

Athanasius of Alexandria on the Holy Spirit, Conversion, and Sanctification

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Last modified: January 18, 2017

Introduction: Sanctification in Recent Christian Reflection

The Spirit and Sanctification: Some Paradigms

One's views of the Holy Spirit and sanctification involve intricacies which are quite complex. What is human responsibility when Jesus as the one true human has done something on our behalf which is finished. *What* is finished, and how are we to respond to it? Is a response necessary? What is the relationship between atonement, conversion, and sanctification? What do conversion and sanctification mean? How do we encourage conversion? Sanctification?

According to Gerhard O. Forde, the Lutheran contributor to the book *Christian Spirituality: Five Views of Sanctification*, discussing sanctification leads to a pre-occupation with the self, an interest in the moral progress of the self, an inescapable rise in 'self-effort' to advance one's progress, and a turning of one's focus away from Christ:

'Talk about sanctification is dangerous. It is too seductive for the old being... We are driven to make an entirely false distinction between justification and sanctification in order to save the investment the old being has in the moral system. Justification is a kind of obligatory religious preliminary which is rendered largely ineffective while we talk about getting on with the truly 'serious' business of becoming 'sanctified' according to some moral scheme or other.'¹

In his mind, the Lutheran approach to this problem is ideal. And that consists of simply avoiding teaching on sanctification as much as possible. On his understanding, people should be constantly reminded of their justification by Christ. I note in passing that in the Lutheran schema, justification is the result of the atonement of Jesus interpreted as a penal substitution. That is, God's retributive justice looms against every sinful act and thought; He threatens an eternity in hell; no one's 'good works' are good enough; but Christ substituted himself in for our death and absorbed God's punishment for those whom He has chosen; and justification refers to the state of forgiveness on the other side of God's retributive justice. Sanctification, for Forde, is what will follow as a spontaneous and mostly unguided response. Yet, one wonders, what should one do when one encounters commands in Scripture? Or when the term 'sanctification' actually occurs? Forde expresses some regret for the concept even being named as such, at least in the discipline of systematic theology, and perhaps also in the practical work of pastoral ministry:

'It is difficult to escape the suspicion that the distinction between justification and sanctification is strictly a dogmatic one made because people got nervous about what would happen when unconditional grace was preached, especially in Reformation times. Doesn't justification do away with good works? Who will be good if they hear about justification by faith alone? So the anxious questions went. Sanctification was 'added' as something distinct in order to save the enterprise from supposed disaster. But dogmatic distinctions don't save us from disaster. More likely than not, they only make matters worse.'²

Given that this is his framework, one wonders how Forde stops himself from faulting the apostle Paul and Jesus himself for mentioning the term 'sanctification' in the first place.

The Reformed tradition answers the question of sanctification differently from the Lutheran. For example, Reformed theologian Sinclair B. Ferguson seeks to straddle the objective and subjective poles of sanctification by saying, 'All that is true *for me* in Christ has not yet been accomplished *in me* by the Spirit.'³ However, in the view of T.F. Torrance and his mentor Karl Barth, this results in moralism, turning

¹ Gerhard O. Forde, 'The Lutheran View' in Donald L. Alexander, *Christian Spirituality: Five Views of Sanctification* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1988), p.15

² *Ibid* p.17

³ Sinclair B. Ferguson, 'The Reformed View' in Donald L. Alexander, *Christian Spirituality: Five Views of Sanctification* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1988), p.62 – 63

Christ into a mere behavioral example to follow, and probably the evoking of guilt, shame, and anxiety in people's relationship with God, and unhealthy comparisons in people's relationship with each other. It becomes an aspect of 'works-righteousness.'

Torrance is concerned to relieve people from the burden of achieving not only their salvation, but also their sanctification. Hence, he passionately cautions against any theological framework which ultimately 'throws people back on themselves'⁴ – meaning their own energies and efforts. People should not feel the 'burden' of achieving something that Jesus already has achieved in our place and on our behalf. For Torrance, it is not up to human beings to bring about any outcome. Torrance defines sanctification to be first and foremost objectively achieved already by Jesus Christ. Because Jesus, in his vicarious humanity has already fully sanctified himself for us and for our salvation, we participate in what Jesus has done for us by the Spirit. We are therefore freed from the 'burden' of having to achieve our own sanctification, because Jesus has done it for us. Drawing from Hebrews 9 – 10 in the high priesthood of Christ, Torrance speaks therefore of sanctification in its objective pole – that is, one side of a binary state of when we are consciously participating in Christ by the Spirit. Indeed, 'We have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all' (Heb.10:10). Fundamentally, I am in agreement with this. My explorations below should not be taken as disagreement with that basic insight. I wish to express disagreement with them concerning the subjective pole of sanctification, and the theological issues in the background.

Torrance and Barth are responding to the placement of the doctrine of sanctification in a position following the doctrine of justification in the 'order of salvation' (*ordo salutis*). They lament that the vicarious humanity of Christ gets lost because, in Protestant churches, justification is announced as conferred by Christ, but sanctification is often something that must be 'worked out for ourselves.' In response to this problem, Barth says:

'It has not always been taken with sufficient seriousness that He took our place and acted for us, not merely as the Son of God who established God's right and our own by allowing Himself, the Judge, to be judged for us, but also as the Son of Man who was sanctified, who sanctified Himself. Far too often the matter has been conceived and represented as though His humiliation to death for our justification by Him as our Representative were His own act, but our exaltation to fellowship with God as the corresponding counter-movement, and therefore our sanctification, were left to us, to be accomplished by us. "All this I did for thee; what wilt thou do for me?" The New Testament does not speak in this way.'⁵

But this approach leads to a variety of questions mostly having to do with how we might discuss the subjective pole of sanctification. When an alcoholic celebrates the first year of his sobriety with his church and family, what is it that they are celebrating? When a pastor honors her church's volunteer team for their faithful service for the past year despite personality challenges in working together, what is it that she is honoring? In these cases and many more like them, we celebrate and honor the faithful choices of Christians, ostensibly. But if the faithfulness of Jesus in his humanity on our behalf eclipses whatever faithfulness we demonstrate, how do we articulate and express what we are doing? Must we only express how another person reminds us of Jesus? I affirm that ultimately all gratitude for people ought to lead us back to gratitude towards, and worship of, God. It is absolutely true, I believe, that all human goodness is a reflection and manifestation of Jesus himself. But how do we celebrate and honor people in their particularity, and especially for their often hard-fought and sacrificial choices?

Then, there is the question of unity and diversity. Theologically, how do we account for the one-to-many relationship between Christ and believers, such that each believer is united to Christ and yet develops different spiritual gifts by the Spirit, different senses of vocation (e.g. towards marriage or singleness), etc.? I am ever mindful, for example, that I love theology, and my wife does not! How do we account for the diversity that is apparently 'stored up' in the Son such that Christians might be converging in character upon the character of Christ, but diverging in virtually every other way? Going even further, what is the

⁴ T.F. Torrance, 'Preaching Jesus Christ,' p.28

⁵ Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics* IV/2, p.516 – 517

pastoral significance of asserting that the Son took to himself a human mind in his incarnation, as the Cappadocians would insist against the Apollinarians in the late fourth century? How do we participate in someone else's mental state, even if that person is Jesus Christ? What does it mean for multiple human beings to share in his one mind and yet still have our own?

I think at the heart of the matter is the question of whether the human will *is* actually thrown back on itself, ever, at any time. Or, is one's felt experience of that actually a problem of spiritual perception? Ultimately, we are faced with the nature of the human will, human nature, and human experience in our onto-relational reality (a helpful term Torrance coined, joining 'ontological' and 'relational'). Torrance was quite convinced that Western Christians must rejoin their Eastern brethren in holding to a relational, rather than individualistic and atomistic, view of human personhood.⁶ Yet, does Torrance's approach to sin presuppose a disjuncture between God and humanity introduced by the fall so total that no aspect of the human being desires God any longer? In other words, is it too Augustinian? Does it require us to believe that God's pursuit of the human being – who is otherwise so totally alienated from God – is found only in the circumstance of when that person hears the gospel accurately proclaimed, and understands and remembers that information cognitively? No doubt that helps very much. But does not God pursue us and exert a 'pull' on us constantly, by virtue of His loving creation of every human being universally in His image? Can God's pull be experienced even in a pre-rational or non-cognitive mode? That is, can we find God's pursuit of us, and leading of us, among our emotions and desires? I use the word 'among' with great intentionality here. I am not suggesting that God is to be *identified* with our wants, or that God is the *sum total* of our wants. But is He *refracted and dimly perceptible* through the human desires for love, goodness, justice, beauty, meaning, and so forth, in such a way that we are in fact *always* experiencing Him and His loving pursuit of us?

The Spirit in the Works of T.F. Torrance and Douglas Farrow

In 1986, Torrance put forward an article called 'Karl Barth and the Latin Heresy' in which he criticizes the manner in which salvation, in the Latin West as opposed to the Greek East, came to be defined externally and extrinsically to the person of Jesus Christ.⁷ Torrance argues, and I agree with him, that the theologians of the first four centuries saw the salvation of human nature happening *within* the union Jesus' divine and human natures, intrinsically *within* his one person, the person of the eternal Son of God. By contrast, the Protestant penal substitution view, which comes in for sharp criticism by Torrance, holds that Jesus absorbed the wrath of God in some manner extrinsic to his person. Penal substitution collapses the moment of salvific significance to Jesus' death on the cross rather than all throughout his incarnational descent into human flesh in the womb of Mary, life of faithful obedience resisting temptation, death, resurrection, and ascent back to the right hand of the Father, with a healed and redeemed human nature. Penal substitution also defines the critical transaction as a punitive one occurring somewhere within the Godhead, but thus potentially dividing the Trinity, rather than between the united Trinity on the one hand against the corruption of sin in human nature on the other – once again, *internal* to the Son and not external to him. Torrance and Swiss Reformed theologian Karl Barth saw themselves as recovering this emphasis on the person of Christ and his two natures – through a history of dogmatic theology, renewed attention to the cosmic role of the Word-Son as taught in Colossians 1:15 – 20, for example, and ecumenical dialogue between the Latin West and the Greek East. Significantly, they claim Athanasius of Alexandria as a key predecessor.

⁶ Greek Orthodox theologian and philosopher Christos Yannaras, *Person and Eros* (Brookline, MA: Holy Cross Orthodox Press, 2007), p.5 reminds us that the term for *person* is 'a referential reality. The referential character of the term is revealed fundamentally by its primitive use, that is, by its grammatical construction and etymology. The preposition *pros* ("towards") together with the noun *ops* (*opos* in the genitive), which means "eye," "face," "countenance," form the composite word *pros-opon*: I have my face turned towards someone or something; I am opposite someone or something. The word thus functioned initially as a term indicating an immediate reference, a relationship.' It is vital to recall that the Greek term for person (*prosopon*), as well as the Latin term (*persona*), were used in the Greek and Roman theater to indicate the 'masks' or 'faces' that the actors wore. When Christians brought this term into settled formal theological discourse by the time of Nicea (325 AD), the divine 'persons' were understood to be intrinsically and eternally persons-in-relation, 'facing' one another as it were. And we as human persons are always persons-in-relation as well, although our orientation in relationship, and experience of our relationship with God, is shaped by our nature and determined by our choices. See also Metropolitan of Nafpaktos Hierotheos, *The Person in the Orthodox Tradition* (Levadia-Hellas, Greece: Birth of the Theotokos Monastery, 1998)

⁷ T.F. Torrance, 'Karl Barth and the Latin Heresy,' *Scottish Journal of Theology*, Volume 39, Issue 04, November 1986, p.461 – 482

Interestingly, Canadian Catholic theologian Douglas Farrow returns T.F. Torrance's critique of the 'Latin heresy' with one of his own.⁸ He expresses agreement with the rooting of dogmatic principles in a way that is internal to the person of Jesus Christ. However, he questions Torrance's views of both the humanity of Christ and also the Holy Spirit. He argues that Torrance and Barth imposed on the Chalcedonian definition an ontology that collapses Jesus' humanity into an event, a 'pure act' of God. Farrow characterizes this as an unintended 'Eutychian' move, naming the mistake by which the human nature of Jesus is variously reduced or rendered meaningless, which the Council of Chalcedon (451 AD) meant to address, along with Nestorius' teaching. In this instance, Farrow means the variation of Eutychianism where Jesus' human nature is essentially collapsed into the divine nature. Farrow views this as a failure to distinguish being and act for a creature, of which Jesus is one, since in his view, being and act can only be completely one for God considered in His transcendence. If Torrance is correct, he argues, the whole cosmos is already reconciled in an actualist mode because the ontology of Christ is such that the whole cosmos already existed in Jesus' sojourn in human flesh from conception to ascension. The consequences of this move, Farrow, argues, includes four points. Since I have more sympathies with Torrance than with Farrow on the first three points, I will make short comments on them, and take the fourth as an opportunity to revisit Athanasius. Farrow writes:

‘The first consequence of turning Jesus into a reconciling event, into a divine-human Happening that (unlike other happenings) is everywhere and always taking place, is that the Church becomes nothing more than a community of witnesses, a community of people who with the eyes of faith see and confess what is everywhere and always the case. The sacraments themselves become mere acts of confession. Torrance, to his credit, resisted Barth's drift in this direction, even pleading with him not to publish the fragment of the final volume of the *Dogmatics* that rejected infant baptism. Yet Torrance himself could not quite allow the Church its sacramental concreteness. For if reconciliation is an event strictly internal to the being of Christ, and if Christ is without remainder the reconciliation he achieves, then the Church must be denied any reconciling or mediating function of its own, lest it somehow be confused with Christ. Thus the Eucharist, as traditionally understood both in the Latin and the Greek Churches, is incomprehensible—even idolatrous. And the Church remains something hidden. Even in the Eucharist it cannot be said, “Here is the Church.”’⁹

I agree with Torrance that the church is a witness to mediation in Christ and not a mediator itself. Is not witness the function of the eucharist when Jesus says, ‘Do this in *remembrance* of me’ (Lk.22:19) and when Paul says, ‘You *proclaim* it until he comes’ (1 Cor.11:26)? This view of God-man mediation flows out of the Epistle to the Hebrews’ presentation of Jesus as the sole high priest, or mediator (cf. 1 Tim.2:5). When the apostles call us ‘a royal priesthood’ (1 Pet.2:9), it is only in a limited, subsidiary, and even metaphorical sense, purposed yet again around proclamation (‘that you may proclaim...’; 1 Pet.2:9) and connected to Israel's failure to become a kingdom of priests (Ex.19:6) at Mount Sinai by going up ‘on’ the mountain (Ex.19:13; Dt.5:5), which itself continues a recapitulation of Eden, the original mountain on which humanity met with God (Eden being a mountain is the most reasonable explanation of how four rivers diverged rather than converged from it; Gen.2:10 – 14; and Ezk.28:13 – 14 names Eden as a mountain). Moreover, it stands to reason that if the church is a witness, in both proclamational, moral, and relational dimensions, then it is visible. That seems to me an adequate response to Farrow's charge that the church would be ‘hidden’ without a Catholic and Orthodox high sacramental view of the Eucharist.

Farrow deepens his concern for the church to be a particular and identifiable community:

‘A second consequence is that one is forced to emphasize the *petra* of Peter's act of confession at the expense of Petros himself, whose confession it is and to whom the keys are given. Keys imply jurisdiction, and jurisdiction canons, and canons of lawful succession, and so on. Confession and keys together imply magisterium. But again, this is all too concrete. The Church, in its pastoral function as in its proclamation, points to the reality that is Christ, but it only points. It possesses

⁸ Douglas Farrow, ‘T.F. Torrance and the Latin Heresy,’ *First Things*, December 2013; <http://www.firstthings.com/article/2013/12/t-f-torrance-and-the-latin-heresy>

⁹ Ibid

nothing. Torrance might be readier than Barth to allow that the Church, through its councils, does have power to declare what is orthodox and what is heterodox. Yet with Barth he is unafraid to tell the Church that it is guilty of “the Latin heresy”: that it does not know, or not as well as they, what is orthodox or heterodox. (Here I worry that Torrance is closer to Tertullian, whom he criticizes as one of the earliest sources of the Latin heresy, than to Irenaeus, whom he admires.)¹⁰

One’s doctrine of the Holy Spirit must logically undergird one’s understandings of both Scripture and church. For example, in 1 Corinthians 7:12 and 25, Paul exercised an apostolic prerogative to lay down Christian ethics on points which Jesus had not addressed, and he invoked the Spirit of God as his authority to do so (7:40); what was happening there from a theological and dogmatic standpoint?¹¹ Similarly, the Gospel of John also indicates that the Spirit would bring more theological clarity to at least the apostles (Jn.16:12 – 15). Farrow, as a Catholic, wants to extend that principle of apostolic authority beyond the apostles to the ongoing Church hierarchy, and while his move can certainly be debated, I find this instance of Paul’s apostolic innovation difficult to ignore. Either Paul had the authority by the Spirit to do that or he did not. If he did, then the Holy Spirit can communicate more words from the Word which are continuous with the historical Jesus, but did not come from his earthly ministry. This has important ramifications about one’s doctrine of the Holy Spirit.

I think the debates about orthodoxy and heterodoxy are quite serious, but that church hierarchy is not the answer, and has never been; education is. Torrance was appreciative of the first seven ecumenical councils of the church because of their allegiance to the intrinsic and inseparable union of the person of Christ with the work of Christ. One suspects that Farrow is more sympathetic to the outward form of the seven great Councils, although I wonder how he would defend the typical Western position in matters disputed by the East: the Latin West inserting the *filioque* into the Nicene Creed without the Greek-speaking church’s approval; Leo of Rome’s understanding of Jesus’ assumed human nature as unfallen as opposed to fallen (see Torrance’s critique of the *Tome of Leo* and its influence at Chalcedon¹²); and the fact that the teaching of Augustine of Hippo, the most influential teacher of the Latin West, is incompatible with the teaching of Greek theologian Maximus the Confessor,¹³ whose thought undergirded the Sixth Ecumenical Council. Since I take special interest in Irenaeus as well, I might add that I doubt Irenaeus thought church hierarchy was an automatic solution. He wrote his massive analysis of heresy to educate fellow Christians. And besides that, he had to correct Eleutherus, bishop of Rome in 177 AD, about the Montanist heresy, and Victor, bishop of Rome in 191 AD, about his attempt to impose the Roman practice on the celebration of Easter on all Christians. Irenaeus had also seen his mentor Polycarp, bishop of Smyrna, correct the previous bishop of Rome, Anicetus, on the same matter. So when Irenaeus traces out an ‘apostolic succession’ of sorts,¹⁴ he is giving a historical explanation about inheriting apostolic truth, not making a theological claim that succession of bishops somehow guarantees it.

Farrow’s third point involves the role of Mary:

¹⁰ Ibid

¹¹ Jesus laid a groundwork for his teaching ministry to be reproduced, as Paul says he repeated the teaching of Jesus in 1 Corinthians repeatedly (2:1 – 2; 4:17; 7:10, 17; 9:14, 21; 11:2; 23 – 25; 14:37); James quotes the Sermon on the Mount over twenty times; and quite possibly Jesus himself is the author of ‘creedal’ material placed in the New Testament like the tradition of Jesus’ resurrection appearances in 1 Corinthians 15:1 – 7 and the ‘Christ-hymn’ of Colossians 1:15 – 20. When Paul speaks about something that Jesus did not address in a historical sense, he must say so while claiming the Spirit’s authority as an apostle to nevertheless answer the question in a way that is in continuity with Jesus (1 Cor.7:12, 25, 40). Paul’s words now have authority alongside Jesus’ words, because the Spirit has given him those words. I explain Paul’s development of the Jesus tradition as the Spirit enabled him to reason from existing material and prayerfully reach an authoritative position that is faithful to Jesus. It seems to me that only the apostles had the authority to reach judgments like this.

¹² T.F. Torrance, ‘Karl Barth and Patristic Theology,’ *Karl Barth, Biblical and Evangelical Theologian* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2001), p.203. Catholic scholar Thomas Weinandy, *In the Likeness of Sinful Flesh* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1993), p.36 agrees with Torrance’s assessment of Leo’s *Tome*, but points out that Leo, *Sermon 7:2*, says, ‘lowered himself to our condition, He not only assumed our substance (nature), but also the condition of our sinfulness.’

¹³ Edward T. Oakes, *Infinity Dwindled to Infancy: A Catholic and Evangelical Christology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2011), p.162 – 164; see Gösta Hallonsten, ‘Theosis in Recent Research: A Renewal of Interest and a Need for Clarity,’ edited by Michael J. Christensen and Jeffery A. Wittung, *Partakers of the Divine Nature: The History and Development of Deification in the Christian Traditions* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2007), p.285 – 286 for Tertullian’s influence on Augustine in making a strong distinction between nature vs. grace.

¹⁴ Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* 3.2.2 and 4.26.2

‘A third consequence is the marginalization of Mary, who is not allowed to be what Irenaeus claimed she was, the new Eve. She cannot be that, because in the Barthian scheme it is her role to transmit to Jesus the fallenness of the old Eve. That the unassumed is the unhealed is not denied by the Catholic Church, but affirmed. It is denied, however, that Mary transmits fallenness to Jesus in the sense of original sin or the bondage of actual sin. What she passes on, what he takes up from her in partaking of her humanity, is her situation in “the land of sepulture,” her place under the Law, her place too under the shadow of Satan, beset by temptation, and her mortality. It was precisely to show solidarity with all those in this situation that the Son became incarnate so late in time, says Irenaeus—only at the end of history, rather than at the beginning, “being made like us in all things, sin excepted.”’¹⁵

I affirm that Mary must be honored but not in the particular way Farrow suggests. Farrow reflects a tendency among Christians to interpret Mary as a representative of the *church* as opposed to *Israel*. Israel received the word of God, bore the life of God in an anticipatory way, and endured mockery and scandal for actually being faithful. Israel represented the new or renewed Eve, even as Israel at times also represented the sinful Eve. Correspondingly, Irenaeus honored Mary as the new Eve in the sense that Mary made a courageous choice to receive the word of God (unlike Eve), bear the life of the Messianic child (to fulfill Eve), and endure mockery and scandal (which Eve did not have to face) by becoming pregnant, even though her pregnancy was godly. This does not interfere with Barth’s and Torrance’s claim that Jesus drew a fallen human nature from her. In my opinion, this extraction of Mary of Nazareth from her context in Israel leads to other unfortunate results, mostly having to do with overlooking the role of biblical Israel¹⁶ and an inability to appreciate the ongoing presence of Judaism in its current forms.

Nevertheless, Farrow continues with the objection I believe is most worth considering:

‘Attention to Mary in this last connection is important, because a fourth consequence of the actualist scheme is its tendency to minimize pneumatology. This happens when the work of the Spirit is reduced to its epistemic dimension, which is a natural result of making the whole work of atonement or reconciliation internal to the person of Christ. Where the focus is on Jesus Christ as God-humbling-himself-and-man-being-exalted, rather than on the God-man abasing himself with the Spirit’s help to do the Father’s work and being exalted by the Spirit at the Father’s command, how far does the Spirit even come into view? What is left for the Spirit to do?’

‘The Spirit enables people to confess Christ, yes, and so constitutes the Church as a community of confession. But the miracle that takes place in Mary’s womb, when the Son of God takes to himself our humanity through the mighty act of the Spirit, who overshadows a second time the formless void; the deep bonding of man to man and race to race when the same Spirit hovers over the followers of Jesus in the upper room or in the house of Cornelius; the shaping of the new-covenant community, through its ministers, its sacraments, its dogmas, and its laws, into a royal priesthood; the missions and miracles and sufferings by which the city of God is built; the raising of the dead at the parousia, when dark and stinking tombs are opened to the light of an everlasting Day—all of this stands somewhat awkwardly outside the actualist scheme, with its conflation of person and act. That is because it is the work of both “hands” of God, of two distinct divine persons, not of one only. And because it makes room for Mary and the Church as real agents in the narrative of salvation.’¹⁷

I wish to dwell here on Farrow’s fourth point. Is there something about Barth’s and Torrance’s approach that turns the humanity of Jesus into a divine event that somehow reduces its significance as a human event and a human narrative? And is there appropriate place given to the Holy Spirit in our humanity and human narratives?

¹⁵ Farrow, ‘T.F. Torrance and the Latin Heresy,’ *First Things*, December 2013

¹⁶ Colin Gunton, *The Promise of Trinitarian Theology* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1997), p.65 asks, for example, what was Jesus doing in choosing twelve disciples: ‘If, on the one hand, the twelve represent a reconstituted Israel, the emphasis will be on the creation of a historical community... if, on the other hand, the disciples are the first of an order of clergy, to whom is transmitted authority over the community, a more strongly clerical ecclesiology will – and did – emerge.’

¹⁷ Farrow, ‘T.F. Torrance and the Latin Heresy,’ *First Things*, December 2013

Deepening the Double Movement of the Incarnate Son

Indeed, in describing Jesus Christ as mediator between God and humanity, Torrance rightly stresses the 'double movement' in the incarnation. One movement in Christ is the movement of God to humanity in terms of God coming in the fullness of His gracious love, shown in the descent of the Son into our humanity, into the conditions of frail human community, vulnerable to the powers and sharing in Israel's exile, and into death itself to rescue us. The other movement is that of humanity to God in terms of perfect human response, shown in Jesus' trusting reception of the Spirit in joy, prayer, and worship to the Father. I agree with the essence of this perception. However, I believe the latter movement requires clarification, based on an onto-relational view of the human: The second movement in Christ is not *only* the movement of the human to God, but, given a proper definition of the human, the movement of God within the movement of the human back to Himself. This fills in a gap (as I perceive it) in Torrance's theology created by his incorporation of the doctrine of total depravity into his systematics, and therefore the mistake that human beings offer our response to God from a position that is truly individualistic. And that means that the revelation brought by Christ and in Christ also has a double movement regarding time and history: Christ reveals something of the consummation of creation in God's transfiguring glory; Christ also reveals something of the beginning of creation, and what has transpired since. In the person of Jesus, the Word of God who took flesh to himself reveals what he has been doing since the very beginning: upholding all things, including human beings (Col.1:15 – 17; Acts 17:28) and drawing them back to himself such that they would 'seek God' (Acts 17:27).

Jesus also fulfilled and revealed a double movement in the specific relationship between God and Israel. God descended to make Himself known in a preliminary way in the midst of Israel. But God was also upholding Israel under the weight of the Sinai covenant in a preliminary way as well. For if Jesus Christ entered history on behalf of Israel, then he carried Israel's Sinaitic covenant upon himself and in himself as the true Israel. And if he did that, then he accomplished what no other Israelite and what Israel as a whole could not accomplish: Receive fully the word and Spirit of God into their own flesh so as to present back to the Father a cleansed, circumcised humanity. Therefore, Jesus of Nazareth reveals what God was doing in and through Israel within their human response, honoring their human agency: upholding them, and helping them to try to do the thing that only He could truly accomplish, documenting their diagnosis of human nature in the form of the Hebrew Scriptures, and crying out in hope for a deeper deliverance. How else can one support a doctrine of inspiration of Scripture without this underpinning? Hence the double movement Torrance perceived in the incarnation is better articulated as both God toward humanity, and God drawing humanity back to God.

It appears to me that a difference between the patristic theologians in comparison with Torrance is that the latter theologian believed that our participation in God begins (logically and pastorally, at least) with our justification in Christ. Torrance says, for instance, 'Justification by grace alone *remains the sole ground of the Christian life*.'¹⁸ In this, he faithfully follows the Lutheran and Reformed traditions. Hence, Torrance is constantly concerned to speak of sanctification also not imposing a burden on the believer. But this assumes that God's commandments, as expressed in relation to both justification and sanctification, are fundamentally *foreign* to human nature, and that human persons can be considered in theological study as being fundamentally *individualistic and atomistic*. There is no doubt that sanctification can be *challenging*. But the Lutheran and Reformed traditions seem to presume that what is challenging is necessarily *burdensome*. It is *challenging* for an alcoholic parent to resist the pull of alcohol for the sake of his or her children, but is it a *burden* in the sense that Torrance speaks of it? For it is not at all clear that the victory of Christ in winning sanctification for us makes participation in that reality less difficult; at times it is still absolutely grueling. But notice how the Greek Byzantine theologian and monk Maximus the Confessor spoke of 'burdens': 'There is nothing more burdensome and grievous then when conscience accuses us in anything, and there is nothing dearer than calmness and approval of the conscience.' For Maximus, whom I take as a representative of the patristic tradition on the subject, a burden occurs when one traverses a

¹⁸ The fuller quotation is as follows: T.F. Torrance, *Reconstruction*, p.161 – 162 says, 'Justification by grace alone *remains the sole ground of the Christian life*; we never advance beyond it, as if justification were only the beginning of a new self-righteousness, the beginning of a life of sanctification which is what we do in response to justification. Of course we are summoned to live out day by day what we already are in Christ through his self-consecration or sanctification, but sanctification is not what we do in addition to what God has done in justification.' (emphasis mine)

moral trajectory away from God, causing the conscience to protest because it is *against one's true human nature*. For Maximus, conscience speaks with the voice of God, and even *as* the voice of God in the human person. I suspect Torrance assumes the lived experience of sanctification is burdensome because of his tendency to read his doctrine of sanctification against the backdrop of his Reformed (shared with the Lutheran) doctrine of justification – that is, as if the Sinai covenant ('Law') was *primarily* a burden (a la Luther's exegesis of Galatians) and not a gift and a step in the liberation of human beings to become once again who God created us to be (as in Romans). They therefore seek to motivate human trust in Jesus' self-sanctification through gratitude for being freed from crushing obligations, which is the same transactional motivational structure the Reformed and Lutheran traditions deploy for their concept of justification. I am left to wonder if the biblical data can be considered in a more accurate way, and whether a greater and deeper range of human motivations can be evoked and cultivated, more like those to which Athanasius appeals in his earliest work, the two volume *Against the Heathen – On the Incarnation*. I also wonder whether Torrance was as free from the residue of penal substitutionary atonement as he wished to be.

Sanctification in Creation

The Jewish wisdom tradition, by contrast, understood human nature and God's commandments to be perfectly fitted to each other *from creation*: Both flow from God's wisdom (e.g. Prov.8:22 – 23). To suggest otherwise means that God commands things that are strangely inappropriate for His creation, or that God made the creation in some way that is disconnected from His commandments and moral character. Either hypothetical case would boggle the Jewish mind. The corruption of sin does not alter the basic categories of creation. However much we now face sinful desires in ourselves that resist God, a situation acknowledged in the Psalms and supremely by Paul in Romans 7:14 – 25, that does not take away from the fact that we are already participating in God's wisdom – and therefore in God Himself, in some sense – by our very creation. If God's commandments cause the heart to rejoice (e.g. Ps.19:8), then the heart cannot be marred by sin beyond recognition. We may struggle to follow the commandments of God. Yet our struggles are framed by a prior assurance of God's love for us as Creator, a teleological hope in God's goodness to heal human nature as part of our destiny (e.g. Dt.30:6; Jer.4:4; 31:31 – 34; Ezk.36:26 – 36; etc.), along with joy in finding in ourselves a desire to follow those commands in the present, despite the resistance we also feel. That is arguably why Paul can speak of a true 'I myself' in contrast to the alien 'sin that indwells me' (e.g. Rom.7:18) in that convoluted passage and convoluted journey of self-diagnosis. Athanasius shared this understanding. In his second *Discourse Against the Arians*, Athanasius produces a very lengthy treatment of Proverbs 8:22 – 23 in his exposition of the eternal Son as God's Wisdom. Proverbs 8:22 – 23 contains the statement about God's wisdom bringing forth the creation. The passage was heavily contested material in the struggle between Nicene and Arian theologians. And the early church – Athanasius being an example insofar as this paper is concerned – was persuaded that the Word of God, our creator, already participated in us *from creation, not only our justification*. Rooting sanctification in creation, not justification, yields this important shift in our theological anthropology: What God commands of us might be *challenging*, in light of the fall, but not *'burdensome.'* Why? Because by commanding us, God awakens and strengthens our truest desires – desires which linger on *in us* despite the fall by His persistent creational and providential love *for us*.

Rooting sanctification in Christ as creator, not merely justifier, rooting it in creation and not justification, explains more of the biblical data. I briefly give three examples here. First, the Sabbath day was made 'holy' prior to the fall and independently of it. 'Then God blessed the seventh day and sanctified it, because in it He rested from all the work which God had created and made' (Gen.2:3). Thus ends the poetic account of the creation in the literary composition we know as Genesis 1:1 – 2:3. Whatever else might be said of the Sabbath day, God's sanctifying of it and setting it apart shows that 'sanctification' does not inherently and intrinsically have to do with sin. It has to do with creation and God's development of creation with His image-bearers. Had humanity not sinned, God would have invited people into the Sabbath rest of every seventh day of the week, simply with the passage of time. They would have participated in the 'holiness' of the Sabbath day, and grown in 'holiness' themselves – not only in their distinctiveness from the rest of creation as they matured, but probably in distinction from each other because of the diversity of experiences throughout the world. Simply put, the Sabbath day was a type of seal marking the completion of a unit of time along that progression. The seventh day meant a summing up of the previous six days, a reflective enjoyment of what is common and ordinary, and a celebration of the development of creation through the partnership between God and humanity. This creational pattern

reflected in the Sabbath becomes archetypal. For it becomes a 'temple' in time: a manner in which the past six days are related to the seventh. Conceptually, the Sabbath day can serve as a frame which the previous six days 'fill' with joy, as people might look back at the work, service, and beauty they had rendered to the creation and, like God, look out and say, 'It is good.' Or vice versa: The previous six days serve as a frame which the seventh day 'fills' retrospectively, in that the Sabbath reminds human beings that throughout their six days of work, God has been enthroned and still rests on His throne, which is the inner reason why life grows to fill the creation at all. Either way, and in both ways at once, the 'temple' structure of the seventh day in relation to the previous six already fits the literary format of Genesis 1:1 – 2:3 as a whole, where days one, two, and three serve to 'frame' the realms that are 'filled' on days four, five, and six. The six days and the seventh day mutually reveal each other.

Second, as Israel was on the cusp of entering the promised land to become a partial restoration of Adam and Eve in the original garden land, Moses urged them to 'listen to the statutes and the judgments' God gave them – through Moses – 'to perform' (Dt.4:1). That is, just as God gave Adam and Eve a command in the garden, meant to be a help and guide to them in the development of their own humanity, so God was giving Israel commands:

'So keep and do them, for that is your wisdom and your understanding in the sight of the peoples who will hear all these statutes and say, 'Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people.' For what great nation is there that has a god so near to it as is the Lord our God whenever we call on Him? Or what great nation is there that has statutes and judgments as righteous as this whole law which I am setting before you today?' (Dt.4:6 – 8)

Israel's subsequent failures in keeping the fullness of the Sinai covenant should not take away from the points that I am observing about this passage and the role of God's commandments in the overall scope of Israel's historical existence. First, Israel did actually manage to be morally different from their pagan neighbors, at least in important ways and for long stretches of time. In effect, when God said, 'Be holy,' or its equivalent, 'be sanctified' and 'set apart,' Israel did so. It is a wide open question whether they were 'justified' as the Lutheran and Reformed traditions would understand it. So how could Israel's 'sanctification' be happening, on some level prior to, and independently of, their 'justification'? The second point, furthermore, is quite to the point. And that is: Moses expected the Gentile peoples around Israel to observe the life of Israel, to *admire* its laws, and therefore to become somewhat acquainted with Israel's God. This assumes a strong doctrine of creation which persists despite humanity's fall into the self-corruption of sin. For if the Gentile peoples roundabout were to be favorably impressed – on some level – with Israel's moral and legal life, one must ask why. What is it about human nature itself that God and Moses expect Gentiles to appreciate and admire God's wisdom as a result of their encounters with Israel? The Gentiles roundabout cannot reasonably be said to have been 'justified' in any real sense, at least with any certainty. Yet Israel's presence is expected to influence their behaviors in some sense. One thinks of Daniel influencing King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon to care for the poor (Dan.4:27), which is reminiscent of Joseph's influence on the Pharaoh of Egypt to care for the poor and the peoples roundabout during the famine (Gen.41:56 – 57). Those episodes are significant because they show Israel at one sociological extremis: In exile among foreign peoples, Israel's adherence to Mosaic Law leads to a preliminary human rights orientation *among those peoples*. And what other foundation does this have other than the teaching that every human being *is created* in the image of God? If Israel's ethics are ultimately rooted in the biblical narrative of creation, which it is, then the Gentiles' recognition of 'wisdom' in those ethics is a lingering resonance of creation. This Deuteronomic passage above and the broader expectation it set constitutes at least a preliminary experience of 'sanctification.' And it happened independently of 'justification,' though ultimately in relation to it.

My third example, from the New Testament, also supports my thesis about 'sanctification.' The apostle Paul gave teaching to the Corinthians about mixed-faith marriages. The passage is remarkable in many ways, not least because he breaks sharply with the Roman tradition where the wife was simply expected to take on the religious beliefs and duties of her husband. For Paul, faith in Christ cut through Roman marriage tradition in both directions: A Christian husband was not to force his non-Christian wife into Christian faith in such a manner. Neither can a Christian wife, for the sake of her non-Christian husband, abandon Christ, dilute her faith, or worship another god alongside Christ, even in a nominal way.

