

The Theological Implications of Seeing Jesus in the Gospel of John: Partakers of the Divine Life

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Abstract

In the Gospel of John, “seeing Jesus” appears as a crucial theme (e.g., John 1:14, 18, 34; 2:23; 6:46; 8:19; 9:1–7, 33; 13:12–15; 14:9–10; 20:29). This study examines the meaning of seeing Jesus within the framework of theosis, a theology of the early church fathers that has been the subject of discussion in recent New Testament scholarship. While Johannine themes such as mission, incarnation, sacrament, and sonship have been connected to the concept of theosis, the theme of seeing Jesus has not been explored according to the significance of theosis. In John’s Gospel, seeing is not merely limited to the act of physical sight. Rather, it involves perceiving God revealed in Jesus, which yields knowledge of God. Moreover, this knowledge becomes believers’ participation in the life of God, who shares his life with us. The dynamics of this participation are rooted in the relationship between God and Jesus. Jesus sees God as the giver of life, and by acting according to what he sees, Jesus participates in the life-giving works of God, thereby embodying theosis (e.g., John 5:26; 9:7; 10:38; 14:11). Likewise, believers behold the divine life revealed in Jesus and become partakers of the divine life. In particular, Jesus’s washing of the disciples’ feet in John 13 serves as a quintessential model of “seeing-knowledge-participation” structure. By seeing Jesus’s washing of their feet, the disciples come to live out the life of love and service after the pattern of Jesus’s life, thereby becoming partakers of Jesus’s life-giving work (John 13:12–14).

Keywords: seeing, knowledge, participation, oneness, theosis

1. Introduction

Recently, the theology of the Gospel of John in conjunction with *theosis* (θέωσις)—a theological concept developed in the early church fathers—has been the subject of discussion. New Testament Scholars, for instance, have examined several key Johannine themes, such as the incarnation of the word becoming flesh (John 1:14), divine sonship (John 1:12), the sacrament of participating in the bread of life (John 6:51–57), and mission (i.e. being sent by God), in connection with theosis.¹ This study investigates how “seeing Jesus”—a vital theme in the Gospel of John that has nonetheless been overlooked in relation to theosis—can be illuminated within this framework. The Gospel of John shows a profound interest in who Jesus is, depicting his identity throughout the narrative (e.g., John 6:48; 8:12; 10:7–9; 11:25). In John, Jesus is especially presented as the one who reveals God. Thus, seeing Jesus is directly linked to seeing God (e.g., John 14:9).

This study aims to demonstrate that seeing Jesus forms knowledge of God, and when this knowledge is understood in terms of theosis, it becomes our participation in the life of God that goes beyond a mere informational level. To carry out this research, this study will first examine the dynamics of the relationship between God and human beings in the Old and New Testaments and then analyze how the early Christian patristic tradition understood the God-human relationship in connection with theosis. Next, it will introduce previous research on theosis in the Gospel of John. Based on these observations, this study will explore the implications of seeing Jesus in the Gospel of John within the framework of theosis. Through this exploration, this study proposes that the knowledge of God formed by seeing Jesus can be semantically connected to theosis, which entails participating in the life of God, who shares his life with us.

2. The Notion of Theosis in the Biblical and Christian Patristic Traditions

Before we examine the Johannine theology in conjunction with theosis, it is worth exploring the notion of theosis in the biblical and Christian patristic traditions. In the early Christian patristic tradition, theosis has been understood as human participation in the character and power of God. Although the explicit vocabulary of theosis does not appear in the biblical texts, the motif of human beings participating in the divine nature and attributes is already present

¹ Stephen J. Davis, “The Copto-Arabic Tradition of Theosis: A Eucharistic Reading of John 6:51–57 in Būlus al-Būshī’s Treatise *On the Incarnation*,” in *Partakers of the Divine Nature: The History and Development of Deification in the Christian Traditions*, ed. Michael J. Christensen and Jeffrey A. Wittung (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008), 163–174; Stephen Finlan, “Deification in Jesus’ Teaching,” in *Theosis: Deification in Christian Theology*, vol. 2, Princeton Theological Monograph Series 156, ed. Vladimir Kharlamov (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2011), 21; Andrew J. Byers, *Ecclesiology and Theosis in the Gospel of John*, Society for New Testament Studies Monograph Series 166 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017); Michael J. Gorman, *Abide and Go: Missional Theosis in the Gospel of John* (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2018).

throughout the Old and New Testaments. For instance, God creates human beings in the image of God (Gen 1:27). Being created in the divine image indicates that human beings originate from God, with the result that human beings exist are called to commune with God, partaking in God's life.

