God is quite clear in patristic writings. While Latter-day Saints typically do not use the same communion wording that the early church fathers did, the ideas put forth by President John Taylor (in the quotation linked to footnote 2 above) and exemplified in the scriptural passage "that they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us" (John 17:21) do point to this. Latter-day Saints are somewhat uncomfortable with the metaphysical unity of the Trinity, but the oneness enjoyed by Father, Son, and Holy Spirit is the oneness in which we are called to participate. Later Keating will explain that the metaphysical unity of the Trinity is not in fact the same as the oneness that deified humans enjoy with God.

mentioned as an accepted truth from which to defend other aspects of the gospel from challenges like Arianism, the heretical doctrine that Christ is not of the same substance as the Father.

There are clearly differences in the way the Roman Catholic sacraments and Latter-day Saint ordinances are viewed, but Keating's observations serve as a reminder of how important baptism, confirmation/gift of the Holy Ghost, and the Lord's Supper are to Christians. For the early church, as well as for modern Catholics and Latter-day Saints, these practices should be viewed as an indispensable part of the path God offers for his children's ultimate return to him and deification.

The chapter "Transformed into His Image" begins with an excellent summary:

> The topic of human progress in deification is vast, encompassing far more terrain than a summary study of deification such as this could possibly cover. Under the heading "progress in deification" one could include topics such as holiness, freedom, prayer, the theological virtues (faith, hope, and love), the fruit of the Holy Spirit, and more broadly all that concerns our communion with God and our ethical responsibility as disciples of Christ in the world. While acknowledging that all these subjects (and more) pertain to our growth in deification, I will focus more narrowly on three foundational truths concerning our progress in the divine life granted to us through Christ in the Spirit. First, all progress in deification—in its various manifestations—is grounded in divine grace and the prior indwelling of God. Second, the New Testament presents us with—and beckons us to—transformation into full maturity in the image of Christ, expressed especially by faith, hope, and love. Third, our progress in deification has a baptismal and Eucharistic shape. We are called to share progressively in the communion of Christ's suffering, death, and resurrection. These aspects of our deification have been selected because they help us to see the continuity in our path to deification from its beginnings to maturity in this life. (p. 63)

A few points in the above summary should be highlighted to a greater extent. Keating's discussion of two different readings of the scriptures that were prevalent in the early church identifies a moral/tropological reading (i.e., how we ought to live) and an allegorical/Christological reading (i.e., who Christ is and what his work is) (p. 65). The point should be made that the moral reading considered the imitation of, and even the transformation into, what Christ is to be a major theme of the New Testament. In addition, both readings reflect underlying themes of the New Testament. Moreover, those who reject the doctrine of deification seem to emphasize the message that Christ is the manifestation of his Father while neglecting the clear message that we are to become through grace what Christ is as we strive to live in imitation of him. To become like Christ, one must know him—that is, know of his great love implicit in his redemptive mission. Thus "we love him, because he first loved us" (1 John 4:19).

Keating next revisits the idea of humankind transforming into the image of Christ (2 Corinthians 3:18; Romans 8:28–29). He then discusses the similarities and possible differences in the terms *image* and *likeness*. However, it appears that none of the early Christian fathers utilized these terms to suggest that we are weakly remade into what Christ is.

> The Western theological tradition, following Augustine, has typically understood "image" and "likeness" to be roughly synonymous terms. The patristic witness to the other side of this issue—that the terms "image" and "likeness" refer to distinguishable aspects of the divine work in us—begins with Irenaeus, and is developed by authorities such as Clement of Alexandria, Evagrius, Diadochus, and Maximus the Confessor. According to this view, "image" refers to what is given in creation and not lost in the Fall, while "likeness" typically describes what the human race lost in the Fall, and what we progressively attain as we cooperate with the grace of God in Christ. (pp. 72–73)

Keating goes on to discuss growth toward Christ while emphasizing moral virtue, the place of prayer, and even suffering in the life of the Christian. He also underscores our dependence on the work of Christ.