Therefore, I am most interested in the astonishing section where Paul says the believing spouse ‘sanctifies’ the unbelieving spouse, and their children:

‘But to the rest I say, not the Lord, that if any brother has a wife who is an unbeliever, and she consents to live with him, he must not divorce her. And a woman who has an unbelieving husband, and he consents to live with her, she must not send her husband away. For the unbelieving husband is sanctified through his wife, and the unbelieving wife is sanctified through her believing husband; for otherwise your children are unclean, but now they are holy. Yet if the unbelieving one leaves, let him leave; the brother or the sister is not under bondage in such cases, but God has called us to peace. For how do you know, O wife, whether you will save your husband? Or how do you know, O husband, whether you will save your wife?’ (1 Cor.7:12 – 16)

By way of commentary, Paul clearly wanted Christians to marry Christians, as he tells Christian widows that they may remarry, ‘only in the Lord’ (1 Cor.7:39). Mixed-faith marriages resulted through other avenues. One spouse in a non-Christian marriage might have become a Christian. And, perhaps some people did not have a choice about their marriage partner. So Paul dealt with the resulting mixed-faith marriages sensitively. He seems concerned about the level of frustration that a non-Christian spouse might face in a marriage to a Christian. All kinds of values and practical life issues would lead to conflict: who and where to publicly worship; how to use one’s home for community and hospitality; how to use one’s money; how to raise one’s children; whether and how to honor the dead; etc. culminating in the question of whether to bow down to the image of Caesar in veneration. The resulting frustration for a non-Christian spouse in a mixed-faith marriage has the potential to be extremely high. In such a situation, rather than use legal coercion as was possible for Roman husbands, or maybe emotional and sexual manipulation by either partner, it is more loving for a Christian spouse to ‘let him [or her] leave.’ The rhetorical questions Paul asks in v.16 seem to assume a negative answer while a mixed-faith marriage stays intact through coercion or manipulation, and maybe a more distant positive answer if the marriage is allowed to dissolve and the non-Christian spouse is free to go without shame.

The important point, for my purpose, is to observe how Paul uses the word ‘sanctified.’ Can unbelievers be ‘sanctified’? In Paul’s mind, absolutely. But not in the strict sense that the Lutheran and Reformed traditions define it as part of the *ordo salutis*. It cannot possibly mean ‘growth in Christlikeness subsequent to one’s justification which follows faith in Christ presented as a penal substitutionary atonement’ in the traditional Protestant sense because Paul is talking about non-believers. Nor can it mean ‘conscious participation in the objective reality of Christ’s self-sanctification on our behalf’ as in the thought of Barth and Torrance – because we are still speaking of non-Christians who resist any conscious acknowledgement of Christ, especially a conscious participation in him by the Spirit. One must at least concede that the word ‘sanctification’ has a broader lexical range in Scripture than the ‘doctrine of sanctification’ does per se. The simplest alternative, it seems to me, is that Paul is referring to human marriage in the order of creation from Genesis 1 and 2. A non-believing spouse is ‘sanctified’ in the sense of honoring the original design of marriage from creation. This mitigates a worry that Christian spouses could have about the validity of their mixed-faith marriage. And the children of a mixed-faith marriage grow up in an intact home in that sense, and are presumably still exposed to Christian teaching from their Christian parent. In that sense, they too are ‘sanctified.’

Sanctification, therefore, refers to humanity’s growth in the broad purpose God gave us *from creation*. That purpose, of course, is ultimately found in receiving life and love from Jesus Christ, the incarnate Word who uttered the creation into being. But whether or not human beings have faith in Christ does not impede the start of one’s sanctification. One’s sanctification should therefore be understood as an experience which comes before, includes, and far exceeds one’s ‘justification.’ The book *Christian Spirituality: Five Views on Sanctification*, published in 1989, and yet another book titled *Five Views on Sanctification*, published in 1996, demonstrate that Christians debate whether and how ‘justification’ plays a psychological role in our sanctification. That depends, I think, on one’s theology of atonement and the positioning of God towards human sin. Regardless, the key category about sanctification as an experience is not how hard or easy it is, from the standpoint of moral exertion. The key category is whether sanctification is *appropriate* to us as the fulfillment of our nature from creation, or whether it is *alien* to us. As a subcategory of the latter possibility, the subsequent question is whether ‘total depravity’ is true. Has human nature has been

so ruined by the corruption of sin that every fiber of our being actually resists God? Do we totally resist resuming the path God intended for us from creation? I believe the biblical data, especially the Jewish wisdom tradition, answers in the negative. So does the simple empirical observation that no one breaks all of God's commandments all of the time. However much we resist God, we retain a desire for God, and – however inarticulate – an awareness of who He created us to be, and to become, in relationship with Him.

Sanctification, in its subjective pole, should also be understood to be describing *more* than our moral character or moral effort alone. It includes far more. That is, sanctification does not merely repose on the backdrop of sin, as the Lutheran and Reformed traditions make it out to be, so preoccupied as they are with sin, especially as they tend to read the punishments of the Sinai covenant and/or a retributive hell as looming very near. Instead, I believe sanctification refers us back to *creation*. The infinite wisdom and richness of the eternal Son will be infinitely scattered throughout all human beings. This, Athanasius recognized. Sanctification is, first and foremost, rooted in the distinction God conferred upon human beings as different from the rest of the created world. God breathed into humanity uniquely, making each of us a precious microcosm of creation, a mixture of earth and heaven. As such, our growth in general knowledge about the creation is part of our incremental sanctification. It includes the learning of human languages and our ability to communicate with and know one another, because God created us to be speaking beings like Himself. It includes the knowledge and skills to work with earth in all its forms, as God set apart artistic Israelites who built the tabernacle with great craftsmanship. We are called upon to cultivate our spiritual awareness and experience, rooted in our relation to God as we know Him in Christ and by the Spirit. That includes the cultivation of the Holy Spirit's gifts, or charisms, which is a lifelong journey. It also includes spiritual warfare and our battles with the demonic, our growth in ministry, and the global mission of the church. It involves the discovery of a sense of vocation that may lead to new expressions of Christian organization, or the discernment of whether to be single or married, and so on. For example, Luke describes the Holy Spirit as saying, 'Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them' (Acts 13:2). In all these realms of life and more, which are part of the subjective experience of sanctification as I believe Scripture defines it, the path is not merely moral, and except for the character of Christ, not necessarily focused on some 'end goal.'

Sanctification, in its subjective pole, should also be understood as *incremental*. Athanasius certainly understood it that way, as I demonstrate below. The Gospel writer upon whom he leaned the most, John, seems to have taught that in his recollection of the vine and the branches (Jn.15:1 – 8). The branches certainly participate in the vine, but they are still recognizably distinct from the vine per se as branches, and they bear fruit in an organic, incremental mode. That mode is *growth*. Arguably, this is logically required: For we human beings are finite, temporal beings relating to the infinite, eternal being who is the Triune God of love. That means infinite growth and deepening for us, simply because we are created and He is creator, in which He is not rushed, precisely because His perspective is eternal. Depending on one's theological leaning on this particular matter, it may be that the person I am becoming for all eternity is undetermined and unpredictable. While on the one hand, we are rooted in Christ in an onto-relational and moral way, in another sense, perhaps our choices in partnership with the Spirit are what God uses to shape other aspects of us. In fact, an 'end goal' as such might not even exist as a determined state in the mind of God, even if God knows all possibilities for us.

Protestant theologians, by comparison, generally define sanctification in a perfectionistic sense which sees 'Christ-likeness' as an end goal and a lofty static state, more or less, even if we are distant from it. This may be especially true for the Wesleyan tradition in its teaching on 'total sanctification' as the state in which one no longer consciously sins. That is what I think Barth and Torrance may rightly protest as 'burdensome.' For even Jesus of Nazareth was not in a hurry to simply crush the corruption of sin in his own humanity and emerge in his resurrection – otherwise, why did he not die and rise immediately after his birth? Instead, Jesus lived a rather full human life to a mature age, as Irenaeus pointed out in a quotation I examine below. And this was held to be theologically significant, not incidental. In the Incarnation, God respected His own definition of the *human* as He laid out in creation. It bears repeating that since Protestant discourse evidences a preoccupation with defining all theological terms in relation to sin, then sanctification thus framed *would* probably lead to some kind of impatient perfectionism, self-denigration and despair, boredom, or cynicism. But if sanctification is in relation to creation and sourced and destined teleologically by a participation in the infinite richness and ever brightening transfigured glory of Jesus'

own humanity, then we experience something far more comprehensive than sin-reduction. Such growth can and must be joyfully incremental. It is a process of self-discovery in one's ever deepening relation to Christ whose humanity is ever brightening. It is a conversation with Jesus where the words exchanged ever deepen in meaning. It is a constant sourcing of one's life, by the Spirit, from the ascended Jesus who manifests – and is – the life, love, and goodness of the ever overflowing Father.

If I am correct in my handling of the biblical and theological data, then the Lutheran and Reformed conceptual structure for the doctrine of sanctification must be reworked. For they are trying to answer questions that flow from a state of the human mind which assumes that its own resistance to God is primary, and not from an objective perception of our human nature in the eyes of God; and only in relation to sin, not in relation to creation and eternity. And thus, the objective and subjective poles of sanctification can be reunited in ways that Torrance did not foresee, or recovered from the patristics as the case may be. Athanasius points us in that direction.

Relatedly, if we do not find a place for human nature, agency, and development to be gifts from God to us *from creation*, then human agency can only be understood as competing with, and possibly interfering with, God's agency. Barth, for example, in his approach to theology, so consistently emphasized the disjuncture between God and humanity that his theological system apparently had to be dialectical rather than linear. That is, at one pole of the dialectic, Barth arrays God 'in Himself.' At the other pole, he regularly refers to humanity 'in itself.' But if God has bound Himself to us onto-rationally in *creation*, then in the unfolding of the creation and salvation history, it is not appropriate to speak of God 'in Himself,' nor humanity 'in itself,' when considering the economic trinity. Methodologically, such categories separating 'God in Himself' from 'humanity in itself' suggests that Barth reads the immanent trinity (God in Himself) in for, and in place of, the economic trinity (God in creation) in such a way so as to displace actual commitments God makes to us in the space-time economy. For instance, Barth is very fond of speaking of God's 'freedom' with respect to creation and humanity.¹⁹ Conversely, Barth is averse to supplying 'necessity' as a rationale for God's actions. He does define and ground God's freedom in God's nature: God's freedom is His freedom to be Himself and love us. But why is this not a necessity born out of God's nature to love us and be 'for us'? And, most confusingly, Barth even speaks of God as 'one who wills Himself,'²⁰ raising the intriguing question of whether God could will Himself not to exist, and the troubling specter that God could have a *will* prior to having a *nature*, and thus be free to change His nature from one of love and goodness to one of sheer arbitrariness. Compare this to Athanasius' unhesitating declaration that nature *precedes* will in God. He was arguing against Asterius the Arian, who asserted that God took counsel with Himself and, at some point in time, exercised 'will' prior to the Son to beget the Son:

'What is according to nature transcends and precedes counselling... For let them tell us themselves—that God is good and merciful, does this attach to Him by will or not? If by will, we must consider that He began to be good, and that His not being good is possible; for to counsel and choose implies an inclination two ways, and is incidental to a rational nature. But if it be too unseemly that He should be called good and merciful upon will, then what they have said

¹⁹ I agree with Barth and most Christian theologians in saying that God's *will to create* was totally free and undetermined, even by His nature. However, at issue is whether God's relationship with the creation *once He created it* entails a commitment on God's part to love. In *CD III/2*, p.220 Barth speaks of an *analogia relationis*, that is, an analogy between the relationship(s) of love within the inner being of God and the relationship between God and those He creates. However, in *CD IV/1*, p.39, Barth also speaks of the covenant as 'freely' willed by God. This puzzles me because I would understand the covenant as inherent in creation, and therefore God *necessitating* its resurfacing through Noah and his family, Abraham and Sarah, Israel, and climactically in the divine-human person of Jesus. The covenant was grounded in and necessitated by God's triune nature as love and goodness. In other words, God was free not to create. But once He did, He was committed to it in covenantal love because His nature is love, life, and goodness.

²⁰ Barth, *CD II/1*, p.550; God's 'being is decision' in *CD II/2*, p.175. 'No other being is absolutely its own, conscious, willed and executed decision' in *CD II/1*, p.271. 'God... in Himself, in the primal and basic decision in which He wills to be and actually is God' in *CD II/2*, p.76 and *CD IV/1*, p.39. Couenhoven, p.243 cites Robert Jensen, *God After God: The God of the Past and the God of the Future, Seen in the Work of Karl Barth* (New York: Bobbs-Merrill, 1969), p.127 saying that for Barth, 'God is the free event, independent of His own nature yet nonetheless having a nature, because he decides to be and to be what he is.' Although some disagree with this reading of Barth, see Couenhoven's subsequent summary of the scholarly discussion about Barth's notion of divine freedom. Confusingly, or perhaps dialectically, Barth *CD II/2*, p.306; etc. also says, 'We do not say that God creates, produces or originates Himself. On the contrary, we say that (as manifest and eternally actual in the relationship of Father, Son, and Holy Ghost) He is the One who already has and is in Himself everything which would have to be the object of His creation and causation if He were not He, God...'

themselves must be retorted on them— ‘therefore by necessity and not at His pleasure He is good;’ and, ‘who is it that imposes this necessity on Him?’ But if it be unseemly to speak of necessity in the case of God, and therefore it is by nature that He is good, much more is He, and more truly, Father of the Son by nature and not by will.’²¹

As far as God has worked in actual history, was God ‘free’ to break commitments that He Himself has made? If God gave true agency to human beings in creation, was this a self-limitation on God’s part, or was it in faithful accordance with His nature of love? Did God withdraw human agency after the fall? Are the gifts and callings of God revocable after all (reversing Rom.11:29)? Or, must we go further and say that in creation, God did not actually entrust human beings with anything ultimately meaningful to begin with? If God patterned His relationship with us after the unbreakable relationship of love between the Father and the Son in the Spirit, then has Barth given sufficient consideration for human agency, human nature, and human development? Is Barth giving a proper account of the economic trinity in God’s relationship with us? Or is he making a methodological error by invoking the immanent trinity, and perhaps even a ‘will of God’ logically prior to the immanent trinity itself, throughout all considerations of the economy? Saying that one’s account of creation is Christ-centered, which Barth admirably does, only begs the question of what that means.

Moreover, at the other end of the list of theological topics, how do we explain hell without including an account of human agency? I affirm with Barth and Torrance against Luther and Calvin that God does not require some people to be in hell. There is no ‘attribute’ of God that needs to be expressed in such a way. However, when explaining the *possibility* that some people might choose to damn themselves by continuing to reject Christ, I prefer the Eastern Orthodox explanation: From creation, God entrusted human beings with a decision about Him, to fulfill the desires He planted and maintains in us. Intrinsically related to that choice is an impact upon our own human nature, and what becomes of it. In this framework, human irrationality is contained and explained by the theological system itself, because such rejection is nevertheless an outgrowth of the rationality and love of God Himself to neither create automatons nor to force Himself upon people. Barth’s and Torrance’s explanations, by contrast, appear to make human beings into objects of God’s activity²² to such a degree that the first assertion about hell one must make, in their theological system, is that God has ruled it out. But if some human beings perversely and stubbornly refuse Jesus for all eternity, which must be maintained as a possibility in order to not fall into universalism, then the *how* (not the *why*) of how people apparently have an irrational ability to reject God appears to lie outside the rationality of the theological system itself, with no explanation. This might be appreciated as an intentional move to highlight the sheer irrationality and awfulness of sin. But it also makes the theological system itself – and God along with it – irrational, because it does not explain *how* such a thing might, in fact, happen. What account do we give for human choice, that awkward thing that sneaks in and rears its head in the end after all?

²¹ Athanasius of Alexandria, *Discourses Against the Arians* 3.62

²² Barth, *CD II/2*, p.417 relates God’s freedom to our inability to say whether salvation is strictly universal. In addition, Barth also says that God’s freedom is ‘for us.’ See also Brian D. Asbill, *The Freedom of God For Us: Karl Barth’s Doctrine of Divine Aseity* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2014). But in what sense can God be ‘for us’ and also ‘free’ to apparently not will universal salvation, in Barth’s own framework? Barth appears to be ambiguous in his use of the term freedom. On the one hand, he insists that ‘freedom’ for God means God’s ability to act in a way true to Himself without impediment. On the other, with respect to hell, he slides into the notion of ‘freedom’ as the power to exercise contrary choice. Therefore, Jesse Couenhoven, ‘Karl Barth’s Conception(s) of Human and Divine Freedom(s),’ p.240 – 241 says, ‘Barth was not concerned with theoretically resolving questions about divine and human freedom. Nimmo takes Barth as his model in focusing not on defining terms or providing a theoretical resolution to questions about the nature of freedom but on a descriptive task: both authors speak of freedom, and also of obedience, and even of determination. These concepts are placed in relationship, in that they are set alongside one another, but neither theologian explains how they are related. I find such treatments of the idea of freedom somewhat frustrating, but some theologians might defend the ambiguity of Barth’s discussion of freedom... I find Barth less ambiguous in his discussions of the nature of human freedom than in his discussions of divine freedom. As a result, I propose in this essay that Barth’s interpreters would do well to use his account of human freedom to limit the ambiguities of his account of divine freedom. This is not to claim that human freedom has an ontological or even an epistemic priority, but only that it may be helpful for Barth’s readers to give hermeneutical priority to his discussion of the concept of human freedom.’ Couenhoven effectively makes human agency an expression of God’s agency, a move which I endorse. In doing this, it should be noted, Couenhoven is arguing that we ‘smooth out’ the dialectical tension in Barth’s thought. Whether or not other readers of Barth will find this move satisfying will probably depend on whether they find it agreeable to situate the dialectic in this particular way.

Athanasius and the Holy Spirit: Some Scholarly Appraisals

Can Athanasius help us here? Athanasius, bishop of Alexandria, is known as the courageous theologian who went ‘against the world’ (*contra mundum*) to defend the deity of Christ. He defied various Roman Emperors and Christian bishops who advocated a position that Athanasius regarded as the heretical, ‘Arian’ position. The Arian heresy denied the full divinity of the Son of God and his sharing of the same nature and essence as the Father. To Athanasius, the truthfulness of Scripture, along with salvation itself, were at stake. For if the Son was not one in being with God the Father, then his oneness with us in his incarnation into human nature benefits us nothing. It brings us no closer to God the Father, who lies on the other side of an unbridgeable chasm even the Son – construed as some super angelic being – cannot cross. But if the Son were really *homoousios* (one in being) with the Father, while being eternally distinct persons, then the Son really does redeem human nature in himself for the Father, and unto the Father. Moreover, Athanasius helped develop the Nicene Creed, named the twenty-seven books of the New Testament, and gathered support for Christian orthodoxy while being exiled five times from his native city by hostile Roman Emperors.

Athanasius ought to be just as well known for his later work on the Holy Spirit, and on pastoral ministry:

‘By reaffirming the propriety of the Spirit to the Son, Athanasius not only secured, at a decisive hour, the Church’s faith in the one Godhead; he fixed the line upon which its Pneumatic doctrine was to develop.’²³

Thus concludes C.R.B. Shapland in his introduction to Athanasius’ *Letters to Serapion on the Holy Spirit*. When his colleague bishop Serapion was faced by the ‘Tropici’ who denied the deity of the Spirit, Athanasius wrote these letters, around 360 AD. We also know that Athanasius’ written correspondence – which is no longer extant – with Basil of Caesarea on this subject contributed to the latter’s work, *On the Holy Spirit*, in 375 AD, which brought about much needed improvement over the Nicene article about the Spirit at the Council of Constantinople of 381 AD. Didymus the Blind, the renowned teacher at the Catechetical School in Alexandria, and perhaps even appointed by bishop Athanasius, wrote his own book, *On the Holy Spirit*, before 381 as well. Ambrose of Milan wrote for the Latin West his own book, *On the Holy Spirit*, in 381. Around this time, Gregory of Nyssa, the younger brother of Basil and a bishop and renowned Christian theologian and mystic in his right, wrote his own book against the Macedonians called *On the Holy Spirit* and a second book to his fellow bishop Eustathius called *On the Holy Trinity and of the Godhead of the Holy Spirit*. The greatest Christian rhetorician and thinker of his generation, Gregory of Nazianzus, to whom the Eastern Orthodox give the title ‘the Theologian,’ gave his *Fifth Theological Oration* on the Holy Spirit. The flurry of works on the Spirit was perhaps historically to be expected. Once the debates about the Son settled down, what else would erupt but debates about the Spirit?

But debates about the Spirit had actually been happening simultaneously, and not always about the divinity of the Spirit. These debates affected the life of the Christian community in very practical, pastoral dimensions. (1) Christian ‘miracle workers’ are attested well into the fifth century, and this prompted reflection on the role of the Holy Spirit and how one might cultivate supernatural gifts like healing and exorcism. (2) Advocates of an ‘adoptionist’ Christology – who saw Jesus as only a man who was subsequently ‘adopted’ as Son of God by the Spirit because of his obedience – overplayed the role of the Spirit in the life of Christ, prompting a response from the orthodox. (3) In the mid to late second century, the prophetic Montanist sect emerged, claiming to be a Holy Spirit movement of sorts, invigorating the phenomenon of prophecy among both men and women. (4) The monastic tradition had also emerged in the third century, starting in the Egyptian desert, and while this was not a movement ‘debating’ the Holy Spirit, their desire for holiness and, as I suspect, healing from the sexual trauma of the Greco-Roman cities led naturally to reflection on the Holy Spirit. The church’s sheer indebtedness to monasticism can be seen in how many bishops and theologians from the fourth century onwards had previously been monks in monasteries. Meanwhile, (5) all the various debates about the Son involved deep, underlying assumptions about the potential for interaction between humanity and divinity, which included the Spirit by necessity. Resisting heresy was understood positively as safeguarding what it meant to be saved and shaped by the

²³ C.R.B. Shapland, *The Letters of Saint Athanasius Concerning the Holy Spirit* (London: Epworth Press, 1951), p.43

Word and the Spirit, and that the life of Jesus of Nazareth empowered by the Spirit was the visible embodiment of that salvation and shaping of human experience. So discussions about the Holy Spirit had been taking place consistently.

Trinitarian theologians of all types – including Barth, Torrance, Gunton, etc. – speak of their indebtedness to the renowned Alexandrian. Yet each theologian's relation to Athanasius is varied. American scholar of historical theology James B. Ernest, in his impressive 2004 study of Athanasius' use of Scripture, also surveys other scholars' prior efforts at doing the same. He includes T.F. Torrance among them. Torrance's four part article from 1970 and 1971 on 'The Hermeneutics of St. Athanasius' comes in for critique by Ernest's skilled pen. Ernest cautions that Torrance 'plucks texts from across the Athanasius corpus without distinguishing authentic, doubtful, and spurious works (fragments on Luke, the Psalms commentary, the *De incarnatione contra Apollinarium*).'²⁴ That is unfortunately the result of Torrance not engaging other scholars writing on Athanasius. Ernest reminds us that Torrance does not comment on the *Life of Antony* except for one reference found at the end of a footnote. This is a serious oversight because Athanasius himself seems to have regarded the work as his mature attempt at promoting monastic sanctification and growth in the Holy Spirit. Considering its very positive reception by the wider church – Gregory of Nazianzus praised it as 'a rule for monastic life in the form of a narrative'²⁵ – as it had an impressive role in spurring on more Christian monasticism, Torrance's neglect of this work is quite unfortunate. Also significant is Torrance's lack of engagement with Athanasius' many *Festal Letters*, where we find Athanasius as bishop in his most pastoral moments. Where else would we develop a better idea for Athanasius' views on sanctification? Positively, Ernest recognizes that Torrance saw the underlying coherence in Athanasius' thought, but at the expense of some of the development of his thinking, and at the expense of appreciating some stylistic variation within Athanasius' different rhetorical purposes. In the end, Ernest strongly commends Torrance for seeing the overall forest of Athanasius' theology and method. But Ernest himself remains uncertain whether Torrance understood all the trees. In Ernest's judgment, 'For these and other reasons his articles are not a reliable guide to the details of Athanasius' biblical interpretation.'²⁶ In my tentative assessment, this appears to have some truth concerning sanctification.

Another contribution I would like to engage is that of Leopoldo A. Sanchez M., a Latino-American Lutheran theologian, and his 2015 work *Receiver, Bearer, and Giver of God's Spirit: Jesus' Life in the Spirit as a Lens for Theology and Life*. I am sympathetic to Sanchez M.'s proposal that a Logos Christology eclipsed a needed and complementary Spirit Christology within the first few centuries. A Logos Christology focusing on Jesus' identity as the divine Word and Wisdom has emphasized, and will emphasize, clear explanations, rational language, and articulable concepts. There is irreplaceable value to that. But a Spirit Christology focusing on Jesus' identity in the Spirit can admit of intuitive, non-rational, non-linguistic knowing (in some sense, apophatic rather than cataphatic theology). So when we consider how Jesus as a crying infant, or babbling toddler, or a child with only a few words knew his heavenly Father, the only answer we can provide is: by the Spirit. But surely, this means something about how we think about the Spirit's activity in others, even if the parallel between us and the human Jesus of Nazareth is qualified? A Spirit Christology makes much more effort at understanding the role of the Spirit in the human narrative of Jesus, and thereby fills out how we define human nature for ourselves.

His argument resonates with, for example, the much earlier observation made by Shapland who said, 'This development may ultimately be traced back to the influence of the Logos doctrine, which, by overemphasizing the cosmological function of the Word, limited and impoverished the Church's conception of the Spirit.'²⁷ In particular, Sanchez M. argues that Athanasius 'sh[ie]d away from giving too much weight to the Holy Spirit's active role in Jesus and his earthly mission,' whereas Basil 'does not hesitate to do so.'²⁸ However, Sanchez M. confines his study of Athanasius to the first *Discourse Against the Arians*. Once we include Athanasius' other work both dogmatic and pastoral, we get a much more full picture of the Alexandrian's pneumatology.

²⁴ James D. Ernest, *The Bible in Athanasius of Alexandria* (Atlanta, Society of Biblical Literature, 2004), p.13

²⁵ Gregory of Nazianzus, *In laudem Athanasii*, PG 35:1085 – 1088

²⁶ Ernest 2004, p.13

²⁷ Shapland 1951, p.82 regarding Athanasius of Alexandria, *Letters to Serapion on the Holy Spirit* 1.9

²⁸ Leopoldo A. Sanchez M., *Receiver, Bearer, and Giver of God's Spirit: Jesus' Life in the Spirit as a Lens for Theology and Life* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2015), p.32

A challenge with reading Athanasius is that, as Sanchez M. points out, in his dogmatic treatises up until his three *Letters to Serapion on the Holy Spirit*, the Alexandrian focused almost entirely on a Logos Christology. This is understandable given the threat he perceived in the Arian heresy and its lowering of the status of the Word-Son to a created being. Hence, Sanchez M. focuses on the baptism and anointing story as a litmus test for theological reflection. On the one hand, the baptismal anointing of Jesus by the Spirit tends to be a minor embarrassment which makes theologians quick to state that Jesus already had the Spirit from his incarnation, so the anointing is interpreted as simply making that fact transparent. Or, on the other hand, the Jordan episode is sometimes seen to merely anticipate Jesus being able to share his Spirit with us in the resurrection/ascension. But in either case, there is no inherent meaning in the Jordan event itself. What meaning was left for the Spirit-anointing in itself, for Jesus as a human being? If God is the same yesterday, today, and tomorrow – and the Trinity always has been, is, and shall be, then what is the meaning of the Spirit-anointing? The Jordan event is an awkward event because it is clearly Triune, yet this moment in the life of the Trinity in the economy of salvation (i.e. the economic Trinity) does not map straightforwardly onto the life of the immanent Trinity. As Sanchez M. points out, we see in Augustine, for example, an inability to make the Jordan episode meaningful: ‘Augustine goes as far as *denying* that Christ was anointed at the Jordan and instead finds the significance of the event as its prefiguration of the church’s reception of the Spirit in baptism.’²⁹ I believe Augustine’s exposition corresponds exactly with his view of the human being as static, not developmental and dynamic as Irenaeus and the Greek tradition taught.³⁰ Significantly, Augustine believed that, despite the appearance given by Genesis that God took His time in creation, and lingered over the development of the goodness of His creation, God created instantaneously.³¹ Augustine’s apparent discomfort with God being developmental in creation and in humanity is one of the issues at stake here.

Might this event, which all four Gospels find significant, have been entirely dispensed with, in the life of Jesus, in the Gospel accounts, or in preaching today? By 360 AD, Athanasius held a position which preserved most of the meaning Irenaeus saw in it, although not all. Basil of Caesarea’s work on the Spirit was perhaps the most clear and pastorally meaningful, perhaps reflecting the recovery of Irenaeus’ teaching by both bishops as they corresponded with each other; but sadly, we are missing the correspondence between Basil and Athanasius on the subject. In any case, these three theologians’ teaching on the Holy Spirit was overshadowed for a season in the history of dogma by Logos Christologies.

In that light, I wish to comb through Athanasius’ writings to analyze how he speaks about the Holy Spirit, and even reinvigorate Shapland’s 1951 analysis of Athanasius’ *Letters to Serapion on the Holy Spirit*. I still find authors referencing Shapland’s work with deep appreciation for his thorough commentary. I acknowledge that, strangely enough, Shapland made some negative conclusions about Athanasius’ views of

²⁹ Sanchez M. 2015, p.43 (emphasis mine) referring to Augustine of Hippo, *On the Holy Trinity* 15.26.46, ‘And Christ was certainly not then anointed with the Holy Spirit, when He, as a dove, descended upon Him at His baptism. For at that time He deigned to prefigure His body, i.e. His Church, in which especially the baptized receive the Holy Spirit.’

³⁰ Kallistos Ware, *The Orthodox Church* (New York: Penguin Books, 1993 2nd edition), p.219 – 220 says, ‘According to Augustine, man in Paradise was endowed from the start with all possible wisdom and knowledge: his was a realized, and in no sense potential, perfection. The dynamic conception of Irenaeus clearly fits more easily with modern theories of evolution [and the text of Genesis!] than does the static conception of Augustine.’ Also found here: http://www.fatheralexander.org/booklets/english/history_timothy_ware_2.htm#n2. Augustine quoted from Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, 4.2.7 and 5.19.1 in his writings against Pelagius and Julian of Eclanum (*Contra Julian* 1.3.5), perhaps also quoted *Against Heresies* 4.30.1 in *Christian Doctrine* 2.40.60, and mentions Irenaeus by name (*Contra Julian* 1.7.32), yet apparently did not consistently understand Irenaeus on this point. Note that Ambrose of Milan (340 – 397), who helped lead Augustine to faith, also held to a developmental view of humanity in creation: ‘Man, therefore, was, figuratively speaking, either in the shadow of life because our life on earth is but a shadow, or man had life, as it were, in pledge, for he had been breathed on by God. He had, therefore, a pledge of immortality, but while in the shadow of life he was unable, by the usual channels of sense, to see and attain the hidden life of Christ with God. Although not yet a sinner, he was not possessed of an incorrupt and inviolable nature... Hence, he was in the shadow of life, whereas sinners are in the shadow of death... There is no distinction, therefore, between the breath of God and the food of the tree of life. No man can say that he can acquire more by his own efforts than what is granted him by the generosity of God. Would that we had been able to hold on to what we had received! Our toils avail only to the extent that we take back again what was once conferred on us.’ (Ambrose of Milan, *Paradise*, chapter 5, paragraph 29; dated between 374 to 383 AD). Augustine was in Milan, in his early 30’s, from the fall of 384 to the summer of 386 AD, so his neglect of Ambrose’s teaching requires explanation.

³¹ Augustine of Hippo, *Unfinished Literal Commentary on Genesis* 3.7

the Spirit and sanctification.³² However, Shapland includes only incidental mentions of Athanasius' *Letters* or *Life of Antony*. Only one mention of Antony appears, and it concerns a linguistic matter. He does not reflect on any of the bishop's *Festal Letters* or his literary corpus on virginity. To me, this seems unfair to Athanasius. Moreover, on a scholarly level, it suggests that having Athanasius give a formal, abstract definition of 'sanctification' would be preferable to seeing how he actually called for it, pleaded for it, gave venues for it, and deployed Scripture for it *over the course of forty-five years as a Christian archbishop*. The advantage of studying Athanasius is that, until we get to John Chrysostom and Augustine of Hippo, and with the exception of Cyprian of Carthage, the Alexandrian is the only figure for whom we have ample pastoral material. Justin Martyr was an apologist. Irenaeus was a bishop, and we do have his instructional material for new Christians in *Demonstration of the Apostolic Preaching*, but he wrote his massive *Against Heresies* as a theologian and heresiologist. Tertullian was a brilliant polemicist but was not in a formal position of ministry that we know of. Cyprian was a bishop but not deeply theological. Clement and Origen were teachers in a school without formal pastoral responsibilities.

Thus, I would like to add to Shapland's analysis about the Spirit our theologian's pastoral writings. Athanasius' early *Festal Letters*, which he wrote beginning at the same time as *Against the Heathen – On the Incarnation*, to demonstrate a rich field of data by which to explore for our theologian's view of the Holy Spirit. I argue, perhaps surprisingly to some, that in his *First*, *Third*, and *Tenth Festal Letters*, written in 329, 331, and 338 AD respectively, Athanasius had a robust theology of the Holy Spirit which had already reached its basic expression and pastoral function, especially in relation to his understanding of the Logos. His *First Letter to Virgins* from 337 AD is also valuable to understand for its dogmatic and pastoral content; it confirms the conclusion I am making. His mid-career *Discourses Against the Arians*,³³ written probably in 342 – 343 AD, are of course the most mature expression of his Logos Christology, and fills out some biblical and dogmatic questions we might ask of Athanasius. Then, at around 360 AD we find Athanasius giving his most mature, concise, and well-rounded theological formulation of Christian doctrine, even more so than in the *Discourses Against the Arians*: He wrote to Serapion in 359 – 360 AD about the Holy Spirit, and he wrote *Life of Antony* around 356 – 362 AD. Finally, I glance at other written correspondence from Athanasius to a few Egyptian monastics, and then the bishop's last *Festal Letters*, to see the continuity of his thought. We see much continuity but development of thought as well across this segment of his literary remains, spanning over four decades of pastoral ministry, tumultuous theological debate, and organizational turmoil. And, I wish to include Basil of Caesarea's work on the Holy Spirit without quite crediting Athanasius for it; but I suggest that we consider the possibility that their missing correspondence might have contained valuable information on Athanasius' own articulation.

In fact, I would like to extend Sanchez M.'s proposal as well by one more step. Interestingly enough, the Chalcedonian Definition has been critiqued from various quarters for reasons related to this present study.

³² Shapland 1951, p.37 – 38 says, 'In his exposition of the Spirit's work in sanctification [in his *Letters to Serapion on the Holy Spirit*], Athanasius once again takes us back to the New Testament. It is true that he falls far short of the great Pauline and Johannine doctrine. He has little to say of the ethical fruits of the Spirit or of His witness with the spirit of the believer. Nor is he concerned, as his contemporary, Cyril of Jerusalem, is concerned, with the illumination of the mind and conscience by the Spirit.' However, to Serapion, the Alexandrian was defending the divinity of the Spirit, not giving a full account of the nature of sanctification. Shapland himself concedes, 'This limitation is partly due to the purpose with which he writes. He does not set out to describe the work of the Spirit but to establish His propriety to God. In his treatment he necessarily selects such points as most directly bear on his main subject. But, more fundamentally, his apprehension is limited by his conception of sanctification, which is metaphysical rather than ethical.' And by this, Shapland seems to reduce Athanasius' doctrine of atonement to the so-called 'physical theory' which makes physical 'death' the main problem, to which immortality is the solution. Shapland writes on p.38 that supposedly for Athanasius, 'The purpose of the Incarnation is not only to enlighten, but also to recreate our humanity by reuniting it with God and thus staying the process of death' and on p.39, note 22, 'Ethical conceptions fall into a secondary place.' But this is an erroneous way to read Athanasius. 'Corruption' and 'death' for Athanasius have clear ethical import even if 'the ethical' does not exhaust the significance of 'the ontological.' See *Against the Heathen* ch.1 – 5 in connection with *On the Incarnation* ch.5 – 6, where Athanasius defines 'corruption' as an ethical and ontological term categorically distinct from 'death': 'death having gained upon men, and corruption abiding upon them...' (6:1). Shapland, confusingly, seems to reconsider his own criticism on p.39 n.22, 'Certainly his doctrine of redemption, as expounded in the *de Inc.*, is profoundly ethical.'

³³ Most scholars date the *Discourses Against the Arians* to Athanasius' second exile 339 – 350 AD. David Brakke, *Athanasius and Asceticism* retitled from *Athanasius and the Politics of Asceticism* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), p.158 n.93 supports the dating of the third *Discourse* to before the first *Letter to Serapion* based on the how the imagery and argumentation for the Holy Spirit is less developed in the former than in the latter.

T.F. Torrance criticizes it for treating the human nature of Jesus as if it were a generic and static quality.³⁴ There is no ‘generic human nature.’ There is only fallen or redeemed human nature. Torrance said this in order to advocate for what he and Barth perceived (correctly, I believe) as the older theological position whereby Jesus assumed a fallen human nature and cleansed it through his lifelong obedience, culminating in his death and resurrection, as opposed to assuming a pre-fallen human nature by cleansing human nature of sin instantly at conception. I believe this latter problem goes part and parcel with the lack of a Spirit Christology, as Sanchez M. suggests, because the Spirit and Word together – and not the Word alone – must be responsible for deifying the human nature of Jesus, ridding it of sin, and receiving the Spirit into his humanity for us and on our behalf. Looking for a fuller account of the Holy Spirit necessarily means that we must look for a fuller account of the humanity of Jesus, and also our own humanity. For if the Spirit played a role in empowering and transfiguring Jesus as a human being, then there is something normative about that interaction which also pertains to us. And if we hold that God’s intent for humanity in eternity is not to reach some static state, but rather to keep deepening and brightening in relation to Him, then we must correspondingly posit that the ascended humanity of Jesus, who mediates that experience to us, is also ever deepening and brightening by the Spirit because it is the humanity of the infinite Word of God. This view holds together both objective and subjective poles of sanctification.

This Spirit Christology of course recalls Athanasius’ rather underappreciated predecessor, Irenaeus of Lyons. Irenaeus is famous for describing the Word and Spirit as the ‘two hands of God,’ where God always does everything with both hands.³⁵ This was a principle which Athanasius would formalize in his *Letters to Serapion on the Holy Spirit*: God acts in a united way in all His activities, so even though the biblical text might name one or the other as acting at any given time, all the activities of God are carried out by the three persons.³⁶ Sanchez M. notes that Athanasius altered some teachings of Irenaeus about the Holy Spirit at Jesus’ baptism, which he urges us to revisit.³⁷ Not coincidentally, Colin Gunton, who Douglas Farrow names as a primary influence,³⁸ also advocated a deep re-examination of Irenaeus (as well as the Cappadocians) to have a healthier and fuller account of the Trinity.³⁹ Farrow cites Irenaeus quite appreciatively in his article in *First Things*. All this supports my claim that once we identify the changes Athanasius made to Irenaeus, and why, we will be in a better position to offer a slightly modified Athanasian exposition on the Holy Spirit – along the lines of Irenaeus and Basil – to address the concerns noted above. Thus, here begins an exploration of Athanasius’ thoughts on the Spirit, human responsibility, conversion, and sanctification.

