

CHRISTOPHER J. MERTENS

THE BEATITUDES: A PATHWAY TO THEOSIS



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by Christopher J. Mertens

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To my wife, Rhonda

FORWARD

Father Deacon Christopher Mertens' thesis on 'THE BEATITUDES: A PATHWAY TO THEOSIS' is an exceptional exposé submitted as a Master's thesis to the Faculty of the Antiochian House of Studies, in partial fulfillment of the Master of Arts in Applied Orthodox Theology. In the Gospel of St. Mark, the Lord says: "Verily I say unto you, that there be some of them that stand here, which shall not taste of death, till they have seen the Kingdom of God come with power." (Mark 9:1). These words enlighten the hearts and minds of those who seek theosis and are in pursuit of the Kingdom of God during the span of their lives. In this regard, Deacon's Mertens' book is received as an attempt to read the Beatitudes in the light of the understanding of the Scriptures; especially the life of Moses the prophet and, elaborated by St. Gregory of Nyssa, the Blessed Augustine, St. John Chrysostom, and other Church Fathers, who used the Beatitudes as a ladder of ascent, leading the faithful to theosis.

Deacon Christopher's book is an attempt to bring together the biblical account with the writings of Church Fathers, enriched by the comments of great theologians such as Vladimir Lossky, Bishop Kallistos of Diokleia, and others who converge harmoniously to 'emphacize the truth that endeavoring to ascend the spiritual summit to ultimate union with God ironically opens limitless horizons' (chapter 2).

ST. Symeon The New Theologian, on the Mystical life, says blessed are those who daily feed on Christ and are cleansed of every stain of both soul and body, and those who have recognized already the divine and have become themselves already sons and co-participants of the resurrection light of the Lord. And here I can humbly and proudly say:

There is no doubt that those who seek knowledge of the Scriptures and the comments of the church fathers will find in this book a path of spiritual ascent that will penetrate the hearts and minds of those who seek spiritual perfection and eternal life.

Thanks to Deacon Christopher for his valuable book and for expressing by the Beatitudes the eternal progress in the journey of the soul to theosis and to the acquisition of virtues (Epilogue).

V. Rev. Joseph Antypas
St. George Orthodox Church, Troy, Michigan

PREFACE

This book is a publication of my master's thesis in Applied Orthodox Theology from the Antiochian House of Studies (AHOS), in partnership with the Saint John of Damascus School of Theology of the University of Balamand. The idea for the thesis topic was borne out of the course work on the mystical theology of the Church. I became convinced of the necessity of incorporating an apophatic approach in acquiring knowledge of God to ensure continual growth in the spiritual life and progress toward the goal of deeper communion with God. At the same time, I kept asking myself, how does one go about developing an apophatic disposition and infuse it into everyday living? How does one consciously go about advancing the soul toward theosis in a concrete way?

As I puzzled over these questions, I suppose it was not too surprising that my thoughts gravitated toward the Beatitudes. After all, for as long as I can remember, I've esteemed the Beatitudes to be the greatest words spoken by our Lord, or ever spoken for that matter. They are music to my heart. I've always had the sense that the Beatitudes are the Gospel, containing all the treasures of the Kingdom of God, just waiting to be found if only one would commit to the task of digging. Serendipitously, I was teaching an adult education series at my parish on the Beatitudes at the same time I was taking the course work on the mystical theology of the Church. I began to study St. Gregory of Nyssa's sermons on the Beatitudes as a source of material for the adult education series I was teaching. I was delighted and greatly encouraged to discover that St. Gregory saw the Beatitudes as a ladder to ascend in the journey of the soul towards mystical union with God, affirming my initial instincts.

The instructional method employed by St. Gregory in his sermons on the Beatitudes is to expound each virtue congratulated, and then provide guidance for the follower of Christ to stretch and expand his soul in the assimilation of the virtues towards union with the

infinite glory and goodness of the Holy Trinity. The Beatitudes for St. Gregory provide instructions and guidance for the development of the spiritual life with an apophatic approach that leads to ever-greater participation in the Divine Life. At this point, there was no question of what my thesis topic would be. I had found the answer to the questions I had been asking myself. The answer to my questions is this: It is the Beatitudes that illuminate the path and guide the soul toward theosis in a step-by-step, concrete way.

