

Some have called it the essence of sin, others the depth of salvation. Regardless of one's evaluation of it, however, deification throughout Western history has been a part of human aspiration. From the ancient pharaohs to modern transhumanists, people have envisioned their own divinity. These visionaries include not only history's greatest megalomaniacs, but also mystics, sages, apostles, prophets, magicians, bishops, philosophers, atheists, and monks. Some aimed for independent deity, others realized their eternal union with God. Some anticipated godhood in heaven, others walked as gods on earth. Some accepted divinity by grace, others achieved it by their own will to power. There is no single form of deification (indeed, deification is as manifold as the human conception of God), but the many types are united by a set of interlocking themes: achieving immortality, wielding superhuman power, being filled with supernatural knowledge or love—and through these means transcending normal human (or at least "earthly") nature.

"This engaging and informative study explores a neglected but fascinating theme, demonstrating through diverse historical and cultural permutations, from antiquity to the present, a perennial human aspiration not merely to self-transcendence but to divinity itself. There is much here to interest students of antiquity, of Christianity, and of the history of ideas."

—HARRY GAMBLE, University of Virginia

"The earliest religious texts in the West ascribe to humankind both a prehistory and a destiny among the gods. M. David Litwa presents a striking survey of the varieties the latter of these beliefs has had, both within and outside the Christian tradition. *Becoming Divine* reconstructs an accessible and fascinating mosaic of this too-long neglected idea, utilizing figures as disparate as Orphic cultists, Augustine, and Nietzsche."

—TERRYL L. GIVENS, University of Richmond

"Deification is a fascinating but strangely neglected topic in the history of religions. Bizarre though it might seem at first sight, the idea that human beings can become divine is a recurring one from antiquity to the present, not only in 'pagan' Hellenistic contexts but in Christian and Islamic ones as well. M. David Litwa's very well-researched and eminently readable overview fills an important gap."

—W. J. HANEGRAAFF, University of Amsterdam

M. DAVID LITWA (PhD) is currently an instructor in Greek at the University of Virginia. He is author of *We Are Being Transformed: Deification in Paul's Soteriology* (Walter de Gruyter, 2012) and *Jesus Deus: The Depiction of Jesus as a Mediterranean God* (Fortress, forthcoming).

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An Introduction to
DEIFICATION
in Western Culture

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