

LSM's Deification Doctrine—Biblical or Blasphemous?

Witness Lee (*Li Changshou*) is on record asserting “The Bible does *not* teach that believers will ever be deified [made God].”^o He also said, “The fact that we have the divine nature with the divine life *does not mean that we shall ever be deified.*” In his closing years, however, Witness Lee recanted and adopted deification, an Eastern Orthodox notion. He dubbed it the “High Peak,” saying “The high peak of the divine revelation...in the Holy Scriptures...is that *God became man that man may become God in life and nature but not in the Godhead.*”¹ In LSM's Local Churches this slogan is recited repeatedly. W. Lee argued, “If a cat begets kittens, those kittens are baby cats. In the same way, God begot us to make us the sons of God...*to make us 'baby gods,'* having God's life and nature but not His Godhead...Thus, we are not only the children of God ...*we are also the 'baby gods.'*”² Again he contended, “What is begotten of man is man, and what is begotten of God must be God. *We are born of God; hence, in this sense, we are God.*”³ He challenged listeners, “We may be able to say that we ‘become like God’ in life and nature, but *do we have the boldness to say that we 'become God' in life and nature?...since we are born of God...are we not God?*”⁴ Expounding, W. Lee says, “God's economy...is to make Himself man and to *make us... 'God,'* so that He is 'man-ized' and we are 'God-ized.' In the end, He and we...all become God-men.”⁵ Men become God by “absorbing God;” W. Lee says, when we “absorb the divine substance with the divine essence, the divine element, and the divine expression. This will *cause us to be deified...to be made God in life and in nature but not in the Godhead.* In this sense we may speak of the deification of the believers...”⁶

“The local churches hold that man may become God”--LSM's Kerry Robichaux

Deification—man becoming God—is now a tenet of the faith in LSM's Local Church; it is part of their creed. “We in the local churches hold that man may become God in God's salvation,”⁷ declares LSM's K. Robichaux. LSM asserts this is “absolutely scriptural.”⁸ LSM's K. Robichaux says “We are also confirmed by the ancient testimony of the church.” He appeals to the Roman Catholic Church & Eastern Orthodox Church for support.⁹ Indeed some Orthodox statements seem to echo W. Lee, such as: “The deification of the human being [is] the goal of the economy of salvation.” & “The economy of God consists in the deification of the created world...”¹⁰

“This is not just three-in-one. This is four-in-one.”—W. Lee

W. Lee's deification dogma raises significant theological issues. The assertion that “man may become God in life and nature,” suggests many “Gods” are being produced, raising the specter of polytheism. Evidently, as a result of deification, the unique Creator God of biblical monotheism (mono—one; *theos*--God. Deut. 6:4; Mark 12:29; 1 Cor. 8:6) is joined by many additional “Gods” (deified men) resulting in polytheism (at least in terms of Gods in “life & nature”). Moreover, although W. Lee contends that “man may become God...but not in the Godhead,” yet he is also on record asserting that the Triune God has become “four-in-one,” suggesting redeemed humankind is indeed added to the Trinity's Godhead. He claims “*Four persons—the one Body, one Spirit, one Lord, and one God the Father —[are] mingled together...thus, the Triune God and the Body are four-in-one.*”¹¹ W. Lee relates God becoming “four-in-one” to man's deification; he said:¹² “Man, the Spirit, the Lord, and the Father are built together. *This is not just three-in-one. This is four-in-one. God became a man that we, His redeemed, might become God...But...we do not have the Godhead.*”

Assertions about the “Four Persons” of the “four-in-one God” trigger alarm bells among evangelicals; W. Lee's assertions appear to fail evangelicals' “orthodoxy test.” They also raise the specter of divine mutation—has the ‘*three-in-one*’ Trinity (prior to incarnation) mutated into the “*four-in-one God*” (after Christ's exaltation)? Such concerns caused scholars to publicly implore LSM and the Local Churches to disavow “statements by Witness Lee [which] appear to contradict or compromise essential doctrines of the Christian faith.”¹³ Even LSM admits that,¹⁴ extracted “from its immediate context...Witness Lee's term *four-in-one God* can...be understood to refer to a heretical addition to the eternal and inviolable Triune Godhead.” Reading W. Lee's statements *within their context* does little to allay concerns about heresy. Perhaps in response to evangelicals' alarm, LSM's Kerry Robichaux asserts that “man will never take part in the Godhead; *he will never be a fourth person in the Trinity.*”¹⁵ Yet this directly contradicts Witness Lee's own words; plus, Kerry Robichaux's position is not reflected in LSM's intransigent response to the Christian scholars.

LSM's Deification Doctrine—not Biblical, but Blasphemous

LSM asserts that its deification doctrine is “absolutely scriptural.” However, this article maintains it is *not* biblical, rather it is blasphemous. This last statement is not a personal attack on Bro. Witness Lee. It is not merely the author’s subjective evaluation, nor is it a ‘knee jerk’ response to a new doctrine. Witness Lee’s doctrine of deification is not Biblical in that no biblical writer ever asserted that “man may become God in life and nature but not in the Godhead.” Nor did they ever make a statement even approximating this. Scripture uses capital “G” God, to designate the eternal, transcendent Creator and Sovereign Ruler of all things; it does not recognize LSM’s “semi-Gods,” who are “God in life & nature but not in the Godhead.” None of Scriptures’ ‘overcomers’— Enoch, Elijah, etc—are deified, or called “semi-Gods.” The Bible does not designate Paul, Moses, Samuel or any other prophet as the “acting God.” W. Lee’s earlier denial--“do not for a moment think that we have deified Paul. Paul was not God”--was replaced by the assertion, “Paul was...the acting God,”¹⁶ and “It is not too much to say that Samuel...was *the acting God on earth.*”¹⁷ But Scripture never uses this terminology.

More importantly, respected evangelical Bible scholars conclude that the deification dogma violates the strict monotheism maintained by writers of both the Old and New Testaments which holds that a clear dichotomy exists between the unique, eternal, self-existing God, the Creator and Sovereign Ruler (on the one hand) and His creatures (on the other) including God’s people—Old Testament Israel and the New Testament Church.¹⁸ The strict monotheism established by God in His revelation to Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and the nation of Israel, recorded in the Old Testament, is reiterated by Jesus Christ and retained by the New Testament authors—the apostles and their close associates. The distinct boundary between the unique Creator God and His creatures was ‘breached’ in only one case, by God--through the incarnation, death, resurrection and ascension of Jesus Christ. Hence the New Testament authors recognize Jesus Christ (“God become man...”) as true God, while simultaneously rejecting the claims of other men to be, or to become, God. The Apostle Paul includes the resurrected Christ within the “divine identity” of Israel’s one true God.¹⁹ The New Testament theology which *includes* Jesus in the “divine identity,” *excludes* all other humans and hence rejects deification. The purported biblical basis for W. Lee’s ‘deification’ derives from *eisegesis*—imposing a preconceived notion on Scripture.

“Blasphemy,” “appalling,” “repellant,” & “ridiculous”

“Blasphemy,” “appalling,” and “ridiculous”—these are not my terms, but those of scholars who conclude that the Apostle Paul, other New Testament authors, and the first-century Church would have rejected the doctrine of deification as heresy. Terms such as²⁰ “blasphemous,” “abhorrent,” “repellant,” and the object of “allergic sensitivity,” describe the anticipated response of first-century Apostles, New Testament authors, Christians and Jews to the deification dogma. Witness Lee’s deification dogma is not exempt from this unequivocal rejection.

“Deification...would be appalling to the Jewish-Christian mind.” –Dr. Arie W. Zwiep

Statements by biblical scholars substantiate these assertions. Already, some 90 years ago, Divinity Professor, A. H. McNeile wrote, “The words [*apotheosis*, deification] represent ideas...[from] which the first Christians, who were all Jews...would have shrunk *as from blasphemy.*”²¹ He also asserted that “the notion would have been abhorrent to Jews.”²² Among contemporary scholars, Dr. Arie W. Zwiep, Theology Professor at Amsterdam University, asserts, “divinization or deification...would be appalling to the Jewish-Christian mind.”²³ He also observes that, “a literalistic conception [of deification] would be near blasphemy in the Jewish mind.”²⁴ Dr. Mark D. Nispel observes, “the earliest Christian authors explicitly and vehemently reject the idea of any creature being considered a god as this was contrary to the church’s monotheistic confession.”²⁵ University of Edinburgh Professor Larry W. Hurtado concludes that “the rejection of *apotheosis* [deification] as ridiculous and blasphemous seems...to have been characteristic of devout Jews of the Roman period...”²⁶ He also states,²⁷ “For Roman-era Jews the plurality of deities and demigods and the practice of deifying rulers were repellent, even blasphemous.” He designates this as a “repellant category” also to Christian Jews.²⁸ We note that all the early apostles (including Paul) and all the New Testament authors (except Luke) were *Jewish-Christians* with an “allergic sensitivity,” to the notion of man’s deification, considering it “appalling,” “near blasphemy,” and a “repellant category.” Not surprisingly, Paul “keeps his distance from the idea of a deification of believers.”²⁹

Jewish Monotheism

Dr. David Litwa notes “The most common objection to the notion of deification in early Christian sources is the concept of ‘monotheism’.”³⁰ The distinguished scholar, Dr. Richard Bauckham of the University of St. Andrews, Scotland, addresses this lacuna. He describes Jewish understanding of deity, both before and during Jesus’ era, enshrined in Scripture, as *exclusive monotheism*, saying:³¹

“*Exclusive monotheism*...understands the uniqueness of the one God in terms of an absolute difference in kind from all other reality. We could call it transcendent uniqueness. It means there is no class of beings to which God belongs and of which he can be the supreme instance. It takes a ‘binary’ view of reality... Early Jewish literature...is strongly committed to [exclusive monotheism] by the way it constantly understands the uniqueness of the God of Israel as that of the one Creator of all things and the one sovereign Ruler of all things...These definitions of God’s uniqueness drive an absolute difference of kind between God and ‘all things’...and create an essentially binary view of reality. This does not and need not deny the existence of many heavenly beings [‘gods’], but simply insists that they are created by God and subject to the sovereign will of God. In early Judaism, the binary distinction between God and all other reality was observed and inculcated—in daily religious observance—...exclusive worship of the one true God. Such exclusive worship *was* acknowledgement of the transcendent uniqueness of the God of Israel.”

‘Divine Identity’— ‘Who God is,’ not ‘What God is’

Professor Bauckham argues that Judaism focused on *who God is* rather than *what divinity is* in the abstract. He says, “For Jewish monotheistic belief in God what was important was *who God is*, rather than what divinity is.”³² ‘Divine identity’ answers the question, ‘Who is God?’ Scholars emphasize the importance of focusing on³³ “the identity of God and not (for example) the divine essence or nature. These latter categories certainly came to dominate the [later] Patristic debate, but they are Greek metaphysical concepts, alien to the first-century Jewish understanding of God. ‘Identity,’ by contrast, encapsulates this Jewish understanding, where God has a name and character, acts, speaks, relates and can be addressed,” Dr Andrew Chester explains. Prof. “Bauckham emphasizes that a monotheism defined in terms of [God’s] personal (narrative) ‘identity’ differs greatly from a monotheism defined in the categories of Greek philosophy, namely the ‘concept of divine essence or nature’... [Judaism] was not concerned with abstract attributes but with the identity of the personal God, YHWH...Israel has learned God’s *personal characteristics*—who, rather than what, God is—through her history (the patriarchs & the Exodus) and through God’s revealing the divine name and its meaning to Moses (Exo. 3 & 34),”³⁴ says, Matthew Levering. Doug Ward elaborates, “Jews during the Second Temple period knew the one God of Israel as their Deliverer and Lawgiver and also as the eternal Creator and Ruler of the Universe. He alone was worthy of worship, a fact that all creation would one day acknowledge...This understanding of God involved qualities like eternity and power, it did not include philosophical speculation about God’s nature or essence. God was someone to worship and obey; his essence was assumed to be beyond understanding.”³⁵ Professor N.T. Wright concurs, saying, “Jewish monotheism in this period was not an inner analysis of the being of the one true God. It was not an attempt at describing numerically what this God is, so to speak, on the inside. Instead it made two claims...[1] that the one God, the God of Israel, was the only God of the whole world; [2] that therefore the pagan gods were blasphemous nonsense...the true God would one day decisively defeat these pagan gods.”³⁶

Revelation vs. Reason -- Jewish, Biblical Understanding vs. Greek Philosophical Thought

The other question—what is divinity?—arose centuries later among the Greek Patristics (e.g. Athanasius) who grappled with this issue in terms of God’s essence, nature, substance, ‘person,’ *hypostasis*, etc. Dr. Andrew Chester links Dr. Bauckham’s thesis to the view which rejects “the whole ontological tradition emanating from Aquinas [1225-1274] (& ultimately Aristotle) with its emphasis on the nature & essence of God...[that] rejects the God of Aquinas’ natural theology...[as] something created by human reason, a philosophical construct and not the God of the Christian faith.”³⁷ Against this later Greek theology, Professor Bauckham “emphasizes very strongly that this unique personal divine identity stands in complete contrast to that of the divine essence or nature...As he puts it, ‘Identity concerns who God is; nature concerns what God is, or what divinity is.’ Jewish

understanding and Jewish tradition [reflected in Scripture] have as their focus the ‘unique identity of the God of Israel,’ in contrast to the merely philosophical abstraction that contemporary Greek thought aspired to.”³⁸ Plus Prof. Chester points out the “divide [which] Bauckham draws between Jewish and Greek thought...the contrast between Jewish (or biblical) understanding as ‘good’ (showing God as he truly is) and Greek thought as ‘bad’...corresponds to the sharp (or absolute) contrast between reason and revelation as possible ways of knowing and understanding God.”³⁹ For Bauckham, Jewish, biblical thought embodied in the ‘divine identity,’ represents God’s revelation; later Greek metaphysical debates were the issue of human reason, not revelation. Dr. Richard Bauckham uses the term “divine identity,” to describe who God is, based on His acts which manifest His character. He concludes that, during the era of Jesus and Paul, “Judaism was self-consciously monotheistic and understood the unique identity of God in terms of uniquely divine characteristics. The most important were that God is the sole Creator and the sole Ruler of all things. The properly divine worship which was restricted to the one God *was* recognition of and response to this unique divine identity.”⁴⁰

“It is not enough...to define deification in terms of ‘likeness’”--Dr. David Litwa

The concept of “divine identity” has implications for the deification doctrine. Dr. David Litwa, states that “Deification—as I understand it—is sharing in a, or the, divine identity—that is, sharing in those distinctive qualities which make (a) God (a) God. It is not enough, in other words, to define deification in terms of ‘likeness’...”⁴¹ God’s “distinctive qualities,” as defined by Prof. Bauckham, include (1) being the pre-existent Creator of all things & (2) the universal Ruler, which (in turn) imply (3) being the one valid object of worship. Applying Dr. Litwa’s criterion for deification, “likeness is not enough;” it is not sufficient merely to be ‘creative,’ one must be a Creator to qualify for deification. The obvious question arises—who then can be deified?

Scripture specifically excludes other agents (angels, etc.) from God’s work of creation. “Thus says the LORD...‘I am the LORD, who made all things, *who alone* stretched out the heavens, who spread out the earth *by myself*.” (Isa. 44:24) University of St. Andrews Professor Richard Bauckham elaborates, “As the only Eternal One...God alone brought all other things into existence. God had no helper, assistant or servant to assist or to implement his work of creation. God alone created and no one else had any part in this activity.”⁴²

As the Sovereign Ruler, God is “the One who is high & lifted up, who inhabits eternity, whose name is Holy...” (Isa. 57:15). “God employs servants, especially myriads of angels,” Dr. Bauckham says, yet “the uniqueness of God’s total sovereignty means...[they] carry out the will of God in total obedience. They do not share his rule; they serve. While God sits on his throne, the angels...stand...awaiting his command...”⁴³ The sole exception is “one like a son of man” (Dan. 7:13) who is brought to the throne and shares God’s rule.

“In Second Temple Judaism...the throne of God in the highest heaven became a key symbol of monotheism, *representative of one of the essential characteristics definitive of the divine identity*,” Dr. Bauckham observes, “While a few traces of other enthroned figures associated with God’s rule can be found, the subordination of such figures to God’s rule is almost always stressed, while the overwhelming trend of the literature is towards emptying heaven of all thrones except God’s...The uniqueness of the heavenly throne of God belongs to the logic of the monotheism that dominated common Judaism...”⁴⁴ God alone is on the throne of the universe.

No room for ‘semi-Gods,’ ‘partial-Gods,’ or ‘Gods in life & nature, but not the Godhead’

These traits constitute God’s “divine identity.” God is the unique Creator and universal Ruler of all things; hence He alone is worthy of worship. Dr. Bauckham asserts “These definitions of God’s uniqueness drive an absolute difference of kind between God and ‘all things’...and create an essentially binary view of reality.”⁴⁵ There is no gradient allowing for degrees of deity—one is either capital ‘G’ God (absolutely) or not. There is no room here for ‘semi-Gods,’ ‘partial-Gods,’ ‘half-way Gods,’ or “Gods in life and nature, but not in the Godhead.” George Carraway asks, “How can one be almost God?” He quotes earlier scholars asking, “What kind of God is it, then, who is only God *with* qualifications? On any legitimate use of terms is any being who is only God *with* qualifications, not God absolutely, any longer truly God?”⁴⁶ Along these lines, we ask: Is any human who “is God, *but not in the Godhead*,” truly God? This binary view of God, Prof. Bauckham asserts, is enshrined in the Old and New Testaments. David Bernard concurs, “The Hebrew Scriptures do not describe God in theoretical

or philosophical terms. Yahweh [the LORD] is not an abstract object with attributes but a personal deity with emotions. He is the sole creator, ruler, and savior, and he is the one who acts in both nature and history.”⁴⁷ The category, “God in life & nature, but not in the Godhead,” is a foreign category from later Greek philosophy, alien to God-inspired Scripture, which dissects the indivisible personal God which Scripture reveals. LSM’s Kerry Robichaux asks, “*Can Human Beings Become God?*” These scholars answer unequivocally, “No!”

Monotheism & Deification

Devout Jews might not have been clear about God’s substance, essence or *hypostasis*; but they knew who their God was. Twice daily they prayed the ‘Shema:’ “Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one.” (Deut. 6:4). The Lord alone is Israel’s God, ‘the only one.’ It is a statement of exclusivity, not about the internal unity of God. It requires Israel to observe a practical monotheism, and stands in sharp contrast to pagan polytheism. [ESV Study Bible] It echoes the commandment: “I am the LORD your God...You shall have no other gods before (beside) me,” (Deut. 5:6-7) mandating exclusive worship. As Jesus said, rebutting Satan, “As it is written, ‘You shall worship the LORD your God, Him only shall you serve.’” (Matt. 4:9-10)

Jewish belief and practice contrasted sharply with first-century Greco-Roman society with its polytheism and idolatry. R. T. France describes the first-century situation:

“Monotheism was the hallmark of Judaism. To be a Jew was to be committed, often fanatically committed, to the maintenance of faith in only one God, in the face of a surrounding Hellenistic [Greek] culture which worshipped many gods, not to mention many semi-divine heroes, and a deified emperor. Hellenism had made great inroads in Palestine, to be sure, but not to the extent of modifying the monotheistic fervour of the ordinarily religious Jews out of whom Jesus’ first followers were drawn, still less that of the Pharisee Saul of Tarsus. *For a Jew then, as now, to speak of a man of his own times as divine was as impossible as it is for a Muslim to welcome the Christian doctrine of the Trinity or of Jesus as the Son of God...No Jew would calmly listen to a man being described as divine...*”⁴⁸

“Humans cannot participate in this ‘unique’ divine identity”--Dr. David Litwa

Under the paradigm of ‘divine identity,’ which these scholars argue is biblical, “the distinction between belonging and not belonging within the divine identity is absolute and it is simply not possible to move gradually into this divine identity through a series of stages.”⁴⁹ Deification--humans becoming God--is impossible. Israel’s exclusive worship of the LORD, the transcendent Creator and Sovereign Ruler, rules out human deification. Dr. David Litwa states, “A strong doctrine of transcendence is often based on the idea of God creating the world (especially *ex nihilo*)...Since God created the world out of nothing, ‘he is utterly distinct from, and other than, the world’ (Kaufmann). [Such] a God...cannot share his identity (or identity-constituting qualities)...*Humans cannot participate in this ‘unique’ divine identity.*”⁵⁰ Humans are creatures, part of God’s creation; they did not participate in God’s creative work. So, on this score, they are disqualified from the role of Creator, an indispensable qualification for being the unique God. Hence they can never be ‘deified,’ in terms of sharing the unique “divine identity;” the biblical ‘bar’ is too high for mankind, even Christians, to be ‘deified.’