The goal of this book is to show how each Beatitude opens up boundless opportunities for progress in contemplation and inner purification at each step in the ascent of soul towards union with God. Although the contributions from many Church Fathers and churchmen are included in this work, the primary approach taken to accomplish the goal of this work is to produce a synthesis of the writings of St. John Chrysostom, Blessed Augustin, and St. Gregory of Nyssa. At each step in the ladder of the Beatitudes, St. John Chrysostom illuminates the initial approach to assimilating the virtues expressed in the Beatitudes by identifying and characterizing ways of *putting on Christ*. The apophatic approach to extend beyond the affirmative knowledge of the Beatitudes is revealed most clearly in the writings of St. Gregory of Nyssa. The theological approach of Blessed Augustin falls somewhere in between the literal application of St. John and the mystical theology of St. Gregory. The writings of these three Church Fathers provide the theological core of achieving the objective of this book: - i.e., to show that the Beatitudes provide a pathway to theosis.

The Church is blessed to possess the writings of these three Fathers on the Beatitudes. Each one has a unique, yet complementary, theological vision for growth in the spiritual life. Taken together, the writings from these three Fathers provide a comprehensive view of the pathway to theosis and a trustworthy guide on navigating the soul along its journey to communion with God. St. Gregory and Blessed Augustin both saw the Beatitudes as an image of a ladder, by which Christ the Word leads His follower one step at a time towards union with God. Blessed Augustin saw the Beatitudes more as a ladder leading the faithful from the lesser virtues to the more excellent. St. Gregory, whose apophatic approach is more explicit, sees the Beatitudes as a ladder leading to mystical union with God. One does not *see* God's essence, but rather *sees* God by possessing Him within

oneself. St. Gregory agrees with Blessed Augustin that the Beatific Vision is achieved by developing the virtues of the soul, especially inner purity and freedom from the passions.

In contrast to St. Gregory and Blessed Augustin, who were heavily influenced by the Alexandrian school of biblical interpretation, St. John Chrysostom is grounded in the Antiochene school of interpretation. Thus, St. John places more emphasis on the literal sense of the biblical text. He sees the Beatitudes as Jesus's commandments to apply to the flesh, and the rewards of such obedience as sensible promises rather than mystical or eschatological promises. Nevertheless, one can still discern the image of a ladder in the order of the Beatitudes in St. John's interpretation, however obliquely, as his emphasis shifts from the sensible realm to the spiritual realm in proceeding from the first to the last of the Beatitudes.

The foundational background and context of this book for seeing the Beatitudes as a pathway to theosis is provided in the second chapter of this book by summarizing St. Gregory of Nyssa's exegesis of the Book of Exodus in his work entitled *The Life of Moses*. For St. Gregory, the life of Moses is a prophetic symbol of the spiritual journey of the soul to God. The apophatic approach implied by the Beatitudes was prefigured in Moses's ascent of Mount Sinai, which the Church has always associated with the ascent to knowledge of God and union with Him.

I am grateful for the encouragement and feedback from Fr. Joseph Antypas throughout the Doctrine courses of AHOS, and for his encouragement to go forward and pursue this topic for my thesis, which is now being published as a book. I am also thankful for Fr. David Hester for carefully reading the manuscript and identifying several typographical mistakes. Any remaining errors are due to my oversight and negligence.

I am eternally grateful for the love and support of my traveling companion along the journey to God, my wife, Rhonda. There were many occasions when she wished I was spending time with her rather than with my nose in a book or writing my thesis. Her loving sacrifice is more than I deserve.

THE BEATITUDES: A PATHWAY TO THEOSIS

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Beatitude is the possession of all that is good, from which nothing is absent that a good desire may want¹. Blessedness is the state of beatitude which is unconditional happiness and contentment. The one thing truly blessed is God Himself, for blessedness is God's way of being. "The Lord God is blessed; blessed is the Lord from day to day" (Ps. 67:19-20 [The Orthodox Study Bible]). The nature of the Godhead is inaccessible and unknowable to the created order (e.g., John 1:18; I John 4:12; I Tim. 6:16). Nevertheless, whatever the Divine Life may be in its ineffable and incomprehensible goodness, it is beatitude. The beatitude of God is an inexpressible beauty, which is very grace, wisdom, and power; it is the true light, which is the fountain of all goodness, and mighty above all else; it is the one thing lovable which is always the same, always rejoicing in infinite happiness².