A specific case that illuminates this relationship between God and human beings in the Old Testament is Jacob's wrestling match with a divine figure. When Jacob wrestles with God at the river Jabbok, he receives the name Israel. Here, the meaning of Jacob's newly bestowed name, Israel, is generally translated as "you have striven with God and with humans and have prevailed" (Gen 32:28).² Jennie Grillo and Caitlin Joy Hubler suggest that if this passage is understood as "a poetic couplet instead of prose," and if the Semitic meaning of the verbal root *s-r-h* ("to strive," or "to rule") is taken into account, the clause can also be translated as follows: "Because you are like God, you will prevail over humans."³ More importantly, the river Jabbok, where Jacob wrestled with God, marks the territorial boundary secured during the Israelites' first military victory during the wilderness wanderings (Num 21:24).⁴ It represents the very boundary the Israelites would later have to cross to claim the promised land. Within this context, Jacob's wrestling match with God can be understood as an experience wherein Jacob transcends the boundary—that is, an experience of transcending limitations, thereby participating in the power of God. Elsewhere in the Old Testament, there is a scene where Moses' face shines after speaking with God, causing the people to fear approaching him (Exod 34:29–30). Moreover, in Israel's history, kings are referred to as the "son of God" at specific moments, such as their coronation (cf. Ps 2:7). The Davidic dynasty and house are called not merely an individual's dynasty and house, but the kingdom and house of God (2 Sam 7:16; 1 Chron 17:14). The interconnectedness between David and God is also confirmed when the Israelites bow down before both Yahweh and king David (1 Chron 29:20). Rather than deifying David, this indicates that he is respected as one who participates in God's authority and power, thereby acting as God's representative before the people of Israel. Not only the kings but also the people of Israel are depicted as intimately connected to God. God declares to the people of Israel, "One who touches you touches the apple of my eye" (Zech 2:8). This connection is further illustrated as Israel is described as participating in God's holy character: "You shall be holy, for I the Lord your God am holy" (Lev 19:2). Just as God is holy, so the people of Israel are called to participate in that holiness.

In the New Testament, a representative expression is found in the phrase "partakers (κοινωνοί) of the divine nature" (2 Pet 1:4).⁵ Here, "divine nature" (θείας φύσεως) can be interpreted as the divine essence or the divine character. In the context of 2 Peter 1, those who participate in the divine nature do not lose their distinct human identity to be absorbed into

² All the Old Testament translations are adapted from NRSV.

³ Jennie Grillo and Caitlin Joy Hubler, "The Hebrew Bible/Old Testament," in *The Oxford Handbook of Deification*, ed. Paul L. Gavriluk, Andrew Hofer O. P., and Matthew Levering (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2024), 40.

⁴ Grillo and Hubler, "The Hebrew Bible/Old Testament," 39.

⁵ Unless noted otherwise, translations from Greek are my translations.

God. In this regard, when we think of theosis, there is no ontological fusion between God and human beings. Believers are rather called to escape the corruption of the world and participate in God's holy character. That is, the phrase partakers of the divine nature refers to those who manifest and project God's holy character through their lives. In the Gospel of John, within the context where Jesus expresses his identity as the Son of God, he quotes Psalm 82:6, stating, "I said, you are gods (θεοί)" and refers to those to whom the word of God comes as "gods" (John 10:34–35). Additionally, in the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus teaches his disciples to "be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect" (Matt 5:48). In context, participating in the perfection of the heavenly Father is realized through a life of loving and forgiving one's enemies (Matt 5:43–47). Moreover, just as Jesus casts out demons and performs healings by the power of the Holy Spirit (e.g., Matt 12:28), so his disciples also cast out demons and exercise healing in the name of Jesus (e.g., Matt 10:1; Acts 3:6–8; 16:16–18). The continuity between Jesus and his disciples demonstrates that the disciples become partakers of Jesus's power.

The church fathers articulated the dynamics of the divine-human relationship already rooted and expressed in the Old and New Testaments by using the term theosis.⁶ According to Athanasius, for instance, the incarnation in which God takes on human flesh serves as the ground for human theosis (De Inc. 54). The church fathers reworked the notion of theosis from Greek philosophy to understand the purpose and transformation of human life brought about by the incarnation of Jesus.⁷ In the Christian patristic tradition, the concept of *participation* was recognized as uniquely vital to understanding theosis.⁸ While the concept of participation in Greek philosophy was understood as sharing in the attributes of the divine, the church fathers applied this participatory language to understand the incarnation of Jesus, the Eucharist, and the relationship between God and human beings.⁹ As we have seen, the expression "partakers (κοινωνοί) of the divine nature" (2 Pet 1:4) shows an example of the participatory dynamic between God and human beings. For the church fathers, the notion of theosis, embedded with this meaning of participation, provides an interpretive framework for understanding the scriptural theme of human participation in the divine nature. In line with this view, this study defines theosis as follows: *theosis is our transformative participation in the life-giving works of God, who shares his life with us.*

3. Previous Research on Theosis in the Gospel of John

⁶ Kangil Kim, "Theosis and Stephen's Prayer of Forgiveness in Acts 7:59–60," *Korean New Testament Studies* 31 (2024): 40.

