

Article

The “God-Man Living”: Deification in Practical Theology

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Abstract: The doctrine of deification (or *theosis*) has seen renewed interest in recent decades within lines of inquiry that extend beyond its traditional association with the Eastern Orthodox tradition. The ascendancy of Tuomo Mannermaa’s Finnish interpretation of Luther—a rereading of the mercurial monk linking his doctrine of justification to deification—was an important catalyst of this turn of events, as it prompted scholars to reexamine the presence of deification–imagery within the intellectual topography of significant Protestant figures. Initially regarded as absent from, alien to, or even contradictory with Western Protestantism, deification is increasingly being recognized as a core feature of biblical soteriology—particularly in relation to articulating the contours of what union with Christ and/or participation in the divine nature (2 Pet 1:4) truly entails. Indeed, several biblical specialists—Michael Gorman, Ben Blackwell, Stephen Finlan, L. Ann Jervis, and others—following the lead of their theologian counterparts, have similarly proposed that deification best characterizes both Pauline and Johannine soteriologies. Although scholars are now exploring how deification operates within the theological frameworks of key Protestants, two significant issues persist within the ever-growing body of literature on the doctrine. The first issue concerns adequately *defining deification*, as its contours and content differ among individual thinkers and across theological, chronological, and geographic spectrums. Norman Russell aptly recognizes this problem due to his decades-long research tracing the evolution of the concept of deification and notes that the doctrine requires a clear working definition due to entering both mainstream theological traditions—manifesting in diverse forms—and popular spirituality. The lack of a clear definition is directly tied to a second issue—little attention has been given to articulating the doctrine’s *practical disciplines and lived experience* within theological frameworks external to Eastern Orthodoxy, and more recently, the Western academy. To fill this lacuna in scholarship, we introduce a portrayal of deification advanced by a significant Christian voice from the Global South, Witness Lee (1905–1997), whose theological vision presents a distinctive understanding of the practical experienced of deification called the “God-man living”.

Keywords: deification; theosis; practical theology; imitatio Christi; sanctification; Witness Lee; Living Stream Ministry; God-man living; divine and mystical realm; Watchman Nee



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1. Introduction: Aims and Scope

Though less known in Western academia, Witness Lee’s robust understanding of deification¹—promulgated apart from Roman Catholic sacramental or Eastern Orthodox ascetic conceptions²—offers a practical, lived experience of divine participation. Lee’s writings shift the discussion surrounding deification from ontological speculation to an existential and ecclesial reality and, by doing so, provides a valuable dialogue partner for

those outside and/or averse to “high church” traditions. The two ensuing sections of this article introduce Lee, his theological outlook, and a working definition of what deification *is* and *is not* within his corpus.

The remainder of the article addresses the issue at hand—Lee’s articulation of the *practical implications of deification* in the daily life of lay believers. While a near-unanimous consensus among scholars is that deification promises much in the next age—immortality, participation in God’s glory and power, and a glorified/resurrected body—details pertaining to the present life are more sparsely stated. To be sure, some past thinkers have linked deification to the formation or growth of virtue within individuals, and a subset propose that it entails a cruciform life of suffering mirroring and even re-narrating Christ’s own sufferings.³ These insights are crucial, as Christian deification follows the same trajectory of Jesus of Nazareth, “from the manger to the cross”.

Much more, however, can be said about the experience of deification in believers’ present lives. Other scholars emphasize that this transformative process involves ever-increasing conformity to Christ’s entire life—not just his sufferings—leading to the notion of “Christosis” or “Christification” (Blackwell 2016; Cooper 2014; McGrath 2024). This is a cogent description of deification: becoming fully conformed to the person of Jesus Christ. Yet, like many other Christian doctrines, deification must be transferred from the ethereal to the practical and from the theoretical to the devotional in order to impact the lives of lay Christians (Austin 2015).⁴

Lee conceives of deification as the progressive, transformative reproduction of Christ’s life within believers that is manifestly expressed in their daily lives. To examine his claims, we contrastively place the “God-man living” in dialogue with the broad concept of *imitatio Christi* (“imitating Christ”)—i.e., the notion of mimetically modeling or following the example of Jesus that influences numerous groups across theological, sociolinguistic, and denominational spectrums to this day—to clarify key concerns of each theological outlook. Ultimately, by drawing from several of Lee’s publications, we articulate a vision of *deification in practice*—i.e., the “God-man living”—which we suggest is an important contribution to the growing line of inquiry surrounding deification both due to incorporating a non-Western perspective and Lee’s emphasis on practical spirituality.

2. Introducing Witness Lee

Witness Lee is a prominent figure among Chinese and Chinese-American Christians and exerts a profound influence upon theological and ecclesiological currents in the Global South. He is less familiar within the Western academy for three reasons: (1) his ministry emphasizes discipling lay Christians as opposed to directly engaging with academic scholarship; (2) perhaps relatedly, there is a paucity of scholarly engagement with his theology and influence; and (3) he has no official biography published in English.⁵

Born in northern China in 1905, Lee was raised in a Christian household. His mother, a third-generation Southern Baptist, played a significant role in his upbringing and afforded him the opportunity to attend a Southern Baptist Chinese elementary school and the Presbyterian English Mission College in Chefoo. At 19, Lee had a dynamic conversion experience after attending a gospel gathering led by female evangelist Peace Wang (1899–1969) (Lee 1991, pp. 108–13; Lee 2004–2020, vol. 72, p. 102). His early adult years were spent among the Brethren Assemblies (Benjamin Newton branch) before moving to Shanghai to work with Watchman Nee in 1934. Lee then served as editor of one of Nee’s periodical *The Christian* for six years (1934–1940) and began traveling to establish local churches. By 1949, Nee and Lee had established more than 400 congregations in 30 provinces across China.

Due to the changing political landscape after the Second World War, Nee implored Lee to leave China and settle in Taiwan. This proved prescient, as the newly formed Communist

regime imprisoned Nee and other church leaders only three years later. From 1949 to 1962, Lee established hundreds of local churches in Taiwan, the Philippines, Malaysia, Indonesia, Singapore, Japan, and Korea. He moved to California in 1962, where he founded a publishing house Living Stream Ministry, established churches on six continents, completed a commentary series of the 66 books of Scripture entitled *The Life-Study of the Bible (LS)*, and delivered a series of messages outlining his theological outlook, *The Conclusion of the New Testament (CNT)*. He passed away in 1997 at age 91. Today, an estimated 1.5–2 million Christians meet in churches directly established by Nee and Lee’s ministry, and tens of millions of believers in underground Chinese churches continue to be formatively shaped by their writings.