Greek Heroes were deified; Jewish Heroes were Not

In pagan Greek literature & myths deification was a common occurrence; Gods in the Greco-Roman world were a ‘dime a dozen.’ Rulers and heroes were deified by rapture to heaven to join the pantheon. Professor Zwiép refers to Romulus, the mythical founder of Rome. He says, “In a large number of Hellenistic [Greek] rapture stories we find deification vocabulary as a standard feature. The proposition, ‘Romulus has gone to heaven’ is materially identical with, ‘Romulus has become a god’ and *vice versa* (i.e., the proposition ‘Romulus has become a god’ implies his previous ascent to the world of the gods).”⁵¹ Plus Dr. Zwiép says, “A recurrent, if not standard feature, in the Hellenistic [Greek] rapture stories is that heavenly assumption is regarded as the gateway to immortality and the means of deification.”⁵² However, this was not the case in Jewish literature.

“Deification-- appalling to the Jewish-Christian mind” –Professor Arie Zwiép

The Hebrew Scriptures record cases of rapture—Enoch (Gen. 5:24; Heb. 11:5) and Elijah (2 Kings 2:11). But neither was said to be deified or divinized in Jewish extra-biblical writings. Prof. James Dunn observes that “Patriarchs were glorified, not deified.”⁵³ Plus, Dr. Dunn says, “Elijah is never deified in Jewish or Christian thinking...Enoch is described as one transformed into angel-like form.”⁵⁴ “There is no deification involved here for these two Jewish figures”—Enoch & Elijah,⁵⁵ says Dallas Theological Seminary Professor, Darrell L. Bock. Prof. Arie Zwiep concurs; referring to Enoch, Elijah, etc., he says, “The raptured saints are not being ‘deified.’ In none of the cases of rapture [do] we find a statement about an enthronement act, let alone an affirmation of divinization or *deification*. *This would be appalling to the Jewish-Christian mind.*”⁵⁶ The LORD is the only God; the notion of a man (even Enoch or Elijah) being deified was scandalous to Jews & 1st-century Christians.

“A literalistic conception [of deification] would be near blasphemy...”--Dr. Arie Zwiep

God told Moses, “I have made you God to Pharaoh” (Exo. 7:1 Rcv.) Yet, surely this is meant in a metaphorical, not a literal, sense. “Judaism maintained [a] difference in kind between God and angels and human beings. Moses is as God to Pharaoh, and *is never deified,*”⁵⁷ says Fletcher-Louis. This case illustrates a non-literal application of deification. Professor James Dunn observes that in extra-biblical Jewish literature, “Jewish apologists in and before the first century AD [e.g. Philo, Josephus, etc.] could use extravagant language attributing deity in some sense to particular individuals and yet *not intend it to be taken literally* and without wishing to diminish the distinction between God and man.”⁵⁸ Dr. Arie Zwiep concludes that “Although in some quarters of first century Judaism historical figures of Israel’s past were occasionally elevated, even up to the status of *theos* [e.g., in Philo & the Dead Sea Scrolls] there is little evidence that this...compromised its basic belief in monotheism because it perceived this type of *divinity in an attenuated, non-literal sense. A literalistic conception [of deification] would be near blasphemy in the Jewish mind...*”⁵⁹ These scholars conclude that, due to Judaism’s strict monotheism, even outstanding figures in Israel’s history—e.g. Enoch & Elijah who were raptured to God’s presence—were not deified or considered as ‘gods.’ Rare instances of literary deification (e.g. Moses in Philo) are judged to be metaphoric and non-literal. Hence Athanasius’ maxim of “man becoming God” is antithetical to both canonical and non-canonical Jewish writings. As Dr. Larry Hurtado states,⁶⁰ “The Jewish monotheistic stance forbade *apotheosis*, the divinization of human figures, and thus clashed with a major theme in pagan religion of the time. Philo’s quip about Gaius Caligula’s claim to divinity aptly illustrates Jewish attitudes...: ‘Sooner could God change into a man than a man into God.’ *The rejection of apotheosis [deification] as ridiculous and blasphemous* seems...characteristic of devout Jews of the Roman period...”

Monotheism in the New Testament

“In the New Testament, the Christian faith presupposes Jewish monotheism,” states Dr. Bauckham. The New Testament accepts the monotheistic assumptions inherited from the Old Testament and Judaism. It accepts the basic divide in reality between all that is created and God Himself, who is utterly distinct from creation,”⁶¹ says Charles Irons. Jesus affirmed Israel’s *Shema* (Deut. 6:4-5). When asked about the greatest commandment, Jesus responded by quoting the *Shema*, “The most important is, ‘Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. And you shall love the LORD your God with all your heart...soul...mind and...strength’.” (Mk. 12:29-30) The Apostle Paul quotes an expanded *Shema*: “Although there may be so-called gods in heaven or on earth—as indeed there are many ‘gods’ and many ‘lords’—*yet for us there is one God*, the Father, from whom are all things and for whom we exist, and one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom are all things & through whom we exist.” (1 Cor. 8:5-6) Paul rejects the so-called ‘gods’ & ‘lords’ of pagan worship; he acknowledges the one true God, ‘the Father,’ and the Creator of all. Dr. Larry Hurtado states “As a zealot for the religious integrity of Judaism and ‘the traditions of [his] ancestors’ in his pre-Christian religious life, Paul was devoted above all to the uniqueness of the God of Israel; and *he continues to exhibit a firm monotheistic stance in his Christian letters*. This is evident, for example in Rom. 1:18-32... & 1 Cor. 8-10...So we must remember that for Paul, as for other Jewish Christians, and also for the Gentile converts they sought to make obedient to the one God of biblical/Jewish tradition, devotion to Christ is expressed in the context of a firmly monotheistic stance.”⁶² Paul’s 1 Timothy contains a “remarkably strong affirmation of Jewish monotheism [e.g. 1 Tim. 2:5]...A favorite phrase is ‘God our Savior.’ That the God of Jewish monotheism is meant is clear,” Dr. James Dunn writes.⁶³

New Testament authors show the same distaste for deifying people as Jewish writers. There are “instances where men are taken for gods...Herod Agrippa (Acts 12:20-23)...Paul & Barnabas (Acts 14:8-18)—but at a level of popular superstition *which Jews and Christians would not and did not approve* (as the same passages make clear),” observes Professor James Dunn.⁶⁴

Many early Christians lived in pagan societies where the deification of humans was common place, yet they adamantly opposed this pagan practice. Professor David Aune observes that “Many of the [Roman] emperors beginning with Augustus were posthumously deified in emulation of the legend of the *apotheosis* or deification of Romulus, the legendary founder of Rome...Particularly in Roman Asia, cults in honor of living emperors were instituted in various cities (e.g. Pergamum & Ephesus)...Toward the end of the first century and beginning of the second century CE, Christians who were arrested were often required to sacrifice to the emperor to prove that they had renounced their [Christian] beliefs.”⁶⁵ Prior to Emperor Constantine, faithful Christians accepted martyrdom rather than offering worship to Rome’s deified Emperors. Worship & deification were inextricably linked; early Christians rejected both. It would have been hypocritical for them to accept Christian deification.

‘Late’ Direct Affirmation of Jesus’ Deity

The combination of strict monotheism with opposition to man’s deification, explains the late and sparse direct affirmations of Jesus’ deity in the New Testament documents. It is not until John’s Gospel, written in the AD 90s, 60-years after Jesus’ crucifixion, that we have an uncontroverted statement (Jn. 1:1, 14). Dr. James Dunn “traced a development...of ideas throughout the New Testament leading to the decisive step of attributing true deity to Jesus and the enunciation of a clear doctrine of incarnation, which he believed did not fully occur until the Johannine [John’s] writings.”⁶⁶ A common question faced by today’s Christians is—where does the New Testament attribute deity to Jesus? R. T. France responds “We might start...by discussing whether the New Testament calls Jesus ‘God’. We would then study a small number of passages where explicit God-language may be applied to Jesus. In that case we will find ourselves disappointed that in many cases the apparent direct attribution of divinity to Jesus melts away in the light of uncertainty about either the text, or the punctuation, or the syntax, leaving us with *no undisputed (or almost undisputed!) direct attribution of divinity to Jesus outside the opening and closing declarations of the Gospel of John* (John. 1:1, 14, 18; 20:28).”⁶⁷

These observations about the New Testament require an explanation: [1] The New Testament has relatively few straight-forward statements directly affirming Jesus deity—stating unambiguously that Jesus is God. Once we go beyond John’s Gospel, statements linking Jesus with God are more obtuse and/or depend on inference. [2] The New Testament’s most direct affirmations are ‘late,’ appearing in John’s writing dated around the AD 90s.

Deification: Did Jesus evolve from a Jewish Prophet to Gentile God?

These data suggest the earliest Christians, mostly Jewish believers, did not find it easy to directly affirm that Jesus is God, based on their adherence to monotheism and concomitant resistance to deification. Indeed, some scholars (e.g. Maurice Casey, *From Jewish Prophet to Gentile God*) argue it was only after Christianity spread beyond its roots in Judaism to the wider Greco-Roman world that Deity was attributed to Jesus.⁶⁸ The pagan concept of deification, it is argued, overcame Jewish inhibitions, allowing Christians to assign deity to Jesus.⁶⁹ The result is an evolutionary process—Jesus (it is alleged) was a Jewish prophet, exorcist and Messiah who evolved into a ‘God,’ as Christianity spread to the Greco-Roman world where deification was common-place.

Other scholars refute the notion that Jesus evolved into a ‘God;’ they look for subtle, indirect affirmations of Jesus’ deity. R. T. France explains: “It is in this light that we must understand the fact...the explicit use of God-language about Jesus is infrequent in the New Testament, and is concentrated in the later writings, and that hardly any such language has avoided textual surgery or syntactical ambiguity. It was such shocking language that, even when the beliefs underlying it were firmly established, it was easier, and perhaps more politic, to express these beliefs in less direct terms. *The wonder is not that the New Testament so seldom describes Jesus as God, but that in such a milieu it does so at all.* There must have been a very strong compulsion behind such a radical conversion of language. What then was the driving force behind this...? In a word, it was Jesus Himself and the impact He made on His followers...[that was expressed in] the worship of Jesus.”⁷⁰

New Testament authors include Jesus in the ‘Divine Identity’

Evangelical scholars argue that the New Testament authors were neither slow nor late in attributing deity to Jesus Christ; rather they assert that they did this in ways consistent with biblical monotheism. Professor N. T. Wright asserts that, “From the earliest days of Christianity we find an astonishing shift, for which...nothing in Jewish traditions of the time had prepared Jesus’ followers. They remained firmly within Jewish monotheism; and yet they said...Jesus was...the unique embodiment of the one God of Israel.”⁷¹ Dr. Bauckham contends that the authors had a “deliberate and sophisticated way [of] expressing a fully divine Christology”⁷²—affirming that Jesus is truly God. In his view, “The New Testament writers, without rejecting Jewish monotheism, purposely include Jesus within God’s identity.” More specifically, Professor Richard Bauckham asserts:

“The writers do this deliberately and comprehensively by way of precisely those characteristics of the divine identity on which Jewish monotheism focused in characterizing God as unique. They include Jesus in the unique divine sovereignty over all things, they include him in the unique divine creation of all things, they identify him by the divine name which names the unique divine identity, and they portray him as accorded worship which, for Jewish monotheists, is recognition of the unique divine identity. In this way...[they view] Jesus Christ himself as intrinsic to the identity of the unique God.”⁷³ In short, the “New Testament authors identify Jesus with the God of Israel.”⁷⁴

For example, Paul expands Israel’s *Shema*, by including Jesus. In doing so, Paul employs the fact that the Greek Old Testament [Septuagint] uses “LORD” (Greek: *Kyrios*) as a proxy for the personal name of God: YHWH. Israel’s creed says, “Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one.” (Deut. 6:4) Paul’s expanded version says: “For us there is one God, the Father, from whom are all things and for whom we exist and one LORD, Jesus Christ, through whom are all things and through whom we exist.” (1 Cor. 8:6) Here, Professor Bauckham contends, Paul affirms Israel’s creed, but reformulates it to “incorporate the belief of the unity of Jesus and the Father. Paul is not adding to the one God of the Shema a ‘Lord’ the Shema’ does not mention. He is identifying Jesus as the ‘LORD’ whom the Shema affirms to be one. This is Paul’s quite unprecedented reformulation...the unique identity of the one God *consists of* the one God, the Father, *and* the one Lord, his Messiah.”⁷⁵ R. Ciampa & B. Rosner agree that 1 Cor. 8:6 “has a creedal sound to it, leading many to believe that Paul is citing (or slightly modifying) creedal material from the early church,” adding, “N. T. Wright is not exaggerating when he asserts that the writing of this text ranks as ‘one of the greatest pioneering moments in the entire history of Christology’.”⁷⁶ Also of note is the fact that “Paul’s reformulation in 1 Cor. 8:6 includes Christ in this exclusively divine work of creation by giving him the role of instrumental cause.”⁷⁷ The implication is that the early “Christians said something about Jesus that Second Temple Jewish literature was not interested in saying [nor willing to say] about anyone: that he [Jesus] participates in the divine identity.”⁷⁸ More generally, Dr. Richard Bauckham contends that the first Christians understood that Jesus—the man—in resurrection, was exalted to God’s throne to share in “God’s unique sovereignty over the whole cosmos.” “Jesus is...the one who exercises God’s eschatological [end-time] sovereignty over all things, with a view to the coming of God’s kingdom and the universal acknowledgement of God’s unique deity. Jesus is included, we might say, in the *eschatological* identity of God.”⁷⁹ As we have seen, the first Christians also included Jesus in the divine identity in terms of God’s creative activity: “The participation of Christ in the creative work of God is necessary, in Jewish monotheistic terms, to complete the...inclusion of him in the divine identity,” Bauckham says.⁸¹ By virtue of this, Jesus in resurrection became a valid object of Christian worship & devotion. “Exclusive devotion is now given to Jesus, but Jesus does not thereby replace or compete with God the Father, since he himself belongs to the unique divine identity.”⁸² This wasn’t due to an evolutionary process; it occurred from the start. Scholars contend it was their dynamic experiences of salvation and encounters with their risen Lord which constrained the first believers to assign such an exalted status to Jesus. Such experiences, facilitated by the Spirit, overcame their inhibitions due to their Judaic monotheism & objections to deification and issued in their worship of Jesus as they worshipped God. Dr. Larry Hurtado postulates that for the earliest Christians:

“The conviction that God raised [Jesus] from death and exalted him to unparalleled heavenly glory was the likely ignition for the explosively rapid and remarkably early development of the intense Jesus-devotion that we see...in our earliest NT writings (Phil. 2:9-11). In its earliest form, this crucial conviction was that in raising Jesus from death, God confirmed Jesus as the true Messiah (Acts 2:35), declared Jesus as God’s unique Son (Rom 1:3-4), and exalted him as the Lord (*Mar/Kyrios*) who now shares the divine throne, glory and ‘the name above every name’ (Phil. 2:9-11; Heb 1:3-4). This conviction likely erupted in the earliest days/weeks after Jesus’ crucifixion, and was generated & confirmed by... encounters with the risen /glorified Jesus, visions of him in heavenly exaltation, prophetic oracles ...declaring his status & expressing God’s will that Jesus be revered, and new ‘charismatic’ readings of scriptural texts that...helped believers to understand better how to accommodate Jesus in relation to God ...[Due to this, these] early believers felt obliged to incorporate the risen/exalted Jesus...in their devotional/[worship] practices, according to Jesus the sort of place that they otherwise reserved for God alone. For example...they invoked (‘called upon’) and ‘confessed’ the risen Jesus in their worship-gatherings (e.g., 1 Cor. 16:22; Rom. 10:9-13). Their initiation rite was a baptism in Jesus’ name.”⁸³

Certainly Paul’s conversion was not the result of resolving theological or philosophical issues; it resulted from his encounter with the risen Lord which had a seismic impact on his belief system. So George Carraway concludes that, “In Paul’s vision on the road to Damascus he came to realize that the one God as expressed in the *Shema* had always included the Lord...that the identity of the one God included Christ the Lord.”⁸⁴ Scholars assert that this realization about Jesus Christ, reflected in the New Testament documents, characterized the faith of the Church from the very beginning. Dr. R. Bauckham states that, “The inclusion of Jesus in the unique divine identity—was central to the faith of the early church even before any of the New Testament writings were written, since it occurs in all of them.”⁸⁵ These conclusions repudiate the notion that Jesus’ ‘deification’ was the result of a decades-long evolutionary process as the Christian faith spread into the pagan Greco-Roman world. For 1st-century Christians the “bar for inclusion in the divine identity” was very high; only Jesus ‘made the cut.’ Scholars emphasize the need to view these conclusions in their first-century context, rather than super-imposing later, alien theological issues on the NT documents. George Carraway summarizes Bauckham’s view that, “The New Testament writers simply identified Jesus with YHWH, God of the Old Testament, without reference to any explanation of essence. The explanation of essence was taken up by the councils and the rest of the Church has wrestled with the problem for two millennia.”⁸⁶ Doug Ward emphasizes the earliest Christians did not debate the divine essence, nature or *hypostasis*, saying: ⁸⁷“The first Christians knew what they had experienced before and after Jesus’ resurrection. In the New Testament writings, they faithfully recorded what Jesus and the scriptures had taught them. Since they were not philosophers or practitioners of systematic theology, they did not engage in a philosophical analysis of the nature or essence of the unique divine identity. The theological and philosophical implications of what they wrote were left for later generations to work out.” It is therefore anachronistic to read Nicene notions of essence, *hypostasis*, etc., back into the New Testament documents. Prof. Wesley Hill notes that “In [later] Nicene theology the question of monotheism has receded in prominence, and the question of the internal relations of the divine persons was at issue...To read Paul’s theology from the perspective of Nicaea [Nicene Council, AD 325], then, would be to allow an alien question (intra-trinitarian divine relations) to obscure what was at stake (the exaltation of Jesus and his status in relation to God).”⁸⁸ The New Testament does not countenance “man becoming God in life & nature but not in the Godhead;” it was a notion alien to both first-century Christians and the New Testament’s authors.