⁷ Heleen E. Zorgdrager, "On the Fullness of Salvation: Tracking theosis in Reformed Theology," *Journal of Reformed Theology* 8 (2014): 363, 368.

⁸ See Grant Macaskill, *Union with Christ in the New Testament* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 42–76.

⁹ Kim, "Theosis and Stephen's Prayer of Forgiveness," 40.

To date, studies on theosis in the Gospel of John have primarily centered on John 1:12–14, 10:34–35, and chapter 17. Among New Testament scholars, Stephen Finlan focuses on Jesus’s quotation of Psalm 82:6, “I said, you are gods” (John 10:34), insisting that Jesus intends the theosis of believers.¹⁰ Edith M. Humphrey draws attention to the term “sonship” in the Gospel of John, observing that sonship implies not merely one’s legal status but a genuine participation in divinity (cf. John 14:20).¹¹ Humphrey points out that when believers are referred to as “gods” (θεοί) in John 10:34, the term “gods” is used synonymously with “children.” In the Gospel of John, the children of God are those who believe in Jesus and receive him (John 1:12–13; 12:36): “Believe in the light, so that you may become children of light.” Humphrey suggests that this divine sonship can be understood through the lens of theosis in the Gospel. While Humphrey’s connection between sonship and theosis is apt, the meaning of sonship warrants a more explicit elaboration. In John, sonship entails believing in Jesus and thereby living a life that participates in God’s authority and power (John 1:12). Consequently, those who receive Jesus are granted the power (ἐξουσία) to become children of God (John 1:12–13). Believing in Jesus is inherently linked to being born again of the Holy Spirit (John 3:5–6). In the Spirit, believers see heaven opened (John 1:51), with the result that they become partakers of the kingdom of God (John 3:3). Therefore, by believing in Jesus, human beings come to live a life that participates in divine power (ἐξουσία) as children of God.

Būlus al-Būshī, a medieval Coptic Orthodox Egyptian theologian, emphasizes believers’ sacramental participation in the incarnate body of Jesus within the Johannine narrative.¹² Influenced by Athanasius and Cyril, al-Būshī lived within an Arabic-speaking culture, translating Coptic theology into Arabic and writing treatises defending Christ’s incarnation, particularly in dialogue with Muslim scholars. Grounded in John 6:51–57, where Jesus describes himself as the living bread that comes down from heaven and declares that whoever eats this bread will live forever, al-Būshī analyzes partaking in this sacrament as believers’ participation in the life-giving, divine body of Christ.¹³ He observes that participating in the divine body through the sacrament allows believers to participate in eternal life.¹⁴ Thus, al-Būshī articulates participation in divine life through the sacrament. In a similar manner, this study seeks to examine participation in divine life through seeing Jesus. Yet, this study does not attempt to force later patristic idea of theosis into Johannine theology. Rather, it proposes that the notion of theosis can be semantically useful for understanding the dynamics of the divine-human relationship already embedded within the Gospel of John.¹⁵ Through this approach, this study aims to illuminate the meaning of seeing Jesus—a crucial Johannine theme

¹⁰ Finlan, “Deification in Jesus’ Teaching,” 21.

¹¹ Edith M. Humphrey, “The Synoptics and the Johannine Literature,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Deification*, ed. Paul L. Gavrilyuk, Andrew Hofer O. P. and Matthew Levering (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2024), 84.

¹² Davis, “The Copto-Arabic Tradition of Theosis,” 163.

¹³ Davis, “The Copto-Arabic Tradition of Theosis,” 168.

¹⁴ Davis, “The Copto-Arabic Tradition of Theosis,” 171.

¹⁵ Byers, *Ecclesiology and Theosis in the Gospel of John*, 169.

that has nevertheless been overlooked in relation to theosis—within this participatory framework.