Man is created in the *image* and *likeness* of God (Gen. 1:26-28). Discerning the ways in which man is the image and likeness of God has long been a subject of intense investigation in the writings of the Church Fathers and in Scripture itself. According to the Book of Wisdom, "God created man for immortality and made him an image of His own eternity" (Wisd. of Sol. 2:23). The *image* of God is what forms the ontological basis of man's relationship to God³ (cf. Gen. 2:7). To summarize St. Gregory of Nyssa, "the soul of man is created

¹ St. Gregory of Nyssa, *The Lord's Prayer, The Beatitudes*, trans. Hilda C. Graef, vol. 18, Ancient Christian Writers: The Works of the Fathers in Translation, ed. Johannes Quasten and Joseph C. Plumpe (New York: Paulist Press, 1954), 87.

² *Ibid.*, 87.

³ Norman Russell, *Fellow Workers with God: Orthodox Thinking on Theosis*, Book 5 of the Foundations Series (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Press, 2009), 91.

in the image of God as a mirror reflecting Him.”⁴ The *likeness* of God is a dynamic realization of the capacity of man to bear the image of God and increase in His divine glory and goodness⁵. As a result, God has sown within each human being all the gifts, in seed-like form, which form us in His image and lead us toward His likeness⁶. Being made in the image and likeness of God (Gen. 1:26-28), man is called to the blessed life (Gen. 2:7-8; 3:8, Ps. 132:3), to the extent that he freely participates in the true beatitude (Eph. 1:3-6; 2 Pet. 1:2-4), as a communicant of divine grace⁷.

The Only-Begotten Son, who fashioned man’s soul in the likeness of the only Blessed One (Gen. 1:26-28; Col. 1:15-17), describes in the opening words of His Sermon on the Mount all that produces beatitude (Matt. 5:3-10). The beatific form is communion with God, as St. Gregory of Nyssa exclaimed: “The Lord does not say it is blessed to know something about God, but to have God present within oneself.”⁸ That beatitude is the fulfillment of the divine call of man as the attainment of union with God is made explicit by the Apostle Paul: “To them [the saints] God willed to make known what are the riches of the glory of this mystery [of salvation] among the Gentiles: which is Christ in you, the hope of glory” (Col. 1:27; see also John 14:14-21; 17:3; 20:26). Therefore, the Beatitudes illuminate the pathway to *theosis*⁹ (“*deification*” or “*divinization*”), which is a journey of eternal progress

⁴ Hilda C. Graef, introduction to *The Lord’s Prayer, The Beatitudes*, by St. Gregory of Nyssa, 17.

⁵ Russell, *Fellow Workers with God: Orthodox Thinking on Theosis*, 91.

⁶ Archimandrite Christoforos Stavropoulos, *Partakers of Divine Nature*, trans. Rev. Dr. Stanley Harakas, 6th printing (Minneapolis: Light and Life Publishing, 1976), 26.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 17-19.

⁸ St. Gregory of Nyssa, *The Lord’s Prayer, The Beatitudes*, 148.

⁹ Christopher Venianmin, *The Orthodox Understanding of Salvation: “Theosis” in Scripture and Tradition* (Dalton, PA: Mount Thabor, 2016), 14, 25. *Theosis* is the *deification* or *divinization* of the entire person in Christ through the union of the human with the divine, to be “partakers of the divine nature” (2 Pet. 1:4) – i.e., participants in the nature of God and in the life of Christ (John 10:25-39; Ps. 81:6). There is an exchange of lives in our souls and bodies with His flesh, His humanity, which is achieved by our ascetic struggles through the grace of the Holy Spirit in the Sacraments of the Church.

in the virtuous life (Matt. 5:48) by which a perpetual transformation is made into the likeness of God “from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord” (2 Cor. 3:18).

Theosis is a complex term with both anthropological and economic components. Norman Russell provides a definition that nicely synthesizes the teachings from Scripture and the Church Fathers:

Theosis is the restoration as persons to integrity and wholeness by participation in Christ through the Holy Spirit, in a process which is initiated in this world through our life of ecclesial communion and moral striving and finds ultimate fulfillment in our union with the Father – all within the broad content of the divine economy¹⁰.