Jesus’ Exaltation was Not His Deification

The earliest Christians and NT authors affirmed that Jesus’ exaltation—his resurrection, ascension and enthronement—qualified him as a valid object of divine worship. This was *not*, however, a case of deification (*apotheosis*). Some 90-years ago, A. H. McNeile, objected to such identification, saying, “Some writers have used unfortunate language in speaking of the *apotheosis*, the deification of Jesus. The words [*apotheosis*, deification] represent ideas connected with pagan thought [from] which the first Christians, who were all Jews thought very differently, and from which they would have shrunk as from blasphemy.”⁸⁹ Dr. Hurtado echoes

this view, stating, “Jesus’ divine status was, however, not really an instance of *apotheosis*, but instead, a rather novel religious innovation among circles deeply antagonistic to all such pagan ideas [i.e., *apotheosis*], and so unlikely to have appropriated them. So, in that sense we can say that Jesus did not really ‘become a god’.”⁹¹

The same Christians and New Testament authors who now worshipped the exalted Jesus as God, were also convinced that Jesus pre-existed as God (since he participated in God’s creation work, etc.). Hence, in his exaltation, Jesus did not ‘become a God,’ in the sense of attaining to something he never previously possessed. To regard this as deification (*apotheosis/theosis*) is a misrepresentation. Charles L. Irons explains, “Some have attempted to argue... [that Jesus’ exaltation was] the deification of a mere man, a belief that would be more at home in a polytheistic context (recall the ancient Romans’ belief about the *apotheosis* of Romulus after his death). But the exaltation of Jesus, with its implication of divine status, cannot be interpreted as an *apotheosis*. Such a construction would be conceptually and theologically impossible within the context of an early Christian movement composed of Jewish believers raised in and committed to the strict monotheism inherited from Judaism... Rather than viewing his exaltation as an *apotheosis*, we must view his exaltation as a manifestation and confirmation of his identity as the divine Son of God.”⁹²

Witness Lee did not hesitate to “venture where theologians fear to tread.” Hence, in contrast to the above, he asserts that Jesus’ exaltation was indeed deification. Witness Lee asserts that “By incarnation Christ, the only begotten Son of God in His divinity (John 1:18), put on the flesh, the human nature, which had nothing to do with divinity; *in His humanity He was not the Son of God.*”⁹³ Subsequently, “In resurrection *Christ’s humanity was deified*...meaning that He became the Son of God not only in His divinity but also in His humanity.”⁹⁴ This exposition could be understood to mean that Jesus, as he walked the earth, was (at the cellular level) a “hybrid” —part God and part man. In his divinity he was the Son of God, yet “in His humanity He was not the Son of God,” (W. Lee asserts) and therefore Jesus’ humanity needed to be deified. Rather engaging in a metaphysical debate, we note that such issues taxed the greatest theological minds at the Council of Chalcedon (AD 451). It is anachronistic to project these issues back to the first-century believers and the New Testament authors.

Witness Lee vs. Eastern Orthodoxy

More importantly, we note that Witness Lee’s teaching contradicts Eastern Orthodoxy on this point. Eastern Orthodoxy teaches that Christ’s humanity was deified as a result of the incarnation;⁹⁵ Witness Lee maintains, however, that it was only “*in resurrection* [that] Christ’s humanity was deified.” Orthodoxy’s V. Khartamov writes, “The Logos, who is God...does not require any deification for himself. When we speak about deification in Christ we speak only about the deification of Christ’s human nature *at the moment of his incarnation.*”⁹⁶ James Gifford elaborates:⁹⁷ “The man Jesus Christ was fully God because he was hypostatically joined to the Logos, the Son. *Theosis* [deification] first entered human history in the deification of Christ’s human nature. Because the enhypostatic humanity of Christ was joined to the Logos, the presence of the Logos deified his human nature...This deification of Christ’s human nature is a direct result of...the interpenetration of the divine and human natures in one person,”—the man, Jesus. Emmanuel Hatzidakis also states that,⁹⁸ “His [Christ’s] human nature was divinized ...upon its assumption by God the Logos” --which occurred at the incarnation. Donald Goergen declares,⁹⁹ “In Christ, human nature has already experienced deification. The human nature of Jesus Christ, due to its *koinonia* [fellowship] with the divine nature through the hypostatic union, becomes divine...The incarnation is not an exception, but rather [a case] of that which is elsewhere possible: deification.” Indeed many Greek Fathers (e.g. Clement of Alexandria AD 150-215) argued¹⁰⁰ that Jesus Christ was incapable of sin due to his deified human nature. Hence Eastern Orthodoxy (in contrast to W. Lee) asserts that Christ’s humanity was already ‘deified’ when he walked the earth. In this case Jesus resurrection, while clearly his exaltation, transfiguration, etc, was not his deification. Dr. Kavin Rowe contends that Luke’s Gospel, with its birth narrative identifying “Jesus as Lord [=YHWH, Luke 1:43] even from the womb...protects against a divinized interpretation of Jesus *kyrios* [i.e. deification]. Jesus did not after his death and resurrection become something he was not before, but rather was vindicated precisely in respect to and even because of his identity.”¹⁰¹ Resurrection demonstrated (proved) what Jesus Christ already was—the Son of God; it ‘designated’ (marked him out) as such (Rom. 1:4). Eastern Orthodoxy clearly rejects the view that Jesus was a part-God/

part-man 'hybrid,' and that Christ's humanity was 'deification' via his resurrection. Witness Lee's notion of Christ's deification via resurrection contradicts Eastern Orthodoxy. But this is not the only contradiction.

The Patristics' Appropriation of Pagan Terms

We commenced our study from a biblical base. However our attention has gradually turned from the Scriptures to secular Greek society & literature which spawned the deification concept. None of the key terms the Greek fathers used for deification are found in Scripture; all originate in pagan society where they were used for the deification of Greek heroes, Roman emperors and illustrious citizens. In the early centuries there were no specifically "Christian terms" for deification; both Christians and pagans drew on the same vocabulary pool.

Nicholas Bamford gives a brief overview of the concept & terminology. He says:¹⁰²

"The concept of deification initially evolved from the pagan language of *apotheosis* [*apo-* 'from, away from' plus *theosis*], to Platonic language and came to be incorporated into Clement of Alexandria's [~AD 150-215] use of *theoipoieo* [verb: 'God' plus 'make'] and *theoiosis* [noun]. The language of deification was later developed by Gregory Nazianzen [AD 329-390] through the term *theosis* ...[Norman] Russell argues that deification 'only became fully assimilated with Maximus' (Maximus the Confessor [AD 580-662]) who...develop[ed] a dynamic...theology of deification.' Later the medieval Byzantine Bishop, Gregory Palamas [AD 1296-1359] used the term *theosis* with great effect..."¹⁰³

Thus the second-century Church father, Clement [~AD 150-215], appropriated the pagan terms *apotheosis* & *theoipoieo* and employed them for Christian purposes. We briefly consider these words and related terms:

Theosis: The noun *theosis*, rendered 'deification' or 'divinization,' does not correspond to any New Testament word. In later Eastern Orthodoxy it became a "Christian technical term" for deification. The word, *theosis* was first used in AD 363 by Gregory of Nazianzus [AD 329-390]; so *theosis* first appeared in the fourth century. Norman Russell also notes, "Although this [*theosis*] became the standard term for deification in Byzantine theology, it is the rarest of the various expressions employed by the earlier [Greek] fathers."¹⁰⁴ The related verb, *theo* (to deify) was first used by secular Greek writers in reference to Heracles. Later, Clement of Alexandria (d. ~AD 213) employed it. Frederick Norris notes that *theosis* (via its cognate verb) "was not first a Christian word nor always employed by only Christians after they made it central...the Theologian [Gregory of Nazianzus, AD 329-390] picked it up, cleaned it up and filled it with a Christian sense."¹⁰⁵

Apotheosis: Again this was not first a "Christian word;" *apotheosis* was used ~100 BC to describe the deification of Alexander the Great. The first Christian usage of *apotheosis* was by Clement of Alexandria (d. ~213 AD) and Origen (d. ~253 AD). Norman Russell says, "The first Christians to use *apoththeo* ['to deify' (verb)] and *apotheosis* ['deification' (noun)] Clement and Origen...follow a recognizable contemporary [secular] usage which their [Christian] successors extend..."¹⁰⁶ This term also had pagan connotations; "While not all emperors in the Roman Empire were deified...[the concept was democratized, so that] it also became common for '*apotheosis*' to be used for the 'solemn burial of ordinary [Greco-Roman] citizens'."¹⁰⁷

Theoipoieo: The verb, *theoipoieo* ('God' plus 'to make') was used as early as Clement of Alexandria (~AD 150-215). Among Church Fathers, Athanasius popularized it. "In the thirty instances [in his *Orations*] where Athanasius speaks of deification in Christ, he uses the verb *theoipoieo*, and the noun he coins, *theoiosis*."¹⁰⁸ This verb was the "favorite word of Athanasius [AD 296/8-373], *theoipoieo*, with the element *poieo*, 'to make,' 'to produce,' implies agency, something done to someone. It can be translated, 'to make god'...Even though *theoiosis* and later *theosis* became the choice expressions for Christians, other deification vocabulary was retained," writes V. Kharlamov.¹⁰⁹ We conclude that during the early Christian era, sacred (Christian) and secular (pagan) writers largely shared the same vocabulary concerning deification. Any differences were not linked to the use of a specialized "Christian" versus "pagan" terms; that was a much later development.

Anachronistic Error—Christian '*Theosis*' versus Pagan '*Apotheosis*'

The conclusions above are based on careful analysis by qualified scholars. They imply it is erroneous to project the later dichotomy of sacred/secular terms back into the early Christian era. Jordan Cooper makes this

mistake when he says: “A distinction, which the [Greek Church] fathers were careful to make, must be drawn between *theosis* and *apotheosis*.”¹¹¹ He also says “As long as deification has been taught, theologians have been careful to distinguish a biblical form of deification from pagan concepts of *apotheosis*.”¹¹² Taken together J. Cooper’s statements suggest that *theosis* was a “Christian” and “biblical” term, while *apotheosis* was a pagan, secular term, reflecting distinct deification concepts. Allegedly, “as long as deification has been taught,” it has been straight-forward to distinguish “biblical” from “pagan” versions.¹¹³ In fact the data show that during the first centuries AD, sacred and secular (pagan) writers used both these terms (plus others). This explains why discerning between the Christian and the pagan concepts of deification was by no means as simple & clear-cut as some deification-apologists suggest. Plus it suggests a well-founded Christian aversion to using pagan terms.

Dangers of the Deification Doctrine

Deification was a doctrinal innovation of the Greek Church Fathers. The early formulations, expressed in terms of sharing God’s essence, nature &/or substance (*hypostasis*), were fraught with pitfalls. The eminent historian of Christian doctrine, Jaroslav Pelikan, observes that “The idea of deification in the Greek fathers had run the risk of obscuring the distinction between Creator and creature.”¹¹⁴ Modern presentations can be innocuous; Kelly Kopic and Bruce McCormack, for example, focus on Eastern Orthodoxy’s “central...claim that humans participate quite literally in the divine life. Humans, in this qualified sense, become divine. They do not take on the full range of divine attributes, but rather share in the actual divine life of the Triune God. This is often called deification.”¹¹⁵ The obvious question which arises, in this case, if—‘humans participate in the divine life’-- why use the term, ‘deification’? Why aren’t biblical terms, like “God’s children,” or “sons of God” adequate?

However, a ‘strong version’ of the deification dogma is often presented which runs afoul of problems. Kelly Kopic and Bruce McCormack maintain that “the Eastern Orthodox often speak of *theosis* as an ontological or metaphysical change. Humans share in the divine being itself...The ontological claim of *theosis*...often carries a Neo-platonic cast whereby the creature takes on actual characteristics of the Creator, and the distinction between creature and Creator is minimized ...[so that] There is no fundamental ontological chasm between creature and Creator. On this rendering, the Western churches (Protestant & Catholic) parted company with Eastern Orthodox. They [Western churches] are ill-disposed to think of the creature’s relation to God as one of ontological union [i.e., union, ‘in a real sense’].”¹¹⁶

This problematic category advocating a ‘strong version’ of deification includes Greek Fathers who taught deification in terms of sharing God’s essence, nature &/or substance (*hypostasis*), formulations which are fraught with pitfalls. Ex-Orthodox scholar, N. N. Trakakis explains:¹¹⁷

If “the process of deification involves participation in, or sharing of, the very essence, nature and inner being of God...In that case, *theosis* would amount to...divinization in the sense of being transformed into a god (in a literal, ontological sense)...Deification, on this construal, could take one of two forms:

- (1) a crude *polytheism*, as those who are deified become gods in their own right retaining some sense of personal identity and thus introducing many hypostases into the divinity as there are human beings; or
- (2) a form of monism, where union with God amounts to *absorption* and *fusion with the divinity*, thus annihilating any trace of individuality or autonomy.” “To avoid such a slide into polytheism or monism [absorption]...the distinction between the divine essence and energies is often introduced...The solution to the problem lies in the notion of the ‘divine energies.’ Although God is unknowable and unapproachable in essence, we can come to know God insofar as we participate in his divine energies....including such attributes...as goodness, power, wisdom and love.”

The twin pitfalls of deification--humans becoming God in his essence, nature, or *hypostasis*, thereby obscuring the Creator-creature distinction--are that it issues in either (1) polytheism—wherein many Gods are produced or (2) “absorption into God,” if deified humans lose their personal identity. Both outcomes are objectionable. Hence the Patristics introduced “the distinction between the divine *essence* (what God is in himself) and divine *energies* (God interacting with creatures)... Between the utterly transcendent Creator and creatures there is a link, and the link is God himself in action”—his ‘energies’ or activities.¹¹⁸ In this scenario God’s *energies* can be

known (experienced); his essence cannot. “The unknowability of God’s essence [is] a consequence of the ontological gulf between God and creation which results from the doctrine of creation out of nothing, while it is through the energies [activities] which are God himself, that God encounters his creatures personally.”¹¹⁹

Scholars of Orthodox theology emphasize the crucial “distinction between God’s energies and essence. Human beings can participate in the former [God’s energies] but not the later [God’s essence]. Modern Eastern Orthodox theologians typically make the essence/energies distinction *sine qua non* [i.e., an indispensable condition] for any doctrine of deification,” says Professor Carl Mosser.¹²¹ Reflecting this dichotomy, the eminent Orthodox scholar V. Lossky says, “God is knowable on the economic level in his operations or energies but unknowable on the eternal level of his essence.”¹²² In this context “divinization (Greek *theosis*)” represents, “The view of Eastern theologians that sees salvation as the penetration of the human condition by the *divine energies* (2 Pet. 1:4).”¹²³ Dr. David Fagerberg explains that in this scenario,¹²⁴ “Deification means that we participate in the energies of God (which are really divine), but the divine essence does not substitute for our human essence. No human being turns into a divine being; the Father, Son and Holy Spirit alone possess the divine nature (consubstantially). Nevertheless, in divinization, the energies of God extend from him as rays extend from the sun and their warmth divinizes us.” The essence/energies distinction was often illustrated by the medieval example of a sword in the fire. “A steel sword is thrust into a hot fire until the sword takes in a red glow. The energy of the fire interpenetrates the sword. The sword never becomes the fire, but picks up the properties of fire [e.g. heat, color, glow].”¹²⁵ Every illustration is inadequate; the important point is that the essence/energies distinction restores the fundamental ontological chasm between Creator and creature.

Deification in terms of God’s Essence vs. His Attributes

Orthodoxy’s distinction between God’s essence and His energies is alien to Western theology. Dr. Ben C. Blackwell makes this distinction more “user friendly,” by expressing it in terms of God’s essence and His attributes. Thus he contrasts “essential deification” with “attributive deification,” saying: “With *essential deification*, the human shares ontologically in the essence of the divine [God]...Those who are transformed or changed by taking on the divine element experience an essential-transformational deification...[They are] constituted by a divine element.”¹²⁶ In contrast, “Those proposing *attributive deification* maintain that humans remain ontologically separate from the divine [i.e., God] primarily due to the distinction between the Creator and the created, but humans are ontologically changed as they share particular divine attributes such as immortality.”¹²⁷ Hence Blackwell’s “attributive deification” equals Orthodoxy’s deification by divine *energies*.

Professor Ben Blackwell argues that, consistent with the central tenet of Eastern Orthodoxy, the deification of the Greek Fathers [Irenaeus (AD 130-202) & Cyril of Alexandria (AD 376-444)] was not “essential deification,” but, rather “attributive deification” as believers express more of God’s attributes. Dr. Ben Blackwell writes:¹²⁸

“Deification [in Irenaeus & Cyril is] the process of restoring the image and likeness of God primarily experienced as incorruption and sanctification through a participatory relationship with God mediated by Christ & the Spirit. Through the Son and the Spirit believers become adopted sons of God, even gods, by grace and not by nature, because they *participate in divine attributes*. Accordingly, we characterized this ontological transformation as *attributive deification in contrast to essential deification*. That is, since Irenaeus and Cyril maintain a fundamental Creator-created distinction as well as the distinct agency of the Spirit, deified *believers do not* consubstantially or connaturally *share in the divine essence; rather deified believers* are ontologically transformed by the personal presence of the Spirit and therefore *experience the divine attributes*,” he says.

W. Lee’s Essential Deification vs. Orthodoxy’s Attributive Deification by Divine Energies

Orthodoxy’s central tenet¹²⁹ is deification via God’s “energies” and not His essence. In Dr. Blackwell’s terms, it is “attributive deification,” and not “essential deification.” Thus Kallistos Ware says: “‘Deification’ on the Orthodox understanding, is to be interpreted in terms of the distinction between the divine essence and the divine energies. *Human beings share by God’s mercies in His energies but not in His essence*, either in the present age or in the age to come. That is to say, in *theosis* [deification] the saints...*never become God in essence*.”¹³⁰ How does W. Lee’s doctrine compare? Does it conform to or contradict Orthodoxy’s deification?

“We...absorb the divine substance with the divine essence, the divine element”—W. Lee

In his ministry Witness Lee constantly emphasized God’s dispensing of Himself into the believers. God’s dispensing, plus the believers receiving (‘enjoying’) produces deification. W. Lee states that “In our spiritual breathing by the exercise of our spirit, we enjoy, receive, and *absorb the divine substance with the divine essence, the divine element, and the divine expression. This will cause us to be deified*, that is, to be constituted with the processed Triune God to be made God in life and in nature but not in the Godhead. In this sense we may speak of the deification of the believers.”¹³¹ He also says: “The Father’s life and nature, the Son’s element, and the Spirit’s essence are dispensed into our being to saturate us thoroughly....*We...are the same as He [the Triune God] is in the sense that we have His life, His nature, His element, and His essence.* We are absolutely the same as He is in this respect, but not in His Godhead. We do not possess any part of the Godhead, but we do possess His life, His nature, His element, and His essence. *We are divine in the sense of the divine life, the divine nature, the divine essence, and the divine element*, but not in the sense of the Godhead.”¹³² Such quotes could easily be multiplied; the main point is clear—Witness Lee’s version of deification emphasizes believers receiving (possessing) God’s “substance, essence, & element.” It is “essential deification,” acquiring God’s own essence or substance; it is distinctly *not* deification in terms of God’s ‘energies’ or attributes. Hence we conclude that Witness Lee’s doctrine of deification is radically different from Eastern Orthodoxy’s *theosis*. In fact, Witness Lee’s own deification doctrine is exactly the version which Eastern Orthodoxy repudiates!

The *Orthodox Study Bible* (Thomas Nelson Pub. 1993) states the following:¹³³

“Theologically, human deification understood ontologically is objectionable in most Western Christian traditions. How can human beings become divine without negating the essential divine-human distinction in classical theological reasoning? Progressively perfected human beings may assume some qualities, attributes or ‘energies’ of divinity (namely holiness, love & wisdom), but never become divine in substance or essence...Whatever Athanasius meant when he declared ‘God became man so that Man could become God,’ he could not have meant it ontologically [i.e. in a ‘real sense’].”

Thus today’s Orthodoxy distances itself from Athanasius’ maxim which LSM reiterates so tirelessly.

Witness Lee’s Deification Doctrine is Heterodox

We can “close the circle” by relating these conclusions back to Professor Bauckham’s concept of God’s “divine identity.” Dr. David Litwa observes that scholars—both western evangelical scholars and Eastern Orthodox scholars—maintain that for the Apostle “Paul, humans do not share the [divine] *identity* (or essence or nature) of God, but only God’s *energies* (or powers or ‘attributes’ non-essential to God’s deity). When I speak of God’s ‘essence’ and his ‘energies’, Professor Litwa says, “I am using the later (medieval) language of Gregory Palamas—but [Ben C.] Blackwell’s distinction between ‘essence’ and ‘attributes’ seems to me to amount to much the same thing.”¹³⁴ Although different terms are used, a scholarly consensus maintains that deification consistent with biblical theology is divinization in terms of divine attributes or ‘energies.’ Conversely deification in terms of God’s ‘essence, substance, element’ or God’s ‘divine identity’ is heterodox. Witness Lee’s own deification dogma falls within this latter category; it is not ‘kosher,’ it is objectionable, plus, it has been judged heterodox.