4. Seeing Jesus and Theosis in the Gospel of John

4.1. The Meaning of Seeing Jesus

The Gospel of John employs a diverse array of sensory language, encompassing sight, hearing, taste, smell, and touch.¹⁶ Within this sensory spectrum, the scope of this study is limited to sight. Verbs of sight in John's Gospel (e.g., βλέπω, εἶδος, ἐμβλέπω, θεάομαι, θεωρέω, ὁράω) are generally employed with two distinct layers of meaning: physical sight and perception with a new cognitive awareness. Marianne Meye Thompson observes that sight in John refers not only to physical sight but also to "perception or spiritual insight."¹⁷ For instance, the expression "we saw (θεάομαι) his glory" (John 1:14) transcends the physical dimension of sight, signifying an insight that comes to see Jesus through a new perception. The term θεάομαι refers to spiritual insight again when John the Baptist testifies that he sees (θεάομαι) the Spirit descending from heaven (John 1:32). In a similar vein, Dale C. Allison Jr. points out that sight is frequently used as a metaphor for insight, meaning that it refers not to physical sight but to "spiritual and intellectual apprehension" through which we will have clear vision of who God is (Matt 5:8).¹⁸

The Johannine author records that "no one has [ever] seen God" (Θεὸν οὐδεὶς ἑώρακεν πώποτε) (John 1:18; cf. John 5:37; 1 John 3:6; 4:12; 3 John 1:11). Declaring that no human being has directly seen God, the author states that only "the one who is from God" has seen (ὁράω) the Father (John 6:46). Here, the one who is from God refers to Jesus. Jesus is depicted as the one who was with God (John 1:1–2), who came from God, and who was sent by God (John 7:29). Consequently, Jesus is the one who has seen (ὁράω) God.¹⁹ Nicodemus recognizes Jesus as "a teacher who has come from God" (John 3:2), and Jesus introduces himself in his dialogue with Nicodemus as "the one who came down from heaven" (John 3:13). Thus, Jesus is the one who has seen (ὁράω) God. In this context, the term ὁράω refers to spiritual insight or revelation that goes beyond mere physical sight. Yet, it is hard to draw the

¹⁶ For the extensive discussion on the five senses in the Gospel of John, see Dorothy Lee, "The Gospel of John and the Five Senses," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 129 (2010): 115–127.

¹⁷ Marianne Meye Thompson, "Word of God, Messiah of Israel, Savior of the World: Learning the Identity of Jesus from the Gospel of John," in *Seeking the Identity of Jesus: A Pilgrimage*, ed. Beverly R. Gaventa and Richard B. Hays (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008), 175.

¹⁸ Dale C. Allison Jr., *Studies in Matthew: Interpretation Past and Present* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005), 54–55.

¹⁹ C. S. Keener, *The Gospel of John: A Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003), 1:686.

strict distinction between physical sight and perception involving deeper cognitive awareness. There are other cases in John where the term ὁράω refers to physical sight: The disciples come to see (ὁράω) the resurrected Jesus (John 20:25); Jesus asks Thomas to see (ὁράω) his hands (20:27); Jesus says, “Have you believed me because you have seen (ὁράω) me?” (20:29). All of them are related to physical sight. This suggests that literary context decides whether verbs of sight in John refer to physical sight or spiritual insight.

The declaration that no one besides the one from God has seen God implies that no human has directly laid eyes on God—a point that aligns with the testimony of the Old Testament. Although Moses is said to have encountered God face-to-face (Exod 33:11; Deut 5:4), what Moses sees is not a direct face-to-face vision of God himself, but rather the manifestation of the divine glory (cf. Ezek 1:28).²⁰ Notably, the Septuagint translation of Numbers 12:8 states that God speaks “mouth to mouth” (στόμα κατὰ στόμα) instead of “face-to-face,” and records that Moses sees “the glory of the Lord” (δόξαν κυρίου) rather than the form of Yahweh. Moreover, God tells Moses, “you will not be able to see (ὁράω) my face, for no one may see me and live,” adding, “you will see (ὁράω) my back; but my face will not be seen to you” (LXX Exod 33:20, 23). Thus, it can be understood that Moses does not directly see God, but he rather partially experiences the manifestation of God’s glory. This Old Testament witness resonates with the Johannine declaration that “no one has ever seen God” (John 1:18).