The word theosis is formed from the Greek word *theoo*, which means “to make god”¹¹. *Theosis* was first used in the fourth century by St. Gregory of Nazianzus. However, the word *theosis* encompasses an understanding of the purpose and process of man’s deification that is traced back to the second century Church Fathers and the New Testament writers themselves. Sts. Clement of Alexandria, Hippolytus of Rome, and Irenaeus of Lyon discussed various aspects of theosis as they reflected on the significance of Christ in the Scriptures. The most frequent biblical texts used by the Church Fathers to support their teaching on deification are: Ps. 81:6, “I said you are gods” and 2 Pet. 1:4, “partakers of divine nature.” These passages were consistently quoted from the beginning of the Church as referring to theosis¹². The quotation from Psalm 81 is much older and the most important. The earliest Christian text to quote this passage is the Gospel of John (John 10:34-36). St. John the Evangelist, Sts. Irenaeus of Lyon and Clement of Alexandria, all base their interpretations of this text on an earlier Jewish tradition¹³. St. Athanasius in the fourth century rephrased the earlier assertion made by St. Irenaeus concerning

¹⁰ Russell, *Fellow Workers with God: Orthodox Thinking on Theosis*, 21.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 36.

¹² *Ibid.*, 55-56. See also Hosea 1:10.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 56-57. In the early rabbinic tradition, the verses in Psalm 81 were originally addressed either to Adam and Eve at the time of their fall, or to the

Christ¹⁴, which is now referred to as the “exchange formula”: “He [Christ] became human that we might become divine.” The passage from the second epistle of St. Peter (2 Pet. 1:4) was not often quoted until applied by St. Cyril of Alexandria to the Christological debates of the fifth century. In all these writings, it is said that the divine nature that man shares is not the essential Being of God, but God’s attributes of glory and goodness¹⁵. From the time of St. Irenaeus in the second century to St. Maximus the Confessor in the seventh century, the Church Fathers saw theosis as summarizing the very purpose of the Incarnation: the self-emptying love of God (*kenosis* in Greek) evoking a fervent human response (theosis), the result of which is the divinization of the human person mirroring the humanization of the divine Word¹⁶.

The very intent of the Beatitudes is to issue the divine call for man to enter into the blessedness of the Divine Life via an eternal journey of the soul to blessed union with God. The very meaning of the Beatitudes is to illuminate the pathway to theosis by providing a step-by-step guide on how to advance to ever greater participation in the Divine Life.

In the preface to the Beatitudes (Matt. 5:1-2), Jesus went up the mountain for two reasons¹⁷. First, to fulfill the messianic prophecy of bringing the “good tidings” of the gospel (Luke 2:10-11; Isa. 40:9): “O You who bring good tidings to Zion, go into the high mountain; O You who bring good tidings to Jerusalem, lift up Your voice with strength; lift it up, be not afraid. Say to the cities of Judah, ‘Behold your God’”. Secondly, the proclamation of the “good tidings” from the “high mountain” is an invitation to all people to ascend the mountain with Him, to leave the low-ground of superficial and ignoble living, that one may reach the spiritual mountain of sublime

Israelites when they worshipped the golden calf in the desert after their exodus from Egypt.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 23-24.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 65. See 2 Pet. 1:3-7.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 39-40.

¹⁷ Anonymous, *Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture: New Testament Ia; Matthew 1-13*, ed. Manlio Simonetti (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2001), 78.

contemplation¹⁸. The divine word also says, “many Gentiles shall travel and say, ‘Come and let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob. He will proclaim His way to us, and we shall walk in it’” (Isa. 2:3), in order that God may be “beheld” by His people (cf. Isa. 40:9).

Furthermore, by ascending the mountain, Jesus showed by symbols and actions that He is the One who handed down the Mosaic Law on Mount Sinai (Exod. 19-20). At the same time, He is the One who is the author and the inaugurator of the New Covenant¹⁹. The blessings of the New Covenant are received by ascending the mountain. Moreover, the mountain is ascended by imitating Jesus Christ in what is possible for human nature – i.e., the dispositions and actions expressed in the Beatitudes – in order that the followers of Christ “may be partakers of the divine nature” through these “exceedingly great and precious promises” (2 Pet. 1:4; Isa. 2:3; 40:9), having put on the blessed form. The words of the Psalmist prefigure the blessedness of the good tidings of the divine call proclaimed by Christ in the Beatitudes when he says, “for there [the mountains of Zion] the Lord commanded the blessing and life forever” (Ps. 132:3).