A significant result of Lee’s six decades of ministry is a voluminous corpus. The *Collected Works of Witness Lee (CWWL)* comprises 139 volumes containing over 78,000 pages.⁶ Recently, this entire collection was digitized and made accessible via an online subscription service, offering an unprecedented ability to comprehensively examine his theological outlook. Our investigation, however, is limited only to his doctrine of deification, and more specifically, only to what Lee articulates pertaining to the practical experience of deification in believers.

3. Defining Deification

The concept of deification has been defined in different ways at different times in different Christian traditions (Russell 2024, pp. 1–4). One of the earliest definitions comes from Pseudo-Dionysius who states that it is “the attaining of likeness to God and union with him so far as possible” (Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite 2004). This brief statement, while doing little to explicate crucial dimensions of the doctrine, is significant in its early attempt to define what deification *is*, as opposed to earlier thinkers like Irenaeus (1981, p. 526) and Athanasius (1995, p. 65) who employed “exchange” formulas.⁷ Later theologians, including Christian mystics and early Protestants, conveyed the concept of deification in the language of union with Christ. In more recent decades, scholars have promulgated differing typologies of the doctrine (Russell 2004, pp. 1–3; Blackwell 2016, pp. xxii–xxiii, 104–8; Popov 2011, pp. 42–82; Borysov 2019, pp. 18–83, 195; Fairbairn 2007, pp. 289–310). Given this spectrum of possible understandings of deification, we turn to outline a working definition of what “deification” (and, by extension, deification in *practice*) refers to in this article.

We begin by detailing what deification is not. Against portrayals advanced by Mormonism and Eastern mysticism, Christian deification excludes any possibility of human beings becoming God in the Godhead. Fully deified human beings will never be exalted as objects of worship—whether presently or eschatologically—and their deification never results “in any essential change in the Godhead, in the eternal, immutable, triune being of the one true and unique God” (Kangas 2002, p. 3). In Eastern Orthodoxy, this is captured by the Palamite notion of humans participating in God’s energies but not his essence. On the other hand, some Western theologians, due to an aversion to introducing multiplicity into God’s simplicity, safeguard the Creator/creature distinction with different language; namely, by arguing that humans participate in, but never comprehend, God’s essence. The key issue, regardless of the exact conceptual map employed, is that some aspects of Godself are withheld from human participation both in the present age and in eternity.

These aspects include God’s incommunicable attributes—His otherness, transcendence, omnipotence, omniscience, omnipresence, self-existence, or the ability to create *ex nihilo*—all of which humans never share in (Robichaux 2002, p. 40). Additionally, humans cannot initiate the process of deification. As texts such as 2 Corinthians 5:21 and 8:9 indicate, it is only *because* God acted first via the incarnation that He is now accessible for human

beings to partake of and participate in (Gorman 2019, pp. 214–35).⁸ Lastly, humans are not, as early Platonists or modern-day “New Age” practitioners suggest, connatural with God—though, by virtue of being created in the *imago Dei*, there exists a close relationship.⁹ Rather, God is God according to His “very essence”, while “human beings are made gods by participation in the unique God” (Robichaux 2002, p. 37).

The church fathers were unequivocally clear about these matters; a common description of deification during the patristic era was that God is God by nature, while humans become gods by grace.¹⁰ Augustine, for example, distinguishes between the unique God, deified human beings, and pagan idols by employing this description:

Our God, the true God, the one God ‘stood in the assembly of gods,’ that is of many gods, not by nature, but by adoption, by grace. There is a great difference between on the one hand the God who is, the God who is always God, the true God, not the only God, but indeed the god-making God, so to speak, the deifying God, the unmade God who makes gods, and on the other hand gods who become such—but not by a craftsman. (Casiday 2001, p. 29)¹¹

In brief, a Christian understanding of deification maintains a clear Creator/creature distinction while simultaneously describing the unfathomable—human beings truly become God in particular ways.

This sentiment is captured in Witness Lee’s axiomatic definition of deification: “God became a man that man might become God in life and nature *but not in the Godhead*” (Lee 2004–2020, vol. 127, p. 402).¹² This statement requires careful theological clarification. By emphasizing life and nature, Lee distinguishes his view from any ontological fusion between Creator and creature. He affirms the traditional Christian distinction that believers do not share in God’s incommunicable attributes (e.g., omnipotence, omniscience) but rather in His communicable ones—eternal life (John 3:15), holiness (2 Pet 1:4), divine sonship (Rom 8:29), and so on. Lee (2004–2020) fleshes out particularities subsumed within this maxim in “The God-Men’s Divine Right to Participate in God’s Divinity” (vol. 130, p. 213), a book chapter in which he delineates ten items in which regenerated humans participate in by virtue of their deification:

- God’s life (John 3:15; Col 3:4)—that is, the eternal life of God, through regeneration by their believing into Jesus (Lee 2004–2020, vol. 130, p. 215).
- God’s nature (Eph 1:4; 2 Pet 1:4)—that is, to be “sanctified, separated unto God”, and even to be “saturated and permeated with His holy nature” (Lee 2004–2020, vol. 130, p. 216).
- God’s mind (Eph 4:23; Phil 2:5)—to allow “divine mind” penetrated and saturated their mind (Lee 2004–2020, vol. 130, p. 216).
- God’s being (2 Cor 3:18b; Eph 3:8)—to be transformed by virtue of having God’s unsearchable riches dispensed into them.
- God’s image (2 Cor 3:18a; Rom 8:29)—by virtue of their spiritual transformation, an organic and metabolic process, to conform to the resurrected and glorified Christ (Lee 2004–2020, vol. 130, p. 216).
- God’s glory (v. 30; Heb 2:10)—to have their bodies eventually saturated by the divine glory at Christ’s return (Lee 2004–2020, vol. 130, p. 217).
- God’s sonship (Eph 1:5; Rom 8:23)—to truly become sons of God, an identity and organic reality that far transcends juridical and/or forensic notions of adoption.
- God’s manifestation (v. 19)—to participate in the manifestation that one day God will be manifested with His many sons to the entire cosmos (Lee 2004–2020, vol. 130, p. 218).
- God’s likeness (1 John 3:2)—to bear God’s likeness, which is their “great blessing and enjoyment” (Lee 2004–2020, vol. 130, p. 218).

- Being Godkind—God’s species (John 1:12; Rom 8:14, 16). Ultimately, regenerated humans truly possess God’s life, are thereby God-men (Lee 2004–2020, vol. 130, p. 219).

Within Lee’s framework, deification is neither legal adoption alone nor mere moral transformation but actual participation in God’s divinity. The practical result of participating in all of these aspects of God is that believers are empowered to live the “God-man living”.