> It is because we have been born anew as sons and daughters of God and are partakers of the divine nature that we can make progress in godly virtue. Here it will be helpful to employ a distinction, found in Augustine and developed in Leo the Great, between Christ as *sacramentum* ("mystery") and Christ as *exemplum* ("model"). As *sacramentum*, Christ himself accomplishes the work of salvation, cleanses us from sin, and joins us to the Father. As *exemplum* Christ provides the model for how we are to live in him. Leo sums up this double dependence on Christ by stating that "we cannot come to Christ except by Christ," showing that our imitation of him is necessarily founded on our redemption in him. Because Christ has assumed our nature and redeemed it in himself, and given us a participation in him, we can now "put on" the qualities of that new nature in imitation of Christ himself. In this we are active, putting into practice by the grace of Christ the new way of life in Christ. (p. 81)

In addition, Keating neatly summarizes what is meant by "progress in deification":

> It means that we are to become progressively like Christ, transformed into the image of the one who is the very image of God. The more we become conformed to the image of Christ, the more we are like our Father in heaven (Mt 5:48). We are to become holy as he is holy (1 Pet 1:15). It means that we are to grow into mature sons and daughters of God, living a life more and more characterized by the virtues of Christ himself, especially faith, hope, and love. "Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children. And walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God" (Eph 5:1–2). Through our abiding in Christ

> and our increasing likeness to him, we are to be fruitful as the Father intended us to be (Jn 15:8). (p. 87)

The concise and powerful exegesis Keating offers of the biblical and early church teachings on deification was one of the two motivators for this review. Keating clearly lays out a very powerful biblical case for the deification of man. That we are to become as Christ is the message of the New Testament. This message within the early church was even clearer than the message that Christ was God, but this is also revealed in the New Testament and embraced by the early church. Keating included a great deal more from the early church fathers than is reproduced here, but most of the scriptural references have been addressed. It is clear that the doctrine of deification is central to the New Testament, and it is those who deny it that have departed from the biblical witness.

Limits of Human Deification

Keating embraces a "limited deification," insisting that human "nature" cannot become the same as God's "nature." While aspects of his view of deification are powerful, he is unwilling to fully embrace the second half of the great exchange: "The Son became man that we might become gods" (p. 12). Keating skillfully develops the case for deification but refuses to go to the logical conclusion, as was the case historically when developed theology replaced a biblical (and original) understanding of humankind's final destiny.

"We have now examined in some detail," Keating writes at the outset of chapter 5,

> the meaning of deification according to the "formula of exchange" (*admirabile commercium*): how Christ has redeemed and deified our nature in himself (chapter two); how we have become "sons" and "gods" by receiving new life through the effective indwelling of God (chapter three); and how we make progress in the divine life through transformation into the image of Christ (chapter four). It is now time to return to a question that was posed at the start: Does the doctrine of deification, by means of its elevated and potentially exaggerated

> rhetoric, effectively compromise the fundamental distinction between God and the created order, and so lead explicitly or implicitly to a form of pantheism? To restate the question against the backdrop of contemporary religious movements: Doesn't the notion of deification play into the hands of those religious movements that claim, "you yourself are God," and so refuse to recognize any sovereign and transcendent God deserving of our worship and obedience? The answer given by the Christian tradition is a resounding "No." (p. 91)

Keating then claims that these concerns are not new and that this has been addressed from the beginning. He then turns to Irenaeus (d. ca. AD 202), Athanasius (d. ca. AD 373), and others.

The term *gods*, when used by those who discuss deification today, creates concerns for both those who deny deification and those who take the biblical witness seriously. The Bible itself does not shun the word *gods*. There clearly are examples of this plurality within the Old and New Testaments,[14] but there are also "God is one" statements throughout the Bible and the other Latter-day Saint scriptures. Keating suggests that concern for the oneness of God is reason to be leery of the human deification. Among the church fathers, this same concern was most apparent when they addressed the question of the divinity (or lack of divinity) present within Jesus of Nazareth. The "solution" to this plurality of deities in the early church was eventually the doctrine of the Trinity as set forth in the ecumenical creeds, where the word *homoousian* is employed to explain that God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit were "one God." Those discussing deification concerned themselves with the plurality of gods primarily in connection with the divinity of Christ and not in connection with human deification.