Human nature is made to assimilate itself to the divine nature through *theognosis*²⁰ (cf. John 10:34-35; 2 Pet. 1:2-4). Thus, the reality of theosis is possible for every person, provided the gifts of the image

¹⁸ St. Gregory of Nyssa, *The Lord's Prayer, The Beatitudes*, 85; Chrysostom, “Homily XV: Matt. V. 1,2”, in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, vol. 10, *Chrysostom: Homilies on the Gospel of Saint Matthew; First Series*, ed. Philip Schaff, 5th printing (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2012), 91.

¹⁹ Chromatius, *Ancient Christian Commentary of Scripture: New Testament Ia: Matthew 1-13*, ed. Manlio Simonetti (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2001), 78; Jer. 38:31-34; Matt. 26:28; 14:24; Luke. 22:17-19; John 6:53-58.

²⁰ Vladimir Lossky, *Orthodox Theology: An Introduction*, trans. Ian and Ihita Kesarcodi-Watson (Crestwood, NY: St Vladimir's Press, 1978), 14-16, 18-20, 25; Vladimir Lossky, *The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church* (Crestwood, NY: St Vladimir's Press, [1957?]), 7-9. *Theognosis* is mystical knowledge of God, which starts from a fact: the revelation of God in Jesus Christ (Heb. 1:3; Col. 1:15), the beginning and ending points in theognosis (Heb. 12:2; Rev. 1:11; 22:13-14). It is a personal working out of the content of the common faith, which implies an existential encounter, reciprocity, with faith as a personal adherence to the personal presence of God who reveals Himself. It is communion: I know as I am known (cf. 1 Cor. 8:3). The initiative in theognosis belongs to God. The unknowable God reveals Himself.

of God are cultivated (Mark. 4:1-9, 13-20). Consequently, theosis is achieved little-by-little through the step-by-step deification of human nature. This divine adoption is the calling and purpose of mankind²¹. However, human nature has been mortified in its state of separation from God through the Fall and individual sin (Rom. 3:23, 8:20). The good tidings of the gospel is that the potential to become like God was restored through the re-creation of humanity realized only by the Incarnation of Jesus Christ (2 Cor. 5:14-17). The redemptive work of the Incarnate Word once again opens the way for human beings to the achievement of theosis²². The Incarnate Christ brings us again to the Father and presents us with the potential of realizing the likeness of God (John 17:3, 9-11). The purpose of Christ's redemption of mankind is to restore the potential for theosis through union with the Holy Trinity (e.g., Gal. 4:4-7)²³. Thus, there is an unending transformation into the likeness of God as man stretches beyond his nature to ever-greater participation in the Divine Life²⁴ through deifying grace (John 17:6-26; Eph. 1:3-6, 17-23; 2:22; 3:14-19; 4:11-13; I Pet. 1:3-4).

Theosis is objectively offered to us by the Incarnate, Crucified, Resurrected, Ascended God the Word. In Christ Jesus man finds his true place, "on the right hand of the Father" (cf. Mark 16:19; John 17:24), sharing in the Divine Life. In the same way that the two natures of Christ are united without confusion, man never ceases to be His creatures. God alone is Uncreated and Pre-eternal²⁵. It is the Holy Spirit who subjectively transmits to humanity what is offered to us objectively by Christ (Gal. 4:6-7). Theosis, therefore, is achieved by uniting to our Lord Jesus Christ in baptism through in the Holy Spirit (Matt. 28:19-20; Mark 16:16; Acts 2:38-39; Rom 6:3-11; 8:1-17; Gal. 3:26-29; Col. 3:6-15), to the glory of God the Father (cf. 1 Pet. 1:1-2; Titus

Because He transcends in His personal existence, in His very essence, He can really make Himself a participator in His divine economy (John 1:18).

²¹ Stavropoulos, *Partakers of Divine Nature*, 23-25.

²² *Ibid.*, 28-29.

²³ Veniamin, *The Orthodox Understanding of Salvation*, 40.

²⁴ Abraham J. Malherbe and Everett Ferguson, Introduction to *Gregory of Nyssa: The Life of Moses*, The Classics of Western Spirituality (New York: Paulist Press, 1978), 12.

²⁵ Stavropoulos, *Partakers of Divine Nature*, 40.