4. The “God-Man Living”

Attempts to describe a paradigmatic model and/or the practical implications of deification are not necessarily novel. A prominent exponent of deification, Athanasius of Alexandria, biographically depicts the Egyptian monk Anthony of the Desert (251–356) as the paragon of the lived experience of deification and encouraged his readers to imitate Anthony in following Christ (Athanasius 2006; Bouyer 1963, pp. 308–17; Wu 2018, p. 52); notably, this biography is widely credited to the spread of monasticism in Western tradition. Athanasius’s articulation of Anthony’s life influenced later Christians who considered spiritual and ascetics practices such as solitude, silence, fasting, prayer, and the prayerful reading of Scripture as experiential vehicles by which deification could be fully realized. These practices, as well as others, were thereafter subsumed within the fully developed notion of *imitatio Christi*.

4.1. *Imitatio Christi*

The principle of learning Christ is a foundational teaching in the New Testament (Matt 11:29; Eph 4:20). Peter spoke of Christ leaving believers a “model” to follow in His steps (1 Pet 2:21). But what does this model look like? How do believers follow in His footsteps? In his widely acclaimed book *In His Steps*, Charles Sheldon ([1896] 1985) guides Christians to follow Jesus by posing the question, “What would Jesus do? (WWJD)”. This question, popularized in contemporary Christian culture, serves as a means for believers to reflect on their daily life decisions and act in a manner that embodies Jesus’ teachings.¹³ The fundamental idea underpinning “WWJD” is as follows: for Christians to discern the best course of action, they should muse or contemplate upon what Jesus would do in a given situation and, thereafter, act in accordance with that behavioral speculation. Though a cultural trend of the 1990s and 2000s, this idea of mimetically modeling or following Christ can be directly traced back to a treatise written centuries earlier—Thomas à Kempis’s classic *Imitatio Christi* (Kempis 1427).

Despite the positive intent of authors advancing the notion of *imitatio Christi*, reliance upon this model has been critiqued within the sphere of practical theology (Peterson 2007, p. 38). In *Jesus the Way*, Eugene Peterson (2007) argues that following Jesus entails “[entering] into a way of life that is given character, shape, and direction by the one who calls us” (p. 22). Peterson reminds believers that they cannot reduce the “way” of Jesus (John 14:6a) to a means of attaining His “truth;” rather, the “way” (i.e., the living by which He proclaimed the truth) must also be duplicated within believers (ibid., p. 4). Peterson asserts that knowing Jesus personally is essential, as Jesus’s living was not a behavioral model per se, but an outgrowth of his inward constitution. Believers cannot arrive at Jesus’ “way” of living simply by summarizing two thousand years of history, belief, and worship based upon narratives from the Gospels. Instead, the “way” is actually the very person whom Christians believe in and follow as God-with-us (ibid., pp. 39–40).

Patristic authors often commented about Jesus as the “Way”. For example, Origen of Alexandria and Marcellus of Ancyra argued that a rationale undergirding the incarnation of Son of God was to become the unique “Way” for humans to be able to engage in movement toward the Father (Fernández 2021, p. 7). Applying this thought to Christian deification,

the church fathers argued that humans could achieve deification and become God only if Jesus, the incarnated Son of God, was fully divine.¹⁴ These insights are crucial to our discussion; to wholeheartedly affirm the reality of the hypostatic union—and particularly the notion that Christ possessed the complete divine nature—the notion that deification merely being a model of self-help, moral improvement, or extrinsic imitation of Christ must be rejected. Instead, the doctrine strongly implies recognizing that Christ is the unique God-man—and simultaneously the unique Deifier who produces many God-men.

4.2. The Biblical Model of the “God-Man Living” and Its Reproduction

Unlike the historic notion of *imitatio Christi*—which often, but not always, emphasizes the external imitation of Christ’s virtues—Lee describes deification in terms of the reproduction of Christ’s life within believers. For Lee, deification is fundamentally not about extrinsic or analogical similarity between believers and God, but predicated upon the inward, progressive reproduction of the life of the first God-man Jesus Christ within every regenerated believer. Though Lee (1996b) details both the hidden and visible aspects of Christ’s life on earth—as recorded in the Gospels—neither mimesis or *imitatio Christi* serves as the foundation for this replication. Instead, Lee contends that deification is nothing other than the spontaneous expression of God’s life from believers as the divine life (*zōē*) progressively grows, develops, and matures within them.

Patristic authors primarily emphasized Christ’s incarnation whereas the Reformers more often focused upon His crucifixion due to its significance in debates surrounding personal justification. For Lee, Christ’s incarnation and crucifixion are effectively two “bookends” of the Gospels—incredibly important, but not the entire plot of the “good news” of the divine *oikonomia*. In other words, while historical theological reflection has focused primarily upon these two “book ends”, Lee contends that greater attention must be paid to the actual *human living* of the first God-man due to the direct connection between Christ’s earthly living and the believers’ practical experience of deification.

As is the case with most historic Christian thinkers, Lee (*ibid.*, p. 22) first defines the term “God-man” in respect to Christ’s dual natures: i.e., the hypostatic union whereby Jesus’s divine nature and human nature are united without confusion in a single person. Lee, however, articulates a second definition for “God-man” to describe any “man living God”—that is, ordinary human beings living and expressing God. This is important in terms of how Lee conceives of divine sonship; though he applies the term first and foremost to Jesus as the only begotten Son of God (John 1:18), he simultaneously applies it to believers as the many sons of God who are begotten of the Spirit through regeneration (John 1:13; 3:6) to truly become God’s children (Rom 8:16), and per Lee, to belong to God’s “species” (Lee 1996b, pp. 8–9, 14, 22–23, 92–93, 98). To enter into the practical experience of deification—the “God-man living”—Lee urges genuinely reborn believers to realize their status as “God-men”: “We should never forget our status as God-men. This will affect the way that we live” (*ibid.*, p. 23).