14. There are numerous publications on a "divine council" and other concepts within the Bible that point to a plurality of gods. The *FARMS Review* 19/1 had three essays on this: "You've Seen One *Elohim*, You've Seen Them All? A Critique of Mormonism's Use of Psalm 82," by Michael S. Heiser (an Evangelical scholar); "'Ye Really *Are* Gods': A Response to Michael Heiser concerning the LDS Use of Psalm 82 and the Gospel of John," by David E. Bokovoy; and "Israel's Divine Council, Mormonism, and Evangelicalism: Clarifying the Issues and Directions for Future Study," by Michael S. Heiser.

The claim that the early church fathers were concerned with preserving the distinction between God and the created order is more complex than the plurality of gods issue. Irenaeus and those who discussed deification after him all embraced creation *ex nihilo*.[15] Still, this did not preclude their use of powerful statements concerning the final state of deified men. Keating argues that, in Irenaeus's view, the final state of deified men is limited. He claims that Athanasius, Augustine, and other church fathers of the fourth century and later sought to preserve this distinction between God and the created order by denying that deified humans change nature. Keating's case on this point is strong.

Keating believes the distinction between God and creature to be unbridgeable:

> We begin once again with Irenaeus, who attests to our becoming gods by the grace of adoption: "But of what gods [does he speak]? [Of those] to whom he says, 'I have said, you are gods, and all sons of the Most High' (Ps 82:6). To those, no doubt, who have received the grace of the adoption, 'by which we cry, Abba Father'" (Rom 8:15). Two centuries later Athanasius echoes Irenaeus, but adds the distinction between the Word, who is God in essence, and human beings who are "gods" by participation: "Wherefore [the Word] is very God, existing one in essence with the very Father; while other beings, to whom he said, 'I said you are gods' (Ps 82:6), had this grace from the Father, only by participation of the Word, through the Spirit."[16]

There are other places where Athanasius makes his intent clear in denying that men are changed in their nature, but Irenaeus offers some interesting challenges for one who holds this view.

15. Justin Martyr (d. AD 165) did not embrace creation *ex nihilo*, but he died before Irenaeus did. It should be noted that Latter-day Saints who embrace the concept that "eternal intelligence" is present within all humans have a different starting point than those who wrote during the second half of the second century or later.

16. Keating, *Deification and Grace*, 92. The Irenaeus quotation is from *Against Heresies* 3.6.1, in *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, 1:419. The Athanasius quotation is from *Four Discourses Against the Arians* 1.9, in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, 2nd ser., 4:311.

> His wisdom [is shown] in His having made created things parts of one harmonious and consistent whole; and those things which, through His super-eminent kindness, receive growth and a long period of existence, do reflect the glory of the uncreated One, of that God who bestows what is good ungrudgingly. For from the very fact of these things having been created, [it follows] that they are not uncreated; but by their continuing in being throughout a long course of ages, they shall receive a faculty of the Uncreated, through the gratuitous bestowal of eternal existence upon them by God. . . . [M]an, a created and organized being, is rendered after the image and likeness of the uncreated God. . . . [W]e have not been made gods from the beginning, but at first merely men, then at length gods. . . . He shall overcome the substance of created nature. For it was necessary, at first, that nature should be exhibited; then, after that, that what was mortal should be conquered and swallowed up by immortality, and the corruptible by incorruptibility, and that man should be made after the image and likeness of God, having received the knowledge of good and evil.[17]

This passage shows a number of things. First, as Keating points out, there is a progression in deification. The Christian has received the adoption today, but over time it is possible to "receive the faculty of the Uncreated" and to "overcome the substance of the created nature" and to receive "eternal existence." As mentioned above, it is clear that Irenaeus believed in creation *ex nihilo*, but he did not place limits upon the remaking of men into the image of God, though Athanasius and later church fathers clearly did. Thus we have this statement by Irenaeus:

> How, then, shall he be a God, who has not as yet been made a man? Or how can he be perfect who was but lately created? How, again, can he be immortal, who in his mortal nature did not obey his Maker? For it must be that thou, at the outset,

17. Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* 4.38.3–4, in *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, 1:521–22.

> shouldest hold the rank of a man, and then afterwards partake of the glory of God. For thou dost not make God, but God thee. If, then, thou art God's workmanship, await the hand of thy Maker which creates everything in due time; in due time as far as thou art concerned, whose creation is being carried out.[18]

Here Irenaeus makes his point clear: It is not that God is incapable or unwilling to remake our nature, but rather that it is important that we acknowledge that it is God who bestows this gift upon us. Irenaeus is also saying that human deification is a process.