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BOOK ENDORSEMENTS

To be blessed ourselves, God has to be in us. Deacon Christopher Mertens uses some of the best of the Church's mystical tradition to demonstrate how we share in God's blessedness. He concisely shows how the Beatitudes are foundational to the New Covenant, and how Christ serves as the "new Moses" in bringing people into communion with God. This book is for those who, having been introduced to the Church's Tradition, desire to delve further into their life in Christ. Pastors will also find the work beneficial for straightforwardly instructing their parishioners. Deacon Christopher's work is well worth the read.

- Bishop Thomas Joseph
Diocese of Oakland, Charleston, and the Mid-Atlantic,
Antiochian Orthodox Christian Archdiocese of North
America
- Rev. Father James Purdie
Pastor of Saint Basil the Great Orthodox Christian
Church, Hampton, Virginia

I would like to congratulate Dn. Christopher J. Mertens for publishing his Master thesis in Applied Orthodox theology, titled: "The Beatitudes: A Pathway to Theosis." In his thesis, Dn. Christopher gives a full account of the sermon on the mount, delivered by our Lord Jesus Christ, whose authority is greater than that of Moses, for He proclaims the new Torah, the spiritual Covenant. In the Beatitudes, Jesus describes the way of true discipleship, of the character of those who are worthy to be called children of God, and of the manner of ascending a ladder which leads to theosis. On behalf of the faculty of the Antiochian House of Studies, I commend Dn. Christopher for his work, hoping that his thesis will imbue the reader with spiritual benefits.

— V. Rev. Father Michel Najim (Th.D)
President of the Antiochian House of Studies, La Verne,
California

While there are a great many books dealing with the subject of Theosis at the level of dogmatic and mystical theology, including its elucidation in the fathers and grounding in the Scriptures, Mertens here provides a different approach. Through the interpretive lens of Gregory of Nyssa and other fathers, he utilizes Christ's own homiletic approach in the Sermon on the Mount to provide a 'way in' which connects the mystical life of the church to the life of the faithful within the world. The Beatitudes are here seen to be not simply moral imperatives or a virtue list but a means of spiritual ascent. The means of participation in the divine life described by the Beatitudes form a ladder stretching from earth to heaven and from this age to the eternal age to come.

— Rev. Father Stephen De Young (Ph.D)
Pastor of Archangel Gabriel Orthodox Church, Lafayette,
Louisiana

No journey is as difficult as the one we make towards God and His blessedness. Yet, no journey has been so well-prepared and well-furnished. Fr. Deacon Christopher Mertens offers a wealth of material both in understanding as well as application in his study of the Beatitudes. Readers will appreciate what is offered to them, the treasures both new and old, of the Kingdom of God.

— V. Rev. Father Stephen Freeman
Pastor of Saint Anne Orthodox Church, Knoxville / Oak
Ridge, Tennessee

Mankind is created in the image and likeness of God for the purpose of sharing in the Divine Life and participating in the blessedness of the infinite glory and goodness of the Holy Trinity. This Beatific Vision is not *seeing* God in His essence, but rather *seeing* God by possessing Him within oneself. Communion with God is attained through the cooperation of the divine and human will, whereby the follower of Jesus Christ puts on Christ through the sacraments of the Church and imitates the life of Christ through the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit, to the glory of God the Father. Amen. Jesus describes in the opening words of His Sermon on the Mount all that produces beatitude. The very intent of the Beatitudes is to issue the Father's divine call for man to enter in the blessedness of the Divine Life. Therefore, the Beatitudes illuminate the pathway to theosis ("deification" or "divinization"), which is a journey of eternal progress in the virtuous life by which a perpetual transformation is made into the likeness of God *from glory to glory*. The Scriptures and the patristic writings of the Church Fathers provide the theological foundation of this book, the objective of which is to provide a guide for the soul to consciously advance in the spiritual life toward the divine goal of theosis in a step-by-step, concrete way.



Dr. Christopher J. Mertens is a deacon in the Antiochian Orthodox Christian Archdiocese of North America. He serves at the parish of Saint Basil the Great in Hampton, Virginia. He received a master's degree in Applied Orthodox Theology from the Antiochian House of Studies in partnership with the Saint John of Damascus School of Theology of the University of Balamand in the Republic of Lebanon, under the aegis of the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Antioch. He is a Knight of the Order of St. Ignatius of Antioch. He holds a PhD in Physics from the Georgia Institute of Technology and is a Senior Research Physicist at NASA Langley Research Center in

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