Though elsewhere noting the importance of Christ’s crucifixion—particularly in relation to humankind’s redemption—Lee spends considerable time in his mature writings reflecting upon why Christ lived a human life comprising thirty-three and a half years as opposed to immediately accomplishing redemption after the incarnation. For Lee, Jesus’ earthly living exemplified not a mere model for outward imitation but a “pattern”, “prototype”, and “mold” that satisfies God, fulfills his divine intention, and is reproduced in believers (*ibid.*, p. 8). While he occasionally employs the language of imitating Christ, Lee clarifies that it is a significant mistake for believers to imitate Christ by exercising self-effort with their natural life. Believers are rather encouraged to learn Christ according to “the reality (*alētheia*) in Jesus” (Eph 4:20–21) (Lee 2023a, pp. 382–83). The “Spirit of

reality (*alētheias*)” (John 14:17; 15:26; 16:13), sent by and identified with Jesus in resurrection, dwells in believers, regenerates them with the divine life, enabling them to learn Christ according to the reality in Jesus. Lee explains what he understands “the reality in Jesus” as referring to in a footnote of the *Recovery Version* (RcV) study Bible:

The reality in Jesus refers to the actual condition of the life of Jesus as recorded in the four Gospels. . . . [I]n the godly life of Jesus there is truth, reality. Jesus lived a life in which He did everything in God, with God, and for God. God was in His living, and He was one with God. This is what is meant by the reality in Jesus. We, the believers, who are regenerated with Christ as our life and are taught in Him, learn from Him as the reality is in Jesus. (RcV 1991, Eph 4:21, n1)¹⁵

Ultimately, Lee (2004–2020) suggests that God sent Christ to live a multi-decade human life to express the totality of the God-man living; just as God was pleased with Jesus’s living on earth, so too he is pleased to see its reproduction in and through believers today (vol. 127, pp. 85–86, 93–94). For Lee (1996b, p. 3), Christians actively living Jesus’ “God-man living” is, in fact, their practical experience of deification.

Though Jesus’ earthly life is referred to as a “model” in 1 Peter 2:21, Lee contends that this term does not refer to outward imitation of Jesus’ moral behavior nor a speculative approach to determine what Jesus might do in a given situation (i.e., “WWJD?”). Rather, he interprets the Greek word for “model” in this verse in the following manner:

Lit., a writing copy, an underwriting (used by students to trace letters and thereby learn to draw them). The Lord has set His suffering life before us so that we can copy it by tracing and following His steps. This does not refer to a mere imitation of Him and His life but to a reproduction of Him that comes from enjoying Him as grace in our sufferings, so that He Himself as the indwelling Spirit, with all the riches of His life, reproduces Himself in us. We become the reproduction of the original writing copy, not a mere imitation of Him produced by taking Him as our outward model. (RcV 1991, 1 Pet 2:21, n2; Lee 1996b, p. 76)

Following the Johannine narrative of Jesus—“I live because of the Father, so he who eats Me, he also shall live because of Me” (John 6:57)—Lee argues that Christ’s earthly living was entirely dependent on the Father’s life. This expands the portrayal of the “God-man living” in two directions. On one hand, it is entirely sourced in the Father’s life, but on the other hand it is freely extended to believers through their regeneration and participation in the divine nature. For Lee, believers are the many “God-men” enabled to live out a God-man living as Jesus lived:

[The first] God-man is the prototype for mass reproduction. He is the first God-man, and we are the many God-man . . . We should not forget that our status is that of God-man. A God-man needs to have a God-man living. The God-man living has a prototype, which should be our example. (Lee 1996b, pp. 22–24)

With the key aspects of “God-man living” outlined above, several classic works by Lee further explore Christian deification in relation to Jesus’s human living. *The God-man Living*,¹⁶ one of Lee’s most significant volumes from his mature ministry, devotes thirteen of its seventeen chapters on the living of Jesus, the first God-man, structured around five messages titled “The First God-man’s Living—from the Manger to the Cross” and eight titled “The First God-man’s Living—a Man of Prayer”. Lee (2004–2020) held that Christ’s followers could be formatively disciplined through a close examination of Jesus’ earthly living (vol. 131, p. 76). As believers are being transformed into the same image of Christ (2 Cor 3:18), the Spirit simultaneously reproduces Christ’s living in them, a process Lee considered their deification.

According to Lee, the life of the first God-man had three distinctives:

- (1) Jesus was always a person of humiliation, symbolized by His manger;
- (2) He was a person of denying “self”, obedient to God and sacrificing Himself for others, symbolized by His cross;
- (3) He was a person of manifesting God, sustained by His prayer life.

This trajectory, for Lee, defines a believer’s salvific process of deification and the extent to which their current living aligns with that of the first God-man indicates the extent to which they have experienced deification in practice.

With our preceding discussion in mind, we may now turn to the remainder of this article, which engages in a closer reading of two of Lee’s works—*The God-man Living* and *The Divine and Mystical Realm*.¹⁷ Together, these volumes will assist us in furthering investigate how Lee depicts the relationship between the deification of believers and the reproduction of Christ’s life. This analysis is framed around four key phrases employed by Lee: (1) “from the manger”, (2) “through the silence period”, (3) “to the cross”, and (4) “by a prayer life”. Thereafter, we examine how Lee conceives of Jesus through the lens of being a “man of prayer” living in the “divine and mystical realm”.

4.3. From the Manger—Humiliation

From Lee’s perspective, two pivotal symbols—the manger and the cross—encapsulate the entirety of the first God-man’s life. This way of life was narrow and constricted (Matt 7:13–14), and Jesus voluntarily chose it. Unlike Horatio Alger’s glamorized narrative of rising from “rags to riches”, Jesus took the opposite trajectory and consistently emptied Himself (Lee 1996b, pp. 24–25). He never attained prosperity or outward success; instead, His journey began in a manger and culminated at the cross, the ultimate form of humiliation in the Greco-Roman world.

For Lee, Jesus’ life was firstly characterized by utter humility. As an infant, He was laid in a manger (Luke 2:7–16), a symbol which Lee ascribes to smallness, lowliness, and rejection (Lee 2023b, pp. 44–45). Expounding on Luke 2:7b, Lee writes:

The Man-Savior’s life began in a manger in the lowest estate. This beginning was due to the fact that the inn was occupied by fallen mankind with his own fallen activities. We may say that the manger is a symbol of the Savior’s human living. (ibid., p. 44)

Another example of Jesus’ lowliness is tied to His fleeing from Bethlehem to Galilee, a despised province, and settling in Nazareth, a despised village (John 1:46). Lee (2023b, p. 25) applied these examples of Jesus’ humility to the present-day ministry of believers by urging them not to seek acclaim but to instead follow Jesus’ example.

For Lee, Jesus’ life was one of always choosing the way of the cross, continually humbling Himself, and being fully obedient to God’s will, even unto His death on a cross (Phil 2:8). It was this kenotic humiliation, Lee avers, that ultimately led to His glorification. Lee emphasizes that every God-man (i.e., every believer) must be armed with the same mind as Jesus (1 Pet 4:1; Phil 2:5)—not one of asceticism or a natural desire for suffering, but a mind that is prepared to endure any and all sufferings. Using his personal testimony, Lee encouraged his readers to not to stumble over sufferings but to endure them in union with Jesus’ mind on their journey toward deification (Lee 2023b, p. 24).