Keating returns to the exchange formula as he considers how God became man so that men can become gods while not being gods by nature and, additionally, if God did so without becoming man by nature. In so doing he introduces two ways in which something can "participate" in something else:

> In the thought-world of the Fathers, "participation" and its cognate words (participate, partake, share, etc.) had a more definite meaning than they do for us today. They inherited a common philosophical understanding of these terms—derived from Plato, Aristotle, and the Neo-Platonists—and they re-fashioned them to describe a specifically Christian understanding of God, creation, and redemption in Christ. The concept of participation was used philosophically in two main senses. First, it described how different particulars all share some common element. For example, all individual human beings share a common humanity, and so "partake" of a common nature. In this case each human being shares in this nature equally. Second (and crucially for our purposes), the concept of participation was used to describe the unequal relationship between what is essential and what is derivative. If a king is understood to have authority in himself, then his first minister would participate in that authority. More significantly, if God is the source of all being, then we as creatures

18. Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* 4.39.3–4, in *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, 1:522–23.

> participate in his being. We do not share or participate in the divine being as God himself possesses it. Rather, we share in his being in that he gives us our created being by bringing us into existence. He has it essentially; we have it derivatively and by participation. He is being; we participate in being. Participation is a way of speaking about how "in him we live and move and have our being" (Acts 17:28). (p. 97)

From the above understanding of the word *participate*, it seems that Keating could suggest that Christ participates in the human nature derivatively and that deified humans thus participate in the divine nature derivatively as well. This would be a consistent way to read the exchange formula even though Irenaeus and the Bible seem to indicate a stronger form of participation/partaking. This, however, is not Keating's point.

Instead, Keating seems to further undermine his ultimate point about participation when he shows that Athanasius (who, as noted earlier, embraced the idea of limited deification) claimed that the Son is the Father's not by participation, but rather by being of the essence of the Father:

> [The Son is] not a creature or work, but an offspring proper to the Father's essence. Wherefore He is very God, existing one in essence with the very Father; while other beings, to whom He said, "I said ye are gods" [Ps 82:6], had this grace from the Father, only by participation of the Word, through the Spirit. . . . For He is Himself the Father's Power and Wisdom, and by partaking of Him things originate are sanctified in the Spirit; but the Son Himself is not Son by participation, but is the Father's own Offspring.[19]

Here Athanasius goes out of his way to identify the Son as *fully* divine. This is the position developed and embraced by the later

19. Athanasius, *Against the Arians* 1.3.9; 3.23.1, in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, 2nd ser., 4:311, 394; quoted in Keating, *Deification and Grace*, 98.

church fathers. Keating, however, insists on reading the exchange formula differently.

Keating offers a remarkable proposal. The exchange formula evidenced in the Bible and in patristic writings before the fourth century should be read with two different meanings for the concept of partaking/participating—namely, when Christ participated in our nature (i.e., became man), that transformation was complete and full; but when we participate in his nature, that process is derivative and does not involve a change in our created nature.

> It is noteworthy that both parts of the "formula of exchange"—the Son became like us, so that we might become like the Son—are expressed in the New Testament in terms of participation. In Hebrews 2:14 the Incarnation itself is depicted in the language of participation: "Since therefore, the children share (*koinōnein*) in flesh and blood, he himself likewise partook (*metechein*) of the same [nature]." Here we have an example of the first sense of participation, namely, sharing in a common nature. In order to redeem us and "to bring many sons to glory" (Heb 2:10), the Son of God came to share fully in our nature, that is, he became a human being. But the goal of the Son sharing in our nature is also stated in participationist language. We are told in 2 Peter 1:4 that God's divine power at work in us is brought to completion by our becoming "partakers (*koinōnoi*) of the divine nature." Here we have in bold and demonstrative language the promise that the Father has sent the Son to deliver us from sin and to cause us to become sharers in the divine nature itself. But in 2 Peter 1:4 we have an example of the second sense of participation, the unequal and derivative sharing by the creature in the infinite Creator. In this case, we as partakers never become, strictly speaking, what we partake of. We partake of the divine life, but do not become God by nature. And so we can rephrase the formula of exchange ("the Son of God became the Son of Man, so that the sons of men might become sons of God") in terms of the two senses of participation found respectively in Hebrews 2 and