4.2. Seeing Jesus and Knowledge of God

In the Gospel of John, seeing Jesus is linked to *knowledge* of God.²¹ Since Jesus makes God known (ἐξηγήομαι, John 1:18), to see Jesus is to know God. Jesus is described as seeing what the Father does and acting accordingly: “The Son can do nothing on his own, but only what he sees the Father doing. For whatever the Father does, the Son does likewise” (John 5:19). This indicates that Jesus’s ministry is inherently a revelatory ministry that makes known the works of God. Elsewhere in John, it is said that Jesus is one with God (John 10:30; 14:10; 17:21), with the result that he has the divine life, power, and glory. Since Jesus is one with God in the Gospel of John, God cannot be known apart from Jesus. Because of this “thoroughgoing character of their unity,” knowledge of God is inseparable from knowledge of Jesus.²² In response to Philip’s request, “Lord, show us the Father,” Jesus replies, “Whoever has seen (ὁράω) me has seen the Father” (John 14:8–9). Jesus also teaches his disciples, “If you know

²⁰ Marianne Meye Thompson, “Jesus: ‘The One Who Sees God,’” in *Israel’s God and Rebecca’s Children: Christology and Community in Early Judaism and Christianity. Essays in Honor of Larry W. Hurtado and Alan F. Segal*, ed. D. B. Capes, A. D. DeConick, H. K. Bond and T. A. Miller (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2007), 222.

²¹ In the Old Testament, the Hebrew term “know” (יָדָע) is used in various meanings. It is used to refer to observation (Gen 3:7; 15:13; Exod 2:4), obedience (Hos 4:1; 5:4; 8:2), or an intimate relationship (Gen 4:1, 17; 1 Sam 1:19; Ps 88:18; Jer 31:31–34; Hos 2:20).

²² Marianne Meye Thompson, *The God of the Gospel of John* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001), 141.

(γινώσκω) me, you will also know my Father. From now on you do know him and have seen (ὁράω) him” (John 14:7). Here, seeing and knowing are explicitly intertwined, which confirms that knowledge of God is given precisely through seeing and knowing Jesus. It will be shown that when believers see Jesus, they see Jesus’s action of love and service—that is, Jesus’s life-giving work. Since to see Jesus is to know God, seeing Jesus’s life-giving works enables believers to know that God is the God of life.

In particular, knowing expresses deep intimacy in the Gospel of John.²³ For instance, Jesus uses the metaphor of the shepherd and the sheep, stating, “I know (γινώσκω) my own and my own know me” (John 10:14). In the context of Jesus’s knowledge of his sheep, this language of knowledge is used when Jesus declares that he lays down his life to his people and thus gives them life (John 10:14–15). This knowledge is thus concerned with an intimate relationship where the shepherd (Jesus) and the sheep (his people) share life. In this sense, knowledge of God formed by seeing Jesus denotes a life-sharing intimacy. In a similar vein, Harold W. Attridge observes that in the Gospel of John, “In order to ‘see’ God through the lens of the Son, one must look at the Cross.”²⁴ At the cross, the side of Jesus is pierced, and his blood and water flow out, through which Jesus shares his life with his people.

4.3. Beholding Jesus and Participation in the Divine Life

In the Gospel of John, “oneness” or “unity” has been recognized as one of the significant theological themes.²⁵ For instance, the depiction of God as “one (εἷς) Father” (John 8:41), the phrases “one (μία) flock” and “one (εἷς) shepherd” (John 10:16), the oneness of God and Jesus (John 10:30), and the expression that “one (εἷς) man” should die for the people (John 11:50)

²³ Keener, *The Gospel of John*, 1:244. Keener points out that John never uses the Greek noun *gnosis*. But it is difficult to know whether the absence of the term indicates John’s rebuttal against the Gnosticism. According to Keener, John’s choice of using the verb “to know” instead of the noun “knowledge” seems to stem from a Semitic tendency to favor verbs over nouns. It also reveals that other early Christian writers similarly preferred using verbs rather than nouns (1:238). Keener further observes that the themes of knowledge and revelation appear in Christian texts long before the rise of gnostic influence (e.g., 1 Cor 1:21; 2:2, 4–16).

²⁴ Harold W. Attridge, *History, Theology, and Narrative Rhetoric in the Fourth Gospel* (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 2019), 89.

²⁵ See, for instance, Andrew J. Byers, “One Flock, One Shepherd, One God: The Oneness Motif of John’s Gospel,” in *One God, One People: Oneness and Unity in Early Christianity*, ed. Stephen C. Barton and Andrew J. Byers (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2023), 195–215; Mark L. Appold, *The Oneness Motif in the Fourth Gospel: Motif Analysis and Exegetical Probe into the Theology of John* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2011); C. T. R. Hayward, “The Lord Is One: Reflections on the Theme of Unity in John’s Gospel from a Jewish Perspective,” in *Early Jewish and Christian Monotheism*, ed. L. T. Stuckenbruck and W. E. S. North (JSNTSup 263; London: T&T Clark, 2004), 138–154. The motif of oneness is in some ways connected with the theme of imitation in the Gospel of John. See Cornelis Bennema, *Mimesis in the Johannine Literature: A Study in Johannine Ethics*, The Library of New Testament Studies 498 (London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2017).