4.4. Through Silence Period—Maturing and Being Tested

Lee notes that the Gospels seem to intentionally omit details of Jesus’ life between twelve and thirty, and thus refers to this time-period as Jesus’ “silence” period (ibid., p. 27).¹⁸ The Old Testament, however, provides a window into the general situation Jesus endured during these years; Lee interprets the Isaianic prophecy of the “suffering servant” as being fulfilled by Jesus. Following this line of interpretation, Isaiah describes Jesus’ life as

a root emerging from dry ground (indicating His poor upbringing) (53:2a), lacking beauty or majesty to attract people (53:2b), being despised, rejected, and acquainted with grief (53:3), and appearing marred beyond human likeness (52:14). Yet despite these sufferings, and even in light of being tempted in every respect, Jesus never sinned (Heb 4:15; 2:18) (ibid., pp. 27–28).

He highlights two additional aspects of the intrinsic significance of Jesus' silence period: First, Jesus lived unobtrusively before His public ministry. This period served as a divine test before He was commissioned to carry out His ministry (ibid., p. 28). Second, during this time, Jesus matured in human life. For Lee, this means that true Christian ministry requires both spiritual and human maturity, both of which require a period of time. Although Jesus was concerned with God's interests at twelve, God did not entrust Him with a ministry at that point. Instead, He waited until Jesus was thirty—the same age required for priests in the Old Testament (Num 4:3)—to ensure that he was capable of fulfilling His ministry. This divine patience, for Lee, is necessary for genuine Christian ministry and can be contrasted with humanity's tendency toward haste (ibid., pp. 25–28).

For Lee, Jesus' victorious experience of remaining faithful during a period of silence can be contrasted with other self-proclaimed servants of God who fail the "silence" test. Hence, he questions how many are prepared to be set aside by God, appear to be doing "nothing" outwardly, live solely before God's presence, and manifest God in ordinary life in a manner akin to (or in fact, in a manner which duplicates) what Jesus experienced before His public ministry. Lee suggests that if believers entrust themselves to God and endure a period of silence, Jesus' life will grow and mature within them to give rise to genuine Christian ministry (ibid., pp. 27–28). For Lee, this experience of silence is a participation in Jesus' own experience, which is essential for humankind's deification and authentic service to God.

4.5. *To the Cross—Living Through Death*

Lee notes that when Jesus commenced His ministry at thirty, He was baptized by John the Baptist to fulfill "the way of righteousness" (Matt 3:13–16a; 21:32). For Lee (1996b, pp. 34–36; 2023c, pp. 117–20), this has profound implications for believers' deification in practice. Though born of the Holy Spirit and possessing a sinless human nature, Jesus' baptism signified a personal recognition that His natural flesh and humanity, though sinless, were worthy only of death and burial. This recognition qualified Him to be righteous in God's eyes in His ministry of preaching repentance from all unrighteousness.

Moreover, Lee (2023c, p. 119) highlights that Jesus' baptism also allowed Him to be "put into death and resurrection [so] that He might minister not in a natural way but in the way of resurrection", laying the underlying principle throughout His public ministry. This act of baptism, for Lee, symbolizes living and ministering in death (entering into the water) and resurrection (rising from the water) before His actual crucifixion and resurrection three and a half years later (ibid., p. 119). Thus, all Jesus' works during His ministry were righteous, acceptable, and pleasing to God. Lee (1996b, p. 36) notes that immediately after Jesus' baptism, the heavens opened to Him, the Holy Spirit descended upon Him, and the Father spoke (Matt 3:16b–17), demonstrating the Father's recognition and endorsement. Furthermore, the Father's descending His Spirit upon Jesus indicated the Father and the Spirit's oneness with Jesus as the source, supply, power, and authority of His ministry. Jesus' baptism also laid the foundation for Him to overcome the devil's temptations. As John 14:30 states, "The ruler of the world has nothing in me". Jesus served God, ministered to people, and overcame the temptations—not by His flesh or natural human life but by the Spirit and in continual dependence upon the Father. For Lee, this lesson is of intrinsic significance and should be applied to all Christians in their lives and ministry (ibid., p. 53).

Just as Jesus' baptism brought three things—the open heaven, the descending of God's Spirit, and the Father's speaking—followers of Jesus spiritually experience these things as they walk by the Spirit (Lee 2023c, p. 121).

Lee's reflection on Jesus' ministry highlights two key characteristics in relation to the Father. First, Jesus carried out God's ministry through a cruciform life characterized by self-humiliation and crucifixion. He lived not for His own interests but absolutely and continually offered Himself to the Father as a burnt offering (cf. Lev 6:8–13) (Lee 1996b, p. 159). Second, by denying and humbling Himself, Jesus showed His willingness to be limited by the Father in every way. He did nothing from Himself but only what the Father had been working on (John 5:17, 19, 30a; 8:28), spoke not from His own initiative but what the Father spoke (14:10a), and sought not His own will, glory, or name but the Father's (5:30b; 6:38; Matt 26:39). Jesus had no own freedom to minister according to His own desires but was entirely restricted by the Father, including His works, words, and even timing (John 7:6–8) (ibid., p. 77).

Regarding the Spirit's role in Jesus' ministry, Lee points out that as God's anointed one (*Christos*), Jesus always carried out God's ministry under the Spirit's anointing. Though born of the Holy Spirit essentially (Matt 1:18, 20; Luke 1:35), He was also ministered to by the Spirit economically. Per Lee, "the cross was the center of Christ's living. The Spirit was the center of His work;" (ibid., p. 81) "Jesus lived by the Father, who aboded and worked in Him, and on the other hand moved and ministered by the Spirit" (ibid., p. 85). An evident example was Jesus' casting out of demons by the Spirit of God for the coming of God's Kingdom (Matt 12:28). Thus, in His ministry, Jesus, as one of the divine Trinity, lived a life both essentially and economically in, with, and for the economic move of the divine Trinity (ibid., pp. 81, 85).

Drawing from the model of the first God-man's living in ministry, Lee provides several applications. One key application is learning to suffer afflictions without avenging. Despite oppression and affliction, Jesus remained silence, like a lamb led to slaughter (Isa 54:3, 7; 1 Pet 2:21–23). He even prayed for those who crucified him, asked the Father to forgive their ignorance (Luke 23:34a), and extended salvation to a criminal crucified with him (vv. 42–43). Jesus' way was "the way of the lamb", in contrast to "the way of the dragon", as Goggin and Strobel (2017) noted. Lee states, "When [Jesus] was reviled, He did not revile return. Today we [who work for God] must learn of this model. If people revile us, we should not have any thought of avenging by reviling them in return" (Lee 1996b, p. 76). Moreover, Jesus always ministered, not by His natural human life but by the Spirit. A corresponding application for the ministers of God's words is learning to speak God's word with the Spirit. Lee states, "When [Jesus] speaks the word of God, He gives the Spirit without measure (John 3:34). When we speak the word, we should minister, dispense the Spirit" (ibid., p. 83). These examples illustrate Lee's practical applications for entering into the experience of deification in light of the first God-man's living.