A Starting Point: Temple Humanity, Temple Christology

The Temple Paradigm: A Sample Passage

In a very important passage in his second *Discourse Against the Arians*, written mid-career sometime during his second exile in 339 – 346 AD, when he was forced out of Alexandria and went to Rome,

³⁴ T.F. Torrance, *Incarnation: The Person and Work of Christ* edited by Robert T. Walker (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2008), p.201 – 206

³⁵ Irenaeus of Lyons, *Against Heresies* 4.preface; 4.2.5; 4.20.1; 5.1.3; 5.5.1; 5.6.1; 5.28.4

³⁶ Athanasius of Alexandria, *Letters to Serapion on the Holy Spirit* says, ‘The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of the Almighty... who is inseparable from the Godhead and might of the Word’ (1.11); ‘For it was God himself, who, through the Word, in the Spirit, led the people... For when the Spirit was with the people, God, through the Son in the Spirit, was with them’ (1.12); ‘For the holy and blessed Triad is indivisible and one in itself. When mention is made of the Father, there is included also his Word, and the Spirit who is in the Son. If the Son is named, the Father is in the Son, and the Spirit is not outside the Word. For there is from the Father one grace which is fulfilled through the Son in the Holy Spirit; and there is one divine nature, and one God who is over all and through all and in all.’ (1.14); ‘The Father is called fountain and light... the Son... is called river [and] radiance... we are enlightened [by] the Spirit [and] drink of the Spirit’ (1.19); ‘But if there is such co-ordination and unity within the holy Triad, who can separate either the Son from the Father, or the Spirit from the Son or from the Father himself? ... How, when the Spirit is in us, the Son is said to be in us? How, when the Son is in us, the Father is said to be in us? Or how, when it is truly a Triad, the Triad is described as one? Or why, when the One is in us, the Triad is said to be in us? – let him first divide the radiance from the light, or wisdom from the wise, or let him tell how these things are.’ (1.20). Shapland, p.93 – 94 n.7 describes the impact of Athanasius’ statements on other patristic writers: Didymus the Blind, *On the Holy Spirit* 29 and *On the Trinity* 1.356, 1.440 and 2.548; Basil of Caesarea, *On the Holy Spirit* 28; Ambrose of Milan, *On the Holy Spirit* 1.32. Hilary of Poitiers, *On the Trinity* 7.31 states that mention of ‘Father’ necessarily implies ‘Son’ and ‘Spirit.’ But Athanasius goes farther: Unity of divine nature requires unity of divine operations and energy; hence, all three persons are involved in every work of God.

³⁷ Sanchez M. 2015, p.12 – 20 (Irenaeus) compared to p.21 – 27 (Athanasius); ch.2 is also indispensable

³⁸ Farrow, ‘T.F. Torrance and the Latin Heresy,’ *First Things*, December 2013

³⁹ Gunton 1997, p.xxi – xxxi, 35 – 36, 100 – 117

Athanasius explores the question of how God thought of us before time and before creation. God, according to Athanasius, intended certain things for us, but relates to us within time when we are 'in being.' In both cases, it is because of the Son and our creation 'in' the Son that the Father's love rested on us.

'How then has He chosen us, before we came into existence, but that, as he says himself, in Him we were represented beforehand? And how at all, before men were created, did He predestinate us unto adoption, but that the Son Himself was 'founded before the world,' taking on Him that economy which was for our sake? Or how, as the Apostle goes on to say, have we 'an inheritance being predestinated,' but that the Lord Himself was founded 'before the world,' inasmuch as He had a purpose, for our sakes, to take on Him through the flesh all that inheritance of judgment which lay against us, and we henceforth were made sons in Him? And how did we receive it 'before the world was,' when we were not yet in being, but afterwards in time, but that in Christ was stored the grace which has reached us? Wherefore also in the Judgment, when everyone shall receive according to his conduct, He says, 'Come, you blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world [Matthew 25:34].' How then, or in whom, was it prepared before we came to be, save in the Lord who 'before the world' was founded for this purpose; that we, as built upon Him, might partake, as well-compacted stones, the life and grace which is from Him? And this took place, as naturally suggests itself to the religious mind, that, as I said, we, rising after our brief death, may be capable of an eternal life, of which we had not been capable, men as we are, formed of earth, but that 'before the world' there had been prepared for us in Christ the hope of life and salvation. Therefore reason is there that the Word, on coming into our flesh, and being created in it as 'a beginning of ways for His works [Proverbs 8:22],' is laid as a foundation according as the Father's will was in Him before the world, as has been said, and before land was, and before the mountains were settled, and before the fountains burst forth; that, though the earth and the mountains and the shapes of visible nature pass away in the fullness of the present age, we on the contrary may not grow old after their pattern, but may be able to live after them, having the spiritual life and blessing which before these things have been prepared for us in the Word Himself according to election. For thus we shall be capable of a life not temporary, but ever afterwards abide and live in Christ; since even before this our life had been founded and prepared in Christ Jesus.'⁴⁰

This is a very helpful passage where Athanasius clarifies his thinking regarding the relationship between how the cosmos is 'in the Word' by his creative activity, and the manner in which he affects us in his redemptive activity. Because of his consideration of time and what came before time, this is necessarily a more sophisticated reflection. Athanasius does four things. First, it is highly likely that Athanasius is reflecting on Ephesians. For in Ephesians, Paul uses the phrase, 'before the foundation of the world' (Eph.1:4) and also the temple building motif (Eph.2:17 – 22) in which Jesus is the cornerstone, the apostles and prophets are 'foundations' (Eph.2:20), and we are living stones 'being fitted together' in him (Eph.2:21).

Second, he says that the question of 'how' and 'when' God predestined us to adoption is subordinate in principle to the question of 'in who' God predestines us. Since that 'who' is the Lord, the Word who took flesh, who existed even before we were 'yet in being,' and since he received the blessing of God for us, the Scriptures are absolutely correct when they testify that our adoption and inheritance were predestined for us 'before the foundation of the world.' 'The Son himself was founded before the world,' Athanasius says at the beginning of this passage, so at the end, 'Even before this our life had been founded and prepared in Christ Jesus.' And so, since time itself occurs 'in the Son,' so we who exist in time received the blessing of adoption 'afterwards in time.' He addresses the logical or semantic question of how there could be a 'we' which existed before the world was: 'And how did we receive it 'before the world was,' when we were not yet in being, but afterwards in time, but that in Christ was stored the grace which has reached us?' Time itself is playing out to reflect what God wanted for us prior to time beginning. We could only receive it 'afterwards in time' because that is when we began to exist.

⁴⁰ Athanasius of Alexandria, *Discourses Against the Arians* 2.76

This respect for human time as part of God's creation characterized Athanasius. Eastern Orthodox theologian Georges Florovsky makes the very helpful point that Athanasius considered and rejected the theological system of the influential teacher Origen (c.184 – c.254 AD), the famous Alexandrian of the previous generation, who was drawn by Neo-Platonism into believing that creation itself was co-eternal with God, so human beings had a pre-existence before their conception and birth into this present form.⁴¹ Origen also believed in successive creations. These cosmological views led to various problems and inconsistencies. Athanasius understood well the dangers posed by the Origenist framework. At the beginning of his episcopal career, in *Against the Heathen*, Athanasius considered to whom God was speaking in Genesis 1 when he said, 'Let us...' and reasons that the Father was speaking to his own Word, not to the creation, 'for no one speaks to what does not exist.'⁴² *Not even God* speaks to what does not yet exist. To actually exist and to be 'in being' is the necessary condition for being addressed by God. Within Athanasius' conceptual thought structure, it was logically impossible to speak of us receiving adoption or any blessing from God before we actually existed. God could 'choose' or 'predestine' those blessings for us beforehand. But we had to come into existence in the Son first, and then receive those blessings because the Son had already received it from the Father 'for our sakes.'⁴³

Third, Athanasius is aware that there may be unbelievers, and explains how that might be so. He connects it to Jesus taking on flesh, and through the flesh also taking on 'all that inheritance of judgment which lay against us.' In Athanasius, the nature of this 'judgment' is not penal, as I have explored elsewhere. It is true that Athanasius has death in mind as the 'inheritance of judgment,' since death was God's imposition after the fall to prevent human beings from immortalizing sin into our human nature. Hence death itself served one constructive purpose: it marked the dissolution of sin in the human body. So when Athanasius speaks of 'judgment,' he is not using the term as an act of God unilaterally inflicted upon humanity. It marked an end point to human earthly life, within which the human responsibility was to constantly present one's human nature to God, so as to produce 'circumcision of heart' (Dt.10:16; 30:6) – that is, a human nature 'judged' in a constructive, restorative sense *by both God and the human being in partnership*. I have explored this quite extensively elsewhere,⁴⁴ but some treatment of it is repeated below.

Suffice to say Athanasius now locates our adoption by God in a temporal sense in connection with the *incarnate person of Jesus Christ*, not merely the cosmic Logos considered distinctly: 'through the flesh... we henceforth were made sons in Him.' But this fact of Jesus' incarnation and his own judgment of the flesh serves as the question God puts to every person 'in the Judgment.' Athanasius quotes Matthew 25:34, from the parable of the sheep and the goats, so his intention is quite unmistakable; he is indeed calling to mind 'the last judgment.' When Athanasius repeats biblical language about 'everyone shall receive according to his conduct,' the conduct is summed up in the relational choice discussed in the parable. Those who hear Jesus' word in this life and respond positively by receiving his disciples who are naked, hungry, and imprisoned will be regarded as having made a relational choice about Jesus himself. They judge the corruption of sin within themselves in accordance with Jesus' judgment of the corruption of sin within himself. Thus, the judgment is constructive and restorative and shared by both God and the human being in partnership. Those who reject Jesus' word in this life, by contrast, reject the restored self being offered by Jesus by clinging to the corruption of sin in its addictive quality.

Fourth, however, when Athanasius turns to consider the flow of time within the creation and the unfolding of salvation, he shifts to the motif of constructing the temple building. He speaks of Jesus as 'founded' for the purpose of being a 'foundation' or cornerstone. This is structural building language. Appropriately, we serve in the overall structure 'as well-compacted stones,' 'built upon him' so that we might 'partake' of the

⁴¹ George Florovsky, 'St. Athanasius' Concept of Creation,' *Studia Patristica* 6, pan.4, TU 8 (Berlin, 1962), p.36 – 37, notes that Origen used the term 'pantokrator' (almighty) of God considered in His essence, and therefore required something over which God eternally had power, in a permanent and continuous relationship. This meant that angels and human beings also had an eternal pre-existence. This helps explain the Athanasian insistence that (1) God's Fatherhood of the Son is more fundamental and essential than His Creatorhood; and (2) creation was *ex nihilo* (out of nothing) and his refusal to countenance any discussion of actual beings before they came into existence. See especially Athanasius, *Discourses Against the Arians* 1.20

⁴² Athanasius of Alexandria, *Against the Heathen* 46.5

⁴³ Athanasius of Alexandria, *On the Incarnation* 44.3 says, 'For it was not things without being that needed salvation, so that a bare command should suffice, but man, already in existence, was going to corruption and ruin'

⁴⁴ Mako A. Nagasawa, *Penal Substitution vs. Medical-Ontological Substitution: A Historical Comparison*;

<http://nagasawafamily.org/article-penal-substitution-vs-ontological-substitution-historical-comparison.pdf>; p.57 – 63; 68 – 73

'love and grace which is from him.' Athanasius uses a motif which works with our created experiences of time, sequence, distinctness of persons, connectedness between persons, and human participation. Spatially, we are now envisioning ourselves as part of 'the cosmos in Christ' to being part of the holy temple-community of God whose foundation is Christ where he is present as a human being like us. When Athanasius discusses the flow of time, he includes the history of the human Jesus: 'The Word, on coming into our flesh, and being created in it [as a man] as 'a beginning of ways for His works.'

If Athanasius believed that the Word of God would become incarnate in creation even if the fall never happened, this is one place where his language might be taken to mean that: '[Jesus] is laid as a foundation according as the Father's will was in Him before the world.' However we decide that issue, given the reality of the fall, the presence of the incarnate Word of God within the creation, now having passed through death into resurrection, and carrying our human nature with him into resurrection life, assures us of our immortality: 'that we... may be able to live after them, having the spiritual life and blessing which before these things have been prepared for us in the Word Himself according to election. For thus we shall be capable of a life not temporary, but ever afterwards abide and live in Christ; since even before this our life had been founded and prepared in Christ Jesus.' Athanasius thus situates our participation in Jesus' resurrection on the basis of the Word's participation in our humanity. He does this to assert that we shall outlast the rest of created nature, which does die and/or erode.

The Temple Pattern in Creation

Whether Athanasius was always fully articulating it or not, and perhaps whether he was always fully aware of it or not, he was appealing not to just a few scattered New Testament verses like Ephesians 2:17 – 22, but to a pervasive theme in Scripture. The temple motif goes all the way back to Genesis 1:1 – 2:3 where it becomes paradigmatic for how God creates 'space' for people (and other forms of life) to 'fill.'

Genesis 1:1 – 2:3 evidences careful crafting to engage with other creation stories from the Ancient Near East. Those other creation stories involve a god or a hero overcoming an enemy, or a king entering a new territory, building a temple on the site of the victory, and then placing his image in it to remind passersby who is in charge.⁴⁵ This was a familiar story. So when Genesis opens with that story recast, the points of difference and emphasis were sure to be heard: God has no rivals; He simply created the whole earth to be a temple; He made all living things to bear more life and partner with God in the creation of more life; God made human beings in His image to bear His image in a living way and exercise dominion on His behalf, reminding all creation that God is the ruler of the world. Central to Genesis 1:1 – 2:3 is the motif of 'filling': God made realms on days one, two, and three which He filled on days four, five, and six. Just as impressively, God made all life to continue bearing life so as to 'fill' the earth. That involves human participation and Colin Gunton's acknowledgement of the requirement of both 'space and relation.'⁴⁶ In this case, 'space' means not simply a spatial area for embodied beings to inhabit, as well as time and potential narrative, but 'space' in a theological sense where human beings have genuine choices and are not machines, and are nevertheless called into 'relation' with one another and God.

Athanasius was demonstrably aware that he had to read the Genesis account of creation through the lens of Christ in his creative and cosmic dimension, as he does that many times by referring to Colossians, not least in his first *Discourse Against the Arians*, paragraphs 62 – 64, an exposition of Colossians 1:18. Ingeniously, the author(s) of the 'Christ-hymn' in Colossians 1:15 – 20 (who probably preceded the apostle Paul) focuses upon the various meanings which can be gleaned from the first word of Gen.1:1, 'in the beginning of' (*beresith*). Using three meanings of the Hebrew preposition *be* ('in,' 'by,' and 'for'), the Christ-hymn amplifies the phrase 'in the beginning of' by the statement that all things were created 'in' Christ, 'by' Christ, and 'for' Christ. All of creation exists 'in' Christ. He holds all things together (Col.1:17). The Father's good pleasure was for 'all the fullness [of creation] to dwell in him' (Col.1:19). Furthermore, *resith* has multiple meanings: 'beginning,' 'sum total,' 'head,' and 'first-fruits.' The author expounds upon these, saying that Christ 'is before all things' (beginning); 'in him all things hold together' (sum total); 'he is the head of the body' (head; source which supplies life); and he is 'the firstborn from

⁴⁵ Rikk Watts, 'Making Sense of Genesis 1,' *Stimulus*, Volume 12, Number 4, November 2004

⁴⁶ Gunton 1997, p.106 – 109

among the dead' (first-fruits). Thus the eternal Son of God is implicated in every possible meaning of the first word in the Bible.⁴⁷

The author of the Christ-hymn, who probably preceded Paul, and the author of Colossians, who I take to be Paul, are both making a Christological statement by tying Christ to the motif of the original, unfallen, and yet still developmental, creation. The multiplying of life which elapses within time and within the creation-temple is important because it dramatizes in our time the super-abundance of 'life' which has always existed within the eternal Son (albeit of an infinitely different order), for the Son eternally inherits that life from the Father, and by the Spirit. 'In him is life,' says the apostle John (Jn.1:4). Insofar as God deploys the flourishing of life in the creation-temple context within time and space, for human beings to understand the inner life of the eternal Son, then we have a *developmental temple-creation for the sake of Christology*.

Athanasius demonstrates that he understands this in various ways. He speaks of the Word of God 'framing' creation, then 'filling' it, variously with life, or His Spirit, or joy and gladness, or favor, or (most commonly in Athanasius) the knowledge of Himself. He does so moderately in *On the Incarnation* in 328.⁴⁸ But by 342 – 343, in his first and second *Discourses Against the Arians*, he is quite fond of these expressions.⁴⁹ A specific example occurs when he says that human couples produce children in a manner that serves as a (very!) distant analogy to the Father eternally begetting the Son.⁵⁰ A married couple is a temple-structure as well: a oneness of male and female through which more human beings proceed. But God is the original; we are the variant copies. He is, ever and always, the source of all life. We, by comparison, are occasionally partners with Him in the creation of more human life, and in tending other forms of life. Things created can help us understand things uncreated; things human for things divine. In addition, when speaking of the creation at large in one particularly eloquent passage in *Against the Heathen*, Athanasius shifts the emphasis a bit to stress the stability and harmony of the whole creation, which encompasses opposites like fire and water.⁵¹ But nevertheless Athanasius still appreciates the life-bearing nature of creation – which creation's stability and unity serve – as part of the Word bearing witness to himself through the creation:

'The earth is sown and grows crops in due season, plants grow, and some are young, some ripening, others in their growth become old and decay, and while some things are vanishing others are being engendered and are coming to light. But all these things, and more, which for their number we cannot mention, the worker of wonders and marvels, the Word of God, giving light and life, moves and orders by His own nod, making the universe one.'⁵²

In Genesis 2:4 – 4:26, we again find a temple-filling pattern. The motif of filling the creation occurs in the biblical text once again, as it occurred in Genesis 1:1 – 2:3. This is the first of ten genealogies in the book of Genesis, and the literary format of a genealogy by itself stresses the intention of God for human

⁴⁷ See F. F. Bruce, *The Epistles to the Colossians, to Philemon, and to the Ephesians*, NICNT (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1984), p.68; C. J. H. Wright, 'Family,' *Anchor Bible Dictionary* 2:765–9, 765 for 'and he is 'the firstborn from among the dead' (first-fruits); David E. Garland, *Colossians and Philemon*, NIVAC (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1998), p.85

⁴⁸ Athanasius of Alexandria, *On the Incarnation* 3.1 – 2 twice mentions God 'framing' creation, first quoting Genesis 1:1 and the *Shepherd of Hermas* together, and then Hebrews 11:3. He also says that the Word of God has 'filled all things everywhere' (8.1), quotes Paul's prayer in Ephesians 3:14 – 21 that the believers would 'be filled with all the fullness of God' (16.2), says the knowledge of God has 'filled all things everywhere' (16.3), and that the Gentiles coming to faith in Christ reflects the whole world being 'filled with the knowledge of God' as prophesied (40.7). He repeats those thoughts in 45.1 – 2 and 48.4.

⁴⁹ In *Discourses Against the Arians*, Athanasius speaks of God or the Word as 'the Framer' (1.12, 18, 29, 30, 33, 41, 58, 62; 2.2, 8, 10, 13, 20, 28, 29, 31, 35, 38, 40, 44, 46, 47, 53, 57, 70, 71, 72, 78, 80), of 'the Framing Word' or 'Framing Wisdom' (1.12, 17; 2.2, 24, 25, 26, 27, 28, 29, 38, 39, 41, 42, 77, 78, 80), of the 'framing of the universe' or other things (1.26; 2.48, 79), or of God's 'power of framing' or the equivalent (1.29; 2.2). He describes Christian mission as the 'fulfillment' of prophesy as the world is 'filled' with the knowledge of God (1.59; 2.82). People are 'filled' with the Holy Spirit (2.27). God works so that 'everything is filled with joy and gladness' (*Fourth Festal Letter* 3; *Eleventh Festal Letter* 13 which was written 339 AD at around the time of the first and second Discourses). The 'gift of the Holy Spirit being then richly poured upon all men' results in people saying, 'We are filled in the morning with Your favor...' (*Eleventh Festal Letter* 11). Jesus offers the Spirit as water for the thirsty, and those who are 'filled with these divine waters... may share in the one voice of gladness' (*Twentieth Festal Letter* 1 – 2). Isaac was 'filled with virtue' (*Second Festal Letter* which was previously known as the *Twenty-Fourth*). 'Thanks to the Lord that filled you with all utterance and with all knowledge' (*Letter 55 to Rufinianus*). God frames the creation, then works through its inhabitants to fill it.

⁵⁰ Athanasius of Alexandria, *Discourse Against the Arians* 1.23

⁵¹ Athanasius of Alexandria, *Against the Heathen* 44

⁵² *Ibid* 44.1 – 2; cf. 35.3 where Athanasius quotes Paul speaking to the Lyconians about God in creation, from Acts 14:15

connectedness, filling, and development. The narrative substance of the genealogy stresses the temple-filling pattern. Adam and Eve were meant to tend the garden. But given that Genesis 1:1 – 2:3 states that they were to spread out over the earth, the only way to reconcile these two commissions from these two literary sections is to conclude that Adam and Eve and their children were to expand the garden down the four riverways which flowed out from Eden. They were to take the special order of beauty of the garden across the wild and untamed remainder of creation. That is a temple dynamic where something good (the earth) is filled with something more glorious (the garden). The concept of well-ordered living material is important to note. The same principle articulated by Paul in Ephesians 2:10, that God prepared good works for us to do beforehand in Christ Jesus, was present here. And human beings were to do this under the personal direction and tutelage of the pre-incarnate Word of God who was present on Eden and walked in the garden to commune with them. This overtly mirrors the temple-filling pattern. The Word held the entire creation together in his transcendence, but was also immanent in it. Thus, he is both the one in whom all things consist and hold together, but he is also the foundation and cornerstone of the expansion of actual human life.

But Genesis 2:4 – 4:26 also strongly implies that each individual human person is a temple to be filled by God the Word, and implicitly, by the creative power of the Spirit. The Spirit hovers over all to call forth more and more life, and yet appears to be somehow breathed by God into human beings in a preliminary sense. Implied in the genealogy is the development of human intelligence, creativity, beauty, and special care for each tree, plant, and organism. Human beings could only do this by learning from the pre-incarnate Word-Son who walked about the creation. The Word intended to relate to human beings through his word. Thus, the garden of Eden account describes *a developmental humanity on an individual level*. If my readers are not convinced about my claim that the implied story meant to unfold from the garden, then I summon as support the fact that humanity was meant to learn about good and evil by letting the definition of those words rest in God's power to define (the tree of knowledge); humanity was also meant to take in more life from God (the tree of life). The narrative of Genesis is now gesturing towards the growth of humanity's qualitative inner life – the emotional, cognitive, and spiritual – alongside its outer life and its relation to the physical world. The 'filling' of each person with love, wisdom, and goodness makes each person a 'garden' growing more beauty and life. The outward tasks of humanity – to bring forth more human life and garden life – reflected the inward tasks, and the two were interwoven with each other. Later biblical writers understood this well, not least in Psalm 1, which portrays a person internalizing the commandments (word) of God as a tree drinking in water and bearing fruit. Thus, we have a developmental creation and a developmental humanity for the sake of Christology. And especially since the pre-incarnate Son walking in the garden calling each human being into partnership through his wisdom and life, we are required by Colossians to see in the original garden of Eden, within the confines of space and time, *a developmental temple-Christology for the sake of human beings*, within the economy of *creation*, not just redemption.

Athanasius deployed this framework in envisioning the relationship of the soul to the body in *Against the Heathen*, which I will examine extensively below. There and in some of his pastoral writings, he speaks of a 'well-ordered soul' with the Spirit acting within the soul but without overriding or negating the human will. Conversely, he speaks of a 'disordered soul' to describe the impact of sin.⁵³ Recall my comment above about Genesis 2:4ff. depicting a partnership between God immanent in creation alongside human beings. The fruit (literally and figuratively) of that partnership was well-ordered living material. I argue that, although Athanasius rarely explicitly cites it as such, the temple-creation is serving as a macrocosm for which the temple-human is serving as a microcosm. Just as God intended the creation to become a gardened creation, so also God intends the human person to become a gardened human person. The human person is to be understood as a human *becoming*, not simply a human *being*. And the *telos* – God's desired goal – for each person is to become well-ordered living material in that sense. If this paradigm can be evidenced in both Athanasius and in Scripture, and I believe it is, then we are invited to see God's Spirit acting immanently within the human soul, inviting partnership at all times but never occupying all of the 'space' therein. This means that the 'nature-grace' distinction developed by the Thomist scholastics must

⁵³ Ibid 7.4, 'what she is is evidently the product of her own disorder'

be discarded.⁵⁴ So must the Protestant outworking of that distinction found in forms like the Calvinist doctrine of total depravity, which assumes that humanity can be considered ‘in itself’ and viewed as fundamentally resistant to God. In Athanasius’ view, there is no such thing as ‘humanity in itself.’ If, in reality, God upholds the outer ‘temple’ of the human being by His Word and Spirit, as Athanasius asserted, and if God further maintains a foothold within every human soul by His Word and Spirit, as he also asserts that the Savior is ‘invisibly persuading’⁵⁵ them, then the ‘nature-grace’ distinction must be dropped in favor of a temple relation. There remains a presence of God within the human which desires full reunion with God. Depravity, while serious and devastating, cannot be total.

Another fascinating temple structure in creation has to do with the nature of language and meaning. If rational language and concepts existed with God prior to humanity’s creation, human beings had to learn that language and those concepts by experience. At least two second century Christian writers strongly suggest this awareness – important to note because both of them came from Asia Minor, which was the mission field of the apostles, intentionally.⁵⁶ In other words, the minds of Adam and Eve needed to be gradually filled by experiential knowledge which they could coordinate with the abstract words God shared with them from the outset. The human mind itself was a *temple* needing to be filled. God anchored those words in the human mind, and probably some very preliminary sense of their meaning. But the meaning of those words could only be filled out in the divine-human partnership. Appropriately, Athanasius uses the terminology of God’s Son as Word and Wisdom impressing itself upon the human mind in creation, so that we might be capable of knowing the Father, and thus, ‘not only be, but be good’:

‘Now the Only-begotten and very Wisdom of God is Creator and Framer of all things; for ‘in Wisdom have You made them all,’ he says, and ‘the earth is full of Your creation.’ But that what came into being might not only be, but be good, it pleased God that His own Wisdom should condescend to the creatures, so as to introduce an impress and semblance of Its Image on all in common and on each, that what was made might be manifestly wise works and worthy of God. For as of the Son of God, considered as the Word, *our word is an image*, so of the same Son considered as Wisdom *is the wisdom which is implanted in us an image*; in which wisdom we, having the power of knowledge and thought, *become recipients* of the All-framing Wisdom; and through It we are able to know Its Father.’⁵⁷

I think Athanasius here shares my observation about human development, and the notion that the human mind and/or soul has a temple structure. Three major biblical texts – the creation hymn of Genesis 1:1 – 2:3 which introduces Genesis, the first genealogy (of ten in Genesis) which follows in Genesis 2:4 – 4:26, and especially the story of Babel in Genesis 11:1 – 9 – display a keen interest in the role of language in the relationship between God and human beings.

At Babel in Genesis 11:1 – 9, human beings tried to control one another by controlling language in some way. When human beings bent language around the building of the tower and the city, their words became no longer an image of divine realities, or a wisdom which referred to the divine Wisdom. This, of course, was a problem, precisely because in the positive vision of the creation, human beings are a microcosm of heaven and earth. And humans are represented in the Babel narrative as becoming linguistically and

⁵⁴ Shapland, p.124 – 125 n.15, ‘The truth is that we do not find in Athanasius the rigid distinction between nature and grace which belongs to medieval theology.’ Khaled Anatolios, *Athanasius: The Coherence of His Thought* (London: Routledge, 2005), p.66 – 68 says, ‘Nowhere does Athanasius say that the human being’s inward gaze of contemplation, by which the return to God is facilitated, takes place apart from the grace of Christ. To simply assume that Athanasius means this, and then charge him with inconsistency, seems unjust. What accounts for this assumption has in fact probably less to do with the text [of *Against the Heathen – On the Incarnation*] itself than with a preconceived framework by which the two sections of the work seem to be understood, perhaps even unconsciously, as *De Natura* and *De Gratia*; or at least as “before and after” the incarnation.’

⁵⁵ Athanasius of Alexandria, *On the Incarnation* 31.4: ‘For now that the Saviour works so great things among men, and *day by day is invisibly persuading* so great a multitude from every side, both from them that dwell in Greece and in foreign lands, to come over to His faith, and all to obey His teaching, will any one still hold his mind in doubt whether a Resurrection has been accomplished by the Saviour, and whether Christ is alive, or rather is Himself the Life?’ (emphasis mine); also 53.1: ‘invisibly exposing each man’s error’

⁵⁶ Irenaeus of Lyons, *Against Heresies* 4.38.1 refers to Adam and Eve as ‘infants.’ John E. Toews, *The Story of Original Sin* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2013), p.50 credits Theophilus of Antioch (d.183 – 185 AD), *Letter to Autolycus* 25 with being the first to write that Adam had been *nepios*, ‘a child,’ and needing to properly mature. Irenaeus repeats that in *Demonstration of the Apostolic Preaching* 11, 14. I suspect that Theophilus and Irenaeus meant that Adam and Eve were mentally, not biologically, children.

⁵⁷ Athanasius of Alexandria, *Discourses Against the Arians* 2.78 emphasis mine

spiritually earth-bound. The tragic meaning of this action becomes clear when we consider the creation narrative and first genealogy.

Any serious attempt to grapple with the meaning of Genesis 1:1 – 2:3 must include the strong indication that language preceded humanity. Regardless of whether interpreters are trying to historically contextualize Genesis 1:1 – 2:3 relative to other Ancient Near Eastern literature, or demythologize it altogether, Scripture portrays God as possessing some form of language by which He said, 'Let there be light,' and welcomed human beings into that language. This remains an outstanding and intriguing question for scholars of all types. Neuroscience today, for example, suggests that the physical brain develops via language acquisition, and seems to be made for it. The field attests to what I am calling theologically a temple structure in the human mind. That God blessed humanity verbally (Gen. 1:26 – 28) would seem to indicate that God created humanity with a built-in capacity to understand the words of that blessing. Then, as Adam named the animals, and other human beings later followed suit, he demonstrated the image of God by ordering the creation by speaking, just as God did in Genesis 1:1 – 2:3. Adam's words apparently made a permanent mark on the history of the creation, for God Himself must have accepted the names Adam invented and used them. For example, 'lion' and 'lioness' became names God used henceforth, too. 'Cain,' 'Abel,' and 'Seth' were the names God used henceforth, too. Experiencing God use the names that human beings named animals and children must have been rather astounding. Our special role is to be drawn from the earth to give creation voice in rational praise to God. In this way, the non-human creation is drawn up into the human by a temple arrangement, as people say out loud what the rocks say silently. And the words of praise spoken by human beings deepen in a temple structure as the words 'thank you' and 'thank You, Lord,' overflow with more meaning every time we utter them. There are implications here for practical evangelism and sanctification. If Athanasius' reading of creation and language is correct, then the pull of the rationality of language is itself a force that exerts itself upon us. For human beings to have linguistic categories of 'good' and 'evil,' for example, immediately places us into a world where we are the inhabitants of a moral framework larger than us, which exerts itself upon us. This force is not trivial.

This is not a 'natural theology,' but rather something that can only be asserted and appreciated in light of the revelation of the Son, and the Son's revelation of the Trinity and further insights into our creation and destiny. Athanasius is simply saying that in order for our minds to have any hope at all of rationally apprehending God, God must have impressed His own rationality upon us in the creation, *and specifically through language and our ongoing development of language*. All this hangs on God's prior gracious act. And, at the same time, to 'become recipients' of God's Wisdom, we have to exercise the power of knowledge, thought, and even language. That power *increases and develops* with right usage. God could not automatically supply all the experiential knowledge necessary for Adam and Eve to personally grasp the full meanings of those words as understood by God Himself, precisely because He cannot lie (Heb. 6:18) and manufacture false memories. There may even be a temple structure to certain words insofar as human beings communicate with them: Words like 'good' and 'beautiful' and 'love' are *anchored and framed* in the human mind by God, but we must *fill* those words with appropriate and increasing content in partnership with Him. The Wisdom of God, as Athanasius says, did 'condescend to the creations, so as to introduce an impress and semblance' of God's wisdom in our minds, from which further human development could unfold.

In fact, Adam and Eve still had yet to forge, or receive, and experience certain words, such as the word 'word.' How could human beings have confessed, 'The Word was God,' before they themselves spoke in such a way that ordered creation within the happy commitment of God Himself to use those very words? 'God calls them lion and lioness, too, and uses the name we gave our child;' etc. They needed to speak, observe the impact, and then reflect rationally on the very act of speaking. If their speech had this impact, then what impact did God's speech have? What is God's speech? Or, how about the word 'beget'? How could human beings have confessed, 'The Father eternally begets the Son,' before they themselves had begotten a child? What does it say about God's purpose in creation that the doctrine of the Trinity – as in, our human ability to articulate and understand it – depended on human obedience to God's creational command to be fruitful and multiply, our experience of childbearing, and the further development of language, in partnership with God, that would provide the adequate categories to even begin reflection on it? Perhaps that the distinction between 'nature' and 'grace' as developed in the West should be declined

as a false opposition. Nature already is grace, and expects more grace. In fact, nature articulates grace, because grace has stamped itself indelibly upon nature while calling nature to experience more grace. This is well within the Eastern Orthodox understanding of the 'divine energies.' Human beings already participate in the rationality of language, for we were made 'in him,' that is, 'in the Word' (Col.1:17; Acts 17:28). And thus, it is in the creative Word and through human words that God already anchored His own self-giving to humanity, through the agency of human beings and the words we utter back to God, to provide for the return of God to God in a temple structure of ever-increasing fullness.

The Temple Pattern in Israel

God intended Israel's life in the garden land to have this experience of 'filling' and development. The Israelites were to receive God's creational blessing of fruitfulness, filling the land by becoming 'a thousand-fold more' (Dt.1:11). God sent the Israelites to occupy 'the land [which would contain] great and splendid cities which you did not build, and houses *full* of all good things which you did not *fill*, and hewn cisterns which you did not dig, vineyards and olive trees which you did not plant' (Dt.6:10 – 11; emphasis mine). This was a variation on the temple-filling theme. The only other use of the word 'fill' in Deuteronomy occurs at the ending, where Joshua, notably, is said to be '*filled* with the spirit of wisdom, for Moses had laid hands on him' (Dt.34:9). Without needing to decide about whether Joshua was the author of Deuteronomy 34, since Moses is unlikely to have been the author of material narrating his own death, we can say that the impression given by the final arrangement of the Pentateuch is that the motif of temple-filling applies to the people and to the individual. From beginning to end, the Pentateuch describes the world as a temple, human community as a temple, and each human being as a temple, meant to be filled in their respective ways by God's life and goodness.

In the Pentateuch, the sanctuary is depicted as needing to be continually 'filled' and 'refilled' with purity as a gift from God. This is demonstrated by the application of blood, a life-giving agent given by God to Israel for the sake of cleansing, especially on the Day of Atonement (Lev.16). As the high priest approached God's presence in the holy of holies, he threw incense on the fire to produce a cloud of smoke (Lev.16:13) like the one Moses first entered at Sinai. Then he first sprinkled blood on the mercy seat (Lev.16:14 – 15). The mercy seat had cherubim carved on it so as to represent the cherubim that were once placed outside the garden of Eden to stand watch; the symbolic meaning was that God sat on his throne at the threshold of heaven and earth, the very doorway back to the garden which He withdrew to protect human beings from immortalizing their own sin. That was the 'center' of the earth, from which the high priest of Israel moved outwards to purify things in the actual tabernacle-temple sanctuary. He then made atonement for the holy place (Lev.16:16) via blood sprinkling. Then he moved on to the altar in the courtyard and the general tent of meeting (Lev.16:18 – 19). And, every fiftieth year, called the jubilee year, a horn would be blown throughout the land on the day of atonement as God cleansed the people of financial debts and called people to return to their ancestral lands (Lev.25). It was a wave of renewal that rippled outwards from the holy of holies, as the Israelites proclaimed 'release' from uncleanness staining the land. God restored Israel to the garden land, and blessed every child as His own with their own portion of the garden land. The spatial and temporal nature of these events made clear that God treated not just the sanctuary as His dwelling which needed renewal, but all of Israel. It was a temple-filling of God's goodness rippling outward in purification, with human partnership.

Correspondingly, when Israel envisioned God's renewal of all things through His messianic figure from the house of David, they consistently deployed the image of the earth being filled with the glory and/or knowledge of God. Specifically, Jerusalem would be the epicenter of God's renewal, like Eden was once the epicenter of the spread of God's true humanity and expanding garden. So Isaiah and Micah deploy the vision of the 'torah' 'going forth from Zion' (Isa.2:1 – 4; Mic.4:1 – 5) much like a thematic summary statement of their respective books, with Micah adding the beautiful phrase, 'Everyone will sit under his own vine and fig tree.' Isaiah, in particular, uses the motif of 'filling' for human sin and its consequences on the earth (Isa.8:8; 14:21; 34:6; 65:11) and also God's redemptive power to overtake it and cleanse the world (Isa.6:3; 11:9; 27:6; 33:5), speaking of the 'coastlands' and 'ends of the earth' (Isa.24:16; 41:9; 43:6; 45:22), referring variously to the diaspora of Israel or the Gentiles *en toto*: 'That all the ends of the earth may see the salvation of our God' (Isa.52:10). It is not at all surprising that Jesus and the apostolic writers would understand the Christian mission as the fulfillment of that Jewish messianic vision, and cast the gospel proclamation in the conceptual structure of the originally intended spread of life from Eden. For

instance, Luke portrays the ‘great commission’ in the idiom of Eden and the fall, but in reverse order: A couple walk with God; ‘their eyes are opened’ (a direct quote of Genesis 3:7) in the context of a meal; they recognize their Lord; they more deeply internalize God’s word; they are given a commission to announce a human reign over the creation; they are ‘clothed’ (a unique idiom for the Holy Spirit) with power (Lk.24:13 – 54).