all suggest that unity is a central theme in John's Gospel.²⁶ Although the term theosis does not explicitly appear in John, a theology of oneness is already embedded within the Gospel, and the meaning of this oneness can be semantically linked to theosis. While the theological terms such as incarnation and Trinity do not appear in New Testament texts, the realities denoted by these terms are already inherent within the texts (e.g., John 1:14; Matt 3:16–17; 28:19). Thus, interpreting New Testament texts in light of the patristic notion of theosis is not anachronistic.²⁷ A phenomenon exists first, and only later the phenomenon is conceptualized. The relational reality of the triune God—the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit—is already present in Scripture, and this phenomenon is subsequently conceptualized through the later term Trinity. This implies that the Johannine theology of unity through seeing Jesus can be fruitfully understood in connection with the patristic idea of theosis.

In his *Institutio Oratoria*, the Roman rhetorician Quintilian observes that in order to become like the subject one wishes to imitate, one must first behold and observe that subject (*Inst.* 10.2.27–28). This process of beholding and observing entails discernment and interpretation of the subject's actions, moving beyond a simple replication toward creative re-creation and reproduction (*Inst.* 10.2.6–9). Similarly, Cornelis Bennema observes that mimesis is “a creative, cognitive and mnemonic process that directs the believers' conduct and character” rather than mere replication.²⁸ With regard to the notion of imitation in the Greco-Roman world, Teresa Morgan points out that imitation is “more than learning to do what is done before you” and it is “a habit of mind or body” that is “established in the pupil until he [or she] is able to *behave and think independently* in the manner of his [or her] teacher.”²⁹ When seeing Jesus is understood in terms of theosis, however, it goes beyond the dimension of imitation or *mimesis* that merely brings about creative reproduction in the imitator. Rather, beholding Jesus as theosis advances toward a transformative life that manifests and expresses the life and power of Jesus within the believer's own existence. While theosis and imitation may be overlapped in some ways, theosis entails a more actualized transformation wherein believers, by participating in the divine life, live out and express the divine life rather than merely observing and copying it creatively. Satan can also imitate what God is (2 Cor 11:14). Satan's sophisticated imitation, however, is not one of theosis—that is, participation in the character and life of God. Thus, believers should not mistake Satan's sophisticated imitation for the life of God. As will be shown, Jesus manifests God's own work because God, who is in Jesus, works through Jesus (John 14:10–11). Thus, human beings reflect God's own life in Jesus, with the result that God and human beings do not act independently as envisioned in the notion of imitation in the Greco-Roman world.

²⁶ On the unity between God and Jesus, Marianne Meye Thompson observes that Jesus's “I am he” (ἐγώ εἰμι, John 8:24, 28, 58) resonates with God's “I am he” (ἐγώ εἰμι) in LXX Deut 32:39. See Thompson, *John: A Commentary*, NTL (Westminster: John Knox, 2015), 159.

²⁷ Gorman, *Abide and Go*, 18.

²⁸ Bennema, *Mimesis in the Johannine Literature*, 201.

²⁹ Teresa Morgan, *Literate Education in the Hellenistic and Roman Worlds* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 253; emphasis mine.

To comprehend how believers participate in the life-giving ministry of God through beholding Jesus, it is necessary to first examine Jesus's own theosis. As previously noted, because believers come to know who God is by looking at Jesus, Jesus's theosis serves as the blueprint for what the relationship between God and believers will be. To be sure, the God-Jesus relationship and the God-believer relationship remain distinct. Jesus is originally with God and is the incarnate word of God (John 1:1, 14). Thus, Jesus's knowledge of God is unique and stands apart from the believers' knowledge of God, which is not a direct vision of God. If we interpret Jesus's life through the lens of theosis, he can be described as a participant in the sharing of divine life. Jesus declares, "Indeed, just as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, so the Son gives life to whomever he wishes" (John 5:21). Inherently, the domain of life belongs solely to God in Scripture (e.g., Ps 36:9). Yet Jesus gives life to people just as the Father does (John 5:21). Jesus says that just as the Father has life in himself, so the Father has granted him to have life in himself (John 5:26). That is, because the Father's life is granted to him, Jesus becomes the possessor of and participant in the divine life. Possessing this divine life, Jesus introduces himself as the "bread of life" (John 6:35, 48) and says, "the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh" (John 6:51, 57). Jesus sees that God is the one who gives life, and by acting according to what he sees, Jesus participates in God's life-giving ministry (John 10:10, 38; 14:11). This point is further confirmed when Jesus, who possesses divine life, declares that everyone who sees him and believes in him will have eternal life, and that he will raise them up on the last day (John 6:40).

