



*This article is dedicated to the believer in Christ
who suspects that there is more to Christian experience
than modern Christianity lets on to.*

This essay's title question at first seems as much posterous as it is audacious, and even giving attention to it will strike many as being impious and unworthy of a Christian. But anyone who has merely dabbled in the history of Christian doctrine knows that deification—as the notion is called—has not been completely foreign to Christian thought across the ages. Certainly it has been largely dismissed in the last few centuries among Christian teachers, at least in the West, and is all but gone from the theological understanding of the modern believer, but recently there has been renewed interest in the matter among scholars and even among some of the common believers. Because of this, this essay's title turns out to be something more than an idle and provocative query; rather, in view of the upsurge in interest in deification and due to the many false assumptions and misconceptions about it, the question has become completely relevant and particularly necessary. Given its long and impressive pedigree, its recent reconsideration and guarded acceptance by some, and its perpetual imitation and misapplication by others, the notion of human beings becoming God cannot safely be dismissed but must be met squarely, if only to properly lay it to rest—if need be. And because deification relates to the very core of the Christian faith—in fact, redefines it in many ways—the issue should be seriously considered by every believer in Christ who is more than a mere babe in the Lord. Hence, I beg my reader to read on.

The Pedigree of the Doctrine

Before I attempt an answer to the title question, I first would like to support the claims of my opening paragraph by giving some detail of the history of the doctrine and of its various reconsiderations in the modern era. Further, I would like to set aside the imitations of the doctrine that

have been rejected by the Christian church so as to specify, in a gross fashion, what becoming God does not mean. What it does not mean, more finely considered, and what it does in fact mean will be part of the answer to the title question, to be proposed later.

By far the church's most celebrated expression concerning deification comes from Athanasius, who quite elegantly declared that the Son of God "became man that we might be made God" (*On the Incarnation of the Word*, 54:3).¹ Not many believers today in the West know who Athanasius was much less that he made such a striking statement. But his obscurity is more a testament of the ignorance of our Christian roots than it is of his unimportance. At a time when the Christian church was coming to grips with the full significance of the doctrine of the deity of Christ and when opinions were high that Christ was not the eternal God, but some creature who had been made God, this fourth-century church leader and teacher was the champion of the standard view that we hold today, that Christ the Son and Logos of God is very God in the same sense that God the Father is God. Athanasius also is considered to be the greatest defender of the proper notions concerning the incarnation of Christ. Further, some years after the church had clearly formulated this crucial doctrine and central tenet of the faith, he contributed widely in the debates concerning the deity of the Holy Spirit, again rightly defending the view that the Spirit is as much God as the Father and the Son are. Of course, these two crucial doctrines, taken with the belief that there is a God in the first place, established the uniquely Christian doctrine of the Trinity, which indeed is capital to the Christian faith. It was also Athanasius who first, in 367, after much discussion in the early church, formally defined the authoritative list of books that make up our New Testament. His list was