Athanasius self-consciously follows in this narrative, seeing his own role in Christian mission in these very terms. In the introductory chapter of *Against the Heathen*, he quotes the phrase ‘the whole world to be filled with his knowledge’ from Isaiah 11:9 – and probably also the calling of Isaiah to prophetic ministry in 6:3 when Isaiah uses the term ‘glory’ as an equivalent for ‘knowledge’ – not just to pluck one string, but to evoke an entire symphony of literary interconnections in Scripture:

‘For as the light is noble, and the sun, the chief cause of light, is nobler still, so, as it is a divine thing for ‘the whole world to be filled with his knowledge [Isaiah 11:9],’ it follows that the orderer and chief cause of such an achievement is God and the Word of God. We speak then as lies within our power, first refuting the ignorance of the unbelieving; so that what is false being refuted, the truth may then shine forth of itself, and that you yourself, friend, may be reassured that you have believed what is true, and in coming to know Christ have not been deceived. Moreover, I think it becoming to discourse to you, as a lover of Christ, about Christ, since I am sure that you rate faith in and knowledge of Him above anything else whatsoever.’⁵⁸

Athanasius understands his own efforts in writing his two volume work as an expression of this movement: God gives true knowledge of Himself to fill the world. He refutes and falsifies lies. Athanasius circles back to Isaiah 11:9 again in his second volume, *On the Incarnation*, when he explains that the coming of the Word of God into human flesh effects both redemption of human nature and also revelation of the Father:

‘When, then, the minds of men had fallen finally to the level of sensible things, the Word submitted to appear in a body, in order that He, as Man, might center their senses on Himself, and convince them through His human acts that He Himself is not man only but also God, the Word and Wisdom of the true God. This is what Paul wants to tell us when he says: ‘That ye, being rooted and grounded in love, may be strong to apprehend with all the saints what is the length and breadth and height and depth, and to know the love of God that surpasses knowledge, so that ye may be filled unto all the fullness of God. [Ephesians 3:16 – 19].’ The Self-revealing of the Word is in every dimension – above, in creation; below, in the Incarnation; in the depth, in Hades; in the breadth, throughout the world. All things have been filled with the knowledge of God [Isaiah 11:9].’⁵⁹

I point out in passing that Athanasius’ use of Paul’s second prayer in Ephesians is an invocation of the temple-filling language as applied to the church. Being filled with the fullness of God is not instantaneous. There are, as I will show, conceptual, relational, and other experiential dimensions to it which both the New Testament and Athanasius recognize. In another very important passage towards the end of *On the Incarnation*, Athanasius distinguishes between the Word being present throughout all creation, and the Word filling all creation with the knowledge of himself:

‘Consistently, therefore, the Word of God took a body and has made use of a human instrument, in order to quicken the body also, and as He is known in creation by His works so to work in man as well, and to show Himself everywhere, leaving nothing void of His own divinity, and of the knowledge of Him. For I resume, and repeat what I said before, that the Saviour did this in order that, as He fills all things on all sides by His presence, so also He might fill all things with the knowledge of Him, as the divine Scripture also says: ‘The whole earth was filled with the knowledge of the Lord’ [Isaiah 11:9].’⁶⁰

⁵⁸ Athanasius of Alexandria, *Against the Heathen* 1.6 – 7

⁵⁹ Athanasius of Alexandria, *On the Incarnation* 16

⁶⁰ *Ibid* 45.1 – 2

In other words, in this instance at least, Athanasius takes the temple-structure of creation and God's intention for its 'temple-filling' in a certain way. 'He fills all things on all sides by His presence,' by virtue of being the creator of all. But his incarnation as 'the Saviour' was to show to all creation that the Word of God works with reference to *humanity*, the special inhabitant and special 'instrument[s]' of creation: 'As He is known in creation by His works so to work in man as well.' The knowledge of God which Athanasius is enthused to spread over the whole earth is the news that God the Word wants to fill human beings. This passage, which I will examine in more detail below, actually has to do with the preached word, whereby the Word is presented to people via the proclaimed word of the disciples. This is not the only way Athanasius has of speaking of this filling, as he will integrate the Holy Spirit into this articulation. But for now he finds it sufficient to speak of this knowledge as, at its base, conceptual along humanly understandable lines (which is why he was so motivated to combat heresy), and registering in a human key, because it concerned human life.

Another temple-structure appears in the pattern of God acting in history via promise-fulfillment. God speaks to 'frame' what He will do, and then acts to 'fill' what He said. Athanasius regularly observes that the Word is faithful *to his spoken words*. In fact, God disclosed something about the nature of His Word in a pattern prior to God's full self-disclosure in Christ. The unbroken Old Testament pattern of God's verbal promise and then fulfillment of that promise was a temple structure in a narrative mode. God spoke by His word (to and through a human partner, who is then called a 'prophet'), and then filled out that word to make it a reality. The prophet Amos gave a concise summary of that pattern: 'Surely the Lord God will do nothing except that which He reveals to His servants the prophets' (Am.3:7).

In an extended contrast between the speech of man and the speech of God, Athanasius makes an argument about how God's word is 'unchangeable' from Hebrews 6:17 – 18. Fascinatingly, he links it to the lyrical pre-Pauline dictum that Paul includes in 2 Timothy 2:13:

'His Son is 'faithful,' being ever the same and unchanging, deceiving neither in His essence nor in His promise—as again says the Apostle writing to the Thessalonians, 'Faithful is He who calls you, who also will do it [1 Thessalonians 5:24];' for in doing what He promises, 'He is faithful *to His words*.' And he thus writes to the Hebrews as to the word's meaning 'unchangeable [Hebrews 6:17 – 18];' 'If we believe not, yet He abides faithful; He cannot deny Himself [2 Timothy 2:13]'⁶¹

Here we find one of Athanasius' explicit affirmations of God's spoken word functioning as His promise. God can be trusted to fulfill His promises because they are rooted in his character and nature as 'faithful.' But this is something that Israel and human beings have *learned* by observing it. Athanasius appears to have reasoned this out this characteristic of God from the bottom up, so to speak – that is, from Scripture's written testimony to God's word and act throughout the economy of salvation. This is why he names both 'in His essence' and also 'in His promise.' But the reason why Athanasius was the first theologian to move accurately and confidently from the economic trinity (God working in the creation) to the immanent trinity (God considered in Himself) is because he was very careful about moving first from 'His promise' *outside* of Himself and then to 'His essence' *within* Himself. When I examine Athanasius' first and second *Discourses Against the Arians*, I will carefully examine this pattern in Athanasius' thought because it is connected to his understanding that human agency, ultimately to receive Christ or not, flows out of a spoken word and promise of God from creation, implicit in the *imago dei* of Genesis 1 and formally declared in the choices presented in Eden in Genesis 2. Thus, human agency must be accounted for in one's dogmatic and systematic statements. Consequently, in Athanasius' theology, we cannot move from the economic trinity back to the immanent trinity without factoring in the reality of human agency, the nature and *telos* of human free will, and God's engagement with humanity via His spoken words.

The Temple Pattern in Jesus

Jesus' own growth as a human being was an experience of progressive filling and development, as a temple. 'He prepares the body in the Virgin as a *temple* unto Himself, and makes it His very own as an

⁶¹ Athanasius of Alexandria, *Discourse Against the Arians* 2.10, emphasis mine

instrument, in it manifested, and in it dwelling.⁶² I will start with less contested aspects of Jesus' life. Jesus 'filled to the full' certain narratives before him. I am intentionally translating the word which is usually translated 'fulfilled' as 'filled to the full.' For passages from the Hebrew Scriptures are applied to Jesus in such a way that he is said to 'fulfill' them even though they are not 'predictive' per se. A good example of this is Matthew 2:15 where Matthew narrates Jesus' family's return from Egypt to the land of Israel and says that the phrase 'Out of Egypt I called My Son' from Hosea 11:1 was fulfilled by Jesus, even though Hosea was not making a prediction! He was simply narrating God bringing Israel as a whole out of Egypt. But Israel's story as a whole was predictive of Jesus, because Jesus had to retell the story of Israel and succeed under the Sinai covenant in circumcising his heart (Dt.10:16; 30:16) and returning his human nature back to God the Father fully healed by the Spirit, under the guidance of the Sinai law. So, Jesus was not only persecuted by a maniacal ruler in a manner similar to how Pharaoh of old slew the Israelite boys of Moses' generation, and came out of Egypt like Israel did (Mt.2), the parallel continued further. Jesus went through the waters of his baptism like Israel went through the Red Sea (Mt.3:13 – 17). He went through forty days in the wilderness like Israel went through forty years (Mt.4:1 – 11). He came to a mountain like Israel came to a mountain (Mt.5:1ff.). But the deeper dynamics of Jesus' internal life undid the failures of Israel's internal life. Rather than give into temptation in the wilderness, Jesus succeeded in resisting every temptation. Rather than resist the law, Jesus received the law fully into his own humanity. In these ways and more, Jesus filled to the full the story of Israel. He used Israel's story as a template, into which he poured the content of his own life and teaching. But because he surpassed Israel's previous life, he burst the boundaries of the previous narrative – especially as regards the Sinai covenant – so he could fill it to overflowing.

Jesus also 'filled to the full' the story of David. Like David, he grew up in relative obscurity. Like David was anointed to be king by the prophet Samuel, Jesus was anointed to be king by the prophet John the Baptist (Mt.3:13 – 17). Like David fought Goliath, Jesus fought a giant in the wilderness (Mt.4:1 – 11). Like David was hunted and persecuted by the powers that be, so Jesus was. Like David gathered a following while being pursued, so Jesus did. Like David took five loaves of bread to feed his people (1 Sam.21), so Jesus took five loaves of bread to feed his people (Mt.14:13 – 23). But Jesus was the heir of David who was greater than David. He multiplied the five loaves to feed far more people than David ever did. He took seven other loaves, symbolic of the seven loaves that David left behind in the tabernacle, and fed Gentiles and not just Jews (Mt.15:29 – 39), which is several orders of magnitude beyond David. Just as David laid the plans and resources for the temple in Jerusalem, so Jesus laid the plans and resources for the new temple of his people. Just as David lamented apparently losing the physical protection of God in Psalm 22, so also Jesus lamented losing the physical protection of God when he quoted Psalm 22 from the cross to prove to those around him that the Messiah greater-than-David would suffer more than David on his way from exile to enthronement. Jesus used David's story as a template, into which he poured the content of his own claims to the throne of King David. But because he surpassed David's previous life, he burst the boundaries of the previous narrative – especially in undoing David's failures and shortcomings – so he could secure the truly expansive nature of the Davidic covenant in which God promised to bring forth a Davidic king for the whole world.

By 'filling to the full' these stories, Jesus actually carried out a temple Christology in a narrative mode. Once God articulated the Sinai covenant with Israel (Ex.19 – Dt.34), which gave voice *by the Spirit in the inspired Scriptures* to the need for God to 'circumcise the human heart' (Dt.30:6) to fulfill the vocation of Israel, God was committing Himself once again to the incarnation *in the narrative mode of Israel*: He alone could fill to the full the demand and promise of the law in the Sinai covenant. Or, put another way to make the same point, He alone could fill to the full the vocation of Israel. Therefore, Jesus' progressive 'filling to the full' of the stories he inherited in connection with God's past promises to Israel and to David demonstrates the temple-filling motif on a broader scale. Jesus did not unfold the narratives instantaneously, as if such a thing were even possible. They reflected a development, a progression, and a gradual infilling. This should not be controversial.

What is controversial to some is what I am about to say. Some theologians maintain that Jesus' victory over the corruption of sin within his own human nature was progressive and gradual, in the motif of the

⁶² Athanasius of Alexandria, *On the Incarnation* 8.3, emphasis mine

gradual infilling of a temple. Since Karl Barth raised to prominence the question of the condition of Jesus' humanity, many have debated whether Jesus instantly cleansed human nature at his conception in a full union with his divine nature, or whether Jesus assumed fallen human nature and struggled against it until his death, where he was finally victorious over the corruption of sin within it. I take the latter position. I along with others interpret Irenaeus of Lyons, Melito of Sardis, Methodius of Olympus, Athanasius of Alexandria, Basil of Caesarea, Gregory of Nyssa, Gregory of Nazianzen, John Chrysostom of Constantinople, and Cyril of Alexandria as evidencing this view. Patristics scholar T.F. Torrance sees in the word *proekopten*, which is translated 'growth' with reference to Jesus (Lk.2:52) a reference to Jesus' inner struggle because it comes from the world of metalworking where a smith hammers a metal forward with blows. The temptation stories of Jesus' wilderness experience and Gethsemane experience seem quite well-explained by the assertion that Jesus was struggling against something in his human nature that was resisting him. In fact, the wilderness and Gethsemane stories bracket Jesus' public ministry and serve as literary bookends, suggesting that this struggle characterized his public ministry; the temptation probably did not just happen at those two occasions. Hebrews, meanwhile, tells us that Jesus 'was tempted like us in all ways,' but managed to not sin (Heb.4:15), which could only of serious import if Jesus shared our common fallen human nature. And Paul's experience as a Jew under the Sinai covenant, struggling against covetousness because of 'the flesh' (Rom.7:14 – 25), seems presented as a precursor to Jesus' human nature also containing that lurking resistance to God as well. Coveting was the mark of Adam and Eve's primal sin, so that Jesus had to 'condemn sin in the flesh' – in particular, coveting – throughout his whole obedient and faithful life (Rom.8:3).

Because Athanasius was quite animated by the struggle with Arianism, his dogmatic works tend to focus on the divinity of Christ, not on the literary quality of Jesus 'filling to the full' the story of Israel or the story of David, although there are brief treatments of those themes.⁶³ However, he did show his acuity as a biblical theologian in his *Festal Letters* reasoning from Old Testament shadow/type to New Testament fulfillment/antitype. Regardless, if at times, Athanasius skips over the figures of Israel and David and goes back to Adam, this was not at all an irresponsible move on Athanasius' part, since Israel was already a partial restoration of Adam, living in the garden land and entrusted with God's commandments, and since David was also seen as an Adam-figure, having triumphed over beasts (1 Sam.17:34 – 37) as Adam was commissioned to rule over the beasts, and being one to lead others to worship God as Adam was implicitly called to do. So, to speak of Israel or David was to speak of Adam, at least in the Jewish mind.

Thus, the bishop emphasized Jesus' role as the second Adam who undid the misdeed of the first Adam. In that sense, Jesus 'filled to the full' the story of Adam. More often, Athanasius defends the divinity of Christ by speaking of the impact of his divinity upon his humanity. Here, he refers in his own words to a developmental process of victory in the human life of Jesus, undoing the serpentine damage Adam allowed and inflicted:

'For the Word being clothed in the flesh, as has many times been explained, every bite of the serpent began to be utterly staunched from out it; and whatever evil sprung from the motions of the flesh, to be cut away, and with these death also was abolished, the companion of sin...'⁶⁴

Athanasius seems to indicate Jesus progressively healing his humanity. He demonstrates an understanding that 'every bite of the serpent' was not instantly 'staunched.' Rather, every bite *began* to be utterly staunched from out of it.' The phrase seems to include 'whatever evil' which ordinarily comes 'from the motions of the flesh.' By this I assume Athanasius means any temptation Jesus experienced to turn away from the Father. Those he 'cut away.' The allusion to Jewish circumcision is probably not accidental, because Moses and the prophets envisioned a deeper, spiritual circumcision which would surgically remove the corruption of sin plaguing human beings (Dt.10:16; 30:6; Jer.4:4). This suggests that, in Athanasius' mind, Jesus cleansed his human nature through his lifelong, faithful obedience in the Spirit. It was not an instantaneous reversal at conception to some kind of pre-fallen Adamic humanity. Rather, it was a cleansing and healing from within the depths of human fallenness all the way to 'death' to the heights of

⁶³ Athanasius of Alexandria, *On the Incarnation* 36 – 40

⁶⁴ Athanasius of Alexandria, *Discourses Against the Arians* 2.69

resurrected new humanity seated at the right hand of the Father, throughout the course of Jesus' life. I will examine this passage in more depth below.

A final dimension of this temple-filling paradigm for Jesus himself is the claim of Irenaeus of Lyons that Jesus 'passed through every stage of life, restoring to all communion with God.'⁶⁵ In Irenaeus' teaching, human life itself is considered to have an intended, developmental shape, quite naturally from creation, regardless of the fall and notwithstanding it. So Jesus 'passed through every age' because he needed to 'fill' not just human nature as an abstract thing, but human nature in a developmental paradigm. The natural course of a human life is a temple that needs to be filled by God in time, at each stage of life. So Jesus did to his own human life. Here is Irenaeus' famous statement:

'Being a Master, therefore, He also possessed the age of a Master [i.e. thirty years at least], not despising or evading any condition of humanity, nor setting aside in Himself that law which He had appointed for the human race, but sanctifying every age, by that period corresponding to it which belonged to Himself. For He came to save all through means of Himself – all, I say, who through Him are born again to God – infants, and children, and boys, and youths, and old men. He therefore passed through every age, becoming an infant for infants, thus sanctifying infants; a child for children, thus sanctifying those who are of this age, being at the same time made to them an example of piety, righteousness, and submission; a youth for youths, becoming an example to youths, and thus sanctifying them for the Lord. So likewise He was an old man for old men, that He might be a perfect Master for all, not merely as respects the setting forth of the truth, but also as regards age, sanctifying at the same time the aged also, and becoming an example to them likewise. Then, at last, He came on to death itself, that He might be 'the first-born from the dead, that in all things He might have the pre-eminence [Colossians 1:18],' the Prince of life [Acts 3:15], existing before all, and going before all.'⁶⁶

This statement undergirds Irenaeus' famous 'recapitulation' theory of atonement, which Athanasius shows reasonable indications of holding himself.⁶⁷ Isaiah envisioned the Messiah as learning obedience, not only through obedience as envisioned by the Epistle to the Hebrews (Heb.5:7 – 9), but as a disciple, i.e. one who *learns*:

'The Lord GOD has given Me the tongue of disciples,
That I may know how to sustain the weary one with a word.
He awakens Me morning by morning,
He awakens My ear to listen as a disciple.' (Isaiah 50:4)

We read this in Isaiah and picture the young Jesus of Nazareth listening to Psalms sung by Mary and Joseph, soaking in the Scriptures read in the synagogue, pondering every word, and piecing together his vocation. Jesus' own human process of learning from childhood to adulthood is glimpsed by Isaiah, Luke, and Hebrews. Once again, the portrait we draw from Scripture is that even in Jesus, human nature is not just a timeless 'thing' that had to be united with divine nature in one instant from which the union remained statically true henceforth. Human nature itself, by definition, required development, growth, and filling. For human nature in each person was designed to be the ground for God to fill each stage of life. Human nature and human personhood are inseparable from personal narrative. Since Jesus claimed to be the true 'temple' of God in his humanity (Jn.2:12 – 25; 14:1 – 3), a humanity that already required a temple-filling pattern of gradual development, then I feel doubly confirmed in this temple Christology. If the creator of human nature took human nature himself, how much more would he respect his own design? This Irenaean insight about human developmental stages, combined with the assertion above that Jesus assumed a fallen human nature and fought his way through it, leads naturally to an appreciation of Jesus facing age-appropriate challenges connected to bearing fallen human nature and pressing through these biological and relational stages.

⁶⁵ Irenaeus of Lyons, *Against Heresies* 3.18.7

⁶⁶ *Ibid* 2.22.4; cf. 4.38.2

⁶⁷ See especially Athanasius' treatment of Luke 2:52 in *Discourses Against the Arians* 3.51 – 53

The Temple Pattern in the Church

What was true in the human body of Jesus about development and infilling is also true for the corporate body of Christ. Notice, for example, Paul's usage of 'filling' language in Ephesians. In Ephesians 1:22 – 23, Paul says that God made Christ's body to reflect his 'fullness' because Christ is the one who 'fills all in all': 'And [God] put all things in subjection under his feet, and gave him as head over all things to the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all.' As in Genesis 1:1 – 2:3, God marks out a space in himself, which He plans to fill while involving human partnership. In Ephesians 4:15 – 16, Paul uses the head-body analogy in a slightly different way: '...but speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in all aspects into Him who is the *head*, even Christ, from whom the whole *body*, being fitted and held together by what every joint supplies, according to the proper working of each individual part, causes the growth of the body for the building up of itself in love.' It must be noted that the sense of 'head' as 'source' is present in Colossians 2:19, where Paul says, '...the head, from whom the entire body, being supplied and held together by the joints and ligaments, grows with a growth which is from God.' But whereas in Colossians, the body clearly grows *from* the head ('from whom the entire body'), in Ephesians, the body grows *up into* the head. The emphasis here falls on the idea of Christ sharing himself in such a way that believers are 'filling' his body in the sense of the community in which he dwells and which he characterizes.

Athanasius uses the typology of the temple in a clever way against the Arians. Apparently some Arians believed that it was inappropriate to worship Jesus as God because the worship was directed at his physical body. How could a human body be a proper object of worship? Athanasius advises a fellow bishop named Adelphius of Onuphis in *Letter 60*, written around 371 AD, to ask the Arians if it was appropriate for the Israelites of old to worship God in the Jerusalem temple when it stood. If they answered in the negative, then they will run afoul of the problem that it was commanded, with punishments for refusing. If they answered in the affirmative, then why not worship God in a human body?

'But if they did well, and in this proved well-pleasing to God, are not the Arians, abominable and most shameful of any heresy, many times worthy of destruction, in that while they approve the former People for the honour paid by them to the Temple, they will not worship the Lord Who is in the flesh as in a temple? And yet the former temple was constructed of stones and gold, as a shadow. But when the reality came, the type ceased from thenceforth, and there did not remain, according to the Lord's utterance, one stone upon another that was not broken down. [Matthew 24:2] And they did not, when they saw the temple of stones, suppose that the Lord who spoke in the temple was a creature; nor did they set the temple at nought and retire far off to worship. But they came to it according to the Law, and worshipped the God who uttered His oracles from the temple. Since then this was so, how can it be other than right to worship the body of the Lord, all-holy and all-reverend as it is, announced as it was by the archangel Gabriel, formed by the Holy Spirit, and made the Vesture of the Word?'⁶⁸

Whether this catch-22 question was successful or not, and whether Athanasius had used it as a common ploy with the Arians or not, we do not know. But it did occur to him, and he encouraged its use on at least this occasion, near the end of his long career when he must have known that his sojourn on earth was ending. For my purposes, I point it out to merely show something of the bishop of Alexandria's temperament and acuity with this biblical theme.

As we saw above, Athanasius' specific quote about the church community uses the temple building as a metaphor and image. Elsewhere, Athanasius refers to this reality in its corporate dimension and individual dimension:

'For because of our relationship to His Body we too have become **God's temple**, and in consequence are made God's sons, so that even in us the Lord is now worshipped, and beholders report, as the Apostle says, that God is in them of a truth. As also John says in the Gospel, 'As many as received Him, to them gave He power to become children of God [John 1:12];' and in his

⁶⁸ Athanasius of Alexandria, *Letter 60 to Adelphius* 7

Epistle he writes, 'By this we know that He abides in us by His Spirit which He has given us [1 John 3:24].'⁶⁹

I will explore the significance of this passage and others below. Scripture, meanwhile, draws on this temple metaphor to especially highlight time, connectedness, and human partnership. Isaiah uses the motif of laying stones on a foundation of a new temple. This is one possible place in the biblical narrative where Athanasius was drawing his language:

^{8:14} Then **He shall become a sanctuary**;
But to both the houses of Israel, **a stone** to strike and **a rock** to stumble over,
And a snare and a trap for the inhabitants of Jerusalem.
¹⁵ Many will stumble over them,
Then they will fall and be broken;
They will even be snared and caught.'
¹⁶ Bind up the testimony,
Seal the law among my disciples.
¹⁷ And I will wait for the LORD who is hiding His face from the house of Jacob;
I will even look eagerly for Him...
^{9:1} But there will be no more gloom for her who was in anguish;
in earlier times He treated the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali with contempt,
but later on He shall make it glorious,
by the way of the sea, on the other side of Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles.
² The people who walk in darkness will see a great light;
Those who live in a dark land, the light will shine on them...
⁶ For a child will be born to us, a son will be given to us;
And the government will rest on His shoulders;
And His name will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God,
Eternal Father, Prince of Peace.
⁷ There will be no end to the increase of His government or of peace,
On the throne of David and over his kingdom,
To establish it and to uphold it with justice and righteousness
From then on and forevermore.
The zeal of the LORD of hosts will accomplish this.
⁸ The Lord sends a message against Jacob,
And it falls on Israel.
⁹ And all the people know it,
That is, Ephraim and the inhabitants of Samaria,
Asserting in pride and in arrogance of heart:
¹⁰ 'The bricks have fallen down,
But we will rebuild with smooth stones;
The sycamores have been cut down,
But we will replace them with cedars.' (Isaiah 8:14 – 9:10)

Isaiah's vision of a new king who will lay a new foundation stone for a new temple (and perhaps even be that stone) is followed up with the motif of building. And the new king will empower others to help. So the people of God say, 'We will rebuild... We will replace...' (9:10).

Another vision of Isaiah – this one a bit less clear but nonetheless connected to the temple motif – appears to predict the development of this new temple people including Gentiles who speak back to the Israelites. One cannot help but think of Pentecost in Acts 2:1 – 41, and the fact that Paul quotes this passage in 1 Corinthians 14:21 while he was explaining the gift of tongues:

¹⁰ For He says, 'Order on order, order on order,
Line on line, line on line,

⁶⁹ Athanasius of Alexandria, *Discourse Against the Arians* 1.43

- A little here, a little there.’
- ¹¹ Indeed, He will speak to this people
Through stammering lips and a foreign tongue,
- ¹² He who said to them, ‘Here is rest, give rest to the weary,’
And, ‘Here is repose,’ but they would not listen.
- ¹³ So the word of the LORD to them will be, ‘Order on order, order on order,
Line on line, line on line,
A little here, a little there,’
That they may go and stumble backward,
Be broken, snared and taken captive.
- ¹⁴ Therefore, hear the word of the LORD, O scoffers,
Who rule this people who are in Jerusalem,
- ¹⁵ Because you have said, ‘We have made a covenant with death,
And with Sheol we have made a pact.
The overwhelming scourge will not reach us when it passes by,
For we have made falsehood our refuge
And we have concealed ourselves with deception.’
- ¹⁶ Therefore thus says the Lord GOD, ‘Behold, I am laying in Zion **a stone, a tested stone,**
A costly cornerstone for the foundation, firmly placed.
He who believes in it will not be disturbed.’ (Isaiah 28:10 – 16)

Isaiah’s vision of the human messiah serving as the cornerstone of a new temple humanity flows out of a patterned sequence in the biblical story. The immediate reference is to King David laying the foundation for the majestic temple in Jerusalem. However, the theological meaning behind the Jerusalem temple eclipses its historical instantiation. The temple in Jerusalem itself was never fully embraced by God. God declined to dignify David’s ambitious plan to shift from the portable tent-like tabernacle structure to a permanent ‘house’ in the form of the Jerusalem temple (2 Sam.7). That is also clear from the attitude of the narrator of Samuel, who does not see Jerusalem in a good light. It is further supported by the fact that the Pentateuch in its entirety supports the idea that God really wanted a temple humanity when He called Israel up Mount Sinai to meet with Him face to face (Ex.19:13; Dt.5:5), but only Moses did. Because of that, God veiled His glory, and Moses veiled his face (Ex.34; 2 Cor.3), hiding the glory from the Israelites. So the tabernacle was a temporary concession to Israel’s fear and sin. The temple itself was a more pagan concretizing of a physical institution which was itself destined to pass away. The primary model for the temple of God’s human community is Eden. God wanted to interact face to face with Adam and Eve and all their descendants, and be in their midst as they spread out and filled the earth as His image-bearers.

Isaiah, therefore, was perceiving the true nature of the Scriptures that came before him, and correspondingly perceiving the true nature of the Jerusalem temple. This is why he eventually dismisses it (Isa.66:1 – 2). Psalm 118, perhaps written in the messiah’s voice first hand, picks up Isaiah’s vision of a human messiah as the cornerstone of a new temple humanity: ‘The stone which the builders rejected has become the chief corner stone’ (Ps.118:22; compare Isa.8:14; 28:16). Jesus, when he challenges the Jerusalem leaders, makes this text a tripwire which he says they have triggered (Mt.21:42; Mk.12:10; Lk.20:17). He means, of course, not just Psalm 118:22, but the entire theme running back through Isaiah and Samuel to the Pentateuch.

There is a ‘temple-filling’ dynamic especially present in Ephesians, which quotes strategically from Isaiah. Ephesians names Jesus Christ as the ‘cornerstone’ of this new temple, and expands on that idea in many directions:

Passage in Ephesians	Topic	Passage(s) in Isaiah
1:3 – 14	God redeems His people in a new exodus, in a manner superior to the first exodus, in the life-blood of a new Passover lamb	40:3 – 6; 43:1 – 44:8; 52:13 – 55:13
1:19 – 23	God’s people are under the rule of the Messiah, heir of David	9:1 – 7; 11:1 – 10
2:1 – 10	God brings life out of death, restoration out of exile, triumph over the serpent/devil	25:6 – 7; 26:19; 27:1 – 9

2:11 – 22	In Christ, we have peace to those near and far (quotes Isa.57:19); we are a new temple, with Jesus as the ‘cornerstone’	57:15 – 19; 8:14; 28:16
3:1 – 13	Gentiles will be included in the renewed Israel/new temple	56:3 – 7; 66:21
3:14 – 21	God’s fullness fills the temple, i.e. the church	6:1 – 4; 11:9; 27:6; 33:5
5:7 – 14	Arise, light shines in darkness, nations drawn into the new Jerusalem (quote conflates Isa.26:19, 51:17, 52:1, and 60:1)	60:1 – 11
6:10 – 24	God’s warrior will wear the armor of righteousness to bring justice and righteousness to the world	59:14 – 19

Paul deploys the motif of the temple in Ephesians 2:11 – 22 and then throughout the letter: (1) in 3:14 – 21 when he prays for the church using the spatial, architectural terms Ezekiel used in his new temple vision in Ezekiel 40 – 48; (2) in 5:7 – 14 when Paul uses the light in darkness motif which recalls the Jewish attribution of the light of the Jerusalem temple in a world of Gentile darkness; (3) in 5:15 – 20 when Paul sees the singing and speaking of the church as a symphony which rises from its temple-nature as the place of true worship of God. Similarly, in his role as archbishop of Alexandria, Athanasius thought of the church community as a *politeia*, a unified community, and used this temple language often in his writings. One can detect it even in his appreciation of the biblical Book of Psalms.⁷⁰ I will explore what he saw as challenges to the temple-community, and how he addressed those issues, to explore his understanding of sanctification.

The Temple Pattern in the Believer

In the individual human person, Athanasius seems to understand conversion and the rite of baptism as connected to the in-filling of the Holy Spirit into an individual person. My examination of Athanasius’ writings lead me to conclude that, since Athanasius saw the human person individually as a temple, he understood the work of Christ as already initiated within the person, in such a way that the person is called to receive it. There is a necessary role for human volition. As in any temple structure meant to be filled via human participation with the divine, the person must receive that for which God has laid a foundation. This shares a basic correspondence with the immanent Word of God in the garden of Eden, working with human beings to spread the garden over the creation; it is also structured in the same way as the newly created human minds of Adam and Eve, with certain more abstract words like ‘good and evil’ being anchored by the Word of God, but needing more depth and content in the human mind through one’s own experience. On the one hand, Athanasius spoke of Christ doing something unilaterally to us, ontologically: ‘He transferred our origin into himself, and we may no longer, as mere earth, return to earth, but as being knit into the Word from heaven;’⁷¹ the effect of Jesus sharing in our humanity is that we are ‘liberated by the kinship of the flesh’⁷² which the Word has established. At the same time, conversion and human responsibility are very important categories for Athanasius. He refers to unbelievers as distinct from believers as something to be deeply concerned about; he portrays heretics as worse off than unbelievers; he reflects on the passage in Hebrews 6 about those who ‘partake of the Holy Spirit’ and yet fall away; he sees the initiation rite of baptism as highly significant for believers; and he often quotes from the New Testament about receiving the Holy Spirit in order to receive the blessing of adoption and sonship in Christ. For example:

‘But this is God’s kindness to man, that of whom He is Maker, of them according to grace He afterwards becomes Father also; becomes, that is, when men, His creatures, receive into their hearts, as the Apostle says, ‘the Spirit of His Son, crying, Abba, Father.’ And these are they who, having received the Word, gained power from Him to become sons of God; for they could not

⁷⁰ Athanasius of Alexandria, *Letter to Marcellinus on the Psalms*; see below

⁷¹ Athanasius of Alexandria, *Discourses Against the Arians* 3.33; *Letter #60 to Adelphius* 4 says, ‘For He has become Man, that He might deify us in Himself, and He has been born of a woman, and begotten of a Virgin, in order to transfer to Himself our erring generation, and that we may become henceforth a holy race, and ‘partakers of the Divine Nature,’ as blessed Peter wrote. [2 Peter 1:4] And ‘what the law could not do in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh [Romans 8:3].’

⁷² *Ibid* 2.69

become sons, being by nature creatures, otherwise than by receiving the Spirit of the natural and true Son.⁷³

This language of receiving the Spirit is vital to acknowledge in Athanasius. It certainly does not mean, for him, that the human person was completely without the Spirit beforehand. Nevertheless, the call to receive 'the Spirit of the Son,' as he is fond of saying, requires and invites our human response to receive, and thereby apply, the *words* of the Son into our humanity because he received the Spirit into his own humanity for us. In one place, he calls it 'sequel of the Spirit grace.'⁷⁴ Indeed, even when he discusses the choice to marry or remain an unmarried virgin, Athanasius uses the language of receiving grace. For our theologian, the human volition to receive from God is part and parcel of our very make-up, and an expression of God's power and wisdom. We may be a bit mystified when he speaks of Jesus making the life of chastity 'easy' for us,⁷⁵ even after carefully exploring his reasoning, but this admonition nevertheless attests to Athanasius' experience of Christ sharing the power of his vicarious human obedience with us.

Also, in Athanasius' view, we have a desire to receive from the Spirit of Christ, which is natural, not foreign, and remains in us despite the fall and whatever other resistance we may feel. This is one way – and, I would argue, the most natural way – of holding together Athanasius' statements, more so than a strictly dialectical paradigm.⁷⁶ The temple view of the human person means that there is a linear

⁷³ *Discourses Against the Arians* 2.59. See also: 'Those who partake of Him and are made wise by Him, and receive power and reason in Him...' (*Against the Heathen* 46.8). 'But just as he who has got the asbestos knows that fire has no burning power over it, and as he who would see the tyrant bound goes over to the empire of his conqueror, so too let him who is incredulous about the victory over death receive the faith of Christ, and pass over to His teaching, and he shall see the weakness of death, and the triumph over it' (*On the Incarnation* 28.5). 'Such are the feasts of the wicked. But the wise servants of the Lord, who have truly put on the man which is created in God [Ephesians 4:24], have received gospel words' (*Festal Letters* 2.4). 'For such things as these serve for exercise and trial, so that, having approved ourselves zealous and chosen servants of Christ, we may be fellow-heirs with the saints. For thus Job: 'The whole world is a place of trial to men upon the earth.' Nevertheless, they are proved in this world by afflictions, labours, and sorrows, to the end that each one may receive of God such reward as is meet for him, as He says by the prophet, 'I am the Lord, Who tries the hearts, and searches the reins, to give to every one according to his ways [Jeremiah 17:10].' (*Festal Letters* 13.1) 'But all these things are plain to those who rightly consider them, and to those who receive with faith the writings of the law' (*Festal Letters* 19.3). 'As the men who have received the Spirit by participation...' (*Discourses Against the Arians* 1.37). 'For because of our relationship to His Body we too have become God's temple, and in consequence are made God's sons, so that even in us the Lord is now worshipped, and beholders report, as the Apostle says, that God is in them of a truth. As also John says in the Gospel, 'As many as received Him, to them gave He power to become children of God [John 1:12]'' (*Discourses* 1.43). 'And when He received the Spirit, we it was who by Him were made recipients of It... 'The Spirit shall take of Mine;' and 'I will send Him;' and to His disciples, 'Receive the Holy Ghost.' And notwithstanding, He who, as the Word and Radiance of the Father, gives to others, now is said to be sanctified, because now He has become man, and the Body that is sanctified is His. From Him then we have begun to receive the unction and the seal...' (*Discourses* 1.47). 'We have the sequel of the Spirit grace, receiving 'out of His fullness' [John 1:16].'⁷⁴ (*Discourses* 1.50). 'For as of the Son of God, considered as the Word, our word is an image, so of the same Son considered as Wisdom is the wisdom which is implanted in us an image; in which wisdom we, having the power of knowledge and thought, become recipients of the All-framing Wisdom; and through It we are able to know Its Father. 'For he who has the Son,' says He, 'has the Father also;' and 'he that receives Me, receives Him that sent Me [Matthew 10:40].'⁷⁵ (*Discourses* 2.78). 'For thus is grace secure to him who receives it' (*Discourses* 3.12). 'The Jews who did not receive Him who spoke to them, thereby did not receive the Word, which is the Form of God. This too it was that the Patriarch Jacob having seen, received a blessing from Him and the name of Israel instead of Jacob' (*Discourses* 3.16). 'And we are made sons through Him by adoption and grace, as partaking of His Spirit (for 'as many as received Him,' he says, 'to them gave He power to become children of God, even to them that believe in His Name [John 1:12]')' (*Discourses* 3.19). 'He wills that we should receive the Spirit, that, when we receive It...' (*Discourses* 3.25). 'It is not for you to know times or seasons which the Father has put in His own power; but you shall receive Power.' And what is that Power of the Father but the Son? For Christ is 'God's Power and God's Wisdom.'⁷⁶ (*Discourses* 3.48). 'And as the Lord said himself: 'The water that I shall give him shall become in him a well of water springing up into eternal life... But this he spoke concerning the Spirit which they that believe in him were to receive' (*Letters to Serapion on the Holy Spirit* 1.23). 'For the unction has the fragrance and odor of him who anoints; and those who are anointed say, when they receive thereof, 'We are the fragrance of Christ'' (*Letters to Serapion* 1.23). 'Wherefore, he who receives the Spirit is called a temple of God.' (*Letters to Serapion* 3.3). 'Antony arose and prayed, and received such strength...' (*Life of Antony* 10)

⁷⁴ Athanasius of Alexandria, *Discourses Against the Arians* 1.50

⁷⁵ Athanasius of Alexandria, *First Letter to Virgins* 8, says, 'But when the Lord came into the world, having taken flesh from a virgin and become human, at that time what used to be difficult became easy for people, and what was impossible became possible.' Although, he also says that falling into sin is easy, too (20). This letter was preserved in Coptic and was not translated into English by Archibald Robinson (editor), *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*. David Brakke, *Athanasius and Asceticism* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), p.274ff translates it and includes it in his appendix. Note that the paragraph numbers are Brakke's and are not part of the original text, nor are they necessary reproduced by other scholars in precisely the same way.