LSM’s Disingenuous Sleight of Hand

LSM attempts to portray Witness Lee’s deification doctrine as consistent with Eastern Orthodoxy’s. LSM’s Kerry Robichaux compares W. Lee’s maxim, “...man might become God in life & nature but not in the Godhead” with the Eastern Orthodox distinction between God’s *essence* and His ‘*energies*.’ LSM’s K. Robichaux states,¹³⁵

“In the writings of Witness Lee...the distinction has been expressed more casually by the formula ‘God became man that man may become God in life & nature but not in the Godhead.’ Comparing this to the classical expressions, the distinction [1] ‘*God in life and nature*’ should correspond to the economic Trinity in the West and *the energies of God in the East* and [2] ‘*the Godhead*’ [should correspond] to the immanent Trinity in the West and *the essence of God in the East*.”

This formulation, each line [1] & [2], is transitive, taking the form: A = B = C, which logically implies A = C.

Eliminating the intermediate items, the “economic/ immanent Trinity,” LSM’s Kerry Robichaux asserts that:

- [1] Witness Lee’s “‘God in life and nature’ should correspond to...the *energies* of God in the East” and
- [2] Witness Lee’s “‘the Godhead’ [should correspond] to...the *essence* of God in the East.”

Thus, according to Kerry Robichaux, Witness Lee’s doctrine matches the currently accepted Orthodox *theosis* doctrine. However, this alignment ought to strike the reader as curious.¹³⁶ The alleged correspondence (in fact) is contrived, the result of a disingenuous sleight of hand.¹³⁷ Orthodoxy’s deification occurs in terms of God’s *energies* (attributes) and not in terms of His *essence*. In contrast, Witness Lee repeatedly emphasizes God’s dispensing of His *essence* (element) into the believers. He says, “*We are divine in the sense of the divine life, the divine nature, the divine essence, and the divine element*, but not in the sense of the Godhead.”¹³⁸ What is communicable (dispensed) in W. Lee’s version is “God’s essence;” in Orthodoxy’s it is “God’s energies.” Stated differently, in Orthodoxy “God’s essence” is non-communicable; for W. Lee “God’s essence” is communicable (dispensed). Both employ the term, “essence,” with, we assume, a similar (if not identical) meaning. Yet the two schemes differ, in fact, they contradict each other in terms of communicability. Given this contradiction both deification theologies cannot be true simultaneously. LSM’s dogma does *not* neatly align with Orthodoxy.

The Scandal of LSM’s Scholarship

A straight-forward comparison shows that LSM’s Kerry Robichaux misrepresents the correspondence, falsely claiming W. Lee’s scheme matches that of Orthodoxy. According to W. Lee, believers become “God in life and nature,” and are made “*divine in the sense of the divine life...nature...essence and...element*.”¹³⁹ This surely corresponds to “*the essence of God* in the East,” and *not* to the “energies of God.” However, LSM’s Robichaux alleges W. Lee’s “‘God in life & nature’ should correspond to...the energies of God in the East.” The divine ‘energies’ are defined by Orthodoxy as sharable divine attributes, such as God’s holiness, love, wisdom, and immortality. In contrast, W. Lee does not refer to God’s energies (attributes); they don’t play a role in his scheme. We conclude that the alleged concord, claimed by LSM’s K. Robichaux, between Eastern Orthodoxy’s and W. Lee’s versions of deification, does not exist. Kerry Robichaux’s claim appears to be disingenuous sleight of hand; if this is the case, it is intellectual dishonesty. Not only the author, but also the publisher & publication are implicated in this misrepresentation. If LSM’s *Affirmation & Critique* was truly a scholarly journal, academic integrity would prevent or correct such misrepresentation. In practice, LSM’s journal, *Affirmation & Critique*, affirms Witness Lee and critiques everyone else; this is the scandal of LSM’s scholarship.

Deification Contextualized?

The notion of divinization belongs, not to the first-century, ‘apostolic Church,’ but to the subsequent, ‘post-apostolic’ era during which the gospel spread across continents and cultures. The deification doctrine was developed and found resonance in one particular culture—the Greco-Roman culture of the Eastern Mediterranean, represented historically by the “Greek patristic tradition,” from whence it blossomed in Eastern Orthodoxy. It never had the same appeal in the Latin Western region of the Roman Empire. Adherents perceive patterns of contextualization. “Both Irenaeus & Athanasius contextualize the gospel,”¹⁴¹ asserts Daniel Wilson. He contends that, “Irenaeus and Athanasius...contextualize the unchanging gospel in the terminology of the Greeks and Romans to make it more palatable for their respective audiences.”¹⁴² Hence Dr. Wilson states that “Irenaeus and Athanasius follow the various Greek philosophers in relating humanity’s deification to union with the divine...”¹⁴³ Similarly, V. Kharlamov asserts that *theosis* is contextualized in Clement’s theology¹⁴⁴ and also in that of Gregory of Nyssa [AD 335-394/5].¹⁴⁵

Contextualization Relativizes the Gospel

There are two problems with this “contextualization” argument: [1] it produces a relativized form of the gospel & [2] it risks sacrificing or diluting the absolutes of the gospel.

This “contextualization” rationale relativizes the deification doctrine, in contrast to Scriptural absolutes. If we concede that ‘deification’ was an acceptable and productive means of contextualizing the unchanging gospel to the Greco-Roman society of the E. Mediterranean in the early centuries CE, why should it work today? If we

accept the notion that the Greek Fathers used ‘deification’ to ‘translate the gospel’ into the Hellenistic culture of the early centuries, why should the same concept work for 21st-century western society? And why should it resonate in Asian or African society? There’s no reason to expect a depiction which successfully contextualized the gospel for one society in one era to succeed in another. Any “contextualized version of the gospel” is necessarily relativized in comparison to the absolutes of the New Testament gospel (Gal. 1:7-9). This leaves deification as an interesting curiosity in historical theology, potentially devoid of contemporary relevance. At a minimum, deification’s relevance to 21st-century society needs to be demonstrated, rather than assumed.

We note that LSM’s Tony Espinosa reviewed Daniel Wilson’s *Deification...: The Communication of the Gospel in Hellenistic Culture for Affirmation & Critique*.¹⁴⁶ The review was extensive; yet, strikingly, not a single word was mentioned about “contextualization.” Daniel Wilson asserts that “Both Irenaeus and Athanasius contextualize the gospel,” by presenting it in terms of the deification paradigm. Yet LSM’s Tony Espinosa never acknowledges this issue—a curious omission. A skeptic might suggest that this reviewer realized that the “contextualization argument” undercuts LSM’s position that ‘high peak’ deification is an absolute the gospel!

Deification “a natural connection with...Hinduism & Buddhism”--Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen

A danger of “contextualization” is that the gospel’s distinctive elements (essentials) are sacrificed or diluted in order to enhance its appeal. Some scholars’ enthusiasm for deification appears to reflect a desire to assimilate the Christian message to other religions so that “all rivers flow to the sea and all religions lead to God.” Thus Fuller Theological Seminary professor, Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen, suggests that “deification may find natural connection with religions such as Hinduism and Buddhism with their less guilt-ridden spiritualities. The same applies to spiritualities in the West such as New Age and Eastern religiosity...Could [the Bantu pagan notion of ‘vital participation’] be ‘the Orthodox concept [*theosis*] contextualized for Africa?” he quotes one scholar asking. Another suggests deification is probably “more congenial to an evolutionary perspective than the traditional, often Western language of redemption, salvation, sanctification, etc’.”¹⁴⁷ For Fuller Professor Kärkkäinen the historic gospel, which talks about sin, judgment & redemption, is an unfortunate, “guilt-ridden spirituality.” He prefers the Eastern guilt-free “doctrine of salvation [which] is not focused on guilty concepts and sin—as in the West—but focused rather on a gradual growth...culminating in deification, becoming like God’.”¹⁴⁸

The Orthodox notion of deification shifts the emphasis away from humanity’s fall and Christ’s atoning death, towards the more optimistic notion of “becoming God.” Dr. James Dunn notes there was a “shift in emphasis regarding the decisive saving event, from Jesus’ death as atonement for sin, to his birth and incarnation as the divine taking the human into itself,” via deification.¹⁴⁹ As a result of this shift, de-emphasizing Christ’s death, Orthodoxy’s *theosis*, says Fuller Theological Seminary Professor Kärkkäinen, has a natural affinity to Hinduism, Buddhism, New Age and other forms of Eastern religiosity! Are we to conclude that all these religions are talking about the same thing—*theosis*? Deification, it seems, is admirably suited to a post-modern world that is devoid of absolutes, where people can create God in their own image and even become that God! Plus the idea of “evolving into God” resonates with the evolution taught by science. These views, articulated in the literature, ought to warn Christians against the undiscerning adoption of the deification doctrine.

Athanasius—the Deification of Creation?

Like most advocates of *theosis*, Witness Lee & LSM’s Kerry Robichaux both start from Athanasius, deification’s ‘poster boy,’ who is highly commended due to his association with Nicaea. However, they stop short of full disclosure. They fail to mention that for Athanasius & other scholars the deification signalled by Christ’s incarnation encompasses not only humankind, but also other creatures, even the whole cosmos. Andrew Louth says, ¹⁵¹ “Orthodox theologians think of the great arc of the divine economy as stretching from creation to deification.” Thus, “the economy of God,’ writes Dumitru Stanloae, ‘consists in the deification of the created world...’¹⁵² and “To speak about creation is to speak about the cosmos that God created to be deified.”¹⁵³

Dr. Denis Edwards indicates that “Athanasius speaks...of the deification of creation...not just of the deification of human beings, but of the deification...of the whole creaturely world. Athanasius points to the texts in the *Wisdom of Solomon*... ‘The Spirit of the Lord fills the whole world’ (Wisdom 1:7) and ‘Your incorruptible Spirit

is in all things' (Wisdom 12:1).¹⁵⁴ We note the non-biblical notion that God's Spirit is in all things—created matter and living things, which smacks of Panentheism. Dr. Edwards quotes Athanasius: "In him [the Holy Spirit]...the Logos glorifies creation, and *deifying it [i.e., creation]* and adopting it, brings it to the Father."¹⁵⁵ Edwards comments, "This text is remarkable because it speaks of the creation being deified and adopted."¹⁵⁶ Athanasius is not alone among the Greek Church Fathers advocating the deification of the whole creation. Maximus the Confessor (AD 580-662) is on record proclaiming, "the grace that *deifies the universe* is at work."¹⁵⁷ Some modern Orthodox scholars hold similar views. Dumitru Stanloae's statement, "The economy of God consists in the deification of the created world..."¹⁵⁸ seems fairly innocuous. But, Andrew Louth explains that for Stanloae "To speak [thus] about creation is to speak about *the cosmos that God created to be deified.*" This is not merely deification of humankind; it is the deification of the whole created world, the cosmos.

This notion might appeal to Christian environmentalists and proponents of "eco-theology." Denis Edwards illustrates this view:¹⁵⁹ "Each sparrow and each dog exist because it partakes of the Word in the Spirit, [each] participates in its own way in deification in Christ and is eternally held and treasured in the life of the Trinity." Here, even dogs can be deified—since "each dog... participates in...deification in Christ"! Contemporary Eastern Orthodox theologians promulgate the idea of creation's deification. Edwards cites Boris Bobrinskoy speaking of "a deification that is both personal *and cosmic.*"¹⁶¹ An obvious question is raised, in view of LSM's appeal to Athanasius: Does LSM endorse or disavow Athanasius' notion of the deification of the whole creation?

W. Lee Defends his Deification Doctrine

Witness Lee justified his deification doctrine on the grounds that it was taught by the Church Fathers. He says,¹⁶² "In the 2nd to the 5th centuries, the church fathers found three high mysteries in the Bible: (1) the Triune God, the Divine Trinity, the highest mystery; (2) the person of Christ; and (3) the deification of man—that man could become God in life and in nature but not in the Godhead. However, after the 5th century the truth concerning this last mystery was gradually lost...Much of Christianity does not see anything about the 3rd mystery—the mystery of God becoming man that man may become God...But I feel strongly the Lord is going to recover this truth." However, contrary to this statement, deification is not a "high mystery *in the Bible.*" Its origin is not in the first-century apostles' teaching contained in the canon of Scripture. W. Lee admits that "The high truth of God becoming a man that man might become God in life and nature but not in the Godhead was *discovered by the church fathers in the second century.*"¹⁶³ This statement is important because it recognizes that deification—man becoming God—is not part of the first-century apostles' teachings and writings which ultimately became Scripture. Rather it is a 2nd-century 'discovery' of the church fathers. It was popularized by Athanasius (AD 296-373). W. Lee acknowledges it was "Athanasius, a young theologian who participated in the Council of Nicaea [325 AD, who], said concerning Christ, 'He became man that we might be made God'."¹⁶⁴ The doctrine of deification (*theosis*) was developed, mainly by Eastern Orthodox theologians, based on that insight. Deification is certainly not on par with the Trinity and the Person of Christ; those doctrines are based directly on Scripture and defined in orthodox terms by the early creeds (Nicaea 325 AD & Chalcedon 451 AD). At best, deification is an Eastern Orthodox theological innovation produced derivatively from Scripture. The deification doctrine was not included in the crucial ecumenical creeds--Nicaea 325 AD and Chalcedon 451 AD.

Deification (*theosis*) was finally endorsed by the Eastern Orthodox Councils of Constantinople in AD 1341, 1347, 1351 & 1368; that is 1,000 years after the Council of Nicaea which was 'universal' in scope. In the intervening millennium, various Church Councils venerated Mary as "Mother of God" & "God-bearer" and adopted other statutes, bankrupting their credibility. Rejecting the creeds' definition of the Trinity and Christ's Person constitutes heresy; rejecting deification does not. In fact, certain versions of deification are heretical.

W. Lee's Appeal to the Church Fathers

A notable feature of LSM's defense & confirmation of their deification dogma is their appeal to authority of the Church Fathers. In promoting and responding to critiques of deification, W. Lee and LSM do not mainly appeal to Scripture, but rather to later, post-apostolic writings of the church fathers. As W. Lee writes, "The high truth...that man might become God...was *discovered by the church fathers in the second century.*"¹⁶⁵ Who are

these “church fathers”? LSM refers to Justin Martyr (c. 100-165 AD) as “one of the earliest witnesses,” supporting deification. He is followed by Irenaeus (early 2nd century to 202 AD), Clement of Alexandria (150--215), Athanasius (296--373), Origen (184/185--253/254), Hippolytus (170--235) and the Cappadocians—Basil the Great (329/330--379), Gregory of Nyssa (c. 335--c. 395), & Gregory of Nazianzus (c. 329--389/390). These are notable “church fathers” from the 2nd to 4th centuries; they are not first-century apostles. Moreover their writings do not constitute Scripture, neither are they on par with the Bible. It is ironic that Witness Lee, who lambasted the church Fathers’ creeds and traditions, should cite them as vindication of his deification doctrine.

Return to the Apostles’ Teaching or 4th-Century Church Fathers’ Teaching?

Witness Lee taught that the principle of Recovery is to go back to the beginning, back to the Bible, God’s pure Word. He said, “To be recovered is to be brought back by the Lord to the beginning. At the beginning, there was the Lord Himself and the pure, living Word. Christianity, however, has deviated both from the Lord and from the living Word and has become a religion of doctrine...We in the Lord’s recovery do not care for creeds; we care only to follow the whole Bible. No matter how good or how accurate a creed may be, it can never contain the entire Scripture.”¹⁶⁶ Plus he declared, “we do not care for the creeds; we care only for the Bible. The creeds are not wrong, but because they are incomplete, they unavoidably cause people to err in their understanding.”¹⁶⁷ Moreover, W. Lee berated those calling for a “return to the so-called historic church.” He declared, “There can be no reconciliation between the Lord’s living testimony and the traditional church...We must come back to the pure Word and not care for the traditions of the historic church...Our critics say, ‘You don’t honor the ancient councils which formulated the creeds...’ We respond, ‘We don’t follow the creeds. They are man’s teaching and tradition. Instead, we come back to the pure Word...’”¹⁶⁸ We ask--why did W. Lee contravene this stand when promoting his deification doctrine? He asserts that recovery is a return to the beginning, to ‘God’s pure Word,’ the 1st-century apostles’ teaching. It is not a return to the 4th-century teachings of the ‘church fathers,’ to the traditions of the historic church. According to W. Lee, the deification taught by the 4th-century church fathers (Athanasius, Basil, Gregory, etc) is the “high peak of the divine revelation.” If that is the case, hasn’t the “Recovery” returned to the 4th-century church fathers’ teachings, rather than returning to the beginning—to the first-century apostles’ teaching canonized in Scripture?

W. Lee denigrates theology and the creeds. He says, “The term *theology* is misleading. We have only the Bible; we do not have theology. The problems in Christianity began around the 2nd or 3rd century when the church fathers developed a theology from the Bible...On the one hand, the [Nicene] creed was written according to the New Testament...On the other hand, the creed was written according to the teachings of the church fathers.”¹⁶⁹ We note that W. Lee distinguishes between theology and the Bible, saying, “We have only the Bible; we do not have theology.” His point is that a theological system can develop way beyond Scripture. As a theology it may be internally consistent and intellectually attractive. Yet we ought to distinguish between that theological system and Scripture itself. W. Lee observes that, “The problems in Christianity began around the 2nd or 3rd century when the church fathers developed a theology from the Bible.” Evangelical scholars concur. Professor James Dunn indicates that, in their efforts to address Greek philosophical issues, the Fathers developed “ever more complex creeds, climaxing in the Nicene creed and Chalcedonian definition, in which the attempt to define the indefinable, to express the inexpressible, forced metaphor and analogy beyond what they could adequately express...The ecumenical creeds made a...mistake of thinking they could...define the indefinable.”¹⁷¹

This critique applies to the deification doctrine; paraphrasing Witness Lee, “problems...began around the 2nd or 3rd century when the church fathers developed a [*Theosis*] theology—[about deification, apart] from the Bible.” Given W. Lee’s distinction between theology and the Bible, isn’t it contradictory of him to appropriate the Greek Fathers’ *theosis* theology and make it the “high peak of God’s divine revelation”? Deification is a theological construct of the church Fathers, developed by the Eastern Orthodox Church; it does not derive directly from Scripture. Witness Lee proclaimed, “We have only the Bible; we do not have theology.” In this case, doesn’t the Recovery’s appropriation of Eastern Orthodoxy’s deification doctrine smack of hypocrisy?

Strange Bedfellows—W. Lee Appeals to the Roman Catholic Church

This hypocrisy is heightened when W. Lee, having denigrated the Roman Catholic Church for decades, appeals to their teaching as endorsement for his doctrine. He says, “the Catholic Church is also paying attention to this matter of deification. Not long ago a brother showed me that the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, recently published by the Roman Catholic Church. [It] presents the following: ‘...Why Did the Word Become Flesh? The Word became flesh to make us “partakers of the divine nature” (2 Pet. 1:4)...“For the Son of God became man so that *we might become God*” (St. Athanasius, *De inc.*, 54, 3). “*The only-begotten Son of God...assumed our nature, so that he...might make men gods*” (St. Thomas Aquinas, *Opusc.* 57:1-4).” Witness Lee then comments, “Here we see that the Catholic Church teaches that the believers in Christ can become God...”¹⁷² LSM’s Local Church and the Roman Catholic Church make strange bedfellows; yet they both endorse a doctrine of deification. W. Lee consistently vilified the Roman Catholic Church as “apostate”, “satanic,” “religious Babylon,” and the “great prostitute.” Now he uses their teaching to support his doctrine, saying, “We see that the Catholic Church teaches that the believers in Christ can become God.” But what is the value of that endorsement—the endorsement of the “apostate, satanic, religious Babylon”? Isn’t it hypocritical, on the one hand to denounce Roman Catholicism and, on the other hand, to appeal to their teaching as an endorsement?

