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under
Taras Khomych, Oleksandra Vakula and Oleh Kindiy
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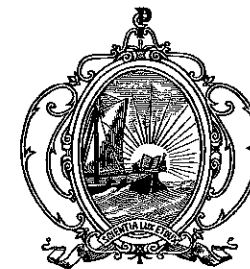
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Introduction

This volume of articles grew out of the international conference "The Image of the Perfect Christian in Patristic Thought" held on 11-12 September 2009 at the Ukrainian Catholic University (Lviv, Ukraine). The conference was jointly organized by the Departments of Theology of the Ukrainian Catholic University and the University of Notre Dame (IN, USA). The purpose of this conference was to draw attention of patristic scholars to the notion of perfection, which has largely been neglected in contemporary scholarship, and to explore relevant patristic research, both contextually and comparatively. In view of this, the organisers invited scholars, specialising in different fields of patristic studies, from several countries, including Belgium, Italy, Poland, Russia, Slovakia, the Netherlands, Ukraine and USA. The speakers presented a variety of understandings of the idea of perfection in a number of different contexts, discussing various Greek, Latin, Syrian, Armenian and Coptic writings. With respect to the period of studies, the papers ranged from the first century C.E. (with the discussion of the *Didache*) through the Byzantine period till the present times (with the presentations on the use of patristic sources in contemporary ecumenical debates and today's social teachings of various Churches).

Patristic views of perfection obviously have biblical roots. This notion occurs both in the Old and the New Testaments. With respect to human beings, it appears already in the book of *Deuteronomy*, offering the following admonition: 'You shall be perfect (תמים) before the Lord your God' (18:13). This ideal was also put forward in the New Testament. According to *the Gospel of Matthew*, which was highly influential amongst early Christians, perfection is inherent to God and yet, it is required of Jesus' followers. In the Sermon on the Mount, more specifically, Jesus concludes his teaching on the love of the enemy with the following exhortation: 'Therefore, be perfect (τέλειοι) as your heavenly Father is perfect (τέλειος)' (*Matth. 5:48*), setting an image of Divine perfection as the goal for the believer. A similar idea is present in other New Testament passages (see *John 17:22f.*; *Phil. 3:12-4*; *1 John 4:17*; etc.), which obviously triggered early Christian reflection on perfection. This reflection, at the same time, did not take place in isolation of the views current in the writers' own environments. In this vein, besides the biblical passages, various concepts of the Greek philosophical tradition, especially ideas of Platonic, Aristotelian and Stoic systems of thought, which were influential amongst intellectuals in the Roman and later on the Byzantine empire, also shaped Patristic teachings (especially of the Greek-speaking authors) on perfection in various ways.

Influenced thus by the scriptural pericopes and sometimes also the philosophical tradition of the day, many Church Fathers used the language of perfection in order to present the goal of Christian existence. In this respect perfection appeared predominantly as an eschatological (and in some cases also a protological)