⁷⁶ Anatolios 2005, p.212 notes, 'The difference in tone between Barth's emphasis on the dialectical opposition of God and world, and that of Athanasius, is signaled by the fact that Barth refuses to speak of humanity's co-operating with God, whereas Athanasius can draw a theological portrait of Antony as a co-worker with Christ.'

relationship between what Christ has done and our reception of him because it is Christ who continues to be at work in us by his Spirit. Khaled Anatolios observes:

'Indeed, sinful humanity's incapacity to renew its relation with God by its own powers is but the extension of the principle that the relation between humanity and God, even in the original creation, is wholly initiated and maintained by God. While humanity is enjoined to actively persevere in maintaining its accessibility to this grace, such activity is primarily a perseverance in receptivity. Sin represents a decisive breakdown in this perseverance in receptivity—one that cannot be repaired from the human side precisely because it is this receptivity itself by which humanity has access to the divine activity that is broken by sin. The incarnation thus represents the renewal of the relation between God and humanity in a way that confirms the original structure of the relation, in which there is a correlative emphasis between divine activity and human receptivity to this activity...'⁷⁷

The developmental paradigm of natural human growth is mirrored in a similar paradigm for spiritual growth by the Spirit of Christ indwelling the believer. In Scripture, for example, a believer's participation in the 'great commission' of Christ to the world is assumed to be developmental. The Gospel of Matthew, in particular, depicts the disciples growing in their experience, knowledge, and conviction about this mission; the Gospel of Matthew seems to be written as an instruction manual for teaching new converts, where the disciples are to be generally imitated by other Christians. Athanasius was certainly mindful of the mission of the church, as I showed above. When he needs a text with which to discuss baptism, like he does at the end of his first *Letter to Serapion on the Holy Spirit*, he most often resorts to Matthew 28:19 because of the trinitarian confession meant to accompany the rite. We cannot be certain about the catechetical instruction that Athanasius and other Alexandrian bishops used with their converts, but it is fairly reasonable to suspect that the Gospel of Matthew played a larger role than the other Gospels because of the baptismal trinitarian creed contained there. Some have faulted Athanasius for shifting focus away from Jesus' teaching in *Against the Heathen – On the Incarnation*, where Jesus' role as teacher seems rather eclipsed by his identity as eternal Word, and role as redeemer of human nature and doer of deeds. Admittedly, as conveyed in his writings, Athanasius' weak point does seem to be unfolding the content of Christian ethical teaching, although we should be mindful that his preaching might have included more of that. Still, our theologian does write that 'coming over to his faith' involves 'obey[ing] his teaching,'⁷⁸ which is Matthean phraseology. And it is surely significant that Athanasius' *First Letter to Virgins* ends on the Matthean beatitudes, while his *Life of Antony* begins by Antony being challenged to give up wealth and enter monastic life by hearing Matthew 6 and 19.

For Athanasius, the Word of God empowers and calls people through his humanly spoken words, especially as they were 'enscriptured,' preached, and proclaimed by faithful Christians. The Johannine stress on the words of the Word appears to have made a deep impression on Athanasius: 'If you *continue in my word*, then you are truly disciples of mine' (Jn.8:31). 'If anyone loves me, he will *keep my word*...' (Jn.14:23). 'If you abide in me, and *my words abide in you*...' (Jn.15:7). The Spirit takes the words of the Word and so develops the believer that way. There is an ontological and ethical content revealed by the Incarnate Word in human language and conceptuality. This seems to reverberate throughout Athanasius' approach to Scripture, and his view of the believer's need for Scripture. It flows out of his stress on the achievement of Jesus as pressing the 'Divine Mind' into the flesh and restoring our 'rational nature' (*to logikon*). To work out our union with Christ in human experience, the Spirit acts through the *words* of the Word of God.

Below, on a very related note, I will examine Athanasius' teaching starting from *Against the Heathen*, his very first work, on how the human soul mediates the knowledge of God and life of God to the body. Athanasius stands firmly in the early Christian tradition (i.e. to which Augustine was the first exception) which saw human free will and divine will in a non-competitive relation. Human free will was both a manifestation of God's energies in which we live, move, and have our being, and also itself in development to be perfected in partnership with God. I will also explore Athanasius' biography of the renowned

⁷⁷ Anatolios 2005, p.66 – 68

⁷⁸ Athanasius of Alexandria, *On the Incarnation* 31.4

Egyptian monk Antony, to show how he understood Antony's growth and development, and portrayed the interaction between Antony's human choices and God's empowering grace. This same perspective informs Athanasius' *Festal Letters* when he encourages sexual abstinence, fasting, prayer, and study of Scripture: the whole objective of his proposed rhythm of Christian life is to help the soul develop in God, and also recover its intended mastery of the body. Athanasius is so consistent that he counsels a leading monk named Amun about male 'nocturnal emissions' with sensitive discernment about the will: To the extent that it happens 'independently of will,'⁷⁹ regard it as any natural bodily secretion; only explore the matter to the extent that someone is plagued in his conscience by profane thoughts. In this dynamic of soul operating via mind and will within and upon the body, Athanasius sees a temple-filling occurring within each human person. The words of the Word are delivered by the Spirit to the human soul.

In fact, although according to his *Festal Letters* he sought to win people over to the forty-day fast before Easter, which was an innovation at the time, the bishop-theologian was quite certain that the Holy Spirit worked in ways almost 'customized' for each person, dealing with each person according to her or his ability, because of God's wisdom.⁸⁰ This is a highly personalized view of sanctification; it puts more responsibility for discernment on the minister, certainly; and it contributed to why Athanasius wanted to provide people with a wider variety of options – about marital status, vocation, and devotion – than Clement and Origen did before him. According to David Brakke in his study *Athanasius and Asceticism*, Athanasius gives every indication that he consciously turned away from the academic theologizing of his predecessors Clement and Origen, who were teachers at the Catechetical School of Alexandria. As teachers at a school, they had held up, as a mark of maturity, perceiving allegorical or otherwise 'spiritual' meanings in Scripture.⁸¹ Athanasius was not a teacher at a school. He was the archbishop of the complex region of Roman Egypt, caring for committed virgins and married people, single people and families, urban city dwellers and desert monks (who were themselves not in agreement with each other!), students at the Catechetical School (like Didymus the Blind) and the vastly larger number of people in the trades and farming, Greek speakers and Coptic speakers. Athanasius was interested in a much wider range of maturation markers and expressions of Christian life. His encouragement to imitate biblical characters or saints spanned an impressively wide range of vocation anchored by a common faith and character. Even when he indulges in typically Alexandrian allegorical exegesis, Athanasius stresses stages of growth, so intent is he on being developmentally relevant to his parishioners.⁸²

In particular, the Christian is taught to develop and grow in her struggle against personal sin and the flesh by the Spirit. For example, Athanasius called the believer a 'temple of God' in his first and third *Letters to Serapion on the Holy Spirit*,⁸³ quoting not only 1 Corinthians 3:16 and/or 6:19 but also Galatians 4:19 about Christ being *formed* in the believer. This elision in his most mature works is telling: He saw Christian growth as a spiritual formation process. In *Life of Antony*, he portrays Antony's ethical growth in relation to increasing in his desire for the eternal things of God and for the encouragement of others in spiritual discipline, and also in relation to decreasing greed, lust, and even his ties to his earthly family. Even when Athanasius, in his first and second *Letters to Virgins*, uses 'temple' language in ways that go beyond Paul's original application to distort the apostle's very positive teaching about women in ministry,⁸⁴

⁷⁹ Athanasius of Alexandria, *Letter #48 to Amun*; the apostles seem to have also held the view that an informed *and* errant will is constitutive of sin from Romans 7:7 ('On the contrary, I would not have come to know sin except through the Law'); James 4:17 ('Therefore, to one who knows the right thing to do and does not do it, to him it is sin'); the incident in Acts 23:1 – 5 where Paul unknowingly reviles a/the high priest ('I was not aware, brethren, that he was high priest; for it is written, 'You shall not speak evil of a ruler of your people'')

⁸⁰ Athanasius of Alexandria, *Tenth Festal Letter* 4; quoting *Wisdom of Solomon* 7:27; cf. Brakke (1995), p.176 - 177

⁸¹ David Brakke, *Athanasius and Asceticism* retitled from *Athanasius and the Politics of Asceticism* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), ch.3 – 4

⁸² Ibid p.170 – 182; Athanasius enjoyed the parables of differentiation – where seed produces different yields of crop, or servants are given different amounts of resources to steward

⁸³ Athanasius of Alexandria, *Letters to Serapion on the Holy Spirit* 3.3

⁸⁴ In his *First Letter to Virgins* 3 (Brakke's arrangement), Athanasius quotes 1 Corinthians 6:17 about being one spirit with the Lord, which is part of Paul's reminder that 'your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit' (1 Cor.6:19). Paul's point is that Christians must not have sexual relations outside of marriage; he uses prostitution as an example. Athanasius, however, extends this principle such that a vow of chastity is a spiritual marriage to Christ, and therefore not to be broken. In his *Second Letter to Virgins* 3, he counsels the despondent female ascetics who made a pilgrimage to Jerusalem that Christ now lives in 'our temple if we keep its holiness undefiled always.' There he appears to also be quoting from 1 Cor.6:19, again referring to the vow of chastity. He continues by discussing Paul's mention of singleness in 1 Corinthians 7.

he is nevertheless quick to reach for that language in order to reinterpret it. This shows that one's working definition of 'sanctification' or Christian ethics cannot ultimately be separated from one's ecclesiology. Athanasius had organizational goals, especially to consolidate support against the Arian heresy and Melitian schism. For better and for worse, his ethical teaching and spiritual guidance reflects those goals.

Relatedly, it can be debated whether Paul and the other apostolic writers used the term 'sanctification' to indicate a progressive spiritual development.⁸⁵ In my opinion, there is some kind of paradigm of developmental *progress* rooted in *participation* in Christ when Paul says in Philippians, 'He who *began* a good work in you will *perfect* it until the day of Christ Jesus' (Phil.1:6); 'the *progress* of the gospel' (Phil.1:12); 'your *progress* and joy in the faith' (Phil.1:25); '*work out* your salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who is at work in you to will and to do' (Phil.2:12); '*reaching forward* to what lies ahead, *I press on* toward the goal' (Phil.3:13 – 14); '*I have learned* to be content' (Phil.4:11); '*I have learned*' (Phil.4:12). This fits the language and paradigm of a temple-filling. In a very significant passage in 2 Corinthians, Paul affirms a movement of 'being transformed from glory to glory' (2 Cor.3:18); that is the work of the Spirit because the Spirit himself upholds human nature and the freedom of the human will. We invite the Word in the Spirit to be more and more 'manifested' in and through us (2 Cor.3:3). For we are not each stone temples made of inert material with 'tablets of stone' at the core of our being, but rather living temples with 'tablets of human hearts' on which the Spirit writes (2 Cor.3:3). Similarly, Paul admonishes the Romans who have already presented '[them]selves' to Jesus for obedience, designating their core 'self' in some sense, to continue presenting 'their members' to Jesus for obedience as well (Rom.6:17 – 19), meaning their eyes, ears, mouths, hands, feet, etc. He says that 'we serve in newness of the Spirit' (Rom.7:6) to 'bear fruit for God' (Rom.7:4), which is a pun on childbearing, which takes some time. He also encourages the Romans to 'be transformed according to the renewing of your mind, that you may *prove* [i.e. *demonstrate and experientially learn*] what the will of God is, that which is good and pleasing and perfect' (Rom.12:2), which implies a time-bound, developmental process of learning, doing, and reflecting. If we perceive an 'Israel narrative' in Paul's thought from Abraham (Rom.4) to exodus through the baptismal Red Sea (Rom.6:1 – 11) to Spirit-filled temple (Rom.8), the point about a developmental progression is that much more reinforced. Whether this is identical with the term 'sanctification,' or lies outside it but follows as a result, or is contained within the term, or is a cross-section of it, can be further discussed.

Also, in the New Testament, the Christian is taught to develop and grow in the spiritual gifts of the Holy Spirit, most notably in 1 Corinthians 14 when Paul encourages his audience to continue seeking all the gifts. Also in the New Testament, the Christian body is taught to expect and grow in spiritual gifts, most notably in Ephesians 4:1 – 16 when Paul lists 'apostles, prophets, evangelists, and pastor-teachers' as working to build up the body, which requires and assumes individual growth about how to interpret others' gifts, cooperate with them, and collaborate together in ministry. Individual growth in this regard is assumed to be developmental; it is not instantaneous. Athanasius, appropriately, followed the apostle Paul in that developmental paradigm in *Life of Antony* by portraying Antony's development of spiritual gifts (prophecy, discernment of spirits, healing, etc.) in a very descriptive way. But this was not at all new for him. In his very first pastoral letter in 329, the *First Festal Letter*, he encourages the same.

As if this were not robust enough, Athanasius ties all this to a spiritual warfare motif. He calls all Christians to personally 'ascend' to God. What is more likely Athanasius' precise meaning is that we must ascend in our *understanding* and *approximation* of God. How does one do this? By overcoming the demons who, like their master, infest 'the air' (Eph.2:2) and resist the Christian's growth. Athanasius, like other patristic theologians, sees demons connected with deception, and human freedom from demonic influence and deception as being progressive. In *On the Incarnation*, every single mention of the word 'deceit,' 'deceive,' or 'deception' – and there are many⁸⁶ – occurs in the same breath as 'the demons.' This tells us a great deal about Athanasius' cosmology. He spends a good deal of effort explaining, in his *Festal Letters* and especially *Life of Antony*, exactly how a Christian breaks through and breaks free of the demons

⁸⁵ It is notable that Paul says that unbelieving spouses and children of Christian believers can be 'sanctified' in 1 Corinthians 7:14. It may be that 'sanctification' in Paul is a broader category than simply 'Christian growth,' and perhaps overlaps with it. Perhaps 'dedication' would be a better translation. But 'sanctification' does not seem to immediately denote, without further contextual qualification, 'participation in Christ.' Perhaps on many occasions it *effectively* means that, but not *inherently* so in every usage.

⁸⁶ Athanasius of Alexandria, *On the Incarnation* 2.5 – 6; 12.6; 13.1; 14.3 – 4; 25.5; 27.3; 45.5 – 6; 46.3; 47.1 – 2; 48.3; 49.6; 55.5

and the temptations and deceptions they offer. This is an inseparable part of his view of sanctification. It involves becoming more spiritually powerful, as in able to exorcise the demons. But it is also, and more fundamentally, a matter of becoming more *truthful* and truth-filled. Hence my translation of ‘ascend to God’ as ‘ascend in our understanding and approximation of God’ in a spiritual warfare context is not about overcoming some kind of spatial-relational distance. It is, rather, more cognitive and moral.

The Temple Pattern in Scripture

The creation is a temple-creation. The human person is a temple-person. Jesus Christ is a temple-person as well. His own human development filled out a temple pattern. His conquest of the corruption of sin in his human nature was by implication a temple pattern by the Holy Spirit. So the Spirit indwelling humanity follows the pattern of a temple-filling. It is developmental, respecting time, human development, and human partnership. And a temple Christology corresponds to a temple pneumatology. The Spirit upholds the Word’s power to uphold every person’s existence, where the Spirit is mingled with the person and non-mechanically draws the person towards Jesus by virtue of the ‘kinship of the flesh.’ But given Athanasius’ theological anthropology whereby the soul mediates the life of God to the body, he would envision there being some reception of verbal content (word) of the Word in the Spirit – where the Spirit is now known specifically as the Spirit of the incarnate Son – which makes the relationship of the Spirit and the human Spirit then progressively and developmentally fills the person with more and more of the life of God. This is why Athanasius can move without a conceptual hiccup from discussing Christ as the one who upholds the creation, to Christ as the incarnate human person who is now the foundation for the renewal of the creation. Some scholars have struggled with whether Athanasius is being coherent on this particular, and very important, point. I will show how the temple-filling paradigm can shed some much needed light on those places of ambiguity.

From this summary, I will survey key portions of Athanasius’ work to confirm this view. I will examine Athanasius’ writings in chronological order. This will give us the benefit of looking at his actual ministry practice before examining in some detail the theological and biblical framework by which he was operating. It will help us resolve some ambiguous places in Athanasius’ other writings, or at least suggest options to consider as solutions. It is not that we always find Athanasius explicitly deploying this temple-filling framework, but the pull of biblical language and patterns is strong enough that even when he is not directly doing it, he seems to have been operating with some acknowledgement of it, and its basic principles.

There are a few points at which I would disagree with Athanasius. For one, I disagree with the way he deployed ‘the Jews’ as a parallel for heretics and other opponents of his. Many times, he uses ‘the Jews’ as the baseline category of unbelief, and resistance to orthodox Christian belief about Jesus. This may be acceptable if, linguistically, one grants that people in this period did not compound identity markers. Today, I describe myself as a Japanese-American Christian. Then, they treated the category ‘Christian’ as a distinct and pointed social identity in itself. There was not a designation for a ‘Jewish Christian’ or a ‘Gentile Christian.’ This follows New Testament semantic practice (e.g. 1 Cor.12:13; Gal.3:28; Eph.4:17). Hence, ‘Jews’ were unbelievers because they were not ‘Christians.’ However, Athanasius variously lumps Samosatenes⁸⁷ and Arians⁸⁸ into this category of ‘the Jews’ for their heresies. He also groups Meletian schismatics into this category for their separateness.⁸⁹ Regrettably, ‘the Jews’ served Athanasius as a remarkably flexible category into which he could place various parties and pour on them various condemnations. At times Athanasius’ frustration that these various parties dishonor Scripture – or at least, his understanding of it – drives him to make this comparison, which might be a reasonable point to make if he contained himself to that. On many of those occasions, however, the further points of intellectual resemblance he tries to make between each of these groups and ‘the Jews’ are tenuous. More problematically, when Athanasius is trying to persuade his Egyptian Christian brethren to shift from the seven day fast prior to Easter, which was traditional in Alexandria, and to adopt the forty day fast, which was being practiced in other parts of the known church, he argues that those who resist his program are like

⁸⁷ Athanasius of Alexandria, *Discourses Against the Arians* 1.38

⁸⁸ *Ibid* 1.8, 53

⁸⁹ Athanasius of Alexandria, *Fifth Festal Letter* 4

‘the Jews’ because of their localism in contrast to the more universal church practice.⁹⁰ In this, Athanasius departed from the model of his theological predecessor Irenaeus of Lyons, who defended the Christians of Asia Minor for following the Jewish calendar for the observance of Easter which placed the day on the 14th of Nisan, while Christians elsewhere followed the practice of pinning Easter to a Sunday. My guess is that the Christians of Asia Minor held onto that practice because there was a significant Jewish presence in Asia Minor still, and that they did so probably because of relational ties with synagogue communities. One wonders why this would not have been the case in Alexandria, and why Athanasius, who honored variety in the body in one sense, did not honor it in another.

As a partial answer to my own question, Athanasius was too influenced by Stoicism in his views of marital sex and human emotion.⁹¹ Athanasius and many other Christians thought of the soul-body connection as ideally functioning as a one-way street. This view fits with the bishop’s desire to increase the standard period of fasting from seven to forty days. But sexual intimacy was and is an experience which clearly could go the other way, from body to soul. This is why sex posed such a difficult ethical problem which resulted in Christian theologians saying that even married couples should have sex for procreative purposes, but not for pleasure. I regard this as a betrayal of Christianity’s Jewish foundations, which celebrated marital sexuality for the sake of the couple, not only children (Pr.5:19; Song 3:6 – 5:1; 1 Cor.7:1 – 5). Moreover, the more we learn about neuroscience and epigenetics, the more we have to question the one-way street view. But this ‘two-way street’ view has enormous ramifications. For example, for the sake of young children or people with mental disabilities, I think it entirely appropriate to expand the vehicles of God’s self-revelation to include inarticulate intuition, emotional connectivity, or even physical affection as expressions of love that are exchanged between people. After all, if, in Athanasian language, the entire creation, for its very existence, partakes in the Word and the Spirit, then can God be participating in a physical act of kindness? And can a person’s *soul* respond to God through the *body* as a mediating agent? I see no reason why not. So in addition to the Spirit providing pre-rational and pre-linguistic knowing of God within the soul, the body can also provide its own mode of knowing as well.

Also, I regret the lack of organizational diversity in the church community as the bishops consolidated their clerical power to combat the heretics. I am particularly disappointed that Athanasius does not struggle to maintain men and women praying and prophesying in the congregation (1 Cor.11:2 – 16), because I agree with what Colin Gunton aptly notes about the church controlling interactions between men and women through cloistering.⁹² I find Athanasius’ appeal to Mary of Nazareth as a *home-bound*, perpetual virgin particularly troubling;⁹³ his reliance on male ascetics to play leadership roles in the church stands in stark contrast to his encouragement of female ascetics to remain home-bound, largely silent, and appearing in public only in a Christian worship service. Moreover, his placement of responsibility for male lust on the female body rather than the male mind seems rather contrary to the teaching of Jesus.⁹⁴ However much Arius manipulated the support of female ascetics, in my judgment, Athanasius went too far in the other direction. My own appreciation for Catholic orders and Protestant parachurch organizations leads me to feel grieved that more organizational structures for Christian activity did not develop sooner, and Athanasius for all his efforts at respecting a diversity of vocations, contributed to a consolidation of power around the bishop, not just for the purpose of reliable teaching but also the deployment of the various gifts of the Spirit. He was overly restrictive. If Jesus Christ is both the ‘first Adam’ in whose temple-image Adam was made, and also the ‘last Adam’ come to undo what Adam did, then surely the human genetic variation ‘stored up’ in Adam for his people, as well as the words Adam uttered to name the creation, are but a reflection of the rich variety and ‘manifold wisdom’ (Eph.3:10) hidden in Christ for his?

⁹⁰ David Brakke, ‘Jewish Flesh and Christian Spirit in Athanasius of Alexandria,’ *Journal of Early Christian Studies*, Volume 9, Number 4, 2001, p.453 – 481

⁹¹ Brakke 1995, p.186

⁹² Colin Gunton, *The Promise of Trinitarian Theology* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1997), p73 – 80 although I believe Gunton inaccurately exegetes Paul in 1 Corinthians 11:2 – 16; by contrast, I find the apostle’s testimony and teaching to be an ally in this endeavor; for my analysis of 1 Corinthians 11:2 – 16, see http://nagasawafamily.org/paul_1corinthians.11.02-16.sg.pdf; and to see my argument that 1 Corinthians 11:2 – 16 testifies to a hermeneutical control context for ‘head-body’ language in Ephesians 5, see <http://nagasawafamily.org/paul-theme-headship.pdf>.

⁹³ Athanasius of Alexandria, *First Letter to Virgins* 15 says, ‘And she did not come and go, but only as was necessary for her to go to the temple.’

⁹⁴ Athanasius of Alexandria, *Second Letter to Virgins* 4, 15 – 19, 30

The Temple Pattern in God

Nevertheless, my disagreements with Athanasius on these matters do not impede my appreciation for him on other topics. Ultimately, I hope to test a constructive theological proposal about not just the Holy Spirit, but the Trinity: I think God is a temple God. That is, I think God has a temple structure within God's own self, and that God *is* a temple structure. (Note: I am not attempting to define God's essence or nature, only a structure of the *perichoresis* of the persons.) When Jesus said that he reveals the Father in the Spirit, was he not using temple language involving the divine persons? Was he only speaking of his human body, or was he also speaking of his eternal Sonship? And was this not especially highlighted by the apostle John, who structured his Gospel around the very institution of the temple? In my mind, this helps bring the field of biblical studies into much more of an explicitly interlocking relation to the field of systematic theology, for the former is the study of the economic trinity (God in relation to us, in history), and the latter is the study of the immanent trinity (God in God's self). Following in the footsteps of the apostle John, Athanasius was the second theologian to accurately move from the economic trinity to the immanent trinity, opening a very important door and laying a foundation for the Cappadocian theologians and others to continue to build upon. Athanasius gives ample evidence that he saw a temple structure in the immanent trinity. What evidence? Much, if we know what to look for. Athanasius hardly had the leisure to put this all together in an organized format as such. His problems were not our problems. But since he was the first to say that the Father eternally begets the Son in the Spirit, or that the Son is ever and always the Father's very power and wisdom in the Spirit, or at other times that the Spirit is in the Son who abides in the Father, then he was in fact articulating for us a temple structure in the immanent trinity – a dynamic structure to be sure, but still discernable as a structure of the divine persons.

Two places clearly support this in the Athanasian corpus. First, the third *Discourse Against the Arians*, which is devoted to interpreting the Johannine statement, 'I am in the Father and the Father is in Me,' along with a few others:

'For when it is said, 'I in the Father and the Father in Me,' They are not therefore, as these suppose, discharged into Each Other, *filling* the One the Other, as in the case of empty vessels, so that the Son *fills* the emptiness of the Father and the Father that of the Son, and Each of Them by Himself is not complete and perfect (for this is proper to bodies, and therefore the mere assertion of it is full of irreligion), for the Father is *full* and perfect, and the Son is the *Fulness* of Godhead. Nor again, as God, by coming into the Saints, strengthens them, thus is He also in the Son. For He is Himself the Father's Power and Wisdom, and by partaking of Him things originate are sanctified in the Spirit; but the Son Himself is not Son by participation, but is the Father's own Offspring. Nor again is the Son in the Father, in the sense of the passage, 'In Him we live and move and have our being;' for, He as being from the Fount of the Father is the Life, in which all things are both quickened and consist; for the Life does not live in life, else it would not be Life, but rather He gives life to all things.'⁹⁵

I think this quotation is evidence that Athanasius sees 'bodies' and container-spaces as imperfect analogies for the relationship between the Father and the Son. As such, he honors the biblical language of one thing being 'in' the other or being the 'fullness' of the other, but insists that we mentally excise the spatial and temporal dimensionalities brought in through the backdoor of our human experience of those words. This quotation provides a point of connection, however, even if only by analogy, between the temple structure in God Himself and the temple structures He sets up in space-time, including the world, the growth of life to maturity, human bodies to be filled with conceptual knowledge and His Spirit, and so on. In this matter, Athanasius appears to be following the apostle John and the bishop Irenaeus of Lyons, who said, 'Therefore God has been declared through the Son, who is in the Father, and has the Father in Himself --He who is, the Father bearing witness to the Son, and the Son announcing the Father.'⁹⁶

Second, in his *Letter 59 to Epictetus of Corinth*, a treatise on the human nature of Jesus which was brought by Cyril of Alexandria to the later Council of Chalcedon in 451, Athanasius says:

⁹⁵ Athanasius of Alexandria, *Discourse Against the Arians* 3.1

⁹⁶ Irenaeus of Lyons, *Against Heresies* 3.6.2; T.F. Torrance, *The Christian Doctrine of God*, p.168, note 1 cites Irenaeus as a precursor to Athanasius 'in putting forward a doctrine of the indwelling or containing of the Son and the Father in one another.'

‘The Body, while it suffered, being pierced on the tree, and water and blood flowed from its side, yet because it was a *temple* of the Word was *filled full* of the Godhead...’⁹⁷

And continuing:

‘Or why, if the Word had come in like manner as He had done in the other cases [in the Hebrew prophets], is the Son of Mary alone called Emmanuel, as though a Body *filled full* of the Godhead were born of her?’⁹⁸

The explicit conjoining of temple language and filling language supports my thesis. Since the occasion for the discussion is the incarnation of Jesus himself, this suggests an opportunity to reason from the economic to the immanent trinity: That which the Son of God revealed of Himself in the flesh is true of His eternal life with the Father in the Spirit. If so, then Athanasius’ use of these terms is highly suggestive: There is some kind of temple relation within the immanent trinity.

Hence, to be concise: I am proposing that the temple structures that God set up in the creation economy – for human beings and creation to be ‘filled to the full’ – can be understood as a distant mirroring of the temple structure of God’s own being. But since God transcends space and is eternally full, this mirroring is transposed and played out for our own sakes as an in-filling of the Spirit into time, space, the human person, human relationship, human knowledge, personal narratives, and the narrative of the whole creation. After all, the only way that finite beings can experience the infinite God is to constantly deepen and grow and be filled. Thus, I would like to explore the addition of one critical detail to Rahner’s Rule, named for the famous Catholic theologian Karl Rahner, who is often called the Catholic counterpart of Karl Barth: The economic trinity is the immanent trinity, *but transposed into the key of the human*. This dynamic of transposition is an unnamed reason (I suspect) Douglas Farrow expressed concern about Barth and Torrance: Locating ourselves as internal to the Son does not quite tell us enough. There are further points of clarification which we need to make about human nature, the humanity of Jesus, the Holy Spirit, and the creation.⁹⁹

Related to this discussion is the status of Jesus’ ascended human nature as he continues to mediate between the Father and humanity in the Spirit. If we are, and will be, always deepening in knowledge of God and brightening in transfigured glory, a view that was given expression in this period by Gregory of Nyssa in his *Life of Moses*, then none other than Jesus in his humanity is mediating that experience to us. Since his humanity is part of the economy of salvation/creation, Jesus’ own humanity must be ever deepening and brightening as well, for all things human in the creation are filled to overflowing by the Spirit. That is, the human nature of Jesus must be infinitely enriched by union with his divine personhood as the Word and his divine nature by the Spirit. If our human experience of God is infinitely progressive, then Jesus’ human experience, because of his mediatorial role between the Father and us, is also in some sense progressive. Then our participation in him by the Spirit is progressive but as a fraction of his, in a mutually reinforcing

⁹⁷ Athanasius of Alexandria, *Letter 59 to Epictetus* 10 emphasis mine

⁹⁸ *Ibid* 11

⁹⁹ Pope Benedict XVI, ‘Faith, Reason and the University: Memories and Reflections,’ September 12, 2006: ‘The faith of the Church has always insisted that between God and us, between his eternal Creator Spirit and our created reason, there exists a real analogy, in which – as the Fourth Lateran Council in 1215 stated – unlikeness remains infinitely greater than likeness, yet not to the point of abolishing analogy and its language. God does not become more divine when we push him away from us [i.e. into an apophatic silence] in a sheer, impenetrable voluntarism; rather, the truly divine God is the God who has revealed himself as *logos* and, as *logos*, has acted and continues to act lovingly on our behalf.’ American Orthodox theologian David Bentley Hart, *The Beauty of the Infinite* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2003) concurs. Hart argues that the *analogia entis* does not make an analogy between created *essence* and divine *essence*: ‘The analogy of being does not analogize God and creatures under the more general category of being, but is the analogization of being in the difference between God and creatures; it is as subversive of the notion of a general and univocal category of being as of the equally ‘totalizing’ notion of ontological equivocacy.’ (p.241 – 42). Being itself always already differs, and our being lies before us ‘as gratuity and futurity,’ so that ‘the analogy of being... is the event of our existence as *endless becoming*’ (p.243, emphasis mine). In this *becoming*, we participate in the beauty of God’s own infinity: ‘God is the infinity of being in which every essence comes to be, the abyss of subsistent beauty into which every existence is outstretched’ (p.245). This corresponds to my statement above that God’s temple-structure relates to His perichoretic union; it is about the divine *persons*, not the divine *essence*. Hart sardonically suggests that the *rejection* of the *analogia entis* might be ‘the invention of antichrist’ and ‘the most compelling reason for not becoming a *Protestant*.’

spiral as the revelation of the Father ever deepens. I will explore this more below as I examine Athanasius' two volume work *Against the Heathen* and *On the Incarnation*.

To be sure, what we believe about the relationship between the economic trinity and the immanent trinity is lurking in the background, to be worked out in our articulations of the Spirit and the human; I believe Athanasius was fully aware of this transposition and operated consistently in this temple paradigm throughout his career.¹⁰⁰ It may be appropriate to say, based on Athanasius' structure of ideas and language, that the *analogia entis*, – the analogy of being¹⁰¹ – if I am understanding it correctly, makes possible the *analogia fidei* in the order of being, and in the order of knowing, the *analogia fidei* comes before the *analogia entis* which can only be properly understood in light of God's self-revelation in Christ in the Spirit. It may also be, however, if this temple pattern can be shown to serve the pattern that I think it does, that the *analogia entis* (properly defined) and the *analogia fidei* have a common root, because both must be grounded ultimately in the Son's relation to the Father in the Spirit: the Son has his personhood from the Father as the Son eternally trusts the Father for his personhood. So 'nature' can only be understood in light of 'grace,' to use the Latin terms, and not in some antithesis with 'grace' but rather as an expression of God's *divine energies* (to use the Eastern Orthodox term) in grace. And 'natural theology' is a misnomer and should be discarded in favor of a 'theology of nature.'¹⁰² 'Natural law,' the idea that a human morality can be deduced or attained through reason alone, apart from Christian revelation, is also denied. So is a 'natural progress of human history' played out in a secular key, towards some human utopia. At least that seems to be the logical trajectory to me. Be that as it may, in the context of this paper, I am interested in insights into Athanasius' approach as a pastoral bishop centered around this temple framework. In matters of conversion and sanctification, did he think the human will is an inviolate part of

¹⁰⁰ Khaled Anatolios, *Athanasius: The Coherence of His Thought* (London: Routledge, 2005), p.211 – 212 notes, 'Barth's way of conceiving the relation between God and the world is at least different in emphasis from Athanasius's. Athanasius worked comfortably and naturally within the framework of participation; a certain conception of *analogia entis* is intrinsic to his doctrine. His emphasis on divine otherness is strongly bound up with an equal emphasis on divine condescension as conditioning this otherness. Such divine condescension is manifest within the internal structure of the cosmos and of human beings, in such a way that its effects are constitutive of these structures. Of course, it is impossible to sum up Barth's conception of the relation between God and the world in a few lines. Moreover, Barth's "dialectical" style is full of opposing statements and emphases; what he asserts about the otherness between God and the world in his polemic against *analogia entis* is often counterbalanced by his doctrine of *analogia relationis*. In view of these difficulties, we can only point to a typical emphasis in Barth's approach that distinguishes his conception from that of Athanasius. This is his recurrent motif of asserting that whatever is given to humanity and the world by God is not "as such," "in and of itself," "independently and intrinsically," "proper to" humanity... Barth's model seems to suggest that, after all, there is a human structure "as such," "in and of itself," independent of God. In other words, the relation to God seems to be conceived by Barth in such a way as to be "extrinsic" to the human structure "as such." [...] The difference in tone between Barth's emphasis on the dialectical opposition of God and world, and that of Athanasius, is signaled by the fact that Barth refuses to speak of humanity's co-operating with God, whereas Athanasius can draw a theological portrait of Antony as a co-worker with Christ.'

¹⁰¹ This phrase refers to the notion that there is some way in which the structure of God's existence and our existence are related by analogy, and understandable by the use of language in analogy. Karl Barth famously called the *analogia entis* the 'invention of the antichrist' and 'the only good reason for not becoming Roman Catholic,' presumably because he believed it diminished Jesus' role as sole mediator between humanity and God. Since he disapproved of any epistemic foundation other than Jesus from which to reach conclusions about God, this means that he would have also disapproved of any epistemic foundation other than Jesus from which to reach conclusions about morality and law (thus critiquing the idea of a 'natural law' common to all and accessible by all). In this sense, I agree with Barth's critique (and also David Hume's). In its place, Barth proposed the *analogia fidei* (analogy of faith), meaning the only link between ourselves and God is one of faith in Christ. But if Jesus' faith/faithfulness is the anchor point for an analogy to our faith/faithfulness, and if Jesus grew in stature, learned obedience in (i.e. taught obedience to) his humanity, and cleansed his human nature over the course of his lifelong obedience, so that he could share his Spirit which then overflowed him, then the structure of his human experience is a temple experience. That means that his status as sole mediator is inseparably embedded in the (temple) structure of human nature established in created space, and human experience established in created time. That is not an additional level of mediation over against the person of Jesus; it is, rather, intrinsically constitutive of the *human*. In my view, that is appropriate because God's perichoretic union of persons is itself dynamically temple-structured; and within the Son who holds all things together, both creation and the human were temple-structured to start; so the *analogia entis* is actually *doubled* (or tripled, or...) around the Son. I concur with this aspect of Farrow's critique of Barth and Torrance: the humanity of Jesus requires seeing Jesus in human terms and not merely as a divine event, of pure divine act; for when we only consider God apart from creation, in the immanent trinity, does God have no potentiality; then He is pure act. By this is meant conversely that Jesus' human maturation and ministry had the character of potentiality, precisely because he became human. Yet this too is salvific: If 'the unassumed is the unhealed,' then human narrative and potentiality, which contains human nature and human personhood, can only be healed if Jesus assumed a truly human narrative and potentiality.