Deification’s Prototype –the Virgin Mary becomes God

The appeal of LSM & Witness Lee to the Ancient Church’s deification teaching puts them among surprising company; LSM’s Local Church, the Roman Catholic Church & the Eastern Orthodox make strange bedfellows. W. Lee credits the church fathers as discovering “three high mysteries in the Bible”: (1) the Triune God; (2) Christ’s person & (3) the deification of man. The Ancient Church (both East & West) adds a fourth mystery—the Virgin Mary. Mary—the “Mother of God” and “God-bearer”—is the obvious candidate for deification! Hannah Hunt explains that for Eastern Orthodoxy, “Humanity’s potential to become God...raises the key issue of the Mother of God, another distinctive aspect of...Byzantine Christianity...Whilst the Western Church venerates Mary as the ever-virgin mother of God, the Eastern Church focuses, through the title *Theotokos* [‘God-bearer’], on how her humanity expresses that of Christ—who is also divine...The term *Theotokos* strongly affirms Mary as the bearer of God in Christ is *far more than a human incubator* of a divine seed.”¹⁷³ The “far more” includes Mary’s deification; in fact the Virgin Mary becomes the prime example for Orthodoxy’s *theosis* doctrine. Jesus Christ, the Son of God, is not deification’s archetype, since He was God’s Son from eternity. The Virgin Mary, having no eternal pre-existence, offers a better prototype for deification’s advocates. So Jaroslav Pelikan writes: “Mary the Mother of God...did not have a pre-existent divine nature, as Christ did, but was completely human in her origin, just as all other human beings are. Yet because she had been chosen by God to be the *Theotokos*, ‘the one who gave birth to the One who is God,’ that completely human nature of hers had been transfigured; and already *in this earthly existence she had in a special way ‘come to share in the very being of God,’* as the 2nd Epistle of Peter had promised that who believed in her divine Son would.”¹⁷⁴ The assertion Mary came ‘to share in the very being of God,’ (in this context) means she was deified, made God.

For Catholics too, Mary’s veneration follows from their deification dogma. Brian Reynolds observes, “The glorification (*doxa*) of Mary in the Greek Fathers was influenced by the notion of deification, that is, that the Incarnation opened the way for humans to unite themselves to God (*theosis*), or to become like God (*homoiosis theoi*), and none more so than the Virgin [Mary].”¹⁷⁵ The same logic applies: If God’s incarnation was so “man might become God,” who could be more qualified than the Virgin Mary, through whom God became man?

Eastern Orthodoxy’s Virgin Mary--already Deified, She Rules the World

It is news to most evangelical Christians, but Eastern Orthodoxy claims that Mary, Jesus’ mother, has already been deified and is reigning alongside her Son! I guess that makes her part of the “Four-in-one God”! The notion of Mary’s deification is promulgated among 260 Million Eastern Orthodox adherents worldwide. The influential 20th-century Orthodox theologian, Vladimir Lossky (1903-58) wrote, “Whilst the Church still awaits the advent of the world to come, [Mary] the Mother of God has crossed the threshold of the eternal kingdom, and, as the sole person to be deified—token of the final deification of creatures—She presides, at the Son’s side, over the destinies of the world which yet unfold over time.”¹⁷⁶ Professor Fairbairn comments, “According to the

Orthodox [Mary] was the only person whose final deification does not need to wait for the return of Christ and the advent of the Kingdom of God. Mary has already completed the process of deification...She was bodily resurrected [the 'Virgin Mary's Assumption'] after her death & burial, rather than waiting for the general resurrection as other believers do."¹⁷⁷ According to Orthodoxy, the Virgin Mary's deification was 'fast tracked'; she is now 'God' and currently rules with her Son, Jesus Christ. Mary's elevated status is reflected in icons depicting her, the *Theotokos*, richly adorned, enthroned, holding the 'Christ-child'—Madonna and Child. Hence according to Eastern Orthodoxy, applying their deification doctrine, the Virgin Mary has joined the ruling Godhead—the “three-in-one, Trinity” which (apparently) has morphed into the “four-in-one God”! Ironically, we arrive where we began. LSM and Eastern Orthodoxy have their own deification doctrines. Each claims to respect the ultimate deity of the triune God. Yet, taken to their logical conclusion, both produce a “four-in-one God.” In Orthodoxy's case the “Blessed Virgin Mary, the *Theotokos*,” already resurrected as a “first-fruit of deification,” has joined the ruling Godhead of the Trinity. In LSM's case, the “fourth person”¹⁷⁸ added to the Trinity is “Man” or “the Church, the Body.” W. Lee asserts there are now “*Four persons*—the one Body, one Spirit, one Lord, and one God the Father— mingled together as one entity to be the organic Body of Christ; thus, the Triune God and the Body are *four-in-one*.”¹⁷⁹ Yes, the ‘usual caveat’ applies—“These are four-in-one. However, only the first three are worthy of our worship; the fourth, the Body, should not be deified as an object of worship.”¹⁸¹ Despite that caveat, in LSM's scheme, both the believer and the Church *are deified*--they become capital 'G' God. W. Lee asserts that “except for the Godhead, we are *exactly the same as God*,”¹⁸² & “God's redeemed people have *become absolutely the very God* in life, in nature...but not in His Godhead [not as an object of worship].”¹⁸³ So LSM-adherents can assert, “I'm absolutely the very God in life and nature; just don't worship me”! For most evangelicals these assertions smack of polytheism and heresy. Such “statements by Witness Lee appear to contradict or compromise essential doctrines of the Christian faith.”¹⁸⁴ In view of this, LSM's “Blended Brothers” might rethink their deification dogma, plus their notion of the “four-in-one God.”

Conclusions

Evangelical scholars contend that deification is not a biblical concept; it is a Greek philosophical innovation of Church fathers in the post-apostolic era. Scripture defines God in terms of the “divine identity”—who God is. He is the eternal, transcendent Creator and the universal Ruler who alone is worthy of worship. Deity's “binary identity” in Jewish monotheism creates a boundary between God and His creation. Deification—man becoming God—sharing the “divine identity” is impossible. That boundary was crossed only once—by God through Jesus Christ's incarnation, death, resurrection & ascension. In response first-century Christians and NT authors recognized Jesus as God, sharing the “divine identity,” and worshipped Him. Through faith in Christ, believers are God's children, Christ's brothers & co-heirs, members of His Body, possessing the eternal life and divine nature. However, they do not become capital 'G' Gods, semi-Gods, partial-Gods or “Gods in life & nature but not in the Godhead.” Scholars deduce such claims would have been “blasphemous,” “appalling,” “repellant,” and “ridiculous” to first-century Christians and the NT authors and would have been unequivocally rejected.

Witness Lee's deification dogma is radically different from Eastern Orthodoxy's. To avoid heretical polytheism, pantheism & absorption into God, Orthodoxy defines deification via God's ‘energies’ (attributes, qualities) and not His essence (substance or inner being). Men do not become God in His essence or nature. Yet, in direct contradiction, W. Lee asserts unequivocally that man becomes God in nature, essence, element, & substance. LSM's portrayal of W. Lee's deification dogma as consistent with Orthodoxy is deceptive and disingenuous.

W. Lee asserted “I have not been influenced by any teaching about deification, but I have learned from my study of the Bible that God does intend to make the believers God in life & in nature but not in the Godhead.”¹⁸⁵ Skeptics might doubt this statement's veracity; I do not. It is essentially true. W. Lee did not adopt Orthodoxy's *theosis*; this explains his radically different version. W. Lee clothed his own homespun theological system with the mantle of deification. The sole item he appropriated from Orthodoxy was Athanasius' maxim. Witness Lee's theology (like Watchman Nee's) is a ‘patchwork quilt,’ cobbled together from Keswick ‘higher life,’ Brethren¹⁸⁶ dispensationalism, typology. Cloaking this *potpourri* with deification gives an aura of respectability & novelty.

Nigel Tomes,
Toronto, CANADA
April. 2016

Notes: Thanks to those commenting on earlier drafts. The author alone is responsible for the contents of this piece. The views expressed here are solely the author's and should *not* be attributed to any believers, elders, co-workers or churches he is associated with. Some other issues related to Deification are addressed in a previous piece, entitled: "*Song of Songs is not about 'Man becoming God'.*" Here we engage primarily with W. Lee's teaching on deification. The writings by LSM's authors are addressed only selectively. Since W. Lee's teachings are the "interpreted word," they are more crucial than LSM's authors' interpretation of "the interpreted word."

- o. The first quote "The Bible does *not* teach that believers will ever be deified" is from W. Lee, *Life-Study of Philippians*, Ch. 36, Sect. 1 (emphasis added). The second quote—"The fact that we have the divine nature with the divine life *does not mean that we shall ever be deified,*" is from [W. Lee, *Life-Study of 1 & 2 Timothy, Titus & Philemon*, Ch. 9, Sect. 1 (emphasis added)] LSM's Lesson Book says: "To say that we are one spirit with the Lord *definitely does not mean that we are deified.*" [LSM, *Lesson Book, Level 3: Two Spirits*, Ch. 17, Sect. 1] In doing so they echo W. Lee: "To say that our spirit is mingled with the divine Spirit *does not mean that we shall ever be deified.*" [W. Lee, *Divine Dispensing of the Divine Trinity*, Ch. 30, Sect. 3] The first quote in the main text, in context, says, the believers are "divine," yet they will never be "deified"—"2 Pet. 1:4 indicates clearly that we are partakers of the divine nature. Because we partake of the divine nature, it can rightly be said that *we are divine*. However, this definitely does not mean that we are evolving into God or that we shall ever become God as an object of worship. *The Bible does not teach that believers will ever be deified.*" [W. Lee, *Life-Study of Philippians*, Ch. 36, Sect. 1] W. Lee says, the believers are "divine," yet they will never be "deified." But, exactly what the difference is between being "divine," and being "deified" is not specified. Elsewhere W. Lee also stated: "*we do not possess His [God's] deity.*" The quote in context reads: "*Godhead* (Gk. Θεότης), used in Col. 2:9, refers to what God is as the Deity and as an object of worship. We, the children of God, are born of Him and therefore possess His divine nature (2 Pet. 1:4). But we do not participate in His Godhead; *we do not possess His [God's] deity.*" [W. Lee, *Concerning the Person of Christ*, (1971) Ch. 1, St. 1 (emphasis add)] In another e.g. from W. Lee's earlier ministry we read: "The perfect living of Paul was the expression of Christ; therefore, for him, to live was Christ. However, *do not for a moment think that we have deified Paul. Paul was not God*, but he was able to express God. *We do not deify ourselves;*" [W. Lee, *Subjective Experience of the Indwelling Christ*, (1983) Ch. 8, Sect. 1 (emphasis added)] In his early years, W. Lee cautioned that care was needed in the use of terms like "deify," & "deification." He said, "Certain early church fathers went so far as to speak of the '*deification*' of the believers in Christ. *We need to be careful in using such a term.* To say that the believers are deified to become objects of worship is blasphemy. But it is correct to say that the believers are deified in the sense of possessing the divine life & the divine nature. We may use the word *deification in a limited sense* to convey the fact that we have been born of God to become sons of God." [W. Lee, *Life-Study of Galatians*, Ch. 20, Sect. 2 (emphasis added)] Later "caution" was thrown to the wind, and the "limited sense" was abandoned in favor of rhetorical impact.
1. W. Lee, *Practical Way to Live a Life According to the High Peak of the Divine Revelation in the Holy Scriptures*, Ch. 2, Sect. 2. It is also termed "the high peak of the divine revelation of God's eternal economy." [Ed Marks, *Truth Concerning the Ultimate Goal of God's Economy*, Ch. 1, Sect. 1]
2. W. Lee, *The Issue of the Dispensing of the Processed Trinity & the Transmitting of the Transcending Christ*, Ch. 2, pp. 25-26 also *Truth Concerning the Ultimate Goal of God's Economy*, Ch. 1, Sect. 2 (emphasis added) Elsewhere W. Lee also uses the term "baby gods": "John 1:12-13 says that we were born, regenerated, by God with His life. As God's children **we are 'baby gods,'** having God's life and nature but not His Godhead. The Godhead is unique; He is the only One who should be worshipped." [*Life-Study of 1 & 2 Samuel*, Ch. 25, Sect. 2] On another occasion W. Lee said: "Thus, in regeneration God begets gods. Man begets man. Goats beget goats. If goats do not beget goats, what do they beget? *If God does not beget gods, what does He beget?* If the children of God are not in God's kind, in God's species, in what kind are they? If they are not gods, what are they? *We all who are born of God are gods.* But for utterance, due to the theological misunderstanding, it is better to say that we are God-men in the divine species, that is, in the kingdom of God." [W. Lee, *Crystallization-study of the Gospel of John*, p. 124 (emphasis added)]
3. W. Lee, *A Deeper Study of the Divine Dispensing*, p. 53 (emphasis added). I am aware of LSM's response to Scholars on this issue--*A Defense of 17 Quotations from the Ministry of Witness Lee*. LSM repeatedly objects to selected

- quotations being culled from W. Lee's publications. They complain that quotations are taken out of context. LSM alleges that "a false impression has been created by excising and clustering together a few carefully chosen quotations from Witness Lee's ministry, and...the impression created is shocking and not consistent with Witness Lee's actual understanding of the doctrine in question." I would respond by saying, "Yes, indeed a 'shocking impression' was made by W. Lee. On occasion, it seems, that is exactly what was intended!" At times W. Lee made radical statements knowing that they had "shock value," and would therefore have impact and be remembered—e.g. his talk about the 'four-in-one God.' Those kinds of statement are equivalent to the "10 second sound bite" in the newscast. These "memorable quotes" are not negated or diluted by other "off-setting quotations" from W. Lee. They ought to be addressed as such.
4. W. Lee, *The Move of God in Man*, Message 2, pp. 20-21 also *Truth Concerning the Ultimate Goal of God's Economy*, Ch. 1, Sect. 2
 5. W. Lee, *A Deeper Study of the Divine Dispensing*, p. 54 (emphasis added). With regard to this quote LSM states, "Our readers should note the specific carefulness that Witness Lee employs in Quotation 9 by **placing the words God and God-ized in quotation marks**, indicating that he is using the terms in nonstandard senses." [LSM, *A Defense of 17 Quotations from the Ministry of Witness Lee* (emphasis added)] We should also note that in many quotations the word, *God* appears **without** quotation marks—e.g. "that man might become God"—implying a "standard sense."
 6. W. Lee, *Life-study of Job*, Message 22, p. 122 & *Truth Concerning the Ultimate Goal of God's Economy*, Ch. 1, Sect. 1
 7. Kerry S. Robichaux, *Truth Concerning the Ultimate Goal of God's Economy*, Ch. 1, Sect. 10. The quote in context reads: We in the local churches hold that man may become God in God's salvation. We are persuaded by our study of the Word of God and by our understanding of God's economy. We are also confirmed by the ancient testimony of the church." [Kerry S. Robichaux, *Truth Concerning the Ultimate Goal of God's Economy*, Ch. 1, Sect. 10]
 8. "The high peak of His divine revelation...can be summarized in the following statement: *God became man that man may become God in life and nature but not in the Godhead*. This statement embodies the entire revelation of God's New Testament economy in an *absolutely scriptural* and careful." [LSM, *Truth Concerning the Ultimate Goal of God's Economy*, Ch. 1, Sect. 1 (emphasis added)] Note that W. Lee asserted that his deification doctrine derived from the Bible; he said: "I have not been influenced by any teaching about deification, but I have learned from my study of the Bible that God does intend to make the believers God in life and in nature but not in the Godhead." [W. Lee, *Life-Study of 1 & 2 Samuel*, Ch. 25, Sect. 2]
 9. On behalf of Eastern Orthodoxy, Bishop Timothy (Kallistos) Ware is cited, affirming that, "deification...according to the teaching of the Orthodox Church, is the final goal at which every Christian must aim: to become god, to attain *theosis*, 'deification' or 'divinization'. For Orthodoxy man's salvation and redemption mean his deification." Kallistos (Timothy) Ware, *The Orthodox Church*, p. 236 quoted by Kerry Robichaux, *Truth Concerning the Ultimate Goal of God's Economy*, Ch. 1, Sect. 10
 10. Both statements come from the writings of Dumitru Stăniloae (1903-93) a Romanian Orthodox Christian priest, theologian & professor. The first quotes Athanasius' maxim, then Stăniloae states that this postulates the "deification of the human being as the goal of the economy of salvation." [Emil Bartos, *Deification in Eastern Orthodox Theology*, p. 318, n. 8] The 2nd quote appears as: "The economy of God,' writes Dumitru Stanloae, 'consists in the deification of the created world...' [Elizabeth Theokritoff (ed.) *Cambridge Companion to Orthodox Christian Theology*, p. 69]. As the opening statement of his *Orthodox Dogmatic Theology*, Stanloae writes: "God's economy or His plan for the world is the deification of the created world and, because of sin, this implies its salvation." [Dumitru Staniloae *Orthodox Dogmatic Theology*, p. 1 quoted (slight changed) by Emil Bartos, *Deification in Eastern Orthodox Theology*, p. 122]
 11. W. Lee, *Crystallization-Study Outlines—Ephesians*, Ch. 1, Sect. 12. The quote, in context, says: "**Four persons**—the one Body, one Spirit, one Lord, and one God the Father— [are] mingled together as one entity to be the organic Body of Christ; thus, *the Triune God and the Body are four-in-one*." [W. Lee, *Crystallization-Study Outlines—Ephesians*, Ch. 1, Sect. 12 (emphasis added)] This is not an isolated statement. Also, W. Lee says: "Because the Father, the Son, and the Spirit are all one with the Body of Christ, we may say that *the Triune God is now the 'four-in-one' God*.' *These four are the Father, the Son, the Spirit, and the Body*. The Three of the Divine Trinity cannot be confused or separated, and the **four-in-one** also cannot be separated or confused." [W. Lee, *A Deeper Study of the Divine Dispensing*, (LSM, 1990), Ch. 15, St. 3 pp. 203-204] Note the phrases "Four persons," "four-in-one" & "'four-in-one' God." Witness Lee was well aware that "mingling" (inter-penetration) has been a contentious issue in Church history, especially in relation to deification. In this regard he noted (earlier in his ministry): "In the early part of the Christian era, there was much debate about the matter of the mingling of divinity with humanity. Some theologians thought that to speak of being mingled with God implied the belief that *a person could become God*, the belief *that a human being could be uplifted* to such an extent that he was *deified*. Those who had this kind of understanding of the teaching concerning mingling

condemned this teaching [i.e. the notion of ‘mingling’]. Eventually, theologians did not dare to use the word mingle or to teach concerning the mingling of humanity and divinity.” [W. Lee, *Life-Study of Leviticus*, Ch. 12, Sect. 3 (emphasis added)] Here W. Lee tells us that scholars (theologians) stopped using the terms “mingle, mingling,” due to the association of these terms with “deification.” Later he told us that the early Christians did indeed teach “deification.” So, ironically W. Lee ended up teaching both “mingling” & “deification”—the very same controversial combination.

12. This quotation, which puts the “four-in-one” in the context of deification, reads: “Man, the Spirit, the Lord, and the Father are built together. *This is not just three-in-one. This is four-in-one. God became a man that we, His redeemed, might become God.* With Him there is the Godhead. But regardless of how much divine life and divine nature we have to be the same as God, we do not have the Godhead.” [W. Lee, *Practical Points Concerning Blending*, p. 24 (emphasis added)] Regardless of the wider context, the issue of “Four persons,” “four-in-one” & “Four-in-one God” ought to be addressed.