> 2 Peter 1. The Son of God partook of our nature and became fully what we are (human beings), so that we might partake of the divine nature and become by grace and participation what he is by nature. To put this in the creedal terminology of the Council of Chalcedon (A.D. 451): The eternal Word of God, consubstantial with the Father, became fully a human being, consubstantial with us in our nature, so that we might become partakers of his divinity. But we never become consubstantial (one in being) with the Father as he is; rather, we are inserted by grace into the divine communion of Persons. This is what it means to become "gods by grace." (p. 101)

For those who embrace the idea of limited deification and wish to reconcile it with the witness of the Bible and the early church fathers, Keating's approach may provide a way out. Nevertheless, there is no evidence to suggest that the biblical authors (and almost no evidence for Irenaeus) would have been so blatantly inconsistent in the course of two halves of one sentence.

Other options available to Roman Catholics do not involve an equivocation in the meaning of *participate/partake*. For instance, one view would be that as the church began to understand more fully who Christ was, it recognized that men could not have their nature remade into the nature of Christ, so the developed understanding of deification became the limited deification advocated by Keating. Alternatively, while one does not see Roman Catholics advocating that humans receive what Irenaeus termed the "faculty of the Uncreated,"[20] there is nothing irreformable that limits the final state of deified men. According to Chalcedon, the single-person Christ became consubstantial with humans and remained consubstantial with his father. To fully embrace the biblical and early church language, it would seem that a deified human could become consubstantial with God while remaining consubstantial with all men (it would always be true that men become gods because of divine grace).

20. See the quotation linked to note 17 above.

For Latter-day Saints who believe that the authority of the early Christian church to define doctrine was lost in the apostasy, the introduction of limited deification language into Catholic thought during the fourth century could be viewed as pointing to a loss of the fulness of the gospel. As creation *ex nihilo* was embraced by the early church and more sophisticated philosophical language became part of theology, the nature of Christ (eternal creator or creature) became an issue. God was "wholly other," and Christ became *homoousian* with the Father. Humans became limited in their future divinity.

Conclusion

For many years the doctrine of deification was discussed only in scholarly contexts. Now, as the writings of the church fathers are enjoying widespread availability, the questions concerning this doctrine are being explored further. There may be solutions to the participation puzzle that are more elegant than Keating's, and there is surely more insight and perspective to be gleaned from the writings of the church fathers. In any event, the Latter-day Saint position that humans can ultimately become fully divine through the work of Christ and their growth in him is solidly grounded in the Bible and in the beliefs of the very early Christian church.[21]

Keating's final chapter retraces his discussion of deification and emphasizes the beauty and awe-inspiring nature of this doctrine. Deification in any of its manifestations is a powerful concept and should pull the Christian closer to God. Because Keating brings out the message of deification contained in the New Testament and in the

21. After discussing the two forms of participation, Keating does address the solution that many attribute to the theologian Gregory Palamas (1296–1359), though early hints exist in the writings of the Cappadocian fathers and Irenaeus: God's energies are fully shared with men, but his essence is unsharable and unknowable. The Eastern Church preserved the idea of deification (or theosis) very openly. The Western Church (certainly in Aquinas's thought but in other sources too) has suggested that the beatific vision (a way of describing what those in heaven experience of God) includes God's energies and essence. Add to this God's simplicity in Western thought, and it would seem to demand that the Eastern solution is difficult to embrace within a Western tradition. Still this may be another option for the faithful Roman Catholic.

writings of the early church fathers, his book, even on this ground alone, is a valuable resource. The Roman Catholic will find a faithful presentation of what it means in that religious tradition for humans to become gods. The Latter-day Saint will find some interesting arguments but will have a different picture of deification in the Bible and the early Christian church. The fulness of life that God wishes to bestow upon his children serves to magnify his goodness and glory. The gospel restoration ushered in by the Prophet Joseph Smith points all people to the wonderful culmination of personal growth toward God, and recognizing this should propel all of us to greater life and fuller love of our Father in Heaven.