¹⁰² Some Christian theologians have postulated that an examination of the natural world would lead one to believe in the existence of a good Creator. I disagree. One can also very reasonably conclude that there are multiple deities working in harmony, or postulate a universe that is eternally co-existent with God or the gods, or come to believe in a Gnostic-Platonic framework where the god of matter is evil over against a good but distant god of spirits. Paul's argument in Romans 1:21 – 32 is not to promote natural theology as such, but is rather a summary of human idol-worship and development from the standpoint of actual biblical history.

the in-filling (and for our own sake) such that it requires us to include human voluntary participation as part of God's own movement in and through the human, something Barth and Torrance are sometimes reluctant to do.¹⁰³ And perhaps by this proposal we will glimpse ways to re-engage some long-standing theological questions: the human nature of Jesus and ourselves, the vagaries of the Chalcedonian Definition, and the *filioque*.

Athanasius' Writings in Historical and Pastoral Context

In light of his assumption of the role of the local archbishop, and also in light of the church-wide role Athanasius would play in fighting the varieties of 'Arianisms,' we can place his writings into a biographical and historical frame. As a young man, Athanasius was apprenticed to, if not adopted by, his predecessor, bishop Alexander of Alexandria. Legendary material circulated in the early church about Athanasius as a teenager. A story is told by church historians Rufinus of Aquileia (died 410 AD) and Sozomen (died circa 450 AD) about bishop Alexander of Alexandria (died 328 AD) seeing the young Athanasius and other boys imitating the baptismal rites while at play on the beach. Athanasius was purportedly fourteen years of age in this account. Alexander decides to meet the boys and finds that Athanasius had been acting the role of bishop. Alexander treats the baptisms as valid because of Athanasius' accuracy in enacting the rite. He requests, however, that Athanasius refrain from performing more baptisms for reason of the baptized being not properly taught. He also requests of Athanasius' parents to let him personally take on Athanasius' education.¹⁰⁴

Alexander, and Athanasius after him, faced a very fragmented Egyptian church. The bishop of Alexandria was nominally the spiritual father not only of Alexandria, but of all Egypt and Libya. This tradition went back to the tradition that Mark, the writer of the Gospel and associate of Simon Peter, arrived in Alexandria to start the church there. But Alexander, and then Athanasius after him, faced the resistance of the Melitians, a schismatic Christian group. During the Diocletian persecution, Peter of Alexandria (who preceded Alexander as bishop) had fled the city. Melitius of Lycopolis had entered Alexandria in 304 AD and found the church in some disarray. Melitius appointed bishops there who maintained a loyalty to him, even when Peter returned, and even further, when Alexander was elected bishop. The Melitians also objected to the conciliatory way that Peter had restored lapsed believers back into the church during the persecution of Diocletian in 304 AD. This was the Alexandrian counterpart to the Donatist schism in Roman North Africa. The Melitians believed Peter had been personally cowardly by fleeing persecution and escaping the city for some years, and had been too lenient in his policy towards the lapsed.

Alexander and his heir also faced the Arian contingent, which had originated in Alexandria. Arius had been raised in Alexandria, traveled to the school of Lucian of Antioch, a shadowy figure in church history of whom we know little. Apparently Lucian was most concerned to combat the heretical teachings of Sabellius, who supposed that the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit were successive masks taken up and then discarded by God, whose nature remained mysterious, remote, and unnamable. Arius had been ordained a priest in Antioch, and returned to serve as a priest in Alexandria under Athanasius' predecessor Alexander. By 318 AD, Arius had gained a following locally through academic theologizing; scholars believe he was also capitalizing on certain features of Origen's theological system – namely, Origen's accommodation of Neo-Platonism, and primarily his language which subordinated the Son to the Father. Arius simply took the next step in accommodating the Neo-Platonic cosmology by making God the Father inaccessible to the creation, and making the Son a created being who did the work of creation. He seems to have done this to safeguard against the blurring of the Father and Son into mere masks with no eternal, personal reality, and also to ensure that there was an eternal, divine substance which was represented by the Father.

Athanasius accompanied his bishop Alexander to the Council of Nicaea in 325 AD as his secretary and deacon. There, he witnessed the three hundred and eighteen bishops comprising the council met and anathematized the teaching of Arius, along with Arius himself and two bishops who stood by him. The Alexandrian theology of Alexander and Athanasius prevailed with the formulation that the Father is indeed

¹⁰³ My own explorations will need to continue elsewhere about whether Barth and Torrance included too much of Augustine's aversion to a developmental paradigm, because my own familiarity with Barth at this point is admittedly thin.

¹⁰⁴ Philip Schaff, *The Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, Series II, Volume 4*, p.19

creator with the Son, the Son is eternally (not temporally) begotten of the Father and therefore true God from true God, and that the Father and Son are of the same substance, or *homoousion*. The Council also called the Melitian schismatics to be reconciled to the rest of the Alexandrian church. Thus, after 325 AD, Athanasius had some reason to think that church's internal skirmishes in Egypt would be largely vestigial. This accounts well for the optimistic tone Athanasius strikes in his two volume work.

Athanasius faced more than formal schism and heresy. There was a growing linguistic divide between Greek-speaking Egyptians in Lower Egypt centered in cosmopolitan Alexandria, the most diverse and arguably important city in the Roman Empire at the time, and Coptic-speaking Egyptians in Upper Egypt to the south. Church historians Rufinus, Socrates, and Sozomen credit Athanasius with appointing and commissioning Frumentius to Ethiopia as a bishop, as early as 328 AD. It is likely that Athanasius' time in these early years were consumed by preaching, visits, and correspondence.

The Egyptian Christian community was also witnessing the beginnings of the desert monastic movement. Although I have yet to see a formal sociological study on this development, the modern corporation owes some debt of origin to the Egyptian monastic Christians in the cities and the desert. For men and women to feel able to join a non-blood-related community, they must develop some new sense of vocation which was encouraged and given formal structure on the one hand, and loosened their powerful obligations to family on the other. This happened in Egypt. Behind this, of course, lay the Christian church in general, especially the teaching of Jesus and the apostle Paul about singleness (1 Cor.7; Mt.19:10 – 12). To some degree, we find precursors in the New Testament order of widows (1 Tim.5:3 – 16), the traveling ministers, the emerging clergy class in the church, Christian schools like those in Alexandria and Antioch, and the *parabolani* ('gamblers') who gambled with their lives to serve plague-stricken cities. But Egypt's Christians, with some encouragement and coordination from Athanasius, lay the foundation for monastic models that resulted in new modes of community life. Next came Christian monasteries in Western Europe under the leadership of John Cassian, Vincent of Lerins, and Benedict of Nursia. From monasteries developed formal Roman Catholic orders like the Benedictines, the Franciscans, the Poor Claires, the Dominicans, and the Jesuits. Alongside the orders came associations like guilds, brotherhoods, and larger hospitals. Subsequently, the English crown created secular versions of the monastery: the chartered corporation like the East India Company. From that point, we see the development of for-profit and non-profit corporations, along with labor unions and a host of voluntary organizations. Many of the earliest ones, in Great Britain and then the U.S., were Christian benevolence ministries, missionary associations, and Bible translation projects.

The precise motivations for Christians to leave for the desert starting in the third century remain shrouded in the mists of history. In 304 AD, however, the solitary monk Antony emerged from the desert having studied the 'best practices' of solitary monks older than himself. He became as a charismatic figure who attracted disciples. His popularity and renown are difficult to overstate, as Antony became known as a teacher of wisdom, healer, exorcist, and reader of souls. Athanasius in his writings made much of Antony's support. In 311 AD, Amun became a desert monk in Nitria, and would later become a spiritual mentor to others. This model was not as solitary as Antony's model, but not yet as communal as Pachomius. Athanasius responded to a letter to Amun requesting pastoral advice for his monks, so we know that Athanasius cultivated a relationship there. Around 324 AD, Pachomius began monastic communities at Tabennesi, and in another few years, Pbow and other areas in the Thebaid, providing an alternative form of desert monasticism which was communal, not solitary. This appears to have provoked some degree of ill-will between the various strains of desert monastics. Athanasius, early in his career, seems to have developed a friendship with the monks of Pachomius. All in all, we get a portrait of Athanasius as taking strong interest in the desert ascetics, supporting all three forms of monasticism, and successfully consolidating their support of his episcopal seat.

The dominant view of scholars today concerning the dating of *Against the Gentiles* and *On the Incarnation* is that Athanasius wrote these two volumes shortly after the Council of Nicaea in 325 AD. Steenberg and Greek Catholic scholar Khaled Anatolios view these theological treatises as typical of a bishop's early

career, and even expected from a Christian bishop.¹⁰⁵ Shortly after Alexander's death on April 17, 328 AD, Athanasius was enthusiastically elected bishop when he was around thirty years old, although there was some controversy generated by the Melitians about whether he was indeed old enough.¹⁰⁶ At the time, he was away from the city on an errand for his bishop. When he returned, he assumed the seat of his mentor on June 8, 328. Also, the internal evidence of the two works suggests that Athanasius was following the Council of Nicaea and elaborating on how a proper view of Christ as sharing the same essence/nature as the Father (*homoousion*; or 'consubstantial') undergirds the Christian view of salvation as God recovering human nature by uniting it with himself in Christ. He does not name Arius or any Arian sympathizers, which suggests he thought the Council was sufficient to defeat the heresy. James B. Ernest adds that Athanasius seems to recapitulate earlier Christian attempts at written apologia in defense of the faith, but by engaging biblical proof-texts that his Arian opponents deployed, and recontextualizing them in his own argument about the divinity of the Son.¹⁰⁷ So I, too, am inclined to date these two volumes closer to 328 AD, when Athanasius was elected bishop to replace his mentor Alexander, and certainly before 335 when he began his first exile. This gives us some indication for Athanasius' maturity, circumstances, and goals in composing the two works. Brakke is among those who finds that Athanasius' pastoral program and intentionality stayed remarkably consistent throughout his long tenure. My examination concludes the same.

Before Easter of 329 AD, in less than a year after becoming bishop, Athanasius began to write his annual *Festal Letters*. Athanasius addressed these letters to his wide 'parish,' as he sought to stir up participation in the fast prior to Easter, which was already a tradition in the church broadly, and furthermore in his ascetic vision which he had explained in *Against the Heathen – On the Incarnation*. Questions can be raised about the origin of, and motivation for, Athanasius' vision of asceticism. Is the story to be believed that the monk Antony of the desert made a lasting impression on Athanasius as a young man? Was Athanasius theologically motivated to recapture the best of Origen's theology and practice, while simultaneously critiquing it? Was he trying to reshape the monastic movement away from Origenist theology towards his own?¹⁰⁸ Was he politically motivated to answer the Melitians, the more rigorous, schismatic sect, with a challenging and appealing vision of his own? Was he politically and theologically motivated to counter the Arians, who numbered significantly in Alexandria and seemed to attract ascetically oriented Christians to their intellectually-oriented study circles? However we answer those questions, which are worthwhile to pursue elsewhere, we must keep in mind how successful Athanasius was. Athanasius seems to have been personally impressed with the Egyptian Christians taking the vow of celibacy around him. But he also had a bigger vision. Citing two scholars from the mid 1970's, Brakke notes, 'Modern scholars have discerned an additional benefit of Athanasius' enthusiasm for the ascetic movement: the unification of an Egyptian Church divided between Hellenistic Alexandria and Coptic Upper Egypt.'¹⁰⁹ From the circulation of *Against the Heathen* to the writing of *Life of Antony* three decades later, Athanasius helped launch the monastic movement that had taken shape in the deserts of Egypt into the wider church, putting his own unique stamp on it. He consolidated the diverse church in Roman Egypt under his leadership. And he became the most well-respected figure of Nicene orthodoxy for his brilliance, labors, and endurance. Therefore, in all this, we must evaluate to what extent Athanasius was faithful to Scripture.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid p.161 in footnote 11 says that these documents were 'the type of doctrinal text relevant to and expected of an early episcopal career.' Also, on p.161 – 162: 'Here, more explicitly than anywhere else, Athanasius is able to present the core of this theological exposition in his own terms, mindful of the issues at stake at the Nicene council that had been held a few years before, but not yet wholly bound up in the disputes that would demand a polemical and often highly contextual shape to his later texts. The CG-DI is Athanasius at his least case-specific. He argues against the general practice of idolatry, but is not yet in disputes with single persons, perceived camps, or over specific terminologies; and this text, more than any of his others, articulates doctrinal theology through an anthropological perspective.' See also Anatolios 2005, p.27 – 31.

¹⁰⁶ Duane Arnold, *The Early Episcopal Career of Athanasius* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1991), p.9 – 99 discusses the scholarly debate concerning Athanasius' election to bishop

¹⁰⁷ Ernest 2004, p.44 – 50

¹⁰⁸ Brakke 1995, p.272 finishes his magisterial study with the sentence, 'The gap between Greeks and Copts may actually have been forced open by the devastating conflicts over 'Origenism' which took place a quarter of a century after Athanasius' death.' Brakke cites Elizabeth A. Clark, *The Origenist Controversy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992), p.43 – 84, 105 – 121, 151 – 157

¹⁰⁹ Brakke 1995, p.14 citing W.H.C. Friend, 'Athanasius as an Egyptian Christian Leader in the Fourth Century', in *Religion Popular and Unpopular in the Early Christian Centuries* (London, 1976), No.XVI, p.20 – 37; G. Griffiths, 'A Note on Monasticism and Nationalism in the Egypt of Athanasius', *Studia Patristica* 16 (1975), p.24 – 28

In 335 AD, Athanasius was accused of various crimes by sympathizers of Arius led by Eusebius, bishop of Nicomedia, and Eusebius, bishop of Caesarea. They convened the Council of Tyre against him. The Emperor Constantine, who had by this time been swayed by the former Eusebius to view Arius as orthodox according to the Creed of Nicaea, and to view Athanasius as interfering with the Egyptian grain supply which fed a substantial part of the Roman Empire, banished Athanasius from Alexandria. Constantine exiled Athanasius to Augusta Treverorum in Gaul (now Trier in Germany) for two years. While there, bishop Maximin of Trier, another opponent of Arianism, received him as an honored guest. In 337 AD, Constantine died, and Athanasius took the occasion to return to Alexandria. It is around this time that he wrote his *First Letter to Virgins* in Coptic, encouraging Christians who had pledged themselves to chastity to continue on.¹¹⁰ Some four letters in all addressing virgins (the chaste), and a treatise *On Virginity* have been attributed to Athanasius. This corpus, or parts of it, was to inspire others like Ambrose of Milan to write encouragement to virgins (the chaste):

‘It is tantalizing to think that the exiled Athanasius brought the Greek original of this letter with him when he moved from Rome to Milan in May 342. Some thirty years later Bishop Ambrose of Milan used a copy of Athanasius’ letter when he wrote his influential book, *On Virgins*; thus, Athanasius’ ideas about proper virginity, like his christological doctrines, passed into the literature of the Western Church, while in Egypt his letter survived only in Coptic.’¹¹¹

In 338 AD, Athanasius was exiled a second time. Emperor Constantius II, the son of Constantine, renewed the order for his banishment. This time, Athanasius went to Rome under the protection of Emperor Constans, who reigned in the West and who had anti-Arian leanings. Athanasius was sheltered by Julius, bishop of Rome, and Hosius, bishop of Cordoba, who defended him and opposed Arian teaching. Hosius had presided over the Council of Nicaea. Despite the fact that a certain Gregory of Cappadocia was selected by the pro-Arian bishops led by the two Eusebii, nearly one hundred bishops met in Alexandria in 339 or 340 to declare their support for Athanasius and protest his innocence of all crimes for which he was accused. The famous monk Antony emerged from the desert to voice his support for Athanasius. Athanasius, meanwhile, continued to write his *Festal Letters* to his congregations in Egypt and Libya from exile. The most powerful sponsor of Arian theology, Eusebius of Nicomedia, died in 341 or 342. Athanasius probably wrote his first two *Discourses Against the Arians* as his theological defense when Julius of Rome persuaded co-Emperors Constans and Constantius to summon the Council of Serdica in 343 to revisit the case of the bishops, especially Athanasius who had been condemned by Eastern bishops in the Council of Tyre in 335.¹¹² These are his main doctrinal contributions to the theological debate. While he focuses on the divinity of the Son, Athanasius also makes some very important comments about the Holy Spirit as well. Both topics are important for us to consider regarding Athanasius’ views on sanctification, etc.

In 345 or 346 AD, soon after the death of the Arian bishop Gregory, Athanasius returned to Alexandria because Emperor Constans used his influence. Reports tell of the Christian population enthusiastically welcoming him back to the city with large demonstrations. From 346 – 356, Athanasius enjoyed a decade of peace in Alexandria. During this time, he assembled an account of his exiles and returns called *Apology Against the Arians*. This being a historical and polemical piece, as opposed to a pastoral one, I will not comment on it below. Before his third exile commenced in 356, Athanasius had been able to write several personal letters: *Letter 48 to Amun* regarding questions desert monastics were asking (before 354); a *Second Letter to Virgins* after various women made a pilgrimage to Jerusalem (before 354); and *Letter 49 to Dracontius* the monk, urging him to serve as bishop under Athanasius (355 – 356). These letters are

¹¹⁰ Brakke 1995, p.xvi dates this letter between 337 – 339

¹¹¹ Ibid p.269; apparently Catholic tradition accords Athanasius the status of having introduced communal monastic life for female virgins to the Christians of Western Europe: ‘Common life among them would seem to have commenced in the East, and St. Athanasius, when, seeking refuge from the Arians, he came to Rome, introduced the custom to the Western Church.’ (New Advent website; <http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/34071.htm>; last accessed August 19, 2016).

¹¹² Ernest 2004, p.108 – 109 begins, ‘Julius’ support may have encouraged Athanasius to compose the first two books of the *Orations Against the Arians*, which have been plausibly dated to this exile, and the death of Eusebius of Nicomedia in 341 and 342 may also have seemed to make the time right for a renewed assault on the theology that he had so effectively sponsored. The main impetus, however, could have been the opportunity presented when Julius persuaded Constans and Constantius to summon a council at Serdica in 343 to revisit the cases of the bishops, including most prominently Athanasius, who had been condemned by the council at Tyre in 335.’

very interesting for our examination of sanctification in Athanasius because he is providing ethically-oriented and church-oriented prescriptions to monks, virgins, and recruitment into church office.

Meanwhile, the pro-Arian faction had been developing their machinations against other bishops sympathetic to Athanasius. The Emperor Constans was assassinated by the usurper Magnentius in 350, leaving his pro-Arian brother Constantius the sole ruler of the Empire. Julius of Rome had died in 352 and his successor, Liberius, had been forced into exile by the Emperor. So too had Hosius of Cordoba. Constantius summoned some three hundred bishops to Milan, where he threatened them with exile and death if they did not consent to an Arian formulation and the condemnation of Athanasius. Athanasius fled from a band of armed men who burst into a church to arrest him. Thus began his third exile in 356 AD.

From 356 – 362 AD, Athanasius remained in the Egyptian desert with his supporters in the monasteries. This was a very productive time for him literarily. During this exile, he compiled or completed various writings. This was probably the occasion on which he wrote his third and fourth *Discourses Against the Arians* which I will consider as continuations of the first and second. He addressed his *Letter to the Bishops of Egypt and Libya*, which is interesting because Athanasius discusses the role of bishop-teachers against heresy as a ministry of the Holy Spirit, as well as the role of language and cognition in the Christian faith. His *Defense to Constantius* was written to the Emperor himself, which is valuable for representing something of the bishop's political ethic or political theology; *Defense of His Flight* details his exile; and in *History of the Arians*, Athanasius, discouraged about the Emperor's continued opposition, shifts to a stance like the Book of Revelation, calling Constantius a precursor of the anti-Christ. I will comment on Athanasius as a political theologian in his dealings with the heretical Emperor Constantius, for the use of political power with respect to Christian theology is always a topic of great practical relevance. So too is Athanasius' view of his role as a bishop in the face of political persecution. Athanasius' three or four *Letters to Serapion on the Holy Spirit*, which laid the groundwork for the church's pneumatological doctrine, was written during this time to one of his bishops who was debating a new heretical group called the 'Tropici' who demoted the Holy Spirit to the status of a creature. In examining the *Letters to Serapion on the Holy Spirit*, I will pay special attention to Athanasius' treatment of believers, unbelievers, and heretics in their relationship to the Spirit. Athanasius' *Life of Antony* about the famous Egyptian monastic which became very influential immediately after it was published. Naturally, the *Life of Antony* deserves very careful consideration for its ascetic themes, spiritual warfare portraits, and portrayal of Antony as a 'co-worker' (*synergos*) with God.

In 361 AD, Constantius died on November 4, and Julius 'the Apostate' succeeded him. Famously against Christian faith, Julian turned his attention elsewhere. This permitted Athanasius to return to Alexandria in 362. Julian changed his mind, however, and summarily ordered Athanasius to leave the city once more. Although his loyal following wanted to protest the edict, Athanasius urged them to desist and accept the verdict. He predicted correctly that his fourth exile would be short. Julian died in 363. Jovian ascended the imperial throne. Athanasius returned from Upper Egypt and his allies in the monasteries. But when Jovian died in 364, and Valens, a committed Arian, became emperor, Athanasius fled once more.

Athanasius reportedly stayed on the outskirts of Alexandria, perhaps spending four months at his father's tomb in a Christian cemetery, if Sozomen and Socrates the church historians are to be believed. For the remainder of the time, he reportedly stayed with supporters outside the city. But Emperor Valens feared another popular uprising in support of Athanasius, so allowed the bishop to return to his seat in a few weeks. Thus in early 366, Athanasius returned from the last of his five exiles. His final years in Alexandria and Egypt were far from peaceful. He wrote his last *Festal Letters*, and from this we can tell that he was eager to consolidate loyalties to the Alexandrian patriarchate. Athanasius died on May 2, 373 AD. He had blessed and consecrated Peter II to be his successor. Then, within a few years of his death, the eloquent bishop in Cappadocia who took up the mantle of theological leadership against the Arian positions, Gregory of Nazianzus, declared that Athanasius had been a 'pillar of the church.'

Athanasius' Early Works: *Against the Heathen* and *On the Incarnation* (c.328 AD)

I will first examine Athanasius' view of the individual person. Eastern Orthodox scholar Matthew Craig Steenberg notes that Irenaeus, Tertullian, Cyril of Jerusalem, Athanasius, and indeed the whole of conciliar

orthodoxy, stand upon the same conceptual architecture. They were convinced that theology is connected to anthropology. Their understanding was that God took what is internal to Him as a pattern for what is external to Him. That is, they anchored the human person in a mirror image relationship to the eternal Son, who is the true Image of the Father and the Father's own Word. Each human being was meant to be in relation to God by the Spirit, in some sense mirroring an internal relation of the Son to the Father in the Spirit.¹¹³

Of course, since the eternal Son is infinite, and we human beings are finite and time-bound, there are critical differences in the pattern. We are meant to 'ascend' in some sense to the Father by the Word and Spirit, in love and in constant growth, since logically, a finite being experiencing the infinite being means constant growth for the finite party. Thus, we owe to patristic Christianity as a whole – beginning with Irenaeus – not an individualistic notion of human personhood, but a relational one, and not a static view, but a developmental one. Also, the patristic theologians appropriately explained the fall in terms of damaged relationship between the divine and the human, along with a corresponding propensity to decline, and the atonement in terms of a restored relationship, along with a renewed desire for ascent.

This naturally impacts our understanding of the role of the Holy Spirit, the Spirit's relation to the Word-Son, human choice, conversion, and sanctification. Orthodox Christians were motivated by their conceptual architecture to protect the humanity of Christ, on the one hand, and the full divinity of Christ, on the other. But not merely salvation was at stake, although certainly that was the most pressing issue, and this is how the arguments were formulated, not least by Athanasius. But since salvation was thought to recover what God intended in creation in terms of renewed ascent, creation and eschatology were also at stake.

Let me keep questions of conversion and sanctification before us. In these two volumes, which are plainly evangelistic in nature, Athanasius never uses the terms 'wrath' and 'anger.' Never does he assign those attributes, qualities, or sentiments to God. This is striking. To a Protestant evangelical mind conditioned to respond to penal substitutionary atonement, such a thing is inconceivable. Correspondingly, Athanasius does not seem very interested in producing a response of guilt in his readers. Now I fully admit that a socio-rhetorical appreciation of any figure of late antiquity is hard to pin down with full certainty, although Ernest does a fine job of it. Some skillful attempts help us appreciate Augustine and John Chrysostom.¹¹⁴ On the one hand, I want to be careful to acknowledge my cultural distance from Athanasius. On the other hand, when I read his two volume work, I sense other emotional and intellectual responses arising in me that I cannot help but think are intentional on the part of our theologian. Athanasius was a skilled, polished orator in a cultural context that extolled skilled, polished orators. So it behooves us to first understand his content, but also, second, to understand what emotional responses he was seeking in us, because the emotional responses he sought reflects back upon his understanding of the human and the divine-human relationship.

The Spirit and the Human Person

Athanasius first brings up the Holy Spirit in only two places in *Against the Heathen*, but does so in ways that are highly illuminating and important to the subject here. The first is in the context of a larger discussion about the soul, creation and fall. The second is when he quotes Scripture condemning idolatry.

¹¹³ Matthew Craig Steenberg, *Of God and Man: Theology as Anthropology from Irenaeus to Athanasius* (New York, NY: T&T Clark, 2009); Edward T. Oakes, S.J., *Infinity Dwindled to Infancy: A Catholic and Evangelical Christology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2011), p.162 – 164 notes that Augustine was the first Christian theologian to believe in a static view of the human person, with very fateful consequences. If the human person is static, then a fall into sin at any time is repeatable in principle, perhaps even in eternity. This seemed to drive Augustine's energy and anxiety on the question of God's grace and human free will, making him land in the monergist (one will, i.e. God's) position. Oakes draws a line from Irenaeus to Maximus the Confessor (c.580 – 662 AD) in the Greek-speaking East. Only a developmental view of the human person, where human nature and free will are being perfected in loving union with God, can sufficiently answer the questions of why God began creation in the way He did, and why human beings progress to the point of making their human nature eternally receptive to God, or eternally tormented by His command to be open to Him.

¹¹⁴ Robert L. Wilken, *John Chrysostom and the Jews: Rhetoric and Reality in the Late 4th Century* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1983); James M. Farrell, 'The Rhetoric(s) of Augustine's Confessions,' *Augustinian Studies* 39:2 (2008), p.265 – 291; Peter Brown, *Augustine of Hippo* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2013); Malcolm Heath, 'John Chrysostom, Rhetoric, and Galatians,' *Biblical Interpretation* (12, 2004), p.369 – 400; Demetrios E. Tonias, *Abraham in the Works of John Chrysostom* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2014)

He attributes that citation also to the Holy Spirit (14.1). Athanasius thus introduces the Spirit as the one who spoke through the Hebrew prophets and continues to speak in the Hebrew Scriptures:

'For she is made to see God, and to be enlightened by Him; but of her own accord in God's stead she has sought corruptible things and darkness, as the Spirit says somewhere in writing, 'God made man upright, but they have sought out many inventions' [Ecclesiastes 7:29]. Thus it has been then that men from the first discovered and contrived and imagined evil for themselves. But it is now time to say how they came down to the madness of idolatry, that you may know that the invention of idols is wholly due, not to good but to evil. But what has its origin in evil can never be pronounced good in any point—being evil altogether.'¹¹⁵

Athanasius quotes Ecclesiastes 7:29 as a way to summarize the creation and fall narrative. He also discloses to his readers that he believes the Scriptures to be inspired by God, and a trustworthy source of information. He anchors himself in the Scriptures twice in 1.3 as 'sacred and inspired' and 'sufficient to declare the truth,' once in 2.4 in reference to the creation story, once in 3.3 in reference to the fall, once in 6.3 as a source of truth superior to human reason but agreeing with it about God being one and not a duality, moreover good and not evil.

This discussion about creation and fall is important to Athanasius for several reasons. First, he maintains that human beings are responsible for bringing forth evil in the creation. This is vital to Athanasius' effort to explain why God is not responsible for evil, and not evil in himself. Athanasius insists that the fall was never necessary.

Second, Athanasius wants to provide a theological anthropology to explain how it is that human beings can possess the knowledge of God. His answer to that involves expounding on the human being as a composite of soul and body. Steenberg notes that Irenaeus and Tertullian, intriguingly, shared the view that the human soul grows in some sense with the human body, and that the Spirit of God gives life to the soul which mediates life to the body. This attestation by two of the earliest Christian theologians should be taken seriously, I think, because of its venerability. It suggests that the early Christians held to a developmental view of human nature, and made space for it in their thinking in various ways. Athanasius does not speculate on whether the soul has a spatial dimension in proportion to the body, but he shares the theological anthropology generally. In chapter 2, after his introduction in chapter 1, Athanasius says that the mind, the uppermost part of the soul, was created by God to perceive, via the creation, the Word by which the Father made all things. The mind, through contemplation, was how the human being was to transcend itself, and this was to pour 'pleasure' into the rest of the soul: 'taking pleasure in contemplating Him, and gaining renewal by its desire toward Him.'¹¹⁶

In chapter 3, Athanasius explains that human beings fixed their minds' attention on the body and its senses, instead of outward and upward on God the Word. This decision 'entangled their soul with bodily pleasures, vexed and turbid with all kind of lusts, while they wholly forgot the power they originally had from God.'¹¹⁷ Athanasius makes an important and subtle remark here. 'The power they originally had from God' is the power to contemplate God via the mind, to orient the emotions and the rest of the soul to delight in the knowledge of God, and thereby to direct the body in service to God. Although he has not yet explicitly brought up the Holy Spirit as the cause of this power, he states that human 'free will' is experienced in the person's soul.

In chapter 4, Athanasius describes the impact of the fall and sin's addictive quality, from the vantage point of the human soul. The soul, which is 'mobile,' has 'power over herself,'¹¹⁸ and in fact comes from God, abuses that power. The soul can still discern what is good – that is, God. Yet the soul, because of the pleasure it finds in lusts, pursues what is evil. In chapter 5, Athanasius explains evils like murder, adultery, and slander as the result of disorder in the human soul that manifests itself as a misuse of the body. He uses

¹¹⁵ Athanasius of Alexandria, *Against the Heathen* 7.5

¹¹⁶ *Ibid* 2.4

¹¹⁷ *Ibid* 3.2

¹¹⁸ *Ibid* 4.2; cf. 44.3, 'For as by His own providence bodies grow and the rational soul moves, and possesses life and thought...'

the illustration of a charioteer driving a fine chariot in a race, not towards the goal, but simply for the experience of racing at high speeds, even recklessly:

‘All of which things are a vice and sin of the soul: neither is there any cause of them at all, but only the rejection of better things.’¹¹⁹

In chapters 6 and 7, Athanasius declares that God is innocent of wrongdoing, despite humanity being guilty of it. This is where we encounter our quotation of Ecclesiastes which Athanasius says is uttered by the Spirit. And once again, he explains sin as a decision made by the human person located in the soul, which then boomerangs back upon the human soul and within it, to become a pattern of decisions:

‘...the soul of man, shutting fast her eyes, by which she is able to see God, has imagined evil for herself, and moving therein, knows not that, thinking she is doing something, she is doing nothing. For she is imagining what is not, nor is she abiding in her original nature; but what she is is evidently the product of her own disorder. For she is made to see God, and to be enlightened by Him; but of her own accord in God’s stead she has sought corruptible things and darkness, as the Spirit says somewhere in writing, ‘God made man upright, but they have sought out many inventions’ [Ecclesiastes 7:29].’¹²⁰

Athanasius then describes the human soul behaving in ways that we today would call habituation or addiction:

‘Now the soul of mankind, not satisfied with the devising of evil, began by degrees to venture upon what is worse still. For having experience of diversities of pleasures, and girt about with oblivion of things divine; being pleased moreover and having in view the passions of the body, and nothing but things present and opinions about them, ceased to think that anything existed beyond what is seen, or that anything was good save things temporal and bodily; so turning away and forgetting that she was in the image of the good God, she no longer, by the power which is in her, sees God the Word after whose likeness she is made; but having departed from herself, imagines and feigns what is not. For hiding, by the complications of bodily lusts, the mirror which, as it were, is in her, by which alone she had the power of seeing the Image of the Father, she no longer sees what a soul ought to behold, but is carried about by everything, and only sees the things which come under the senses. Hence, weighted with all fleshly desire, and distracted among the impressions of these things, she imagines that the God Whom her understanding has forgotten is to be found in bodily and sensible things, giving to things seen the name of God, and glorifying only those things which she desires and which are pleasant to her eyes.’¹²¹

This is both the substance and the symptom of the soul’s self-imposed ‘disorder,’ the word Athanasius used in 7.4 – 5.

Is Athanasius faithful to Scripture? At any given moment, if there is a conflict between sensory data (e.g. hearing vs. sight) and conflicting interpretations of a behavior and its consequences, then I find it acceptable to say with Athanasius that the soul mediates the knowledge of God and the presence of God to the body. We must choose, for example, what we have heard from God over what we see in the world. God clearly intended human beings to prioritize the words He spoke to them as the authoritative interpretation of the two trees, the rest of creation, and the divine-human relationship. By contrast, the serpent encouraged Adam and Eve to interpret the tree, God, themselves, and the world by their own ability to perceive things (‘they saw’), to see this tree like any other tree, and thus make themselves the measure of all things by their appetites (‘good for food’), aesthetic sensibility (‘delight for the eyes’), and growth in experiential knowledge (‘desirable to make one wise’). In that sense, faith indeed comes by hearing, and obedience takes its meaning by what we are told by God to do and not do.

¹¹⁹ Ibid 5.2

¹²⁰ Ibid 7.4 – 5

¹²¹ Ibid 8.1 – 2

But there are other modes of personal human growth that do not involve such a conflict. While I deeply value Athanasius' framework for understanding the soul and body, I think his 'one-way street' view of the soul-body relationship needs to be corrected. Modern neuroscience and epigenetics require us to reopen the question of how the soul and body operate together and as one, but so does a fair reading of Genesis 2 and other passages in the Jewish wisdom tradition. I will stay within what I understand to be Athanasius' use of these terms, which is a Christian appropriation of the Neo-Platonic and Stoic views of the soul and body. Nevertheless, as I said above, I believe in a 'two-way street' view of that relation when the issue of obedience is not front and center.

I think it is fairly reasonable to assume that any reader of Genesis 2 is being invited by the Genesis narrative to consider how Adam and Eve were supposed to understand God at all. The issue of language as a shared experience with God in some way comes back in Scripture in the story of Babel (Gen.11:1 – 9), where God expresses concern that human beings can curtail communication with God by controlling their language. In the garden account, the question is simpler: How could Adam and Eve begin to grasp certain abstract word-concepts – especially the words 'good' and 'evil' – without having had prior experience of them? Athanasius' apparent answer to that question is to locate the influx of information in human mind, the uppermost part of the human soul. By contemplating the world around them, and presumably by direct conversation with the immanent Word of God who walked in the garden with them, Adam and Eve were to perceive 'goodness' and assign more and more content into the word 'good' by their experience. The weakness of Athanasius' view is it does not account for bodily experiences outside the sense of sight, which he tends to categorically relegate into the realm of distraction from the soul's contemplation while the body is still.

By contrast, I think that the creation generally, and the garden of Eden particularly, was the place where the human body could experience goodness in a way that complemented the mode of the soul. There, the body could taste sweet and nourishing fruit, smell the fragrance of earth and flowers, see the beauty of sunsets and the ordered garden, feel sleep as restorative, and otherwise be inspired, refreshed, and rejuvenated in bodily life. That is, the human body supplied invaluable information to the human soul about the goodness of God. That experience and information reinforced the verbal interpretation given by the immanent Word of God about 'goodness,' 'life,' and 'love.' They would also have grown through bodily experience of the diversity of food, flowers, sunsets, etc. that 'goodness' contains 'diversity,' for example. We can see that the authors of the poetic portions of the Hebrew Scriptures communicate value judgments about what is good and evil by using the physical world, and also using nouns far more than adjectives. In other words, the meaning of the abstract words 'good and evil' had to be 'filled out' by things and experiences. So it is not only that the soul receives information and the presence of God, and then mediates them to the body, as Athanasius held. Rather, the soul must make sense of the words which God spoke, must interpret the experiences of the body and the sensory data the soul collects through it, so that the soul has a deepening basis for trusting God's word. The development of the meaning of abstract words like 'good and evil,' 'love,' 'beauty,' and so on, involves both the soul and the body, in order for the soul to properly arrange the human person's relationships with the rest of creation in a way reflective of God's moral order.

The only real way to imagine how Adam and Eve could grow in their appreciation of love as an inherent aspect of goodness was to imagine them becoming friends in emotional intimacy, and then becoming lovers as husband and wife. We now know that sexual discovery and orgasms facilitate emotional bonding, not least because the chemical oxytocin is released in the brain, which encourages bonding with the other, especially in a visual sense. So every time they made love, Adam and Eve would feel just a bit more commitment for each other than before. Starting down this path of sexual intimacy in marriage was not designed to help us feel a pleasure to which we should then feel entitled, but to reinforce the commitment of the marriage itself in its concreteness. Adam and Eve would have increased in their understanding of the words 'love,' 'beauty,' and even 'goodness.' The birth of a child would have increased their wonder that their love for each other could increase because the other spouse loves that child in a healthy and appropriate way; for naturally, when a second person loves a third person you love in a non-competitive way that includes you, your own love for that second person increases. That deepening in 'love' and 'goodness' would have increased with every successive child. By their growth with God, they would have moved towards God's own understanding of those words 'good,' 'life,' and 'love.' They would also appreciate, by imagining a deprivation of those experiences, their opposites: 'evil,' 'death,' and

‘aleness.’ Note that only Adam would have initially understood the meaning of God’s reflection, ‘It is not good for the man to be alone.’ Eve would have had to understand it by imagining it, and only in a comparative sense. Once she had children, she could remember by contrast what it was like to not have children, and be without their love and without her own love for them.