LSM asserts that (in making the ‘Four-in-one’ statements above) “Witness Lee...did not compromise the inviolability of the Godhead, and he did not understand and teach that the Body of Christ shares the deity of God.” [LSM, “*A Defense of the 17 Quotations from the Ministry of Witness Lee*”] Despite LSM’s denial, it certainly appears that W. Lee’s “Four-in-one” statements, taken at face value, imply that “the Body of Christ shares the deity of God”—the “Three-in-one” Trinity has become “Four-in-one;” the “Three Persons” of the Trinity have become “Four Persons”! LSM offers a ‘countervailing quote’—“To say that the church is the embodiment of the Triune God is not to make the church a part of deity, an object of worship...” [W. Lee, *Basic Revelation in the Holy Scriptures*, p. 67] However, this quotation (with its caveat) does not nullify or cancel the other “Four-in-one” quotes. W. Lee’s “Four-in-one” quotes are more memorable, with greater “shock value,” which (we suspect) is why they were made.

We note also the contrast (contradiction?) between the quotes above and W. Lee’s earlier assertion that “In Ephesians 4:4-6 there are *four persons*...there are the Father, the Lord, the Spirit, and us, the Body. *This is not to make ourselves deified, to make ourselves God. We are divine* only in life, in nature, in element, & in essence, but not in the Godhead. Only one in this universe is God in the Godhead—that one is the Triune God.” [W. Lee, *Five Emphases in the Lord’s Recovery*, (1991) Ch. 4, Sect. 2] W. Lee asserts that, “*This is not to make ourselves deified, to make ourselves God*”—seemingly to deny deification. Yet, he immediately asserts that “*We are divine* only in life, in nature, in element, & in essence, but not in the Godhead.” So, apparently, to be “*divine* only in life, in nature, in element, & in essence” is not the “be deified”? Yet “deification” & “divinization” are synonyms!

13. The 2007 “Open Letter” from 60 Scholars to LSM & the “Local Churches” says: “Because the following statements by Witness Lee appear to contradict or compromise essential doctrines of the Christian faith, we respectfully call on the leadership of Living Stream Ministry and the ‘local churches’ to disavow and cease to publish these and similar declarations.” Including statements about the “four-in-one” God [60 Scholars, “*An Open Letter to the Leadership of Living Stream Ministry & the ‘Local Churches’*.” (Jan. 9, 2007)]
14. The quote, by LSM, in context, reads: “Ripped from its immediate context and from the larger context of his entire ministry, *Witness Lee’s term four-in-one God can, of course, be understood to refer to a heretical addition to the eternal and inviolable Triune Godhead.* But doesn’t simple decency require that we ask, ‘Is that really what he meant, especially since *he puts the term in quotation marks* and since the sentences in which the term is found have been severed from their context?’” [LSM, “*A Defense of the 17 Quotations from the Ministry of Witness Lee*” (emphasis added)] We substituted “extracted” for LSM’s “Ripped,” since the latter is a ‘loaded term’ (as LSM’s writers are well aware). Neither W. Lee nor LSM ought to be surprised when the phrase “Four-in-one God” triggers ‘alarm bells’ concerning heresy within the wider evangelical Christian community. Nevertheless W. Lee used the term repeatedly. W. Lee’s use of the phrase “Four-in-one God” is not counter-balanced by his frequent use of the term, “Triune God.” An analogy would be a failed drug test by a professional athlete is not cancelled or counter-balanced by hundreds of drug tests which he/she passed. Witness Lee’s “Four-in-one God,” taken at face value, fails the test of Christian orthodoxy. W. Lee protested (when expounding on ‘the Vine’ in John 15) saying “Does this mean that we are deified? *I have been accused of teaching that there are four in the Godhead—the Father, the Son, the Spirit, and the church!*” [W. Lee, *Mending Ministry of John*, Ch. 4, Sect. 4] Yet his “Four-in-one God,” certainly suggests “there are 4 in the Godhead.”
15. The quote, in context, reads: “Because of God’s incommunicability, *man* will never take part in the Godhead; he *will never be a fourth person in the Trinity...*” [Kerry S. Robichaux, “*That We Might be Made God*,” *Affirmation & Critique*, Vol. 1, No. 3 (July 1996) p. 24 (emphasis added)] A virtually identical statement says: “Because of the incommunicable aspect of God’s existence, *human beings* will never take part in the Godhead; they *will never constitute an additional person or persons in the Trinity...*” [Kerry S. Robichaux, “*Can Human Beings Become God?*” *Affirmation & Critique*, Vol. VII, No. 2, (Oct. 2002) p. 38 (emphasis added)] Yet we note LSM has published a 36,000-word treatise, a

- significant part of which defends/justifies Witness Lee's statement about the "four-in-one God." [LSM, "A Defense of the 17 Quotations from the Ministry of Witness Lee"]. Isn't it hypocritical of LSM to affirm man "will never be a 4th person in the Trinity..." and (on the other hand) defend Witness Lee's statements about the "four-in-one God"?
16. W. Lee's earlier denial appears in his statement: "The perfect living of Paul was the expression of Christ; therefore, for him, to live was Christ. However, *do not for a moment think that we have deified Paul. Paul was not God*, but he was able to express God. *We do not deify ourselves;...*" [W. Lee, *Subjective Experience of the Indwelling Christ*, (1983) Ch. 8, Sect. 1 (emphasis added)] The later statement is found in LSM's *Crystallization-Study* which asserts that: "As an ambassador of Christ, *Paul was 'the acting God'*— 2 Cor. 1:3-4, 12, 15-16; 2:10; 10:1; 11:2:" and also, "Paul was one with Christ to be *the acting God* in comforting the believers [W. Lee, *Crystallization-Study Outlines—2 Corinthians*, Ch. 1, Sect. 9 (emphasis added)] Of course W. Lee's deification doctrine applies to all believers who are being "made God..."
 17. "It is not too much to say that Samuel, a man according to God, was *the acting God on earth*." [W. Lee, *Life-Study of 1 & 2 Samuel*, Ch. 5, Sect. 2 & *Raising Up the Next Generation for the Church Life*, Ch. 8, Sect. 2 (emphasis added)] He also says, "As God's representative, *Samuel was the acting God*. God intended to move, to act, yet He needed a representative. Samuel thus became a prophet, a priest, and a judge. He was God's oracle and God's administration. As such, *he was the acting God on earth*." [W. Lee, *Life-Study of 1 & 2 Samuel*, Ch. 7, St. 1 (emphasis added)] This choice of terminology is unfortunate, since the adjective "acting" has the connotation of "serving temporarily, especially as a substitute during another's absence...e.g. 'acting mayor'." [Dictionary.com] Skeptics could ask: Is God expecting to be temporarily absent or incapacitated?
 18. A major task of this paper is to substantiate the statements made in this paragraph (see below).
 19. The concept of "divine identity" is introduced & applied in the writings of Richard Bauckham. According to *Theopedia*, "Richard Bauckham is a New Testament scholar & professor of NT studies at St. Mary's College, University of St. Andrews, Scotland. Bauckham is perhaps best known for his studies of the Revelation & for his commentaries on Jude & 2 Peter...In his book *God Crucified* (1999), [incorporated into *Jesus & the God of Israel* (2008)], Bauckham displays the craft of both a careful exegete & a deft theologian as he explores the riddle of how the radically monotheistic Jews who composed the earliest church could have come to call Jesus 'Lord'."
 20. The source, context & other details regarding these terms is presented below.
 21. A. H. McNeile (1871-1933) *New Testament Teaching in the Light of St Paul's*, (first pub. 1923) p. 126 (emphasis added). Note: we contend below that *apotheosis* was not a specifically pagan term. This Greek word, and other terms, are used by Church Fathers in the early centuries AD when discussing (Christian) deification/divinization.
 22. The quote in context reads: "The idea of deification, apotheosis of human beings was common among the pagans, and because many were deified their *theotes* did not approach what Jews meant by God-ship, Divinity. Thus *the notion would have been abhorrent to Jews*...The fact that Christianity arose out of Judaism but embraced Hellenism accounts for the difficulty that we feel in the early Christian use of Greek terms." [A. H. McNeile, *New Testament Teaching in the Light of St Paul's*, (pub. 1923) pp. 33-34 (emphasis added)] Note: the majority of 1st-century Christians were Jews. Professor Bas Van Os observes that "It seems that for most of the first century, Gentiles were a minority in most churches." [Bas Van Os in Stanley E. Porter (ed.) *Paul: Jew, Greek, & Roman*, p. 52] Hans Klavbein argues that (even if they were a minority by the end of the 1st century) still, *Jewish-Christians* were the most influential demographic segment in the Church. He says "Towards the end of the first century...the Jewish Christians were still a powerful & influential group in most churches. Even if they numerically were a minority they were respected because of their relation to Jesus & the apostles & their knowledge of the Scriptures" [Hans Klavbein in Jostein Ådna, Hans Kvalbein (eds.) *The Mission of the Early Church to Jews & Gentiles*, p. 56]
 23. Arie W. Zwiep, *Christ, the Spirit & the Community of God: Essays on the Acts of the Apostles*, pp. 60-61. In the context Dr. Zwiep is referring to the rapture of Enoch, Elijah, etc "The raptured saints are not being 'deified.' In none of the cases of rapture [do] we find a statement about an enthronement act, let alone an affirmation of *divinization or deification*. *This would be appalling to the Jewish-Christian mind*." [Arie W. Zwiep, *Christ, the Spirit & the Community of God: Essays on the Acts of the Apostles*, pp. 60-61 (emphasis added)]
 24. Arie W. Zwiep, *Ascension of the Messiah in Lukan Christology*, pp. 39-40, quoted in Zwiep, *Christ, the Spirit & the Community of God: Essays on the Acts of the Apostles*, p. 51 In context: "Although in some quarters of first century Judaism e.g., historical figures of Israel's past were occasionally elevated, even up to the status of *theos* [e.g., as in the writings of Philo & the Dead Sea Scrolls] there is little evidence that this...compromised its basic belief in monotheism because it perceived this type of divinity in an attenuated, non-literal sense. *A literalistic conception [of deification] would be near blasphemy in the Jewish mind*..." [Arie W. Zwiep, *Ascension of the Messiah in Lukan Christology*, pp. 39-40, quoted Zwiep, *Christ, the Spirit & the Community of God: Essays on the Acts of the Apostles*, p. 51]

25. Mark D. Nispel, "Christian Deification in Early Testimonia," VC 53, (1999) p. 271 quoted by M. David Litwa, *We Are Being Transformed: Deification in Paul's Soteriology*, pp. 229-230
26. Larry W. Hurtado, *Lord Jesus Christ*, pp. 91-92
27. Larry Hurtado, Review of Bart Ehrman's *How Jesus Became God*, Christian Century, July 22, 2014
28. Prof. Hurtado challenges "any scholar...to provide a cogent description of the specific process by which Christian Jews could have adopted *this repellant category*..." [Larry W. Hurtado, *Lord Jesus Christ*, pp. 92-93 (emphasis added)] On this point Professor Larry Hurtado says: "Earliest 'Christianity' was originally a Jewish religious movement, and it remained dominated by Jews through the crucial first decades. *Jews* who identified firmly with their people and their religious tradition, *such as those named Jewish Christians* of the earliest years, were scarcely likely to accommodate Jesus in such lofty terms under the influence of pagan notions of *apotheosis*. By all accounts, *loyal Jews of the time* ...found precisely these features of the Roman religious environment [i.e., *apotheosis*] particularly repellant. (Note for e.g. Philo of Alexandria's extended critiques of *apotheosis* [n. #27])." [Larry W. Hurtado, *How on Earth Did Jesus Become a God?: Historical Questions about Earliest Devotion to Jesus*, p. 41 (emphasis added)]
29. George Carraway, *Christ is God over All: Romans 9:5 in the Context of Romans 9-11*, p. 14
30. M. David Litwa, *We Are Being Transformed: Deification in Paul's Soteriology*, p. 229
31. Richard Bauckham, *Jesus & the God of Israel*, p. 109
32. Richard Bauckham, "Monotheism & Christology in Hebrews 1," p. 167
33. Andrew Chester, *Messiah & Exaltation: Jewish Messianic & Visionary Traditions & NT Christology*, p. 18
34. Matthew Levering *Scripture & Metaphysics: Aquinas & the Renewal of Trinitarian Theology*, p. 116 (emphasis original)
35. Doug Ward, "CHRISTOLOGICAL MONOTHEISM OF THE FIRST CHRISTIANS"
36. N. T. Wright, *What Saint Paul Really Said*, p. 63 Prof. Wright offers his own description of the "divine identity" which differs from that of Prof. Bauckham, but reaches similar conclusions. N. T. Wright states that "The Jews believed in a quite different 'god.' [than Greco-Roman concepts] This god, YHWH, 'the One Who Is,' the Sovereign One, was not simply the objectification of forces and drives within the world, but was the maker of all that exists. Several biblical books, or parts thereof, are devoted to exploring the difference between YHWH and the pagan idols: Daniel, Isaiah 40-55, and a good many Psalms spring obviously to mind. The theme is summed up in the Jewish daily prayer: "YHWH our God, YHWH is one!" Classic Jewish monotheism, then, believed that (a) there was one God, who created heaven and earth and who remained in close and dynamic relation with his creation; and that (b) this God had called Israel to be his special people. This twin belief, tested to the limit and beyond through Israel's checkered career, was characteristically expressed through a particular narrative: the chosen people were also the rescued people, liberated from slavery in Egypt, marked out by the gift of Torah, established in their land, exiled because of disobedience, but promised a glorious return and final settlement. Jewish-style monotheism meant living in this story and trusting in this one true God, the God of creation and covenant, of Exodus and Return." [N. T. Wright, "JESUS AND THE IDENTITY OF GOD" Originally published in *Ex Auditu* 1998, Vol. 14, pp. 42-56.]
37. Andrew Chester, *Messiah & Exaltation: Jewish Messianic & Visionary Traditions & NT Christology*, p. 20
38. Andrew Chester, *Messiah & Exaltation: Jewish Messianic & Visionary Traditions & NT Christology*, p. 20
39. Andrew Chester, *Messiah & Exaltation: Jewish Messianic & Visionary Traditions & NT Christology*, pp. 20-21
40. Richard Bauckham, ABSTRACT: "THE THRONE OF GOD & THE WORSHIP OF JESUS" (1998)
41. M. David Litwa, *We Are Being Transformed: Deification in Paul's Soteriology*, p. 32
42. R. Bauckham, *Jesus & the God of Israel*, p. 10
43. Richard Bauckham, *Jesus & the God of Israel*, p. 10
44. R. Bauckham, *Jesus & the God of Israel*, p. 164
45. Richard Bauckham, *Jesus & the God of Israel*, p. 109
46. George Carraway, *Christ is God Over All: Romans 9:5 in the Context of Romans 9-11*, p. 93. George Carraway quotes G. H. Boobyer, "Jesus as Theos in the New Testament," BJBL, Vol. 50 (1967-68) pp. 249-50
47. DAVID KANE BERNARD, "MONOTHEISTIC DISCOURSE & DEIFICATION OF JESUS IN EARLY CHRISTIANITY AS EXEMPLIFIED IN 2 COR. 3:16-4:6," UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH AFRICA (Dec. 2014) p. 66
48. R. T. France, "The Worship of Jesus—A Neglected Factor in Christological Debate?" *Vox Evangelica* 12 (1981) p. 25 (emphasis added)
49. Andrew Chester, *Messiah & Exaltation: Jewish Messianic & Visionary Traditions & NT Christology*, p. 18
50. M. David Litwa, *We Are Being Transformed: Deification in Paul's Soteriology*, p. 258. In order to accommodate the possibility of humans being deified, Dr. Litwa adjusts his criterion/definition, saying, "There are sharable and

- unshareable aspects of the divine identity. The power to create the physical world...is an unshareable aspect of the Jewish God's identity...*Deification involves participating only in those shareable aspects of god's identity* (e.g. immortality & ruling power) *not the unshareable aspects* (such as the power to create physical worlds)." [M. David Litwa, *We Are Being Transformed: Deification in Paul's Soteriology*, p. 262 (emphasis added)]
51. Arie W. Zwiep, in Friedrich Avemarie, Hermann Lichtenberger (eds.) *Auferstehung*, p. 336
 52. Arie W. Zwiep, *Ascension of the Messiah in Lukan Christology*, p. 39
 53. James D. G. Dunn, *Christology in the Making: A NT Inquiry into the...Incarnation*, (2nd ed.) Foreword, p. xxviii
 54. James D. G. Dunn, *Christology in the Making: A NT Inquiry into the...Incarnation*, (2nd ed.) p. 19
 55. Darrell L. Bock, *A Theology of Luke & Acts: God's Promised Program, Realized for All Nations*, p. note #8
 56. Arie W. Zwiep, *Christ, the Spirit & the Community of God: Essays on the Acts of the Apostles*, pp. 60-61
 57. Crispin Fletcher-Louis, *Luke-Acts: Angels, Christology & Soteriology*, p. Richard Bauckham "agrees...that [for Philo] Moses was only a *Theos* [god] in the sense of being a philosopher-king...*Moses the theos is not god (or a god), and thus not deified.*" [M. David Litwa, "The Deification of Moses in Philo of Alexandria," David T. Runia, Gregory E. Sterling (eds.) *Studia Philonica Annual XXVI, 2014*, p. 4 (emphasis added)]
 58. James D. G. Dunn, *Christology in the Making: A NT Inquiry into the...Incarnation*, (2nd ed.) p. 19 (emphasis added)
 59. Arie W. Zwiep, *Ascension of the Messiah in Lukan Christology*, pp. 39-40, quoted in Zwiep, *Christ, the Spirit & the Community of God: Essays on the Acts of the Apostles*, p. 51 (emphasis added)
 60. Larry W. Hurtado, *Lord Jesus Christ*, pp. 91-92 (emphasis added)
 61. The first quote in this paragraph—"In the New Testament, the Christian faith presupposes Jewish monotheism,"-- comes from Richard Bauckham, *The Theology of the Book of Revelation*, p. 32. The quote immediately following is from: Charles Lee Irons, "A Trinitarian View: Jesus the Divine Son of God," in Charles L. Irons, Danny A. Dixon, & Dustin R. Smith, *Son of God: 3 Views of the Identity of Jesus*, pp. 16-17
 62. Larry W. Hurtado, *Lord Jesus Christ*, p. 93 It's worth noting here that we should not make the elementary mistake of thinking that "monotheism" excludes the possibility of the Trinity. As N. T. Wright says, "theologians would of course remind us at once, the point of trinitarian theology is precisely *that it is monotheistic*, not tri-theistic." [N. T. Wright, "JESUS AND THE IDENTITY OF GOD," Originally published in *Ex Auditu* 1998, Vol. 14, pp. 42-56]
 63. James D. G. Dunn, *Neither Jew Nor Greek: A Contested Identity*, pp. 680-1
 64. James D. G. Dunn, *Christology in the Making: A NT Inquiry into the...Incarnation*, (2nd ed.) p. 20 (emphasis added)
 65. David E. Aune, "The World of Roman Hellenism," in D. E. Aune (ed.) *Blackwell Companion to the NT*, p. 26. Professor N. T. Wright elaborates on pagan deification, saying: "Some within the ancient pagan world believed in the *apotheosis* of heroes and kings. The mythological Hercules began as a mortal and was exalted to quasi-divinity. Kings and emperors, from Alexander to the Julio-Claudians and beyond, were regularly deified, using various legitimating devices, mostly to do with witnessing the departed person's soul ascending to heaven, perhaps in the form of a comet, as with Julius Caesar, or an eagle, as depicted on Titus's Arch [in Rome]. Ordinary mortals did not expect this treatment, of course. And Seneca's merry parody of the *apotheosis* of Claudius, though itself of course written to highlight Rome's good fortune in having Nero as his successor, makes us question how many Romans believed that emperors, or at least good ones, were now alive and well alongside Jupiter, Apollo and the rest." [N. T. Wright, *Jesus' Resurrection and Christian Origins*, *Gregorianum*, 2002, 83/4, pp. 615-635].
 66. James D. G. Dunn, *Theology of the Apostle Paul*, pp. 259-260
 67. R. T. France, "Worship of Jesus—A Neglected Factor in Christological Debate?" *Vox Evangelica*, Vol. 12 (1981) p. 24 (emphasis added)
 68. Adherents to this "evolutionary view" (with some variations among them) include James D. G. Dunn, *Christology in the Making: A NT Inquiry into the Origins of the Doctrine of the Incarnation* (2nd ed., London: SCM, 1989), pp. 239-245, 248-50; Maurice Casey, *From Jewish Prophet to Gentile God: The Origins & Development of NT Christology* (Cambridge: James Clarke & Co, 1991), pp. 23-40, 156-159; A. E. Harvey, *Jesus & the Constraints of History* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1982), pp. 158, 158 n.29.
 69. For e.g. Bart Ehrman, in his *How Jesus became God*, "notes that the Roman world was full of gods and deified humans (especially deified rulers), and he suggests that this phenomenon helps explain the emergence of beliefs about Jesus as divine. But," Dr. Larry Hurtado points out, "he fails to indicate that for Roman-era Jews the plurality of deities and demigods and the practice of deifying rulers were repellent, even blasphemous." [Larry Hurtado, "Lord and God," Review of Bart Ehrman's *How Jesus Became God*, in *Christian Century*, July 22, 2014] Such allegations led Dr. N. T. Wright to comment: "Some...have suggested that it was only when the early Church started to lose its grip on its Jewish