The healing of the blind man in John 9 vividly highlights the theme of sight. Jesus spreads the mud made with saliva on the blind man's eyes and commands him to wash in the pool of Siloam. The man washes his eyes in Siloam and is restored with clear sight (John 9:7). The restoration of this man's sight is not merely physical. The man comes to see who Jesus is and to witness the life-giving work of God revealed in Jesus (John 9:33): "If this person were not from God, he could do nothing." Like life, the power to heal originally belongs to God. In Exod 15:26, God introduces himself, saying, "I am the Lord, who heals you." By exercising this divine healing power over the blind man, Jesus participates in the life-giving power of God. In response to this work, the man addresses Jesus as Lord, expressing his faith ("I believe") and worshipping Jesus (John 9:35–38). The man's response is in stark contrast to the Pharisees who claim to see (βλέπω) God's work but do not believe God's work revealed in Jesus and thus are depicted as the blind (John 9:39–41). In the language of theosis, the Pharisees do not participate in the life-giving work of God by not believing Jesus.

Because Jesus sees God and hears God's will in the Gospel of John, when believers behold Jesus and hear his words, it is equivalent to beholding God and hearing God's word: "Whoever has seen (ὁράω) me has seen the Father" (John 14:9). In context, Jesus also says, "If you have known (γινώσκω) me, you will also know my Father. From now on, you know and have seen (ὁράω) him" (John 14:7). We can find that seeing and knowing are juxtaposed and thus are closely linked together. Moreover, seeing is linked to believing again in this context (John 14:10–11). Since those who see Jesus come to see the Father, they can believe that Jesus is in the Father and vice versa (John 14:10). Thus, Jesus's theosis is made possible through the mutual indwelling of God and Jesus. That is, the Father who is in Jesus works through Jesus (John 14:10). Accordingly, Jesus's works become the very manifestation of God's own work (John 14:11).

This theosis-oriented relationship between God and Jesus extends to the relationship between God and believers through Jesus.³⁰ In John, as we have seen, one way Jesus's theosis extends to believers is expressed through the mutual indwelling (μένω) of God and Jesus (John 10:38): "You may know (γινώσκω) and understand that the Father is in me and I am in the Father." The relationship of mutual indwelling between God and Jesus is extended to the relationship of mutual indwelling between God and believers through Jesus (John 14:20; 17:21, 23, 26).³¹ Just as God grants life to Jesus (John 5:26), so Jesus grants life to the believers (the sheep): "I came that they may have life and they may have [it] abundantly" (John 10:10). Moreover, Jesus prays that those who believe in him may all be one (εἷς) as God is in him and he is in God, "may they also be in us (ἐν ἡμῖν)" (John 17:21).

Related to this study's thesis, participation in the divine life is concretely realized through beholding Jesus, who possesses the divine life. In the scene where the disciples receive their initial call, Jesus tells them, "Come and see (ὁράω)" (John 1:39). This means they are to come to Jesus and behold the works of God revealed in him. Jesus explicitly states, "the Father who abides in me does his works" (John 14:10). Therefore, seeing Jesus leads to knowing who God is as revealed in Jesus, which subsequently leads to participating in the life-giving work of God. This dynamic shows the sequence of seeing, knowing, and participation. Granted, there are instances that do not fit neatly into this pattern. The Pharisees, for instance, see (ὁράω) Jesus and yet they do not believe him (John 6:36). In this case, seeing Jesus does not lead to believing him or knowing who he is because the Pharisees are not able to see the truth of Jesus (John 9:40–41; 12:37). In this sense, sight involving cognitive awareness and insight rather than a mere physical sight leads to knowing Jesus.

An important scene that illustrates the dynamic of "seeing–knowledge–participation" is Jesus's foot-washing in John 13. After washing the disciples' feet, Jesus asks them, "Do you know (γινώσκω) what I have done to you?" (John 13:12). In context, Jesus's question regarding the meaning of the foot-washing can be understood as an invitation for the disciples to participate in his ministry of love and service. Before this foot-washing, it is recorded that Jesus loves his disciples to the end (John 13:1). Thus, Jesus's foot-washing is the vivid demonstration of his love for his disciples. As Jesus begins to wash the disciples' feet, Peter resists Jesus's foot-washing (John 13:6–8). But Jesus tells him, "Unless I wash you, you have no share (μέρος) with me" (John 13:8). This implies that receiving Jesus's service is being a part (μέρος) of his life. Jesus's foot-washing is thus a place where Jesus shares his love and life with the disciples. Just as the disciples become a part of Jesus's life through his foot-washing, so Jesus encourages the disciples to do likewise, "So if I, your Lord and teacher, washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet" (John 13:14). Jesus adds, "For I have set you an example