4.6. A Man of Prayer—Living in the Divine and Mystical Realm

After studying the first God-man's living from the manger to the cross, Lee emphasizes that Jesus' living was inherently characterized by His prayer life and highlights that "a very critical part of the history of the first God-man was His prayer" (ibid., p. 92). Nearly half of Lee's book, *The God-man Living*, focuses on Jesus being a man of prayer. As a man of prayer, Jesus often withdrew to mountains or private places to commune with the Father (cf. Matt 14:23; Mark 1:35; Luke 5:16; 6:12; 9:28; John 17). To help believers enter into the practical reality of deification, Lee encouraged his readers to follow his close analysis of nearly every prayer or teaching on prayer in the synoptic Gospels (e.g., Matt 6:5–18; 7:7–8; 9:36–10:4; 11:25–30; 14:19–23; 15:36–39; 17:19–21; 18:15–22; 19:13–15; 21:18–22 [cf. Mark

11:20–24]; Matt 24:15–22; 26:20–30; 36–46; Luke 23:33–34; Matt 27:46; Luke 23:46). Studying these prayers of Jesus, Lee asserts, benefits and edifies believers in practicing deification, particularly in learning “how to pray according to God’s will for the accomplishment of God’s economy” (ibid., p. 155).

Lee, drawing from the Gospel of John, explains that Jesus’ prayers were not merely common prayers (e.g., health, wealth, family, or practical needs) or pious prayers (i.e., for divine attainments, obtainments, or spirituality) but were situated in the “divine, mystical realm” (ibid., p. 89). To describe Jesus’ prayer life, Lee defines the term “realm” as equivalent to “kingdom”, “sphere”, and “domain” (ibid., p. 98; Lee 1996a, pp. 23, 25). The term “mystical”, according to Lee, does not refer to medieval mystics or those who sought direct contact with God through contemplation or self-inflicted suffering but “the mysterious God” whom Jesus prayed to. For Lee, the Divine Trinity—self-existing, ever-existing, coexisting, and coinhering (*perichoretic*)—forms a divine and mystical realm (John 14:10–11) (ibid., p. 36). As a real man in the flesh and the sent Son by the Father in heaven, Jesus lived in both the physical, human realm and the divine, mystical realm, yet His prayers, Lee argues, were rooted in the divine and mystical realm alone, the realm of the divine reality of the Triune God (Lee 1996b, pp. 89–90; Kangas 2023, pp. 44–46).

While believers cannot enter into the divine and mystical realm of the Triune God (i.e., the Godhead or immanent Trinity), Lee argues they can enter into an expanded divine and mystical realm formed after Jesus’ crucifixion and resurrection—a reality which Lee (1996a, p. 36; Kangas 2023, p. 44) notes is prayed for by Jesus Himself in John 14:20 and 17:21. This realm, he suggests, can be known and realized by believers due to their human spirits being joined to Lord as one spirit (1 Cor 6:17). Lee (1996b, p. 92; Kangas 2023, p. 46) argues that believers should apply Jesus’ *perichoretic* experience to themselves in order to live in these dual realms as well—simultaneously living out the mundane details of daily lives while offering prayers sourced in the divine and mystical realm. Believers’ *perichoretic* living in the Triune God and abiding in Christ issues in the practical experience of their deification.

Lee’s close reading of the Gospel of John affirms that Jesus’ living in the divine and mystical realm was sustained through unceasing prayer (1 Thes 5:17). According to Lee (1996b, pp. 89–90, 126–28), Jesus’ prayer life caused Him to (1) not act on His own initiative (John 5:19), (2) not do His own work (4:34, 17:4), (3) not speak His own word (14:10, 24), (4) only to act according to the Father’s will (5:30), (5) not seek His own glory (7:18), (6) only to find satisfaction in God alone (4:13–14, 6:15), (7) remain one with the Father, (8) trust the Father in all situations (10:30; Luke 23:46; cf. 1 Pet 2:23b), and (9) continuously live in God’s presence (John 8:29; 16:32; cf. Acts 10:38c). Lee argues that such a living by Christ on earth is what caused Satan, the devil and current ruler of the world, to have no power, ground, chance, hope, or possibility in anything over the first God-man, Jesus Christ (John 14:30b).

As the prototype for deification, Jesus’ prayer life profoundly impacts what the “God-man living” or deification in practice truly entails. Due to Jesus’ frequent practice of withdrawing for solitary prayer after significant events—e.g., the miracle of feeding the five thousand (Matt. 14:23)—Lee argues that solitude with God or temporarily withdrawing to be alone with God for spiritual purposes is crucial for the believers’ deification. Lee states, “we should learn from the Lord’s pattern here by exercising to *be with Him [the Father] on the mountain in prayer* . . . We need to get to a higher level separated from the crowd, to be with the Father privately and secretly to have intimate fellowship with Him” (ibid., p. 129).¹⁹ According to John 6:27, Jesus prayed for the Father to bless those who participated in the miracle, not to be satisfied with physical food but to seek eternal life and recognize Jesus as the Son of God. Lee (ibid., pp. 130–31) thus suggests that Jesus’ solitary prayer in Matthew 14:23 was to receive the Father’s instructions on caring for those He had fed. This indicates

that Jesus' focus was not merely on performing miracles but imparting the divine life (*zōē*) to people, which should also be the focus of believers' private prayer.

Lee also notes that Jesus' prayer and teachings on prayer are found throughout all three and a half years of His earth ministry. In John 17—which Lee (*ibid.*, pp. 144, 151) considers to be the conclusion of Jesus' teaching in John 14–16 on the “union, mingling, and incorporation of the processed and consummated Triune God with his chosen and redeemed people”—Jesus maintains a prayerful posture even on His way to Gethsemane and teaches His disciples to “watch and pray” (Matt 26:20–30, 36–46). His prayer, according to Lee, strengthened Him by the Spirit to be obedient to God's will; after praying three times, Jesus fully accepted the Father's will and was prepared for crucifixion (*ibid.*, pp. 84, 150–51).