- roots and began to compromise with pagan philosophy that it could think of Jesus in the same breath as the one God.” [N. T. Wright, “*JESUS AND THE IDENTITY OF GOD*,” Originally published in *Ex Auditu* 1998, 14, 42–56]
70. R. T. France, “*Worship of Jesus—A Neglected Factor in Christological Debate?*” *Vox Evangelica* 12 (1981) pp. 25-26
 71. N. T. Wright, *Simply Christian: Why Christianity Makes Sense* (2006), p. 117
 72. Richard Bauckham, *Jesus and the God of Israel*, p. 58
 73. Richard Bauckham, *Jesus & the God of Israel*, pp. 26-27. The introductory quote is from Matthew Levering, *Scripture & Metaphysics: Aquinas & the Renewal of Trinitarian Theology*, p. 117, who quotes most of this paragraph. Rhonda G. Crutcher, *That He Might Be Revealed: Water Imagery & the Identity of Jesus in the Gospel of John* (2015) p. 14 quotes this entire paragraph.
 74. Matthew Levering, *Scripture & Metaphysics: Aquinas & the Renewal of Trinitarian Theology*, p. 118, expounding Richard Bauckham, *Jesus & the God of Israel*,
 75. Richard Bauckham, *Jesus & the God of Israel*, p. 28 (emphasis original). Along the same lines Prof. N. T. Wright says: “Paul, in other words, has glossed ‘God’ with the ‘the Father’, and ‘Lord’ with ‘Jesus Christ’, adding in each case an explanatory phrase: ‘God’ is the Father ‘from whom are all things and we to him’, and the ‘Lord’ is Jesus the Messiah, ‘through whom are all things and we through him’. There can be no mistake: just as in Phil. 2 and Col. 1, Paul has placed Jesus within an explicit statement, drawn from the Old Testament’s quarry of emphatically monotheistic texts, of the doctrine that Israel’s God is the one and only God, the creator of the world. The Shema was already, at this stage of Judaism, in widespread use as the Jewish daily prayer. Paul has redefined it christologically, producing what we can only call a sort of christological monotheism. This fact is becoming more widely recognized in recent scholarship, though its omission from some of the older literature remains remarkable.” [N. T. Wright, *The Climax of the Covenant, Christ and Law in Pauline Theology* (Fortress Press, Minneapolis 1993) pp. 128-129] Evangelical scholar Gordon D. Fee says: “What Paul has done seems plain enough. He has kept the ‘one’ intact, but he has divided the Shema into two parts, with *theos* (God) now referring to the Father, and *kurios* (Lord) referring to Jesus Christ the Son... He insists that the identity of the one God also includes the one Lord,” [Gordon D. Fee, *Pauline Christology: An Exegetical-Theological Commentary* [Hendrickson Publishers, March 2007], pp. 90-91] Dr. Fee also writes: “In the striking passage where Paul reshapes the Jewish Shema to embrace both the Father and the Son while as the same time emphasizing his inherited monotheism, Paul asserts that the ‘one Lord’ (=Yahweh) of the Shema is to be identified as the Lord Jesus Christ ... In a still more profoundly theological way, by his inclusion of the pre-existent Son as the agent of creation, Paul has thus included him in the divine identity at its most fundamental point, since the one God of the Jews was regularly identified vis-à-vis all other ‘gods’ as the Creator and Ruler of all things. Thus, it is one thing for Christ to be the means of redemption, but for him likewise to be the divine agent of creation is what clearly includes him within Paul’s now adjusted understanding of ‘the one God,’ ... One of the reasons for naming Christ as ‘the Lord’ = Yahweh of the Shema [is] to place Christ as already present with the Israel to whom the Shema was originally given,” [Gordon D. Fee, *Pauline Christology: An Exegetical-Theological Commentary*, pp. 502-504]
 76. Roy E. Ciampa & Brian S. Rosner, *First Letter to the Corinthians* (Pillar NT Commentary), pp. 380-381 (emphasis added) Prof. N. T. Wright also says: “In 1 Corinthians 8:6, within a specifically Jewish-style monotheistic argument, [Paul] adapts the Shema itself, placing Jesus within it: ‘For us there is one God—the Father, from whom are all things and we to him; and one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom are all things and we through him.’ This is possibly the single most revolutionary christological formulation in the whole of early Christianity, staking out a high christology [i.e. recognizing Jesus as God] founded within the very citadel of Jewish monotheism.” [N. T. Wright, “*JESUS AND THE IDENTITY OF GOD*,” Originally published in *Ex Auditu* 1998, Vol. 14, pp. 42–56.] In contrast to the emphasis these scholars devote to this passage, Witness Lee virtually ignores it.
 77. Richard Bauckham, *Jesus & the God of Israel*, p. 29
 78. George Carraway, *Christ is God Over All: Romans 9:5 in the Context of Romans 9-11*, (2013) p. 13
 79. Richard Bauckham, *Jesus & the God of Israel*, p. 26
 80. [Blank]
 81. Richard Bauckham, *Jesus & the God of Israel*, p.
 82. Richard Bauckham, *Jesus & the God of Israel*, p. 106
 83. Larry Hurtado, “*YHWH’s ‘Return to Zion’*,” in Christoph Heilig, J. Thomas Hewitt, Michael F. Bird (eds.) *God and the Faithfulness of Paul: A Critical Examination of the Pauline Theology of N. T. Wright*, (Tubingen: Mohr-Siebeck, 2016, forthcoming). pp. 417-38.
 84. George Carraway, *Christ is God over All: Romans 9:5 in the Context of Romans 9-11*, p. 92. Whether Paul would have articulated the change in his belief system in those words at that time, or at some later time, is beside the point. N. T.

Wright points to the first Christians' experience of Jesus' death & resurrection in the light of the OT promises of Israel's God. He writes: "Whereas in the modern period people have come to the New Testament with the question of Jesus' 'divinity' as one of the uppermost worries in their mind, and have struggled to think of how a human being could come to be thought of as 'divine', for Jesus' first followers the question will have posed itself the other way round. It was not a matter of them pondering this or that human, angelic, perhaps quasi-divine figure, and then transferring such categories to Jesus in such a way as to move him up (so to speak) to the level of the One God. It was a matter of them pondering the promises of the One God whose identity, as Bauckham has rightly stressed, was made clear in the scriptures, and wondering what it would look like when he returned to Zion, when he came back to judge the world and rescue his people, when he did again what he had done at the Exodus. Not for nothing had Jesus chosen Passover as the moment for his decisive action, and his decisive Passion. It was then a matter of Jesus' followers coming to believe that in him, and supremely in his death and resurrection – the resurrection, of course, revealing that the death was itself to be radically re-evaluated – Israel's God had done what he had long promised. He had returned to be king. He had 'visited' his people and 'redeemed' them. He had returned to dwell in the midst of his people. Jesus had done what God had said he and he alone would do. Early christology did not begin, I suggest, as a strange new belief based on memories of earlier Jewish language for mediator-figures, or even on the strong sense of Jesus' personal presence during worship and prayer, important though that was as well. The former was not, I think, relevant, and the latter was, I suggest, important but essentially secondary. The most important thing was that in his life, death and resurrection Jesus had accomplished the new Exodus, had done in person what Israel's God had said he would do in person. He had inaugurated God's kingdom on earth as in heaven. Scholars have spent too long looking for pre-Christian Jewish ideas about human figures, angels or other intermediaries. What matters is the pre-Christian Jewish ideas about Israel's God. Jesus' first followers found themselves not only (as it were) permitted to use God-language for Jesus, but compelled to use Jesus-language for the One God." [N. T. Wright, *Paul & the Faithfulness of God*, pp. 654-5]

85. Richard Bauckham, *Jesus & the God of Israel*, p. 19

86. George Carraway, *Christ is God over All: Romans 9:5 in the Context of Romans 9-11*, p. 189

87. Doug Ward, "CHRISTOLOGICAL MONOTHEISM OF THE FIRST CHRISTIANS"

88. Wesley Hill, *Paul & the Trinity: Persons, Relations, & the Pauline Letters*, p. 19 summarizing James D. G. Dunn, *Christology in the Making*, pp. xxxi-xxxii

89. A. H. McNeile, *New Testament Teaching in the Light of St Paul's*, (pub. 1923) p. 126

90. [Blank]

91. The quote, in context, says: "Jesus' divine status was, however, not really an instance of *apotheosis*, but instead, a rather novel religious innovation among circles deeply antagonistic to all such pagan ideas [i.e., *apotheosis*], and so unlikely to have appropriated them. So, in that sense we can say that Jesus did not really 'become a god'." Instead, he was given devotion that expressed the distinctively Christian recognition that Jesus was God's unique emissary, in whom the glory of the one God was singularly reflected and to whom God 'the Father' now demanded full reverence 'as to a god'." [Larry W. Hurtado, *How on Earth Did Jesus Become a God? Historical Questions about Earliest Devotion to Jesus*, p. 30] Dr. Hurtado also reminds us that: "Earliest 'Christianity' was originally a Jewish religious movement, & it remained dominated by Jews through the crucial first decades. Jews who identified firmly with their people & their religious tradition, such as those named Jewish Christians of the earliest years, were scarcely likely to accommodate Jesus in such lofty terms under the influence of pagan notions of *apotheosis*. By all accounts, loyal Jews of the time ...found precisely these features of the Roman religious environment [i.e., *apotheosis*] particularly repellent. (Note for e.g. Philo of Alexandria's extended critiques of *apotheosis* [n. #27])." [Larry W. Hurtado, *How on Earth Did Jesus Become a God?: Historical Questions about Earliest Devotion to Jesus*, p. 41]

92. Charles Lee Irons, "A Trinitarian View: Jesus the Divine Son of God," in Charles L. Irons, Danny A. Dixon, & Dustin R. Smith, *Son of God: 3 Views of the Identity of Jesus*, pp. 16-17

93. W. Lee, *Crystallization-Study Outlines—Gospel of God*, Ch. 1, Sect. 12 (emphasis added)

94. W. Lee, *Crystallization-Study Outlines—Building of God*, Ch. 1, Sect. 12 (emphasis added)

95. Notice that this reflects (in part) the difference in overall emphasis between "Eastern" and "Western" Christianity. "Eastern [Orthodox] Christians emphasize the incarnation, while Western theologians stress Christ's death and resurrection." [Winfried Corduan, *Pocket Guide to World Religions*, p. 44] We note that this characteristic of Eastern Orthodoxy—that it maintains that Christ's humanity was deified at the incarnation (as opposed to his resurrection) is curiously ignored by LSM's Kerry S. Robichaux in his piece, "That We Might Become God" [LSM's Affirmation & Critique (July 1996)]. LSM's Robichaux asserts that "The notion that Christ's humanity was deified through His resurrection is prominent in the work of Athanasius." [Kerry S. Robichaux, "That We Might Become God, LSM's

- Affirmation & Critique (July 1996) p. 27] To focus solely on Athanasius yields a highly selective presentation of the evidence for Eastern Orthodoxy in general. (See for e.g. the quotes which follow in the main text.)
96. Vladimir Khartamov, “*Rhetorical Application of Theosis in Greek Patristic Theology*,” in Michael J. Christensen, Jeffery A. Wittung (eds.) *Partakers of the Divine Nature: The History & Development of Deification ...* p. 121
 97. James D. Gifford, *Perichoretic Salvation: The Believer's Union with Christ as a 3rd Type of Perichoresis*, p. 79. The quote in context reads: “The possibility of *theosis* [deification] begins in the incarnation of Jesus Christ. In one person two natures dwell—the divine & human...The man Jesus Christ was fully God because he was hypostatically joined to the Logos, the Son. *Theosis* [deification] first entered human history in the deification of Christ’s human nature. Because the enhypostatic humanity of Christ was joined to the Logos, the presence of the Logos deified his human nature...This deification of Christ’s human nature is a direct result of...the interpenetration of the divine & human natures in one person [the incarnate Jesus Christ].” [James D. Gifford, *Perichoretic Salvation: The Believer's Union with Christ as a 3rd Type of Perichoresis*, p. 79]
 98. Emmanuel Hatzidakis, *Jesus Fallen? The Human Nature of Christ Examined from an Eastern Orthodox Perspective*, p. 501
 99. Donald Goergen, *Jesus, Son of God, Son of Mary, Immanuel*, p. 34
 100. John E. McKinley, *Tempted for Us: Theological Models & the Practical Relevance of Christ's Impeccability & Sinlessness*, discusses alternative models, including deification.
 101. C. Kavin Rowe, *Early Narrative Christology: The Lord in the Gospel of Luke*, p. 206. The quote (in context) reads: Luke’s Gospel presents “Jesus as Lord [=YHWH, Luke 1:43] even from the womb. Luke presents the totally human Jesus as the heavenly Lord upon earth [via incarnation]...It is doubtful that this move was made to explicitly combat a (generic) pagan view of *apotheosis* in which a mere human is divinized or deified after death; yet, in substance the theological move...protects against a divinized interpretation of Jesus *kyrios*. Jesus did not after his death and resurrection become something he was not before, but rather was vindicated precisely in respect to and even because of his identity.” [C. Kavin Rowe, *Early Narrative Christology: The Lord in the Gospel of Luke*, p. 206]
 102. Nicholas Bamford, *Deified Person: A Study of Deification in Relation to Person & Christian Becoming* p. 108.
 103. Nicholas Bamford, *Deified Person: A Study of Deification in Relation to Person & Christian Becoming* (2011) p. 108. Interior quote: Norman Russell, “*Doctrine of Deification...*” p. 215
 104. Norman Russell, *Doctrine of Deification in the Greek Patristic Tradition*, p. 341
 105. Frederick Norris, “*Deification: Consensual & Cogent*,” p. 415 quoted by M. David Litwa, *We Are Being Transformed: Deification in Paul's Soteriology*, p. 33, note 120
 106. Norman Russell, *Doctrine of Deification in the Greek Patristic Tradition*, p. 337. It is also worthwhile noting Russell also observes that “Jewish writers in Greek, unlike Christians, never apply these [deification] terms to the human *telos* [destiny].” [Norman Russell, *Doctrine of Deification in the Greek Patristic Tradition*, p. 342]
 107. Norman Russell, “*Doctrine of Deification...*” pp. 25, 27, quoted in Wayne Morris, *Salvation as Praxis: A Practical Theology of Salvation for a Multi-Faith World*, p. 112
 108. Denis Edwards, “*Athanasius: The Word of God in Creation & Salvation*,” in E. M. Conradie (ed.) *Creation & Salvation: A mosaic of selected classic Christian theologies*, p. 44
 109. Vladimir Kharlamov, *Theosis: Deification in Christian Theology* (Volume 1) p. 7
 110. [Blank]
 111. Jordan Cooper, *Christification: A Lutheran Approach to Theosis*, p. 4
 112. Jordan Cooper, *Christification: A Lutheran Approach to Theosis*, p. 122. The quote (in context) reads: “As long as deification has been taught, theologians have been careful to distinguish a biblical from (*sic*) of deification from pagan concepts of *apotheosis*. However, early Christians did not feel the need to make a strict distinction between God’s essence and energies...neither Irenaeus, nor Athanasius...make such a distinction, nor do most patristic sources.” [Jordan Cooper, *Christification: A Lutheran Approach to Theosis*, p. 122]
 113. The writings of LSM’s Kerry Robichaux convey much the same impression. Under the heading “Pagan Meanings,” K. Robichaux says, “...in the ancient pagan religions men became gods by mere declaration. The process was called *apotheosis* in Greek...” [Kerry S. Robichaux, “*That We Might be Made God*,” *Affirmation & Critique*, (July 1996) p. 23] He also says, “It is easy to confuse Christian deification with some of the very pagan notions that preceded it, such as *apotheosis*...” [Kerry S. Robichaux, “*Can Human Beings Become God?*” *Affirmation & Critique*, Vol. VII, No. 2 (Oct. 2002) p. 37] These are the only occurrences of the Greek term, *apotheosis*, in Robichaux’s articles, and both link this term to paganism. Meanwhile, *theosis* is presented as a theological term—“*theosis* or deification, as it is called in theology...” [Kerry Robichaux, “*That We Might be Made God*,” *Affirmation & Critique*, (July 1996) p. 2] Such