Nowhere does this Hebraic anthropology differ more from the Neo-Platonic and Stoic view of the soul as in their respective understandings of sex. Sex, even in the context of a husband and wife, posed a problem for the Christian theologians by the fourth century (if not earlier) because of their commitment to this ‘one-way street’ view of the soul influencing body. Sex was one of those experiences which clearly went the other direction. The body could influence the soul. And they believed that sexual desire originated in the body, not the soul, as opposed to being a unified experience. Christian theologians, including Athanasius, started to formalize in the church the Stoic view that childbearing was the only legitimate reason for a married couple to have sex.¹²² They taught this because they believed even a married couple should try to minimize the pleasure they had in intercourse. That view did but come from biblical Judaism, which celebrated married sexuality for the couple, not just for childbearing (Pr.5:19; Song 3:6 – 5:1; 1 Cor.7:1 – 5). I point this out because God’s command to be fruitful and multiply occurs in Genesis 1:27, before the fall. So clearly marital intimacy was something to be celebrated, not despised or reduced to the status of a regrettable evil.

The Spirit and the Atonement of Christ: The Word as Creator

How, then, does the person of Jesus of Nazareth ‘save’ the human being? And does his person and/or action have anything to do with this temple paradigm? In volume 2, *On the Incarnation*, Athanasius explains how the incarnate Word renews humanity as God originally intended human beings. He first focuses on the identity of the Word-Son as God. Because of his proximity to the Arian controversy and the Council of Nicaea, he stresses the distinction between Creator vs. created, placing the Word-Son on the Creator side. He explains how the incarnation of the Word-Son as a genuine human being, in a real human body, makes salvation possible. He defines *salvation* as the *theosis* (divinization by union with God and participation in God) of humanity. The passage below is not explicit about how the Spirit fits into this movement, or whether our response to it matters or in what way. Nevertheless, this passage is a good summary of what Athanasius means throughout the book. It is also, important to my interest, a place where Athanasius sees the cosmic and heavenly nature of the Son, in comparison with yet in connection to the human and earthly presence of the Son in Jesus. In *Against the Heathen*, Athanasius interprets Colossians 1:15 – 20 to mean that the Word stabilizes creation.¹²³ A key idea here in *On the Incarnation* is that the Word sanctified the particular human body of Jesus. Later, Athanasius will become far more sweeping in his explanation, but this local impact is important to note.

‘1. For He was not, as might be imagined, circumscribed in the body, nor, while present in the body, was He absent elsewhere; nor, while He moved the body, was the universe left void of His working and Providence; but, thing most marvellous, Word as He was, so far from being contained by anything, He rather contained all things Himself; and just as while present in the whole of Creation, He is at once distinct in being from the universe, and present in all things by His own power—giving order to all things, and over all and in all revealing His own providence, and giving life to each thing and all things, including the whole without being included, but being in His own Father alone wholly and in every respect—2. thus, even while present in a human body and Himself quickening it, He was, without inconsistency, quickening the universe as well, and was in every process of nature, and was outside the whole, and while known from the body by His works, He was none the less manifest from the working of the universe as well. 3. Now, it is the function of soul to behold even what is outside its own body, by acts of thought, without, however, working outside its own body, or moving by its presence things remote from the body. Never, that is, does a man, by thinking of things at a distance, by that fact either move or displace them; nor if a man were to sit in his own house and reason about the heavenly bodies, would he by that fact either move the sun or make the heavens revolve. But he sees that they move and have their being,

¹²² David Brakke, *Athanasius and Asceticism* retitled from *Athanasius and the Politics of Asceticism* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), p.186

¹²³ Athanasius of Alexandria, *Against the Heathen* 41.3 – 4

without being actually able to influence them. 4. *Now, the Word of God in His man's nature was not like that; for He was not bound to His body, but rather was Himself wielding it, so that He was not only in it, but was actually in everything, and while external to the universe, abode in His Father only.* 5. And this was the wonderful thing that He was at once walking as man, and as the Word was quickening all things, and as the Son was dwelling with His Father. So that not even when the Virgin bore Him did He suffer any change, nor by being in the body was [His glory] dulled: but, on the contrary, He sanctified the body also. 6. For not even by being in the universe does He share in its nature, but all things, on the contrary, are quickened and sustained by Him. 7. For if the sun too, which was made by Him, and which we see, as it revolves in the heaven, is not defiled by touching the bodies upon earth, nor is it put out by darkness, but on the contrary itself illuminates and cleanses them also, much less was the all-holy Word of God, Maker and Lord also of the sun, defiled by being made known in the body; on the contrary, being incorruptible, He quickened and cleansed the body also, which was in itself mortal: who did, for so it says [in 1 Peter 2:22], no sin, neither was guile found in His mouth.¹²⁴

Passages like this beg the following question: What exactly does the phrase 'in Christ' mean when we find it in the New Testament, especially Paul and John? What is, and who are, actually 'in' Christ by the Spirit? Are we speaking of Christ the man from Nazareth? In which case, the answer to the question of 'what' is in Christ would be, 'The unique personal union of divine nature and human nature in his physical body, which is the source of salvation from the corruption of sin.' And the 'who' would probably be, 'Believers.' And then one must ask, 'How does one come to *be* in Christ?' Or are we supposed to see in Jesus God's *intention* to do in the cosmos what He did in the physical body of Jesus, in a kind of sequence? Is God's grace 'stored up' somehow in the physical body of the ascended Jesus? Is it poured out through infant baptism? Baptism? Conversion? Something else? Or, when we read the phrase 'in Christ,' are we speaking of the eternal Word of God who upholds the universe within himself, as the 'Christ-hymn' of Colossians 1:15 – 20 suggests, and as Barth and Torrance insist we give full consideration? In which case, the answer to the question of 'what' is 'in Christ' would be, 'The entire cosmos.' And the 'who' would be, 'Everyone.' The directionality of conversion is affected by these conceptions. Do people choose 'in' or by their rejection, are they choosing 'out?' Is Christ the seed-branch of the new creation, extending out from within the old but bearing fruit beyond it? Or is he the totality of the vine, reinvigorating it? Both? Or something else? When we read the Gospel accounts, are we to picture the cosmos in a microcosm, in him? This is close to the meaning of the term 'actualism' as Farrow uses it, I believe.

Athanasius interprets Colossians 1:15 – 18 to say that the Word upholds and contains the entire creation. He appears to be drawing not only from Colossians 1:15 – 18, although that is the most straightforward place in Scripture from which to appeal. He appears to be reading Genesis 1 in such a way that the involvement of the Word of God is present in the ten declarations by which God created all things:

1. ^{1:3} Then God said, 'Let there be light'; and there was light.
2. ^{1:6} Then God said, 'Let there be an expanse in the midst of the waters, and let it separate the waters from the waters.'
3. ^{1:9} Then God said, 'Let the waters below the heavens be gathered into one place, and let the dry land appear'; and it was so.
4. ^{1:11} Then God said, 'Let the earth sprout vegetation, plants yielding seed, and fruit trees on the earth bearing fruit after their kind with seed in them'; and it was so.
5. ^{1:14} Then God said, 'Let there be lights in the expanse of the heavens to separate the day from the night, and let them be for signs and for seasons and for days and years; ¹⁵ and let them be for lights in the expanse of the heavens to give light on the earth'; and it was so.
6. ^{1:20} Then God said, 'Let the waters teem with swarms of living creatures, and let birds fly above the earth in the open expanse of the heavens.'
7. ^{1:22} God blessed them, saying, 'Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the waters in the seas, and let birds multiply on the earth.'
8. ^{1:24} Then God said, 'Let the earth bring forth living creatures after their kind: cattle and creeping things and beasts of the earth after their kind'; and it was so.

¹²⁴ Athanasius of Alexandria, *On the Incarnation* 17.1 – 7 emphasis mine

9. ^{1:26} Then God said, ‘Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; and let them rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over the cattle and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.’ ²⁷ God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them.
10. ^{1:28} God blessed them; and God said to them, ‘Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth, and subdue it; and rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over every living thing that moves on the earth.’

The Word was not just involved, but *committed* to upholding that which he created. In my view, the Word’s personal involvement explains God’s commitment to the creation. The creative speech of the Word was not just a declaration, but a personal *promise* to the creation to uphold and sustain it. It was the precursor of the *covenant*. Athanasius seems to recognize this in a different way. Admittedly he does not explicitly ground creation’s upkeep in the nature of the Word and the power of the Word’s creative utterance as providential promise, but rather grounds the creation in God’s goodness more generally (see below);¹²⁵ even in view of the fall of humanity, Athanasius names God’s goodness as the reason for why God does not let humanity and creation slip back into death and non-existence.¹²⁶ But Athanasius is keenly aware that humanity’s death is a matter of God being true to his word: God’s declaration that death would be the consequence of the fall in Genesis 2:17 has the force of a *promise*.¹²⁷ Athanasius’ conviction that God’s word must prove true and enduring seems connected to the nature of the Word as utterly truthful and unyielding in what he declares. So I point to that remark as evidence.

Also, when arguing against the Arians, he contrasts God’s speech with human speech, making the intriguing point that human speech accomplishes nothing in itself, which requires humans to work with our hands. God’s speech, by contrast, is how God acts:

‘And man’s word is composed of syllables, and neither lives nor operates anything, but is only significant of the speaker’s intention, and does but go forth and go by, no more to appear, since it was not at all before it was spoken; wherefore the word of man neither lives nor operates anything, nor in short is man. And this happens to it, as I said before, because man who begets it, has his nature out of nothing. But God’s Word is not merely pronounced, as one may say, nor a sound of accents, nor by His Son is meant His command; but as radiance of light, so is He perfect offspring from perfect. Hence He is God also, as being God’s Image; for ‘the Word was God [John 1:1]’ says Scripture. And man’s words avail not for operation; hence man works not by means of words but of hands, for they have being, and man’s word subsists not.’¹²⁸

Immediately after saying this, Athanasius quotes Hebrews 4:12 – 13, showing that Hebrews 6:13 – 18, says God is unable to break His promises, is not far away. It would seem that Athanasius is making a general point: whereas human speech can be heard but accomplishes nothing, God’s speech is both audibly heard and accomplishes what He says because the mighty Word of God is the speaker. Athanasius is drawing from an earlier point he made in the same work when he connected the word ‘unchangeable’ from Hebrews 6:17 – 18 to 2 Timothy 2:13.

‘His Son is ‘faithful,’ being ever the same and unchanging, deceiving neither in His essence nor in His promise—as again says the Apostle writing to the Thessalonians, ‘Faithful is He who calls you, who also will do it [1 Thessalonians 5:24];’ for in doing what He promises, ‘He is faithful to His words.’ And he thus writes to the Hebrews as to the word’s meaning ‘unchangeable [Hebrews

¹²⁵ E.g. Athanasius of Alexandria, *On the Incarnation* 3.3 says, ‘For God is good, or rather is essentially the source of goodness: nor could one that is good be niggardly of anything: whence, grudging existence to none, He has made all things out of nothing by His own Word, Jesus Christ our Lord.’

¹²⁶ *Ibid* 6.7 – 10

¹²⁷ *Ibid* 6.2 – 3 says ‘2. For death, as I said above, gained from that time forth a legal hold over us, and it was impossible to evade the law, since it had been laid down by God because of the transgression, and the result was in truth at once monstrous and unseemly. 3. For it were monstrous, firstly, that God, having spoken, should prove false—that, when once He had ordained that man, if he transgressed the commandment, should die the death, after the transgression man should not die, but God’s word should be broken. For God would not be true, if, when He had said we should die, man died not.’

¹²⁸ Athanasius of Alexandria, *Discourses Against the Arians* 2.35

6:17 – 18]; ‘If we believe not, yet He abides faithful; He cannot deny Himself [2 Timothy 2:13]’¹²⁹

Here we find Athanasius’ explicit affirmation of God’s spoken word functioning as His promise as rooted in his character and nature as ‘faithful.’ Athanasius observes that the Word is faithful *to his spoken words*. As I mentioned before, I believe this promise-fulfillment pattern is a temple structure. God speaks to frame what He will do, and then acts to fill what He said.

Connected to God’s trustworthiness, and anchoring it, is God’s goodness. Athanasius says that because God is ‘good,’ that God must be ‘good’ to humanity and ‘the lover of humanity.’¹³⁰

‘For better were they not made, than once made, left to neglect and ruin. For neglect reveals weakness, and not goodness on God’s part... It was, then, *out of the question to leave men to the current of corruption; because this would be unseemly, and unworthy of God’s goodness.*’¹³¹

Athanasius says this while critiquing the pagan gods: Their frivolous actions flow out of their morally ambiguous natures.¹³² By contrast, Athanasius argues, the Christian God is not morally ambiguous; therefore He does not act in morally ambiguous ways. All of the Christian God’s actions are good because they flow out of His wholly good character.¹³³ Action flows out of character. Activity expresses a nature. In Athanasius’ argument, the Word of God *had* to become incarnate to make incorrupt that which had turned to corruption out of his love and goodness.

The Spirit and the Atonement of Christ: The Word Incarnate

How did Jesus do that, in Athanasius understanding? By assuming to himself that which he wanted to save: humanity in its fullness.

‘Had it been a case of a trespass only, and not of a subsequent corruption, repentance would have been well enough; but when once transgression had begun men came under the power of the corruption proper to their nature and were bereft of the grace which belonged to them as creatures in the Image of God. No, repentance could not meet the case. What – or rather Who – was it that was needed for such grace and such recall as we required? Who, save the Word of God Himself, Who also in the beginning had made all things out of nothing?... Thus, taking a body like our own, because all our bodies were liable to the corruption of death, He surrendered His body to death instead of all, and offered it to the Father... This He did that He might turn again to incorruption men who had turned to corruption, and make them alive through death by the appropriation of His

¹²⁹ Ibid 2.10, emphasis mine

¹³⁰ Athanasius of Alexandria, *Against the Heathen* 35.1; *On the Incarnation* 6.5 – 10; 10.1; 12.6; 43.4

¹³¹ Athanasius of Alexandria, *On the Incarnation* 6.4 – 5; cf. *Against the Heathen* 41.2 – 4

¹³² Athanasius of Alexandria, *Against the Heathen* 16.4

¹³³ Athanasius of Alexandria, *Against the Heathen*: ‘God is good and exceeding noble’ (2.2), ‘For God, being good and loving to mankind, and caring for the souls made by Him’ (35.1), ‘His Word...proceeds in His goodness from the Father as from a good Fountain’ (41.1), ‘But the God of all is good and exceeding noble by nature, and therefore is kind; for one that is good can grudge nothing: for which reason he does not even grudge existence, but desires all to exist, as objects for his loving-kindness’ (41.2), ‘Because He is good He guides and settles the whole Creation by His Word’ (41.3), ‘Seeing the power of the Word, we receive a knowledge also of a good Father’ (45.2), ‘Being the good Offspring of Him that is good, and true Son, He is the Father’s Power and Wisdom and Word, not being so by participation, nor as if these qualities were imparted to Him from without... but He is the very Wisdom, very Word, and very own Power of the Father’ (46.8). *On the Incarnation*: ‘The good Father through Him orders all things’ (1.1), ‘what men deride as unseemly, this by His own goodness He clothes with seemliness’ (1.2), ‘He has yet of the loving-kindness and goodness of His own Father been manifested to us in a human body for our salvation’ (1.3), ‘For God is good, or rather is essentially the source of goodness: nor could one that is good be niggardly of anything’ (3.3), ‘for what is evil is not, but what is good is... [and] they derive their being from God who is’ (4.5), ‘For it were not worthy of God’s goodness that the things He had made should waste away... what was God in His goodness to do? ... For neglect reveals weakness, and not goodness on God’s part... It was, then, out of the question to leave men to the current of corruption; because this would be unseemly, and unworthy of God’s goodness’ (6.5 – 10), ‘this great work was peculiarly suited to God’s goodness... much more did God the Word of the all-good Father not neglect the race of men’ (10.1), ‘inasmuch as He is good, He did not leave them destitute of the knowledge of Himself’ (11.1), ‘being good, He gives them a share in His own Image’ (11.3), ‘God’s goodness then and loving-kindness being so great’ (12.6), ‘since it were unworthy of the Divine Goodness to overlook so grave a matter’ (43.4), ‘by His guidance and goodness’ (43.7). Anatolios 2005, p.41; and on p.47, ‘God’s love and goodness thus constitute the basis within God of all the divine initiatives, from the structure of creation to the event of the incarnation...’

body and by the grace of His resurrection. Thus He would make death to disappear from them as utterly as straw from fire.¹³⁴

As I noted above, Athanasius developed his understanding of the incarnate Word in the context of the pattern of temple structures. Jesus, as a human being with a body and soul, was the temple of God. But this raises a question that scholars debate: Did Athanasius believe that Jesus had a human soul? Colin Gunton, to take one representative example, critiques Athanasius for saying too ‘incautiously’ that the Word ‘wielded the human body like an instrument,’¹³⁵ because that phraseology diminishes the proper qualities – such as the role of the human soul, mind, and will – which are important to Jesus’ humanity. If Jesus saved all of human being, then he must have saved the human soul as well. And if he saved the human soul, then he must have had one himself. All this is required within the standard definition of salvation operating in the early centuries as God’s recovery of true humanity. The constituent and conjoined parts of the human being – soul and body – must be joined with God in the person of Jesus if they are to be saved for us and in us by the Spirit.

In fact, in the mid to late fourth century, Apollinarius of Laodicea (died 390 AD) taught a heretical view like the one Athanasius might be seen as supporting here. Apollinarius opposed the Arians and wanted to uphold the divine-human unity of Jesus, but in such a way that he denied to Jesus a human mind and soul. Those who followed him, called the Apollinarians, were large in number. Apollinarius, the one time ally of Athanasius and Basil, seems to have suspected that sin somehow resided in the soul, and therefore the Word must have assumed a body but displaced the mind and soul and occupied its place instead. The orthodox critique in reply was that this denied salvation to the human soul for all the rest of humanity. For if Jesus did not also save the human soul in himself, then he has no redeemed human soul to offer. It would be left for Gregory of Nazianzus to deploy against the Apollinarians the logic used by Athanasius against the Arians, ‘The unassumed is the unhealed.’ That is, what God does not assume to Himself in the person of Jesus must, of necessity, remain unhealed.

However, Athanasius’ two volume work must be seen in the light of his desire to explain the divinity of the Word, not the human composition of the Word’s self-enfleshment as Jesus of Nazareth. Athanasius’ lack of attention to the role of the Holy Spirit in his early apologetic work was rectified a decade later in his *Discourses Against the Arians*, and supported further yet another decade later in his three *Letters to Serapion on the Holy Spirit*. Moreover, Athanasius’ early two volume work fit into a known Christian genre by that time: that of the Christian apologists like Justin Martyr of Rome, Athenagoras of Athens, etc. who defended the person of Jesus. In the view of Ernest, Athanasius appeared to be using that genre but also recentering the arguments on biblical passages that were commonly used by those in the Arian camp to disseminate their defective theology.¹³⁶ He was recapturing those passages for orthodox theology.

Hence, Khaled Anatolios’ defense of Athanasius on this point is persuasive, and fully addresses Gunton’s concern:

‘His characterization of Christ’s body as an “instrument” is not to be interpreted in light of an analysis of the composition of Christ, but rather within the framework of the Creator-creature distinction, with its attendant dialectic of divine transcendence and immanence. The “instrumentality” of the body is concerned precisely with its being a medium for the immanent revelation of the transcendent God. In other words, the focus is not on the relation of the Logos to the body, so much as on the body as mediating between God and world. Athanasius himself speaks of the “instrument” of Christ’s body not in order to emphasize that it is “directly and physically” moved by the Logos, but rather to characterize it as a privileged locus wherein the invisible God becomes knowable and visible.’¹³⁷

¹³⁴ Athanasius of Alexandria, *On the Incarnation* 2:8 – 9

¹³⁵ Gunton 1997, p.69 critiques Athanasius of Alexandria, *On the Incarnation* 17, 42

¹³⁶ Ernest 2004, p.44 – 50

¹³⁷ Anatolios 2005, p.71 – 74

In support of Anatolios, elsewhere, Athanasius gives evidence that he understood the importance of holding that Jesus had a human soul. In the work *Tome to the Antiochenes*, dated to 362 AD, in which Athanasius and others report on their investigations of a quarrel between two pro-Nicene groups who used Greek terms for theological matters in different ways. He then expresses his approval for one of the groups:

'For they confessed also that the Savior had not a body without a soul, nor without sense or intelligence; for it was not possible, when the Lord had become man for us, that His body should be without intelligence: nor was the salvation effected in the Word Himself a salvation of body only, but of soul also.'¹³⁸

The postscript to the *Tome* by Paulinus and Karterius adds, for good measure:

'For the Savior had a body neither without soul, nor without sense, nor without intelligence. For it were impossible, the Lord being made Man for us, that His body should be without intelligence.'

This brief mention of the human soul reminds us that the robustness and complexity of Athanasius' theological thought should not be seen as minimally constrained to the topics of the Arian controversy. Maximally, Athanasius' thought might mean this: The human soul from the first part of *Against the Heathen* also reflects what happened in the human soul of Jesus throughout the course of Jesus' life and ministry. This is a reasonably likely thesis. If so, then Athanasius can be seen as anticipating the explicit work of Gregory of Nazianzus, who famously said, 'The unassumed is the unhealed.' To substantiate my point on this further, we can revisit this critical passage in which Athanasius quotes the important passage Romans 8:3 to assert that Jesus made his own flesh fully admit the 'Divine mind':

'...what the Law could not do in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin condemned sin in the flesh [Romans 8:3], ridding it of the trespass, in which, being continually held captive, it admitted not the Divine mind. And having rendered the flesh capable of the Word...'¹³⁹

Since Athanasius uses the term 'flesh' to indicate the entire human being, body and soul, considered from the standpoint of being corrupted (as the apostles Paul and John did), and since the mind was held to be the first part of the soul, Athanasius can be understood as asserting that Jesus' divine mind did not displace his human mind. Rather, by and through his human mind working in partnership with his divine mind, Jesus consciously struggled to align his entire soul and body with his divine nature in the power of the Holy Spirit. He thereby governed his entire humanity in conformity with God's will, healing and strengthening it from within. Thus, he 'rendered the flesh capable of the Word.' Or, as he said in another work: 'For to Him, as to a physician, man 'was delivered' to heal the bite of the serpent... and, because He was Word, to renew the rational nature (τὸ λογικόν).'¹⁴⁰ By this, Athanasius seems to mean Jesus conforming his human soul to the original rationality of God's unmarred creation, and his own relation to the Father, which can at least be indicated (though not exhausted) using linguistic rationality in a limited way. Indeed, the Greek word λογικόν is better understood to be 'the rationality of the Logos.' That is the imprint Jesus left on human nature.

If this is the case, then we would hope to find somewhere in Athanasius' literary remains some evidence that he believed Jesus' self-sanctification of his human soul and body was not instantaneous, but an ongoing battle throughout his lifelong obedience. Indeed, we find this very important statement in the Alexandrian's second *Discourse Against the Arians*. Jesus had to progressively rid his flesh of 'every bite of the serpent':

'For the Word being clothed in the flesh, as has many times been explained, every bite of the serpent began to be utterly staunched from out it; and whatever evil sprung from the motions of the flesh, to be cut away, and with these death also was abolished, the companion of sin, as the

¹³⁸ Athanasius of Alexandria, *Tome to the Antiochenes* 7

¹³⁹ Athanasius of Alexandria, *Discourses Against the Arians* 1.8, paragraph 60

¹⁴⁰ Athanasius of Alexandria, *On Luke 10:22/Matthew 11:27* 2

Lord Himself says, 'The prince of this world comes, and finds nothing in Me [John 14:30];' and 'For this end was He manifested,' as John has written, 'that He might destroy the works of the devil [1 John 3:8].'¹⁴¹

Protestants often view the role of Satan as external to humanity, which leads Protestants to view as crude and primitive various patristic passages which speak of Jesus ransoming us from Satan. Satan is seen as the accuser, based on the meaning of the word 'satan,' as somehow connected to our guilt before God. Satan is also seen as having a legal claim upon fallen humanity, shown when the devil offered Jesus the nations in the wilderness (Mt.4:8 – 9), counteracted by Jesus when he claimed for himself all authority on heaven and earth (Mt.28:18). But this is only half the truth.

By contrast, the imagery of 'venom' is what the church fathers recognized to be the main import of Scripture's literary portrayal of the enemy as a serpent, from Genesis 3. That focus is demonstrated by Athanasius in this passage. By following the lead of the serpent and participating in his rebellion against God, we have internalized a 'venom.' That 'venom' must be removed. Jesus is the only human being who has completely drained and healed his own human nature of that 'venom,' not forgetting also 'the motions of the flesh, to be cut away' – which I suspect to be the desires and affections of the flesh. I also suspect that Athanasius, by using the phrase 'cut away,' was hearkening back to the 'circumcision of the heart' language of Moses (Dt.10:16; 30:6), Jeremiah (Jer.4:4), and Paul (Rom.2:28 – 29; 6:6; 8:3; 10:4; Col.2:12). Each of us is called to perform a spiritual surgery of sorts, in partnership with God and empowered by Him, to rid ourselves of these diseased and disordered things that are foreign to our human nature, fundamentally. Jesus is the only one who has done so, on our behalf; he is a medical substitute for us. And this healing is also liberating, for it brings us out from under the influence of the serpent of old, the devil.

What is important to me in this passage is the progressive nature of the cleansing. Athanasius demonstrates an understanding that 'every bite of the serpent' was not instantly 'staunched.' Rather, every bite *began* to be utterly staunched from out of it.' This indicates that, in Athanasius' mind, Jesus cleansed his human nature through his lifelong, faithful obedience. It was not an instantaneous reversal to pre-fallen Adamic humanity at conception. Rather, it was a cleansing and healing from within, throughout the course of Jesus' life, as Jesus took his human nature from the depths of human fallenness, through the course of its natural human development, wrestling with the expectations of parents and others, puberty and one's own body and hormones, the traumatic conditions of Roman oppression of Israel, the burden of public leadership, and so on, to the heights of resurrected new humanity seated at the right hand of the Father. In Athanasius we have a very clear statement about how medical-ontological substitution serves as the foundational stone of the overall christus victor edifice. Just to make my proposal clear: It is not that Jesus ever sinned in word, thought, deed, or emotion; and it is not that Jesus was less victorious at one stage than another; but rather, Jesus constantly had to face new challenges at every new stage of human development and win his victories afresh.

In fact, the context of this passage about Jesus' 'staunching' demonstrates how Athanasius saw our progressive spiritual development as derived from Jesus' lifelong obedience. Athanasius entertains the question of whether God could have simply spoken and healed human nature instantly, without the incarnation of Jesus and without human voluntary participation? Apparently this was an objection raised by some in the broad 'Arian' camp. His reply is as follows:

'Moreover, the good reason of what He did may be seen thus; if God had but spoken, because it was in His power, and so the curse had been undone, the power had been shown of Him who gave the word, but man had become such as Adam was before the transgression, having received grace from without, and not having it united to the body; (for he was such when he was placed in Paradise) nay, perhaps had become worse, because he had learned to transgress. Such then being his condition, had he been seduced by the serpent, there had been fresh need for God to give command and undo the curse; and thus the need had become interminable, and men had remained under guilt not less than before, as being enslaved to sin; and, ever sinning, would have ever

¹⁴¹ Athanasius of Alexandria, *Discourses Against the Arians* 2.69

needed one to pardon them, and had never become free, being in themselves flesh, and ever worsted by the Law because of the infirmity of the flesh.’¹⁴²

Athanasius denies that God could have simply spoken and healed human nature instantly. If God had done so, He would set up the conditions for human beings to eat over and over from the tree of knowledge without ever developing a personal conviction that doing so is sinful. Presumably that conviction must settle in the human soul. One reason for this, in Athanasius’ mind, is that if God had acted in such a way to negate Adam and Eve’s choice, without showing any costly personal involvement on His part, human beings by definition would have ‘received grace from without, and not having it united to the body.’ The phrase ‘grace from without’ seems to indicate the opposite of ‘grace from within.’ Presumably, ‘grace from within’ our human life and experience would mean us sharing with God a conviction about the awfulness of the corruption of sin and its effects, cognitive agreement with God that healing is necessary, and willing commitment to being renewed. The puzzling phrase, ‘not having [grace] united to the body’ probably presupposes an awareness of the then-standard patristic explanation of the soul’s impact upon the body. The human soul – with its capacity to know God, to desire God, and to remember, to feel, to judge – must receive grace from God and mediate that grace into the human body. So, although Athanasius does not make these connections explicitly in this particular passage, there seems to be a temple-like paradigm present. The body is the temple; the Holy Spirit is present in the body, in some way similar to how the shekinah glory of God was present in the holy of holies; the soul in the body is like the priest serving in the temple, drawing from the presence of God to operate the temple and cleanse it.

Athanasius seems to view the actual biblical sequence as the appropriate answer to the hypothetical possibility he entertained just before. First, God had to give Israel the experience of the Sinai Law. Second, the Word of God had to assume fallen human nature ‘under the Law’ and progressively heal the primordial wound. God could not instantly heal human corruption by fiat because, given that the fall did really happen, human beings had to personally learn how terrible the wound is, and receive Christ’s work of salvation on their behalf. Part of that education process would surely include reflecting on one’s own life. It probably also included seeing in Scripture how disastrous sin’s effects are, how deeply Israel struggled under the Law, how deeply Jesus struggled to overcome temptation. That is the type of devotional reflection that would nurture godly and Godward convictions, and shape one’s own desire for healing.

Athanasius saw Christology as soteriology. Who Christ is, he is for us, that we might partake in him by the Spirit. Where he says, ‘every bite of the serpent began to be utterly staunched from out it; and whatever evil sprung from the motions of the flesh, to be cut away,’ that phrase ‘motions of the flesh’ likely refers in Athanasius’ mind to the sinful inclinations of the soul and body which Jesus cut away at the source, the feat that no one else was able to do. Does this provide us with a genuine and reliable insight into the inner life of Jesus as he battled his fallen human nature? I believe so. It also provides us with a template for growth and personal development. We surely are never going to be consistently victorious as Jesus was. However, we are to draw from and share in his victories through the stages of human development. Even if we do not share the same social context he did, this has some implications, for example, for stage-of-life ministries like youth ministry, adulthood, discernment of ministry and/or leadership, etc. For example, in cultures of misogyny, how did the mature Jesus demonstrate the love of the Father towards women? What might that imply about his internal choices as a younger human being? What is the meaning of Jesus’ personal growth in learning to submit to his mother, a woman who at some point became widowed and single, and who continued to bear the social stigma of having had a questionable pregnancy? How might we better know him who saved us from the sin of misogyny?

The Spirit in Conversion

At this point, we long to ask Athanasius two questions. First, how is the Holy Spirit involved in the life and activity of the soul, and its freedom? Second, how did the Spirit work in the minds of the Hebrew prophets such that they can be sufficiently connected with the mind of God?

Let me start first with humanity generally, and non-Christians in particular. Because of how he describes the soul as ‘mobile’ and possessing ‘her own power’ to seek God, Athanasius has been interpreted as

¹⁴² Athanasius of Alexandria, *Discourses Against the Arians* 2.68

saying that the incarnation was not actually required. Human beings, in this interpretation, can still perceive God through the mind and the soul regardless.¹⁴³ Or, others argue that Athanasius was being ambivalent or inconsistent. But ‘renewed mental communication with God’ – however we conceive of it – would not have been sufficient for Athanasius. Sin, corruption, and death had more devastating results than could be fixed by some type of prayer, however meaningful. Khaled Anatolios, therefore, gives this assessment:

‘Nowhere does Athanasius say that the human being’s inward gaze of contemplation, by which the return to God is facilitated, takes place apart from the grace of Christ. To simply assume that Athanasius means this, and then charge him with inconsistency, seems unjust. What accounts for this assumption has in fact probably less to do with the text itself than with a preconceived framework by which the two sections of the work seem to be understood, perhaps even unconsciously, as *De Natura* and *De Gratia*; or at least as “before and after” the incarnation. However, the distinction of the two parts of the treatise is not such that the first part entirely abstracts from the incarnation. Indeed, the incarnation is even read into the account of creation in the *Contra Gentes*, as when the Word through whom the Father creates, “orders the universe and contains and provides for all things,” is simply identified as “our Lord Jesus Christ.” (CG 47) Similarly, when we read that God can be found by looking into one’s own soul, what we have to understand is not that we can return to God apart from the grace of the incarnation, but rather that, precisely through the incarnation of Christ, the knowledge of God has been renewed within us according to the mysterious working of Him who is “invisibly persuading” (DI 1, 30) even his enemies to acknowledge his Lordship and that of the Father.’¹⁴⁴

As evidence, Anatolios cites this critical passage from Athanasius:

‘For now that the Saviour works so great things among men, and *day by day is invisibly persuading* so great a multitude from every side, both from them that dwell in Greece and in foreign lands, to come over to His faith, and all to obey His teaching, will any one still hold his mind in doubt whether a Resurrection has been accomplished by the Saviour, and whether Christ is alive, or rather is Himself the Life?’¹⁴⁵

Athanasius also says the same thing, notably, at the introduction to both *Against the Heathen* and *On the Incarnation*. ‘He daily invisibly wins over the souls of these gainsayers;’¹⁴⁶ ‘He by His own power demonstrates to be divine... and those who mock and disbelieve invisibly winning over to recognise His divinity and power.’¹⁴⁷ These intriguing statements may strike some Protestant readers as an early version of ‘prevenient grace,’ or it will simply be unfamiliar. But located in Athanasius’ structured cosmology, it takes on more meaning than simply ‘prevenient grace.’ Most Protestants are accustomed to thinking of God in distant, deistic terms as if He were mainly interested in letting human beings prove how sinful they are without Him. Lutherans and Calvinists influenced by the writings of the later Augustine take a phrase like ‘dead in your trespasses and sin’ (Eph.2:1) to mean that humanity has no will or even inclination towards God. That is clearly not how the church for centuries thought about the relationship between God and humanity (all humanity, including non-believers). Athanasius’ thought is quite typical; and Augustine was the much critiqued anomaly.

The question at hand is how is the Savior invisibly persuading all these people? Apparently he maintains a foothold in each person. The apostle Paul identified ‘the conscience’ (Rom.2:12 – 16; cf. 1:19 ‘made it known within them’) as a way God maintains some kind of awareness of Himself in each person. Quite possibly Athanasius was thinking of Paul’s insight in Romans because of the similarity in language: ‘the obedience of faith among all the Gentiles’ (Rom.1:5) sounds somewhat similar to Athanasius’ thought

¹⁴³ Andrew Louth, ‘The Concept of the Soul in Athanasius’s *Contra Gentes–De Incarnatione*,’ *Studia Patristica* 13, 1975, p.227; Johannes Roldanus, *Le Christ et l’Homme dans la Theologie d’Athanasie d’Alexandrie: Étude de la Conjonction de sa Coception de l’Homme avec sa Christologie* (London: E.J. Brill, 1968), p.82 – 84

¹⁴⁴ Anatolios 2005, p.66 – 68

¹⁴⁵ Athanasius of Alexandria, *On the Incarnation* 30.4 emphasis mine

¹⁴⁶ Athanasius of Alexandria, *Against the Heathen* 1.5

¹⁴⁷ Athanasius of Alexandria, *On the Incarnation* 1.2; and also at the end, ‘invisibly exposing each man’s error’ in 53.1

about Greeks and others coming ‘over to His faith... to obey His teaching.’ Indeed, in the very next sentence after his description of the Word ‘invisibly persuading’ the Greeks, Athanasius refers to the ‘consciences of men’ being pricked.¹⁴⁸ Athanasius uses these terms synonymously: to be ‘invisibly persuaded’ is to be ‘pricked in conscience.’

By being our Creator by virtue of being the Word, but becoming human and healing human nature,

‘He transferred our origin into himself, and we may no longer, as mere earth, return to earth, but as being knit into the Word from heaven.’¹⁴⁹

This is a remarkable statement. Athanasius is asserting that there is a connection that is intrinsically maintained between a being and its origin. In our case, we are now drawn to the Word considered not just as eternal Word, but to the incarnate Word in the person of Jesus. Jesus is the source of the ‘invisible persuasion,’ which acts non-mechanically within the person and also grants again ‘power’ and ‘mobility’ to the soul to respond. This ‘invisible persuasion’ was not operative simply by the nearness of God to the people of Israel, nor was it operative by the presence of the Hebrew Scriptures in the world. For in neither case was our human origin transferred from earth to Word. Athanasius’ respect for time and the unfolding of salvation history can be seen here.

The Spirit and Speech

And what is the ‘role’ of the Spirit, if ‘role’ is the proper term to use? This is important to ask because, in Scripture, the Spirit connects the life of Christ with the life of Christians. Athanasius would later formalize in his *Letters to Serapion on the Holy Spirit* that all the activities of God are carried out by the three persons, both in creation and redemption.¹⁵⁰ Hence, the Spirit is just as involved as the Word.