³⁰ On the dynamics of this extension, see T. Evan Pollard, "The Father-Son and God-Believer Relationship according to St. John: A Brief Study of John's Use of Prepositions," in *L'Évangile de Jean, Sources, rédaction, théologie*, ed. M. de Jonge, *Bibliotheca Ephemeridum Theologicarum Lovaniensium* 44 (Gembloux: Duculot, 1977), 365–366.

³¹ With regard to the time when God, Jesus, and believers come to be one, see Markus Bockmuehl, "The Gospels on the Knowledge of God," in *A Transforming Vision: Knowing and Loving the Triune God*, ed. G. Westhaver (London: SCM, 2018), 55–56.

(ὕπόδειγμα), that you should also do as I have done to you” (John 13:15). Jesus then blesses them that if they know and do them, they are blessed (John 13:17). Thus, Jesus performs the foot-washing so that the disciples might live a life that embody his service as a model (ὕπόδειγμα). The goal of theosis is to become like the one who sets the example. As 1 John 3:2 expresses, “What we will be has not yet been revealed. What we do know is this: when he is revealed, we will be like (ὅμοιοι) him, for we will see (ὁράω) him as he is.” Through beholding Jesus, one embodies the one who sets the example and pattern, and ultimately becomes like (ὅμοιοι) Jesus. By this principle, the disciples behold Jesus’s foot-washing and embody the love and service modeled by Jesus, thereby participating in God’s life-giving ministry. Thus, when Jesus asks the disciples, “Do you know (γινώσκω) what I have done to you?” (John 13:12), this knowledge is not merely informational data. Rather, it can be understood as one of theosis—a transformative life that sees Jesus’s action, knows (perceives) its meaning, and participates in his love and service.

This theosis is the result of believers abiding in Jesus, thereby receiving his life and power (e.g., John 14:20; 17:21–24). Believers see Jesus and come to know who God is as revealed in him. Through Jesus, who possesses the divine life, believers are empowered to participate in God’s life-sharing works. Just as Jesus gives life and participates in the Father’s life-giving works by acting according to what he has seen and heard from the Father (John 5:21, 26; 6:50–51, 57; 10:28), believers also see Jesus and embody his actions by serving others, thereby participating in God’s life-giving ministry. In the final chapter of John, Jesus comes to Peter—who had denied him—and asks him three times, “Do you love me?” commanding him, “Feed my sheep” (John 21:15–17). Jesus lays down his life for the sheep to give them life (John 10:14–15). In this light, feeding my sheep means that Peter must likewise care for and give his life to the people (the sheep) entrusted to him by the Lord. As the history of the early church narrates, Peter goes on to participate in this divine ministry, releasing the life and power of God (e.g., Acts 2:37–41; 3:6).

5. Conclusion

In alignment with recent scholarship that links New Testament studies to the patristic idea of theosis, this study examined the meaning of seeing Jesus within Johannine theology through the lens of theosis. This research demonstrated that seeing Jesus yields knowledge of God, and when this knowledge is understood within the framework of theosis, it becomes a transformative participation in the life of God, who shares his life with us.

There are three significant benefits gained from this theotic reading. First, it offers a fresh theological understanding of what it means to see Jesus in the Gospel of John. Seeing Jesus is not confined to physical vision. Rather, it entails participating in the life of love and service modeled by Jesus, which subsequently leads to participating in the life-giving ministry of God. Second, a theotic reading provides a blueprint for the truth of who we are and how we ought to live. Through a life dedicated to serving others and giving them life, Jesus manifests the life-giving works of God and provides the desirable model for humanity. We are called to exist not as those who oppress others and live solely for self-interest, but as those who reveal who God

is by sharing our life with others, following the example (ὑπόδειγμα) set by Jesus. In doing so, we become partakers of the divine life. Third, by awakening us to sense the true meaning of human existence—by realizing who we are and how we ought to live—this theotic reading finds broad, meaningful applications within Christian spirituality. Moreover, given the tendency within Korean New Testament scholarship to treat early Christian patristic thought with relatively less interest, this study's exploration of the meaning of seeing Jesus in John through the theology of theosis expands our scholarly horizons, demonstrating how New Testament studies can be fruitfully integrated with patristic thought and Christian spirituality.

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