- statements convey the impression that *theosis* was a “Christian” term, while *apotheosis* was a pagan term, reflecting different concepts of deification. Why then was “easy to confuse Christian deification with...very pagan notions”—as Robichaux suggests?
114. Jaroslav Pelikan, *Christian Tradition: A History of the Development of Doctrine*, Vol. 1, p. 345
 115. Kelly M. Kopic, & Bruce L. McCormack, *Mapping Modern Theology: A Thematic & Historical Introduction*, p. 285
 116. Kelly M. Kopic, & Bruce L. McCormack, *Mapping Modern Theology: A Thematic & Historical Introduction*, p. 285
 117. N. N. (Nick) Trakakis is Senior Lecturer at the Australian Catholic University. “*Why I am not Orthodox*,” explains why he severed relations with the Orthodox Church. <http://www.abc.net.au/religion/articles/2015/12/07/4367489.htm> the quote is from: N. N. Trakakis, “*The Sense & Reference of the Essence & Energies*,” Chapter 8 in Constantinos Athanasopoulos, Christoph Schneider (eds.) *Divine Essence & Divine Energies: Ecumenical Reflections on the Presence of God in Eastern Orthodoxy* (2013) pp. 214-5 (emphasis added)
 118. Mary B. Cunningham, Elizabeth Theokritoff (eds.) *Cambridge Companion to Orthodox Christian Theology*, p. 67
 119. Mary B. Cunningham, Elizabeth Theokritoff (eds.) *Cambridge Companion to Orthodox Christian Theology*, p. 194
 120. [Blank]
 121. Carl Mosser, *Deification: A Truly Ecumenical Concept*, Perspectives
 122. Vladimir Lossky, *Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church*. In a similar statement, V. Lossky says: “This distinction is between the *essence of God*...which is inaccessible, unknowable & incommunicable; and the *energies or divine operations*...In which He goes forth from Himself, manifests, communicates & gives Himself.” [Vladimir Lossky, *Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church*, p.] Also he says: “God, anonymous in His *ousia* [substance, essence], is the mystery of the entire inner Trinity, while in the economic Trinity, God is manifest in His energies or activities.” [Ståle Johannes Kristiansen, Svein Rise (eds.) *Key Theological Thinkers: From Modern to Postmodern*, p. 386] Note here the “economic Trinity” is related to God’s *energies* or activities (which are communicable), not His essence (*ousia*).
 123. Donald K. McKim, *Westminster Dictionary of Theological Terms*, p. 80 (emphasis added)
 124. David W. Fagerberg, “*From Divinization to Evangelization*,” in Andrew Hofer (ed.) *Divinization: Becoming Icons of Christ through the Liturgy*, p. 19
 125. “*Deification*,” *Orthodox Study Bible*, NKJV, (Thomas Nelson, 2008) p. 1692
 126. Ben C. Blackwell, *Christosis: Pauline Soteriology in Light of Deification in Irenaeus & Cyril*, p. 104
 127. Ben C. Blackwell, *Christosis: Pauline Soteriology in Light of Deification in Irenaeus & Cyril*, p. 104
 128. Ben C. Blackwell, *Christosis: Pauline Soteriology in Light of Deification in Irenaeus & Cyril*, p. 253 (emphasis added)
 129. We note here that the deification dogma is a central tenet of Eastern Orthodox theology. However, Evangelicals reject this dogma as central to the Apostolic Faith as taught in the New Testament. Thus Prof. Michael F. Bird, says, “We can disqualify...*theosis* as a primary structure for a salvation framework...*Theosis* is based almost exclusively on 2 Peter 1:4, and though prominent in the Eastern Orthodox tradition, it has never really been a serious contender for the organizing theme of soteriology.” [Michael F. Bird, *Evangelical Theology: A Biblical & Systematic Introduction*, p.]
 130. Eastern Orthodox Bishop Kallistos (Timothy) Ware, quoted by Bill McKeever & Eric Johnson, *Answering Mormons' Questions: Ready Responses for Inquiring Latter-Day Saints*, p. 118 (emphasis added)
 131. W. Lee, *Life-Study of Job*, Ch. 22, Sect. 2 (emphasis added)
 132. W. Lee, *Five Emphases in the Lord's Recovery*, (1991) Ch. 4, Sect. 4 (emphasis added)
 133. *Orthodox Study Bible* (Thomas Nelson Pub. 1993) p. 28
 134. M. David Litwa, *We Are Being Transformed: Deification in Paul's Soteriology*, p. 298 (emphasis original). Litwa begins by saying: “scholars—maintain that for the Apostle “Paul, humans do not share the [divine] *identity* (or essence or nature) of God, but only God’s *energies*.” [M. David Litwa, *We Are Being Transformed*, p. 298] A related (but different) point is made by Norman Russell who “argues that a Christian soteriological perspective on deification cannot really be found in the New Testament, or, in particular...in the Pauline corpus [Paul’s writings].” [Nicholas Bamford, *Deified Person: A Study of Deification in Relation to Person & Christian Becoming* (2011) p. 108 referring to Norman Russell’s *Doctrine of Deification*...] N. Russell contends that the Apostle Paul does not teach deification.
 135. Kerry S. Robichaux, “*Can Human Beings Become God?*” *Affirmation & Critique*, Vol. VII, No. 2, (Oct. 2002) p. 42 The quote in context reads: “In the writings of Witness Lee...the distinction has been expressed more casually by the formula ‘God became man that man may become God in life & nature but not in the Godhead’ Comparing this to the classical expressions the distinction ‘*God in life and nature*’ should correspond to the economic Trinity in the West and the *energies of God in the East* and ‘*the Godhead*’ [should correspond] to the immanent Trinity in the West and the

essence of God in the East.” [Kerry S. Robichaux, “Can Human Beings Become God?” Affirmation & Critique, Vol. VII, No. 2, (Oct. 2002) p. 42 (emphasis added)]

136. LSM’s Kerry Robichaux gives some indication that this alignment is problematic, nevertheless he makes it. Shortly after making these statements he writes, “Those familiar with the history of the distinction may recognize some problems with applying ‘nature’ to the energies of God...” [Kerry S. Robichaux, “Can Human Beings Become God?” Affirmation & Critique, Vol. VII, No. 2, (Oct. 2002) p. 42 (emphasis added)] As indicated earlier, in Orthodoxy terms relating to the “essence, nature, & inner being” of God, tend to be used inter-changeably. Thus N. N. Trakakis states that: If “the process of deification involves participation in, or sharing of, the *very essence, nature & inner being of God*...In that case, *theosis* would amount to...divinization in the sense of being transformed into a god (in a literal, ontological sense),” resulting in, either, “a crude polytheism” or “monism, where union with God amounts to absorption & fusion with the divinity.” Both outcomes are problematic & unacceptable theologically. [N. N. Trakakis, “Sense & Reference of the Essence & Energies,” Ch. 8 in Constantinos Athanasopoulos, Christoph Schneider (eds.) *Divine Essence & Divine Energies: Ecumenical Reflections on the Presence of God in Eastern Orthodoxy*, pp. 214-5] This use of terminology is also confusing; in Orthodoxy, God’s essence/nature is contrasted to His energies, but LSM’s Robichaux equates God’s ‘nature’ (in W. Lee’s scheme) to God’s energies! Clearly something is seriously wrong! Dr. David Fagerberg explains the Orthodox scenario, “Deification means that *we participate in the energies of God* (which are really divine), but the divine essence does not substitute for our human essence. No human being turns into a divine being; the Father, Son & Holy Spirit [*Trinity*] *alone possess the divine nature* (consubstantially).” [David W. Fagerberg, “From Divinization to Evangelization,” in Andrew Hofer (ed.) *Divinization: Becoming Icons of Christ through the Liturgy*, p. 19 (emphasis added)] In Orthodoxy, God’s (real) ‘nature’ is incommunicable; not for W. Lee.
137. LSM’s Kerry Robichaux is obviously intelligent and shows a clear grasp of this body of literature, as evidence by his publications on this topic. This author finds it (literally) incredible that this statement is the result of an inadvertent mistake. (Moreover any such ‘mistake’ ought to have been caught by LSM’s A&C editors.) Hence, we conclude that it is most likely the result of deliberate misrepresentation.
138. W. Lee, *Five Emphases in the Lord’s Recovery*, (1991) Ch. 4, Sect. 4. The quote (in context) reads: ““The Father’s life and nature, the Son’s element, and the Spirit’s essence are dispensed into our being to saturate us thoroughly....*We, the church as the issue of the Triune God, are the same as He [the Triune God] is in the sense that we have His life, His nature, His element, and His essence. We are absolutely the same as He is in this respect, but not in His Godhead. We do not possess any part of the Godhead, but we do possess His life, His nature, His element, and His essence. We are divine in the sense of the divine life, the divine nature, the divine essence, and the divine element, but not in the sense of the Godhead.*” [W. Lee, *Five Emphases in the Lord’s Recovery*, (1991) Ch. 4, Sect. 4 (emphasis added)] As a further e.g. of believers sharing God’s essence, consider the following: W. Lee says God’s Son “is awaiting the opportunity to saturate us with His element. We must cooperate with Him by living according to His nature & moving according to His Person...[God’s] nature constantly remains the same, working within us to *spread His element into our being.*” [W. Lee, *Life-Study of Hebrews*, Ch. 67, Sect. 4 (emphasis added)]
139. “*We are divine in the sense of the divine life, the divine nature, the divine essence, and the divine element, but not in the sense of the Godhead.*” [W. Lee, *Five Emphases in the Lord’s Recovery*, (1991) Ch. 4, Sect. 4 (emphasis added)]
140. [Blank]
141. Daniel E. Wilson, *Deification & the Rule of Faith: The Communication of the Gospel in Hellenistic Culture* (2010) (back cover)
142. Daniel E. Wilson, *Deification & the Rule of Faith: The Communication of the Gospel in Hellenistic Culture* (2010) p. 119. It is argued that this follows the Apostle Paul’s pattern while in Athens. Referring to Dean Flemming’s writings, it is asserted that “the methodology of Irenaeus and Athanasius in their strategy to communicate to a Hellenistic world,” is correlated with Paul’s strategy, where “In Acts 17, Paul presents an evangelistic message to a pagan audience...” [Daniel E. Wilson, *Deification & the Rule of Faith: The Communication of the Gospel in Hellenistic Culture* (2010) p. 119]
143. Daniel E. Wilson, *Deification & the Rule of Faith: The Communication of the Gospel in Hellenistic Culture* (2010) p. 155
144. V. Kharlamov argues that “*theosis* is contextualized in Clement’s trinitarian theology” [Vladimir Kharlamov, *Theosis: Deification in Christian Theology*, p. 16]
145. “The deification theme was contextualized further in the theology of Gregory of Nyssa [AD 335-394/5].” [Vladimir Kharlamov, *Beauty of the Unity & the Harmony of the Whole: Concept of Theosis in the Theology of Pseudo-Dionysios* (2015) p.]

146. Tony Espinosa “A *Balanced Refutation*,” *Affirmation & Critique*, Vol. XVII, No. 2 (Fall 2012) pp. 103-5
147. Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen, “*Deification, Theosis*,” in William A. Dyrness, Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen (eds.) *Global Dictionary of Theology: A Resource for the Worldwide Church*, p. 229
148. Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen, *Introduction to Ecclesiology*, p. 18 quoted by Joshua D. A. Bloor, “*New Directions in Western Soteriology*,” *Theology*, Vol. 118 (3) (2015) p. 183
149. James D. G. Dunn, *Neither Jew Nor Greek: A Contested Identity*, p. 822. Prof. Dunn note there was a “shift in emphasis regarding the decisive saving event, from Jesus’ death as atonement for sin, to his birth & incarnation as the divine taking the human into itself,” via deification. He adds: “Despite the Pauline insistence that central to the gospel was the affirmation that ‘Christ died for our sins’ (1 Cor. 15:3), the creeds shift the focus from the atoning death to incarnation.” [James D. G. Dunn, *Neither Jew Nor Greek: A Contested Identity*, p. 822] The shift in the creeds’ emphasis reflects (& is reflected in) a changed emphasis in the Church Fathers’ teaching *viz-a-vi* the New Testament.
150. [Blank]
151. Andrew Louth, *Modern Orthodox Thinkers: From the Philokalia to the Present*, p. 135
152. Elizabeth Theokritoff (ed.) *Cambridge Companion to Orthodox Christian Theology*, p. 69
153. Andrew Louth, *Modern Orthodox Thinkers: From the Philokalia to the Present*, p. 135 expressing the views of Dumitru Stanloae
154. Denis Edwards, “*Athanasius: The Word of God in Creation & Salvation*,” in E. M. Conradie (ed.) *Creation & Salvation: A mosaic of selected classic Christian theologies*, pp. 49-50
155. Athanasius, *First Letter to Serapion* 1.25. cited by Denis Edwards, “*Athanasius: The Word of God in Creation & Salvation*,”
156. Denis Edwards, “*The Redemption of Animals in an Incarnational Theology*,” in Celia Deane-Drummond, David Clough (eds.) *Creaturely Theology: On God, Humans & Other Animals*, p. 90 (emphasis added)
157. E. M. Conradie (ed.) *Creation & Salvation: A mosaic of selected classic Christian theologies*, p. 96 (emphasis added)
158. Elizabeth Theokritoff (ed.) *Cambridge Companion to Orthodox Christian Theology*, p. 69. Emil Bartos writes that the eminent Orthodox scholar Dumitru “Staniloae follows Gregory of Nyssa and Maximus in asserting that the *whole cosmos and all humanity* participate in the infinity of God...He [Staniloae] boldly declares that ‘*to eternity God will never cease to deify the world*.’” [Emil Bartos, *Deification in Eastern Orthodox Theology*, p. 98 (emphasis added)]
159. Denis Edwards, *Partaking of God: Trinity, Evolution, & Ecology*, p. 52
160. [Blank]
161. Boris Bobrinskoy, *The Mystery of the Trinity* (1999) p. 5 quoted by Denis Edwards, “*Final Fulfillment: The Deification of Creation*,” p. 8
162. W. Lee, *Life-Study of 1 & 2 Chronicles, Ezra, Nehemiah, & Esther*, Ch. 4, Sect. 3
163. W. Lee, *Life-Study of 1 & 2 Chron., Ezra, Nehemiah, & Esther*, Ch. 26, Sect. 1, (emphasis added)
164. W. Lee, *Issue of the Dispensing of the Processed Trinity & the Transmitting of the Transcending Christ*, Ch. 3, Sect. 4
165. W. Lee, *Life-Study of 1 & 2 Chron., Ezra, Nehemiah, & Esther*, Ch. 26, Sect. 1, (emphasis added)
166. W. Lee, *Kernel of the Bible*, Ch. 12, Sect. 1
167. W. Lee, *Proper Aggressiveness of the Lord's Serving Ones*, Ch. 2, Sect. 1
168. W. Lee, *Life-Study of Matthew*, Ch. 45, Sect. 1
169. W. Lee, *Proper Aggressiveness of the Lord's Serving Ones*, Ch. 2, Sect. 1
170. [Blank]
171. James D. G. Dunn, *Neither Jew Nor Greek: A Contested Identity*, p. 822
172. W. Lee, *Life-Study of 1 & 2 Chron., Ezra, Nehemiah, & Esther*, Ch. 7, Sect. 2 The Roman Catholic document is cited as: (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, pp. 115-116).
173. Hannah Hunt, “*Byzantine Christianity*” in Ken Parry (ed.) *Blackwell Companion to Eastern Christianity*, p. 81
174. Jaroslav Pelikan, *Imago Dei: The Byzantine Apology for Icons*, p. 145 Mary was also venerated as a “*hyperdulia*’, [super-saint]...above all the saints and all the celestial hierarchies.”
175. Brian Reynolds, *Gateway to Heaven: Doctrine & Devotion*, p. 334
176. Leonid Ouspensky & Vladimir Lossky “*The Meaning of Icons*” (1969) p. 77; quoted by Donald Fairbairn, *Eastern Orthodoxy Through Western Eyes*, p. 102
177. Donald Fairbairn, *Eastern Orthodoxy Through Western Eyes*, p. 102
178. Witness Lee definitely talks of a “Fourth Person” in the “four-in-one” God. He says: “**Four persons**—the one Body, one Spirit, one Lord, and one God the Father— mingled together as one entity to be the organic Body of Christ; thus, **the**

- Triune God and the Body are four-in-one.** [W. Lee, *Crystallization-Study Outlines—Ephesians*, Ch. 1, Sect. 12] On the other hand, W. Lee is also on record saying: “We *absolutely cannot become the Person of God* or the Godhead. We can never share the Godhead. The opposers say that in our teaching we say that we can become the Godhead; this is slander. We are not transformed to be a part of the Godhead; rather, we are transformed to have the divine nature. Today we do have God’s divine nature within us, but we cannot share His Godhead.” [W. Lee, *One Body, One Spirit, & One New Man*, Ch. 4, Sect. 5 (emphasis added)] It is not my job to reconcile these apparently contradictory statements. LSM routinely defends/justifies any & all statement by W. Lee. Evidently (according to W. Lee) “we *cannot become the Person of God*,” but we *can become the fourth person* in the “four-in-one God”—the expanded Trinity!
179. W. Lee, *Crystallization-Study Outlines—Ephesians*, Ch. 1, Sect. 12. Again this is not an isolated assertion. Consider the following: “Because the Father, the Son, & the Spirit are all one with the Body of Christ, we may say that the Triune God & the church are *four-in-one*. Because the Father, the Son, & the Spirit are all one with the Body of Christ, we say that *the Triune God is now the ‘four-in-one’ God. These four are the Father, the Son, the Spirit, & the Body*. The Three of the Divine Trinity cannot be confused or separated, and the four-in-one also cannot be separated or confused.” [W. Lee, *A Deeper Study of the Divine Dispensing*, (Anaheim: Living Stream Ministry, 1990), Ch. 15, Sect. 3 pp. 203-204 (emphasis added)] “Man, the Spirit, the Lord, and the Father are built together. *This is not just three-in-one. This is four-in-one. God became a man that we, His redeemed, might become God*. With Him there is the Godhead. But regardless of how much divine life and divine nature we have to be the same as God, we do not have the Godhead.” [W. Lee, *Practical Points Concerning Blending*, p. 24 (emphasis added)] “The Body of Christ, the church, is *four in one: the Father, the Son, the Spirit, and the Body*. Eph. 4:4-6 speaks of one Body, one Spirit, one Lord, & one God the Father...God is the origin, the Son is the element, the Spirit is the essence, and the Body is the very constitution. *These are four-in-one*. However, only the first three are worthy of our worship; *the fourth, the Body, should not be deified as an object of worship*.” [W. Lee, *Central Line of the Divine Revelation*, Ch. 11, Sect. 7 (emphasis added)]
180. [Blank]
181. W. Lee, *Central Line of the Divine Revelation*, Ch. 11, Sect. 7
182. W. Lee says: “we, the believers, are made the same as God in life and in nature but not in the Godhead. This means that *except for the Godhead, we are exactly the same as God*.” [W. Lee, *Life-Study of Jeremiah & Lamentations*, Ch. 26, Sect. 2 (emphasis added)]
183. W. Lee, *Practical Points concerning Blending*, pp. 45-46, (emphasis added) Witness Lee *repeatedly equates* “not in the Godhead” with “not as an object of worship.” He says, “On the one hand, the New Testament reveals that *the Godhead is unique and that only God, who alone has the Godhead, should be worshipped*. On the other hand, the NT reveals that we, the believers in Christ, have God’s life and nature and that we are becoming God in life and in nature but will never have His Godhead.” [W. Lee, *Life-study of 1 & 2 Samuel*, Message 25, pp. 166-167 also *Conclusion of the NT, (Msgs. 388-403)*, Ch. 2, Sect. 3 also *Truth Concerning the Ultimate Goal of God’s Economy*, Ch. 1, Sect. 2 (emphasis added)] He also says, “The NT reveals that the *Godhead is unique & that only God, who alone has the Godhead, should be worshipped*. On the other hand, the New Testament reveals that we, the believers in Christ, have God’s life and nature and that we are becoming God in life and in nature but will never have His Godhead. [The same as above.] Regeneration does not make us part of the Godhead. To say that believers become part of *the Godhead as objects of worship* is to blaspheme God. We cannot share in the Godhead, but we can partake of the divine nature. What a great blessing it is to be one with God in His life & nature!” [W. Lee, *Conclusion of the NT, (Msgs. 388-403)*, Ch. 2, Sect. 3 (emphasis added)] LSM’s Ron Kangas elaborates explaining, “not in the Godhead” means “not in rank or position and not as an object of worship.” [Ron Kangas, “*Becoming God*,” Affirmation & Critique, Vol. VII, No. 2 (Oct. 2002) p. 3]
184. Quote from the 2007 “Open Letter” from 60 Scholars to LSM & the “Local Churches” which says: “Because the following statements by Witness Lee appear to contradict or compromise essential doctrines of the Christian faith, we respectfully call on the leadership of Living Stream Ministry and the ‘local churches’ to disavow and cease to publish these and similar declarations.” Including statements about the “four-in-one” God [60 Scholars, “*An Open Letter to the Leadership of Living Stream Ministry & the ‘Local Churches’*.” (Jan. 9, 2007)] To date LSM has not disavowed any.
185. W. Lee, *Life-Study of 1 & 2 Samuel*, Ch. 25, Sect. 2. W. Lee also emphasizes that “he saw” this “high peak truth.” It was not something he learned or appropriated from Eastern Orthodoxy: “Since the ministry began in the US in 1962, I have actually ministered only one matter—God becoming a man that man may become God in life & in nature. However, it was not until Feb. 1994 that *I received such a clear view with a heavy burden to tell God’s people that we all are God in life & in nature* but not in the Godhead.” [W. Lee, *Life-Study of 1 & 2 Chron...* Ch. 2, Sect. 2] “Beginning from 1984 I released many messages on the economy of God. Then in the spring of this year [1994] (actually I saw it

last year [1993]) I continued to go higher. *I saw that it is only by God's becoming man to make man God* that the Body of Christ can be produced. This point is the high peak of the vision given to us by God. Actually, early in the fourth century Athanasius, who was present at the Nicene Council, said that 'He was made man that we might be made God'." [W. Lee, *High Peak of the Vision & the Reality of the Body of Christ*, Ch. 1, Sect. 4]

186. Alexander Chow says, Watchman Nee's "theology came largely through a re-articulation of two schools of fundamentalist thinking: Keswick sanctification and Brethren dispensationalism...Nee's eschatology [was] developed from Brethren dispensationalism." [Alexander Chow, *Theosis, Sino-Christian Theology & the Second Chinese Enlightenment*, p. 42]