Finally, on the cross, Jesus also prayed three times: for God's forgiveness of His crucifiers (Luke 23:33–34; cf. Isa 53:12), to inquire why the Father economically left Him on the cross (Matt 27:46), and to commit Himself into the Father's hands (Luke 23:46). In sum, Lee argues that careful study and application of the first God-man's prayers and teachings on prayer will greatly aid believers in their lived experience of deification. Through genuine prayer in the divine and mystical realm, believers can be brought into a perichoretic experience with the Triune God, both personally and corporately, to become a practical reproduction of the first God-man (*ibid.*, p. 98).

As an addendum, Lee frequently highlights throughout his corpus that the apostle Paul's experiences—his limitations (Acts 16:7), sacrificing (Phil 2:17), and prayers (Eph 1 & 3; Phil 4)—are particularly relevant when discussing the reproduction of Jesus' life in the believers by the Spirit of reality for the reality of Christ's mystical and corporate Body. However, due to the scope of this article, a deeper exploration of Paul's experiences must be reserved for another venue. Nevertheless, it is especially notable as it demonstrates that Lee's understanding of and approach to deification provides a distinctive contribution to the growing body of literature on deification by emphasizing the experiential and corporate dimensions of divine participation within the Body of Christ.

5. Assessment and Potential Contributions

At the outset, we noted a surprising lacuna in recent examinations of deification: a near-universal focus on its ontological implications (or lack thereof) of the soteriological model rather than its practical implications for Christians. To address this, we introduced Witness Lee, a 20th-century Chinese-American Christian who discussed deification primarily in experiential terms and emphasized its significance in the daily life of believers. Lee's articulation of deification offers a distinct and practical vision of Christian life that moves beyond abstraction to embodied participation in divine life. Historically, he is not unique in seeking to articulate deification in practice; as we saw, patristic thinkers such as Athanasius and the late medieval Kempis are examples of others who sought to do so. However, Lee differs in one key respect: whereas many argue for an imitative relationship between believers and Christ, Lee advocates a truly duplicative relationship. Hence, within modern discourse, we suggested that Lee serves as an exceptional and important dialogue partner in describing both the means and content of deification in practical theology.

For Lee, deification in practice is subsumed within the concept of the “God-man living”—a life exemplified by the unique God-man, Jesus Christ. This life provides the normative pattern for the progressive, soteriological duplication of Christ in believers, constituting them as the many “God-men”. Through regeneration, Lee (2004–2020) suggests that believers receive God's life, participate in the divine nature, possess the mind of Christ, participate in God's very being, are transformed into God's image, participate in God's glory, obtain true divine sonship, are enabled to manifest God, bear God's likeness, and ultimately, are transformed to become “Godkind”, “God's species” (vol. 130, pp. 215–19).

In practical terms, this progressive deification occurs as believers follow the narrow way of Jesus from the manger to the cross—symbols marking the origin and completion of the first “God-man living”. Through various practices, such as prayer (including praying with words of Scripture), singing hymns, fellowshiping with other believers, and living a life of faith (dependence on) and love towards Christ, believers are united, mingled, and incorporated into the Triune God, ultimately manifesting God as a corporate entity—the Body of Christ presently, consummating in the New Jerusalem.

In sum, Lee’s approach to deification is a valuable addition to present-day discourse, transforming what is often considered extravagant metaphysical and ontological speculation into experiential and existential practicalities that assist Christians in pursuing an intimate, loving relationship with God. Further, his notion of the “God-man living” shifts the focus from individual sanctification to the collective manifestation of divine life within the church, making his theological model particularly relevant to Global Christianity. While the totality of his conception of deification, inclusive of its corporate and eschatological dimensions, was not fully addressed explored here, one key impression remains: deification is not reserved for an elite group of Christians—whether by theological aptitude, ascetic commitment, or sacramental participation—but is a practicable, experientable reality and destiny for all believers, who, by virtue of their cooperation with the unique God-man, are produced as the many God-men.

Lee’s voice from the “Global South” represents a rare and valuable contribution to the universal church, particularly in its focus on the practical lives of believers. Compared with how deification has traditionally been framed within Eastern Orthodox, Catholic, and certain Protestant traditions, Lee’s unique approach highlights its experiential, corporate, and transformational dimensions. Deeply rooted in Scripture and intensely practical, his vision differs from classical perspectives while resonating with Pauline themes of cruciform participation (Gal 2:20; Rom. 8:29) (Reardon 2023) and Johannine notions of perichoretic abiding (John 15:4–5). In doing so, Lee emphasizes a truly participatory, duplicative life relationship with God that believers can experience daily. His perspective broadens the traditional view of deification advanced by the academy—often associated with Eastern Orthodoxy—by offering a lived expression of this doctrine that serves the global church. Ultimately, this approach aligns with the universal call to holiness and the church’s witness in the world, inviting all Christians to join in the shared pursuit of becoming partakers of the divine nature.

In closing, future research is warranted to explore how Lee’s approach to the “God-man living” aligns with patristic portrayals of practical *theosis* (e.g., Irenaeus, Athanasius, Maximus the Confessor), Protestant participation theology (e.g., Calvin, Mannermaa’s Finnish interpretation of Luther), and/or Pentecostal/charismatic perspectives on divine empowerment. Additionally, examining how Lee’s concept of God-man living intersects with contemporary discussions on spiritual formation, ecclesiology, and eschatology could further enrich theological discourse on deification. Through these further engagements, we hope that Lee’s understanding of and approach to deification can be more fully appreciated as a valuable and underrepresented voice in global Christian thought while also providing a tangible framework for believers seeking to embody divine life in daily practice.

