

Theotic Governance and the Ecumenical Administration of the Commons: A Theological Framework for Collective Stewardship

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Abstract

As conceptualized by Garrett Hardin, the tragedy of the commons describes the overexploitation of shared resources due to individual self-interest, leading to ecological and social collapse. While economic frameworks such as Elinor Ostrom's polycentric governance offer institutional solutions, they often fail to address the ontological, spiritual, and ethical dimensions that shape human decision-making in resource management. This paper introduces **Theotic Governance** as a theological framework that integrates the Orthodox Christian concept of theosis (divinization through grace) and ecumenical cooperation to propose an alternative model for administering the commons through collective stewardship.

This study explores the research question: *How can Theotic Governance inform an ecumenical model of collective administration for the commons, transcending self-interest and fostering sustainable governance?*

Rooted in theological anthropology, this paper argues that *theosis*—the process of human participation in the divine life—reorients the individual's relationship with God, the community, and creation, thereby fostering an ethical framework resistant to depletion and overexploitation. It proposes that four interdependent pillars—*koinonía* (communion), *agape* (sacrificial love), *diakonía* (service), and *asceticism* (self-restraint)—provide an alternative moral and relational foundation for sustainable commons governance. These pillars ensure that the administration of shared resources is not merely a technical or economic challenge but a spiritual and communal responsibility.

Methodology

This study employs a qualitative content analysis of action plans submitted by the Laudato Si' Action Platform (LSAP) participants. These plans, developed by faith-based organizations, dioceses, and grassroots initiatives, provide empirical data on how theological narratives shape real-world approaches to commons governance. The analysis will identify key themes in ecological conversion, community-driven governance, and theological motivations for environmental stewardship. By studying these texts, the research aims to illustrate how Theotic Governance is already implicitly applied in faith-based environmental initiatives.

The theoretical framework integrates:

- Theological anthropology, particularly Patristic and Orthodox thought (Athanasius, Gregory of Nyssa, Maximus the Confessor), conceptualizes *theosis* as both an individual and communal process.
- Catholic social teaching and ecumenical environmental commitments, including *Laudato Si'*, the World Council of Churches' initiatives on climate justice, and Orthodox eco-theology.
- Economic theories on commons governance, particularly Ostrom's design principles for collective action and reciprocal trust models.

Expected Contribution

This paper contributes to the fields of theology, integral ecology, economics, ecological ethics, and sustainability studies by formalizing Theotic Governance as a novel theological theory for the administration of the commons. It challenges conventional governance models by arguing that spiritual transformation (*theosis*) is a prerequisite for effective collective action. The findings will offer theological and policy insights for faith communities, environmental policymakers, and collaborative governance initiatives, emphasizing the role of ecumenism in fostering cooperative and sustainable stewardship of shared resources.

By positioning Theotic Governance as a model for collective stewardship, this paper seeks to redefine resource management beyond secular economic paradigms, demonstrating how theological traditions provide a transformative moral and communal structure for the just and sustainable administration of the commons.

Core References:

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