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Notes

- ¹ At least fifteen new books or collections of essays examining the doctrine have been published in the past two decades: (1) Norman Russell, *Deification in the Greek Patristic Tradition* (Russell 2004); (2) Stephen Finlan and Vladimir Kharlamov (eds.), *Theosis: Deification in Christian Theology* (Finlan and Kharlamov 2006); (3) Michael L. Christensen and Jeffrey A. Wittung (eds.), *Partakers of the Divine Nature: The History and Development of Deification in the Christian Traditions* (Christensen and Wittung 2008); (4) Vladimir Kharlamov (ed.), *Theosis: Deification in Christian Theology*, vol. 2 (Kharlamov 2011); (5) Daniel E. Wilson, *Deification and the Rule of Faith: The Communication of the Gospel in Hellenistic Culture* (Wilson 2015); (6) David Meconi and Carl E. Olson (eds.), *Called to Be Children of God: The Catholic Theology of Human Deification* (Meconi and Olson 2016); (7) Mark Edwards and Elena Ene D-Vasilescu (eds.), *Visions of God and Ideas on Deification in Patristic Thought* (Edwards and D-Vasilescu 2017); (8) John Arblaster and Rob Faesen (eds.), *Theosis/Deification: Christian Doctrines of Divinization, East and West* (Arblaster and Faesen 2018b); (9) John Arblaster and Rob Faesen (eds.), *Mystical Doctrines of Deification: Case Studies in the Christian Tradition* (Arblaster and Faesen 2018a); (10) Jared Ortiz, *Deification in the Latin Patristic Tradition* (Ortiz 2019); (11) Jared Ortiz (ed.), *With All the Fullness of God: Deification in the Christian Tradition* (Ortiz 2021); (12) Khaled Anatolios, *Deification Through the Cross: An Eastern Christian Theology of Salvation* (Anatolios 2022); (13) Paul L. Gavrilyuk, Andrew Hofer, and Matthew Levering (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Deification* (Gavrilyuk et al. 2024); (14) Norman Russell, *Theosis and Religion: Theosis Participation in Divine Life in the Eastern and Western Traditions* (Russell 2024); and (15) Paul Copan and Michael M. C. Reardon (eds.), *Transformed into the Same Image: Constructive Investigations into the Doctrine of Deification* (Copan and Reardon 2024).
- ² The Protestant thinkers in whose writings the presence of deification imagery has been recently reexamined include John Calvin, Huldrych Zwingli, Peter Martyr Vermigli, Richard Hooker, John Owen, John and Charles Wesley, Jonathan Edwards, Herman Bavinck, C. S. Lewis, T. F. Torrance, Karl Barth, and Robert Jenson. For a comprehensive bibliography of these investigations, see Michael M. C. Reardon, *Becoming God: Interpreting Pauline Soteriology as Deification* (Reardon 2023). For an excellent overview of past Protestant distrust of the doctrine of deification and more recent interest in it, see Paul L. Gavrilyuk, *The Retrieval of Deification: How a Once-Despised Archaism Became an Ecumenical Desideratum* (Gavrilyuk 2009); Carl Mosser *Orthodox and Reformed Dialogue and the Ecumenical Recovery of Theosis* (Mosser 2021); Corneliu C. Simu, *Theosis and Baptist-Orthodox Discussions* (Simu 2021); Robert V. Rakestraw, *Becoming Like God: An Evangelical Doctrine of Theosis* (Rakestraw 1997). For an overview of scholars in Pauline studies, see Reardon, *Becoming God: Interpreting Pauline Soteriology as Deification* (Reardon 2023). Investigations into deification in the Johannine corpus include James D. Gifford, *Perichoretic Salvation: The Believers Union with Christ as a Third Type of Perichoresis* (Gifford 2011); Andrew J. Byers, *Ecclesiology and Theosis in the Gospel of John* (Byers 2017); and Michael Gorman, *Abide and Go: Missional Theosis in the Gospel of John* (Gorman 2018).
- ³ For a fulsome account of the relationship between suffering and participation in Christ or Christian deification, see Wesley Thomas Davey, *Suffering as Participating with Christ in the Pauline Corpus* (Davey 2019) and Michael Gorman, *Inhabiting the Cruciform God: Kenosis, Justification, and Theosis in Paul's Narrative Soteriology* (Gorman 2009) and *Participating in Christ: Explorations in Paul's Theology and Spirituality* (Gorman 2019); Ben Blackwell, *Christosis: Engaging Paul's Soteriology with His Patristic Interpreters* (Blackwell 2016, pp. 259–62).
- ⁴ Austin (2015) makes an excellent attempt at translating the doctrine into concrete praxis for Evangelical or Protestant Christians in his article “The Doctrine of Theosis: A Transformational Union with Christ” (Austin 2015).
- ⁵ This biography, *A Bondsman of Christ to Carry out the Divine Revelation in the Present Age: A Brief Description of the Life of Witness Lee* (Living Stream Ministry 1997), produced during and after Lee's funeral in 1997 by Living Stream Ministry, guides much of our overview of Lee's life.
- ⁶ The CWWL (Anaheim: Living Stream Ministry), containing the entirety of Lee's ministry (excluding LS, CNT, and certain publications) from 1932 to 1997, was published in its entirety in 2020. The volumes of CWWL are organized chronologically by year. Volume 72 is CWWL, 1973–1974, vol. 1; Volume 127 is CWWL, 1994–1997, vol. 1; Volume 130 is CWWL, 1994–1997, vol. 4; Volume 131 is CWWL, 1994–1997, vol. 5.
- ⁷ Notably, both Irenaeus of Lyon and Athanasius of Alexandria affirmed deification centuries earlier in so-called “exchange formula” such as “the Word of God, 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” (*Adversus Haereses*, Book V, preface) in (Irenaeus 1981, vol. 1, p. 526), and “for He was made man that we might be made God” (*De Incarnatione*, §54), in (Athanasius 1995, vol. 4, p. 65).
- ⁸ In patristic language, it is *because* God became flesh, humans can become gods.
- ⁹ Plato and Plotinus both propose that souls possess an uncreated portion that shares kinship with the divine realm—for Plato, with the realm of Forms; for Plotinus, with the transcendent One (Louth 2007, pp. 14–41).

- 10 E.g., Cyril, Athanasius, Jerome, Augustine, Symeon the New Theologian.
 11 Augustine, *Homily on Psalm 81*.
 12 Emphasis added. Significantly, Lee refers to this truth as the “high peak of the divine revelation”.
 13 More books on this theme later, for example, Bickel, Bruce and Stan Jantz’s *WWJD?: The Question Everyone Is Asking* (Bickel and Jantz 1997).
 14 For example, in refuting Arian’s heterodox Christology at Nicaea, Athanasius argues, “Then, not being man, he [the Son] later became God; but being God, he later [became] man, that he might deify us” (Athanasius, *Contra Arianos* 1.39, translated by William G. Rusch in *The Trinitarian Controversy* (Athanasius 1980, p. 102).
 15 Lee oversaw the production of the *Recovery Version of the Bible* (RcV), a modern translation of the revised 1980 version of the *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia* and the Nestle-Åland Greek text found in the *Novum Testamentum Graece* (26th edition). In addition to the full-text of the Bible, study editions of the RcV contain over 15,000 footnotes, many of which are excerpts from Lee’s biblical commentary series known as the *Life-Study of the Bible*.
 16 The book comprises a transcribed version of messages delivered by Lee to a group of young students during a Bible training program in Anaheim, California, in early 1996, the year before his departure.
 17 *The God-man Living* and *The Divine and Mystical Realm* are included in Volumes 3 and 4 of CWWL, 1994–1997, respectively.
 18 The New Testament only records that Jesus was the son of the carpenter Joseph and had flesh-and-blood siblings (Matt 13:55–56).
 19 Emphasis added.

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