‘There is nothing which is not originated and actuated through the Word in the Spirit.’¹⁵¹

‘The things created through the Word have their vital strength out of the Spirit from the Word.’¹⁵²

In creation before the fall, the Spirit was inherent in the Word, and was present in the human soul to communicate the things of the Word to the soul. In redemption, the Spirit is still inherent in the incarnate Word, of course, and is still present in the human soul to communicate the things of the incarnate Word to the soul. The Spirit involves us in the new humanity of Jesus, and, in Athanasius’ view, *is* the power of the Word to renew the human:

‘The Spirit is the *energeia* of the Son.’¹⁵³

But the energy or power of the Spirit begins in the human being in such a way that respects the temple-structure of the human being, working through and with the human will. The Spirit is present in every person in a preliminary sense, but must be *received* by the person herself. Hence Anatolios’ summary of Athanasius is apt:

‘Indeed, sinful humanity’s incapacity to renew its relation with God by its own powers is but the extension of the principle that the relation between humanity and God, even in the original creation, is wholly initiated and maintained by God. While humanity is enjoined to actively persevere in maintaining its accessibility to this grace, such activity is primarily a perseverance in receptivity. Sin represents a decisive breakdown in this perseverance in receptivity—one that cannot be repaired from the human side precisely because it is this receptivity itself by which humanity has access to the divine activity that is broken by sin. The incarnation thus represents the renewal of the relation between God and humanity in a way that confirms the original structure of

¹⁴⁸ Athanasius of Alexandria, *On the Incarnation* 30.5; see also ‘pricked in conscience’ in 51.6 as proximate with 53.1

¹⁴⁹ Athanasius of Alexandria, *Discourses Against the Arians* 3.33

¹⁵⁰ Athanasius of Alexandria, *Letters to Serapion on the Holy Spirit* 1.11; 1.12; 1.14; 1.19; 1.20

¹⁵¹ *Ibid* 1.31

¹⁵² *Ibid* 3.5

¹⁵³ *Ibid* 1.20; 1.30

the relation, in which there is a correlative emphasis between divine activity and human receptivity to this activity...'¹⁵⁴

This 'receptivity' can take various forms. In his *Letter to Marcellinus* about the Psalms, Athanasius compares singing a well-ordered melodic Psalm to organizing one's soul *according to the indwelling Holy Spirit*:

'But those who do sing as I have indicated, so that the melody of the words springs naturally from the rhythm of the soul and her own union with the Spirit, they sing with the tongue and with the understanding also, and greatly benefit not themselves alone but also those who want to listen to them... To praise God tunefully upon an instrument, such as well-tuned cymbals, cithara, or ten-stringed psaltery, is, as we know, an outward token that the members of the body and the thoughts of the heart are, like the instruments themselves, in proper order and control, all of them together living and moving by the Spirit's cry and breath.'¹⁵⁵

I will consider that in more detail below. In his third *Letter to Serapion on the Holy Spirit*, Athanasius derives meaning from the connection between the Spirit and human words:

'They made their hearts to be disobedient, lest they should hear my law and the words which the Lord of hosts has sent by his Spirit in the hands of the prophets of old [Zechariah 7:19].' And when Christ spoke in Paul – as Paul himself said, 'Seeing that ye seek a proof of Christ that speaketh in me [2 Corinthians 13:3]' – it was, nonetheless, the Spirit that he had bestowing upon him the power of speech.'¹⁵⁶

As the biblical writers in both Old and New Testaments explained their experience, and as Athanasius perceived it, the Spirit provided verbal content ('the words' of the Word) to those who became 'prophets of old.' That message often had ethical content ('my law'), but it was always an appeal by God to the people. And as the human person responds to God through that word, the soul would 'order' itself, perhaps struggling to reorient itself towards the Word of God which it perceives through the words of God provided by the Spirit, and so direct the body. This development fits into the temple-filling paradigm.

Athanasius writes very tellingly in a letter to one of his fellow bishops, Lucifer of Cagliari in Sardinia, who was also known to be a passionate opponent of the Arian heresy. Lucifer had vigorously defended Athanasius and Christological orthodoxy at the Council of Milan in 354 or 355, suffering confinement and then exile at the hands of Emperor Constantius II. Athanasius hears about Lucifer's efforts and fate. Here, he voices his appreciation of his peer by using 'temple' language, mention of the Spirit, and their tie to the other bishop's speech:

'How good and welcome are your exhortations to martyrdom; how highly to be desired have you shown death to be on behalf of Christ the Son of the living God. What love you have shown for the world to come and for the heavenly life. You seem to be *a true temple of the Saviour, Who dwells in you and utters these exact words through you, and has given such grace to your discourses*. Beloved as you were before among all, now such passionate affection for you is settled in the minds of all, that they call you the Elijah of our times; and no wonder. For if they who seem to please God are called Sons of God, much more proper is it to give that name to the associates of the Prophets, namely the Confessors, and especially to you. Believe me, Lucifer, *it is not you only who has uttered this, but the Holy Spirit with you*. Whence comes so great a memory for the Scriptures? Whence an unimpaired sense and understanding of them? Whence has such an order of discourse been framed? Whence did you get such exhortations to the way of heaven, whence such confidence against the devil, and such proofs against heretics, *unless the Holy Spirit had been lodged in you?*'¹⁵⁷

¹⁵⁴ Anatolios 2005, p.66 – 68

¹⁵⁵ Athanasius of Alexandria, *Letter to Marcellinus on the Interpretation of the Psalms* paragraph 30

¹⁵⁶ Athanasius of Alexandria, *Letters to Serapion on the Holy Spirit* 3.5; Athanasius also provides more examples of the Spirit's activity giving rise to human speech: Peter's speech in Acts 1:16; Paul in Philippians 1:19

¹⁵⁷ Athanasius of Alexandria, *Letter 51, Second Letter to Bishop Lucifer*

This remarkable appreciation describes well the pattern we see in Athanasius consistently. There is some kind of relational identity shared between the Lord Jesus ('the Saviour') and the Holy Spirit. This identification occurs in a two-fold way. First, which person of the Trinity has taken up residence in the believer? Both the Son and the Spirit. Athanasius is quite happy to leave this unexplained. Second, the indwelling of the Son and (or via) Spirit in the bishop gives rise to an overflow of godly words: 'exhortations to martyrdom,' 'exact words,' 'grace to discourses,' 'an order of discourse,' 'such exhortations to the way of heaven,' and 'proofs against heretics.' Athanasius perceives the Holy Spirit as impacting and shaping the other bishop's mind, such that Lucifer has 'so great a memory for the Scriptures' and 'an unimpaired sense and understanding of them.' Athanasius credits Lucifer with being justly called 'the Elijah of our times.' Surely, the bishop of Cagliari spent much time in study and prayer, probably in a spiritual regimen with which Athanasius himself would have been very familiar. But for Athanasius, this human effort would not at all have ruled out the potency and effect of the Holy Spirit. The studious bishop and the Holy Spirit utter the same thing, simultaneously: 'if it not you only who has uttered this, but the Holy Spirit with you.' There is an overlap of agency, as the two share a non-competitive relation when it comes to internalizing the word and wisdom of the Scriptures. Notably, when Athanasius wants to deploy an image by which God's life and truth radiate outward to describe the power of the speech pouring forth from Lucifer's mind and mouth, he calls upon the *temple* image. That which houses God, God fills to overflowing.

I will examine below Athanasius' pastoral biography, *Life of Antony*, to show that Athanasius continued to understand the soul and body as operating this way, and how the Holy Spirit interacts with the human soul, as shown in his characterization of the inspiring Egyptian monk. It is when Athanasius uniquely describes Antony as 'filled with the Spirit of God' after twenty years of solitude and spiritual training, overcoming various temptations,¹⁵⁸ that Antony then delivers the five remarkable speeches that make up the bulk of the book. As I will show, this and other statements of Athanasius fully comport with the connection made in Scripture between being 'filled with the Spirit' and 'speaking' (e.g. Eph.5:18 – 20) out of that 'which fills the heart' (Lk.6:49) to overflowing.

To Athanasius, the apostolic kerygma (preaching about Jesus) itself has some kind of divine power. Athanasius saw great significance in biblical cosmology and thus, spiritual warfare. In this passage below, Athanasius speaks of Jesus 'undeceiving *all*' human beings. The use of the past tense in conjunction with the word 'all' can be interpreted as 'universalism,' as some have suggested from other places where Athanasius speaks this way. However, notice how Athanasius speaks of 'show[ing] Himself everywhere' not in the sense of being physically and personally present in every location of the earth, but in every *category* of location. Athanasius speaks of the Word being present in the heavens (i.e. night sky), then in exorcisms that demonstrate the Word's power over demons, then in miracles that demonstrate the Word's power over waters, then in the confessed victory of Jesus in Hades demonstrating the Word's power over death. All this, Athanasius infers, constitutes touching '*all* parts of creation,' and the liberation of '*all* of them from every illusion.' Here is the passage in full:

'1. Consistently, therefore, the Word of God took a body and has made use of a human instrument, in order to quicken the body also, and as He is known in creation by His works so to work in man as well, and to show Himself everywhere, leaving nothing void of His own divinity, and of the knowledge of Him. 2. For I resume, and repeat what I said before, that the Saviour did this in order that, as He fills all things on all sides by His presence, so also He might fill all things with the knowledge of Him, as the divine Scripture also says: 'The whole earth was filled with the knowledge of the Lord [Isaiah 11:9].' 3. For if a man will but look up to heaven, he sees its Order, or if he cannot raise his face to heaven, but only to man, he sees His power, beyond comparison with that of men, shown by His works, and learns that He alone among men is God the Word. Or if a man is gone astray among demons, and is in fear of them, he may see this man drive them out, and make up his mind that He is their Master. Or if a man has sunk to the waters, and thinks that they are God—as the Egyptians, for instance, reverence the water—he may see its nature changed by Him, and learn that the Lord is Creator of the waters. 4. But if a man is gone down even to

¹⁵⁸ Athanasius of Alexandria, *Life of Antony* 14

Hades, and stands in awe of the heroes who have descended there, regarding them as gods, yet he may see the fact of Christ's Resurrection and victory over death, and infer that among them also Christ alone is true God and Lord. 5. For the Lord touched all parts of creation, and freed and undeceived all of them from every illusion; as Paul says: 'Having put off from Himself the principalities and the powers, He triumphed on the Cross [Colossians 2:15]': that no one might by any possibility be any longer deceived, but everywhere might find the true Word of God. 6. For thus man, shut in on every side, and beholding the divinity of the Word unfolded everywhere, that is, in heaven, in Hades, in man, upon earth, is no longer exposed to deceit concerning God, but is to worship Christ alone, and through Him come rightly to know the Father. 7. By these arguments, then, on grounds of reason, the Gentiles in their turn will fairly be put to shame by us. But if they deem the arguments insufficient to shame them, let them be assured of what we are saying at any rate by facts obvious to the sight of all.'¹⁵⁹

Athanasius believes that preaching about Christ is invested with spiritual power. As I said earlier, the Alexandrian bishop believes that the words of the Word have power because they are accompanied by the Spirit. It is certainly not the case that Jesus will appear bodily to do water-transforming miracles once again, just to show that he still has power over the elements. Nor will he descend again to Hades, just to show that he still has power over death. Those events are historical and known by *narration*. They are preached and proclaimed as facts that accompany the overall message of the incarnate Word.

This passage strongly suggests that Athanasius believed the ministry of the Word is inseparable from the ministry of *the word* of the Word. That is, the earth being filled with the knowledge of the Lord, as prophesied by Isaiah, *is* filled to the full by the message about the Word who became incarnate in Jesus going forward throughout the planet. If human beings can 'behold the divinity of the Word unfolded everywhere,' it is not because Jesus physically and personally appears 'everywhere.' The achievement of the Word in his incarnate mission by the Spirit was to accomplish something in relation to the *categories* of creation, or experiences of life, in which we as human beings find ourselves. A primary outworking of the incarnate Word's achievement involves his disciples repeating this story of Jesus as a history, as 'arguments, on grounds of reason' and 'facts obvious to the sight of all.' For the Spirit continues to inhabit the words of the Word. The Spirit empowers them to have the effect the Word intended. Or, equivalently, the Spirit empowers the Word to save and heal human beings by repeating the word he spoke.

Athanasius appears to share the same understanding of the Spirit and word as the apostle John. John writes in such a way to indicate that the Spirit inheres in the words spoken by Jesus. Here is one example: 'For he whom God has sent speaks the words of God; for he gives the Spirit without measure' (Jn.3:34). This statement is placed on the lips of John the Baptist. He contrasts himself and Jesus, and this seems to accompany the Baptist's understanding of Spirit-baptism which comes from earlier in the narrative. The one who gives the Spirit of God also speaks the words of God. The statement also serves to preface Jesus' conversation with the Samaritan woman. Her internalization of Jesus' word – that he is the Messiah who knows her and engaged with her in a uniquely personal way – seems to prefigure the outpouring of the Spirit; the water motif is linked to the Spirit throughout John's Gospel; also, the woman herself is portrayed by her own water jar, an emblem of her previously porous life, which she then puts down and leaves behind when she becomes a proclaimer of words and a testifier to Jesus in her village. The woman's reception of Jesus as the source of 'spirit and truth' is linked to the Spirit and the word of Jesus which he *personalized* to her. Her jar complements the six stone jars of the wedding at Cana, which were filled to overflowing (Jn.2:1 – 11). Through literary motifs, John linked the stone jars to the stone Temple in Jerusalem (Jn.2:12 – 25) which Jesus filled to overflowing.

Another Johannine statement links Spirit and word as an overflowing of the linking of Spirit and Word: 'It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh profits nothing; the words that I have spoken to you are spirit and are life' (Jn.6:63). Athanasius quotes part of this verse ('the words that I have spoken to you') in his second *Discourse Against the Arians* 39. 'Such words accordingly the Saviour signifies to be distinct from Himself [as *the Word*].' Here, he simply makes the observation against the Arians about biblical interpretation, that the words Jesus spoke are distinct from his identity as Word; he is the speaker of all

¹⁵⁹ Athanasius of Alexandria, *On the Incarnation* 45.5

those words. This is important to his argument insofar as the Arians wanted to regard ‘ordinary’ words from God – in the sense of *utterances* and *pronouncements* God made at certain historical moments – as ‘creations’ of God.¹⁶⁰

For the apostle John, however, Jesus’ statement has more significance. Jesus said this in order to qualify or explain his previous eucharist-like statement. He had said that people, to receive the eternal life he offers, must eat and drink his body and blood (Jn.6:48 – 58). This jarring statement naturally provoked ‘difficulty’ and ‘grumbling’ (Jn.6:60 – 61). But like many statements in John’s Gospel, the dictum operates with a double entendre. Jesus explains what he means by referring ‘flesh and blood’ to ‘Spirit and word.’ The truth of his incarnation is vitally important, but it is not his physical human flesh that must be consumed in some cannibalistic ritual. Rather, it is the Spirit, who takes of the union of divine and human natures in the person of Jesus, who overflows Jesus through his spoken words, and comes into other human beings as food and drink on a different plane of human need. John, the author of the Gospel, is shaped by Jesus’ statements about the apostolic commission. For him, the Spirit is personally involved in the disciples testifying about Jesus: ‘The Spirit of truth who proceeds from the Father, he will testify about me, and you will testify also’ (Jn.15:26 – 27). For him, this is part of the human character of the now incarnate Word. It is characteristic of the incarnate Word communicating as a human being. As the apostle John records Jesus praying to the Father on behalf of the disciples *as distinct* from the rest of the world, ‘The *words* which You have given me, I have given them... I have given them Your *word*... Sanctify them in the truth; Your *word* is truth’ (Jn.17:8, 14, 17). Not without reason does Luke call Christians ‘servants of the word’ (Lk.1:2) – ‘word’ not in the sense of ‘Word’ the eternal Logos, although he would not disagree with that either, but the particular teaching and peculiar narrative of Jesus of Nazareth rendered into human words.

As Athanasius interprets this inheritance of the word of the Word from John and Luke, he deploys the temple-filling pattern within which the human being exists, and even within which the human mind operates. First, the Word – by virtue of being our creator and sustainer – means that he acts upon us to save us from corruption, death, and non-existence. In a sense, the incarnate Word establishes the ‘frame’ of our humanity, the outer part of our temple structure. With what and how is our frame filled? Thus, second, within the body-soul structure of the human being, there is a conceptual claim about the Word incarnate with which each human person must interact. The Word who is creator manifests himself as the incarnate Word and relates to us as a human being and in a human manner. That is, he communicates to us as a human being conveying specific conceptual and rationally understandable content about himself, which is simultaneously his claim upon us. How each person responds to his verbally expressed self-identification, which is simultaneously his expressed claim upon us, affects how we experience the reality which is true in Jesus himself and in us because of him. This is most evident in Athanasius’ writings in his *Third Festal Letter*, which I examine below, when he speaks of the fires of hell in the context of discussing a negative response to the *words* of God.

Varied human responses to the *words* of the Word also gives rise to a diverse church. As Brakke notes, Athanasius creatively used the parable of the sower, the seed, and the four soils (Mt.13:1 – 8) with the word bringing forth varied crops of thirty, sixty, and a hundred fold to reflect how ‘human beings have chosen for themselves’ various marital or single vocations: producing a crop of thirty-fold and sixty-fold refers to being married in a godly way; producing a crop of a hundred-fold refers to taking a vow of chastity:

‘Now, it produces fruits that differ from one another so as to make manifest the zeal of free will and progress. Wherever there is free will, there is inferiority. And this is nothing other than a

¹⁶⁰ Athanasius of Alexandria, *Discourses Against the Arians* 2.39, ‘For where at all have they found in divine Scripture, or from whom have they heard, that there is another Word and another Wisdom besides this Son, that they should frame to themselves such a doctrine? True, indeed, it is written, ‘Are not My words like fire, and like a hammer that breaks the rock in pieces [Jeremiah 23:29]?’ and in the Proverbs, ‘I will make known My words unto you [Proverbs 1:23];’ but these are precepts and commands, which God has spoken to the saints through His proper and only true Word, concerning which the Psalmist said, ‘I have refrained my feet from every evil way, that I may keep Your words [Psalm 119:101].’ Such words accordingly the Saviour signifies to be distinct from Himself, when He says in His own person, ‘The words which I have spoken unto you [John 6:63].’ For certainly such words are not offsprings or sons, nor are there so many words that frame the world, nor so many images of the One God, nor so many who have become men for us, nor as if from many such there were one who has become flesh, as John says; but as being the only Word of God was He preached by John, ‘The Word was made flesh [John 1:14],’ and ‘all things were made by Him [John 1:3].’

revelation that humanity is free and under its own power, having the capacity to choose for itself what it wants.’¹⁶¹

‘And further, when the word is sown it does not yield a uniform produce of fruit in this human life, but one various and rich; for it brings forth, some an hundred, and some sixty, and some thirty, as the Saviour teaches— that Sower of grace, and Bestower of the Spirit. And this is no doubtful matter, nor one that admits no confirmation; but it is in our power to behold the field which is sown by Him; for in the Church the word is manifold and the produce rich. Not with virgins alone is such a field adorned; nor with monks alone, but also with honourable matrimony and the chastity of each one. For in sowing, He did not compel the will beyond the power. Nor is mercy confined to the perfect, but it is sent down also among those who occupy the middle and the third ranks, so that He might rescue all men generally to salvation.’¹⁶²

Athanasius also used the parable of the talents/minas (Mt.25:14 – 30; Lk.19:11 – 27) in like manner, as I will examine below. However much we might fault Athanasius for being overly creative with these parables per se, we see the consistency in his overall paradigm. Human choices alone explain the difference in crop yield or financial return. God wants the field, or the return, to be full. This would seem to be the same type of paradigm that the apostle Paul used to describe the Corinthians. He used the images of the field in cultivation and the temple building being built, calling himself and the apostles ‘God’s fellow workers’ (1 Cor.3:6 – 17). Our human responses of receiving Christian teaching (1 Cor.3:1 – 2) are measurable, ultimately, against Jesus himself, but against his teaching in a derivative sense. Hence, in his *Tenth Festal Letter*, when he refers to the parable of the sower, the bishop explicitly equates ‘the Saviour [who] teaches’ with his identity as ‘Bestower of the Spirit.’ By 338 AD, in a very practical, pastoral context, Athanasius already offers an explanation of *word* and Spirit, rooted ostensibly in the union of *Word* and Spirit from which the former issues forth.

The Spirit, Speech, and Human Receptivity

Moreover, Athanasius’ interest in teaching about responsiveness to the proclaimed word of Christian teaching fits with his view of the human being as articulated in *Against the Heathen*. The human being is a body-soul union with the mind in the uppermost part of the soul, as well as his apparent view of Jesus as a human being as a body-soul union who pressed his own word more deeply, progressively, into his own humanity, by the Spirit. Not only would this mean that we are exposed to more and more content in a quantitative way, but also, in our human minds, the conceptual meaning of the words given to us by Jesus take on more and more qualitative meaning as they fill out our experience. As Athanasius infers obliquely in *On the Incarnation* and more clearly in his later writings, this happens ‘by the Spirit.’ Therefore, returning to his theological anthropology, in the body-soul union of the human being, the soul mediates the knowledge of God by receiving the words of the Word. And the Spirit of God suffuses those words to deliver not just conceptual information but the living presence of God. Jesus spoke precisely to ‘fill’ human beings with his Spirit, and fill us to overflowing.

We interact with the resurrected and ascended Lord Jesus through the words of his narrative biography. And the way in which Jesus placed his words in his own narrative is significant. For example, it seems to me that Jesus gave his ‘great commission’ to his disciples only after his death and resurrection because only by his death and resurrection did Jesus finally and ultimately achieve victory over the corrupted aspect of his humanity which had not been fully for others. If that is the case, then that which Jesus proclaimed to us was based on his own progression personally. When we preach ‘the great commission,’ we must not separate it from the human story of Jesus and the major inflection points he carried out with regard to his own human nature.

The Epistles, for their various pastoral purposes, demonstrate that the Spirit flexibly draws our attention to particular moments of Jesus’ biography: his eternal relationship as Son with his Father in the Spirit (1 Jn.4:8 – 16); his work as creator of the cosmos (Col.1:15 – 18); his covenant relation with Israel and

¹⁶¹ Athanasius of Alexandria, *First Letter to Virgins* 20, 23 (see Brakke, p.48ff., 280ff.)

¹⁶² Athanasius of Alexandria, *Tenth Festal Letter* 4

presence with them (1 Cor.10:1 – 13; Jude 1:5¹⁶³); his incarnation (2 Cor.8:9; Phil.2:5ff.); his lifelong struggle against temptation (Heb.4:14 – 5:10); his transfiguration (2 Pet.1:16 – 18); his death as a victory over his own flesh (Rom.6:1 – 11; 8:3 – 4; 1 Cor.5:1 – 13; Eph.1:6; Col.2:12); his death as fulfillment of the Sinai covenant (Rom.7:1 – 8:4; Gal.3:6 – 4:7; Heb.8 – 9); his death as victorious exposure of the rulers and principalities (1 Cor.1:18 – 2:5; Col.2:11 – 15); his resurrection (1 Cor.15; 2 Cor.4 – 5; 1 Jn.3:2 – 3); his ascension and present mediation (Eph.1:21 – 23; Heb.8:1 – 5). The changes that then happen in us – in our desires especially, as we will see below in the last portion of Athanasius' *On the Incarnation*, and even the physiological changes in our brain as neuroscience describes – are the 'firstfruits' in our humanity of our co-working partnership with God. The 'words' of the Word, which Jesus called us to continue obeying, abide within, and keep (Jn.8:31; 14:23; 15:7; 17:8, 14, 17), which the Spirit then uses, are not simply his ethical teaching, nor is it the doctrine of the Trinity in seed form, but rather the entirety of his own narrative as the eternal Son of God made incarnate as a new Adam, new Israel, and new David who grew in stature and returned his human nature back to the Father, all by the Spirit.

To render my position in Christological terms, if Jesus is a new Adam, then just as Adam contained within himself the material for all genetic variation subsequently, so Jesus contains within himself all the material for all the variation for his renewed people, which is infinitely vast because he is the creator who became incarnate (Jn.1:3). If Jesus is a new Israel, then just as Israel contained within himself the vocations of twelve or thirteen tribes (depending on how we count), so Jesus contains within himself all the various vocations of his people. If Jesus is a new Moses, or mediator of the new covenant, then he contains all the words needed to represent each person to the Father. If Jesus is a new David, then just as David contained within himself the songs and praises with which he led his people in worship, so Jesus contains within himself not just one human response but all human responses to the Father. The Council of Chalcedon (451 AD) was important for excluding heresy, but the problem with over-reliance on the Chalcedonian Definition for pastoral purposes, in my opinion, is that it abstracts Jesus' humanity into a 'generic' humanity. T.F. Torrance pointed this out in terms of the debate about whether Jesus assumed a fallen versus pre-fallen humanity. I would add to this that over-reliance on Chalcedon abstracts Jesus' humanity out from his vocation in the story of Israel *as a covenantal human person*. It does appear that the figures of Adam, Jacob/Israel, Moses, and David were particular covenantal persons in whom *words* were specially 'stored up.' Adam is associated with the naming of creation (Gen.2:19 – 20); Jacob spoke words of prophetic blessing upon his twelve sons (Gen.49); Moses spoke words of mediation on behalf of Israel to maintain the covenant (Ex.32:30 – 33:23). David is connected to the Book of Psalms as the worship leader par excellence. For Jesus to renew, surpass, and fill to the full those figures means something about his own humanity, or role as an emblematic human being, that makes him *unlike* other human beings. His humanity is our humanity *ontologically*, but his humanity is *larger* than our humanity *vocationally* because it is the humanity of the Word. Central to this observation is the connection between being the human partner with God in the formation of a covenant and being the bearer of words.

The imminent Trinity informs the economic Trinity on the nature of Jesus' humanity as well. To the extent that we can say something about the imminent Trinity, prior to creation and space-time, I think the apostle John leads us to say that the Son experienced the love of the Father in the Spirit (or, perhaps, who is the Spirit?) filling him and overflowing him (Jn.1:3; 17:5). In the economic Trinity, denoting God in His commitment to space-time for humanity's sake as a context for love and relationship, the Son still experiences the love of the Father in the Spirit filling him and overflowing him, of course, but he involves his humanity in the experience. This is why I believe it is preferable to say that the humanity of Jesus is not a static 'thing.' He is human and always will be henceforth. But because of Jesus' personal experience, the definition of what it means to be 'human' must itself correspond to the revelation of Jesus' divine-human experience as mediator between the infinite God of love and every single human being who has come into existence, in God's ever-deepening love. Because of our participation in the ever-filled-and-overflowing humanity of the Son, we are and will be growing infinitely. We will certainly never outpace Jesus in his own humanity, as our human experience of divine love and divine words will only be a fraction of his. But it is quite possible to conceive of each person's pace as reflective of her or his willingness to receive more life and love from Jesus, according to our own choices.

¹⁶³ Jude 1:5 reads, 'Now I desire to remind you, though you know all things once for all, that the Lord [some manuscripts read 'Jesus'], after saving a people out of the land of Egypt, subsequently destroyed those who did not believe.'

The spiritual growth of the Christian, then, is *both* a participation in the person of Jesus Christ *and* a co-working (*synergia*) with his Spirit in our humanity. Although some in the Barthian camp would criticize the Eastern Orthodox belief in synergism as collapsing a necessary dialectic, or limiting God's faithfulness to the faithfulness of Christians, and argue for only speaking of a 'participation' in that humanity which is already objectively established in Christ, I am not certain these are mutually exclusive. Athanasius, for instance, seems to operate with a framework that holds both together, and I am plumbing the question of why he does so. Synergism does not limit God's faithfulness to the faithfulness of Christians, because the experience of every human being will be infinitely progressive, simply because of the reality that we are finite beings relating to the infinite God in deep, personal love. It is even possible, and in my view preferable, to say that the humanity of Jesus is not static: Even the incarnate Jesus, that is to say, his humanity, will undergo evermore a constant enriching, deepening, transfiguring, filling and overflowing, because of his relation to the Father and also his relation to us, as the source of our life, and the source of the words of the eternal conversation between ourselves and God.

This is why *synergia* does not, in fact, limit God's faithfulness to the faithfulness of Christians. Judgment day and all that will be revealed at that point, and just as significantly, all eternity, are still to come. They loom ahead like a vast and glorious expanse. In them, too, God will act faithfully according to His loving purposes, in and through human beings. Moreover, this is why participation in Jesus' humanity and Jesus' own subjectivity does not require us to speak in ways that draw attention away from ourselves and our own spiritual progress, in this life, here on earth. There is an objective reality (of human subjectivity) in which we participate presently, into which our subjective experience is drawn up, even while it remains our subjective experience. For how else could we even conceive of Jesus' human experience in ever-deepening love and mediation unless we had some experience of deepening love ourselves? All human experience is a progressive experience of God in the Spirit.

Based on readings of Scripture and Athanasius like this, it appears to me that Douglas Farrow was right to raise his concern that Barth and Torrance leave less room for the Holy Spirit. Their Logos Christology crowds out an aspect of a Spirit Christology which was present in early patristic theology, and implicitly operating in the formation of the Epistles. Barth's Christ-actualist understanding of sanctification, which announces that all human development is already completed in Christ, and which might assert that Christ's subjective experience serves to eclipse our subjective experience rather than interpenetrate it and empower it, downplays the way in which even the risen Jesus in his humanity is not 'finished.' Jesus' saying from the cross, 'It is finished,' regards sin. But Jesus in his humanity is never 'finished.' For to be 'human' is to be intrinsically mediatorial and relational, for Christ if the Epistle to the Hebrews is to be believed, and for humanity in a derivative sense.¹⁶⁴ Moreover, Jesus, precisely because he understands each person's personal development, now speaks to each of us by his Spirit as a human with human content and in a human manner from moments and themes from his human autobiography, filling us with the words and teaching which now overflow him personally. How else can we explain the variety of ways that the Spirit spoke to the churches through the apostles, with the varying styles and personalities and levels of human intelligence of the apostles themselves, but also with the way that different apostles drew from different periods of Jesus' life, as well as different words from Jesus' corpus of spoken words, to deal with the very same issues in the lives of the churches?

If I am reading him correctly, Athanasius might express reservations that Barth's Christ-actualism runs the risk of making Jesus' humanity a static 'thing' and lessening the significance of the human speech of the Word in an attempt to elevate the Word himself. On the one hand, Barth seemed to make this move to make Jesus Christ the absolute center of God's revelation, relativizing the church as a steward of God's revelation in an unfolding sense, to the great consternation of Roman Catholics like Farrow. However, since Paul confesses to giving words in 1 Corinthians 7:12 and 7:25 which lay outside the known repository of words from Jesus, this would seem to present a puzzle. Apparently the Spirit can inspire an utterance that Jesus did not teach per se. In this case, that utterance is logically deducible from what the Word

¹⁶⁴ E.g. Andrew Murray, *The Holiest of All* (Springdale: Whitaker House, 1996), p.48 says, 'As Priest He effected the cleansing of sins here below; as Priest-King He sits on the right hand of the throne to apply His work, in heavenly power to dispense its blessings, and maintain within us the heavenly life.' Cited by

incarnate said, as a matter of extending and/or contextualizing points Jesus taught. But it nevertheless raises a question: In what sense can the Spirit give a word that the Word did not? If the Spirit inheres in the Word, and vice versa, then the Spirit must inhere in the words of the Word, and the Word must inhere in the words of the Spirit. For only one's doctrine of the Holy Spirit can explain this particular instance in the ministry of Paul, where Paul himself *progressed* in his role as an apostolic teacher, and claimed the authority of the Spirit to do so (1 Cor.7:40). But if there is a *progression* of words spoken by the Spirit, even if we (following Protestant convictions) limit that progression to the apostles, then we are still in the presence of a *progression* of doctrinal content after Jesus' earthly ministry and ascension. And if there is a progression of doctrinal content, then it is unclear how Barth's Christ-actualism accounts for it. I am uncertain of how Barth or Torrance explain Paul's apostolic prerogative by the Spirit to develop authoritative Christian teaching beyond what Jesus said historically. Which is not to say that they did not address it, or had no explanation for it, simply to say that I am ignorant of it.

Said a different way, Barth's actualism also has some tendency to elevate the person of the Word at the expense of his spoken words, and/or at the expense of the possibility that he continues to speak words. That is, it tends to reduce the meaning of the name 'Jesus of Nazareth' down to the Chalcedonian dogma of the union of divine and human natures in one person (i.e. the 'hypostatic union') rather than maintain the historical narrative of the pre-incarnate Word in the story of Israel, the covenantal representative as that role functioned in Israel's story, and the incarnate Word as recorded in the Gospels and recalled in summaries in the Epistles, which the dogma helps us to understand, but does not displace. The Word became incarnate not to heal our humanity in silence, but to be a covenant representative in the mode Israel understood, and to be a preacher in the mode of a Hebrew prophet and itinerant Jewish rabbi. Here, Adolf Harnack's accusation of 'Hellenization' as the de-Judaizing of Christianity might have some validity, but in a way unexpected by both Harnack and his critics. In my view, since Jesus' humanity is theologically *larger* than our humanity because it is the humanity of the creating and speaking Word – as he must encompass both genders, all giftedness, all vocations, all mystical experiences of God, etc., which Athanasius did recognize – therefore his subjectivity (human response to the Father) cannot function in such a way so as to replace or diminish our own subjectivity, but rather must include and dignify ours, drawing us up into the great height into which we are ascending in the Spirit *by conversation with him*. If, by contrast, we were simply to neglect the verbal explanation of Jesus' crucified, risen, and ascended humanity as our humanity, it seems to me that we would lose something of the human character of the incarnate Word in his historic and varied interactions, and his verbal communication with us in our conceptual register, and thereby diminish our understanding of the rich personality of the Holy Spirit.

Athanasius' Invitation to Conversion

Indeed, in *On the Incarnation*, there is only one reference to the Holy Spirit, and that in the closing sentence. Except for this conclusion, Athanasius seems to minimize the Father-Son-Spirit language in order to make this more of an evangelistic tract, accompanying his first volume.

'For just as, if a man wished to see the light of the sun, he would at any rate wipe and brighten his eye, purifying himself in some sort like what he desires, so that the eye, thus becoming light, may see the light of the sun; or as, if a man would see a city or country, he at any rate comes to the place to see it—thus he that would comprehend the mind of those who speak of God must needs begin by washing and cleansing his soul, by his manner of living, and approach the saints themselves by imitating their works; so that, associated with them in the conduct of a common life, he may understand also what has been revealed to them by God, and thenceforth, as closely knit to them, may escape the peril of the sinners and their fire at the day of judgment, and receive what is laid up for the saints in the kingdom of heaven, which 'eye has not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man' [1 Corinthians 2:9], whatsoever things are prepared for them that live a virtuous life, and love the God and Father, in Christ Jesus our Lord: through Whom and with Whom be to the Father Himself, with the Son Himself, in the Holy Spirit, honour and might and glory for ever and ever. Amen.'¹⁶⁵

¹⁶⁵ Athanasius of Alexandria, *On the Incarnation* 57.3

Clearly, Athanasius is not deploying a formal Christian argument about the Holy Spirit with either biblical or technical theological terms. Instead, he is content to use philosophical and indeed, experiential, language woven into a biblical citation. This is consistent with his stated mission in writing his two volume work. He does believe that some kind of corresponding washing and cleansing of the soul, including the mind, and also the body ('his manner of living') is vital.

Athanasius is making a pastoral and evangelistic appeal. To the ears of any Protestant evangelical who stands in the Lutheran and Reformed traditions and its deep skepticism of 'works' prior to 'faith,' and sometimes even 'works' in conjunction with 'faith,' Athanasius' admonition triggers alarm bells. At the very least, many Protestant evangelicals might reason, a Christian relating to a non-Christian should follow an order of topics: evangelism with a 'gospel presentation,' conversion, discipleship, and then Christian ethics. Why does Athanasius introduce Christian ethics earlier, and foreground it as part of evangelism and conversion?

Seen in the context of what Athanasius has already said about the soul mediating the knowledge of God, and even the life of God, in some sense, to the body, this makes quite a bit of good sense. He is arguing that one's experience of God and inclination to regard the Christian message is actually dependent on one's willingness to change one's posture and take a few steps of purification, at the very least to appreciate what Jesus himself went through. Especially in the context of idolatry and all the behaviors that Greco-Roman idolatry called for, it is not unreasonable to ask someone to take a few steps towards (say) sobriety and clear-headedness to think more clearly, or sexual restraint to observe the actual state of one's relationships and one's inner emotional life. To locate the same principle in more modern concerns, you don't understand dieting or exercising until you have basic sense for how much self-discipline is involved. The same is true with appreciating Jesus: You don't understand what Jesus' experience uniting human nature to the Father was like until you try it yourself. Certainly the history of the people of Israel can be read that way: God asked them to receive His commandments, which were not even ultimate but penultimate, and they still could not do that; yet this experience helped them appreciate their need for the promised Messiah and what that Messiah had to do on their behalf. Athanasius' unspoken expectation is probably that once a person enters a place of deeper self-awareness, more desires will awaken or grow which will lead them to want more of the substance to which the Christian faith points. It is in that context that Athanasius speaks of 'honour and might and glory' which is now and will continue to be rendered 'to the Father Himself, with the Son Himself, in the Holy Spirit.' Further exploration of Athanasius' writing will affirm that he means that we participate with the Son in the Spirit, to the Father. But Athanasius will have an explanation for why a person has desires that awaken or grow like this. In the soul, and especially the soul of an unbeliever, the Holy Spirit never totally withdraws. Since the human person is a temple-person, the presence of the Spirit in the person's soul is a light that refuses to go out.

What emotional responses is Athanasius hoping to stimulate in his readers? This is an important question because it bears on the pastoral voice. I believe that the emotional responses that Athanasius is hoping to cultivate in his readers correspond to the content of his discourse. First, he is trying to stimulate in his audience an emotional longing and nostalgia for what human beings lost in the fall. Athanasius wanted his readers to mourn the loss of the human soul's connection with God and the resulting moral, spiritual, and emotional malaise that set in. Here is a comparison of the emotional state of the soul under conditions of, first, contemplating God, and second, contemplating the pleasures of the body. Here is Athanasius' account of a person's emotional experience as one's soul contemplates God:

'...he might rejoice and have fellowship with the Deity... He is awe-struck as he contemplates...'¹⁶⁶

'...taking pleasure in contemplating Him, and gaining renewal by its desire toward Him...'¹⁶⁷

¹⁶⁶ Athanasius of Alexandria, *Against the Heathen* 2.2

¹⁶⁷ *Ibid* 2.3

‘...in a freedom unembarrassed by shame, and as associating with the holy ones in that contemplation of things perceived by the mind which he enjoyed in the place where he was...’¹⁶⁸

Here is the soul as it turned self-ward to contemplate the pleasures of the body:

‘They entangled their soul with bodily pleasures, vexed and turbid with all kind of lusts, while they wholly forgot the power they originally had from God...’¹⁶⁹

‘Having formed a desire for each and sundry, they began to be habituated to these desires, so that they were even afraid to leave them: whence the soul became subject to cowardice and alarms, and pleasures and thoughts of mortality. For not being willing to leave her lusts, she fears death and her separation from the body. But again, from lusting, and not meeting with gratification, she learned to commit murder and wrong.’¹⁷⁰

To what extent Athanasius’ evangelistic and pastoral goals are dependent on a shared Hellenistic culture which took for granted the existence of the human soul, and a certain conception of it, I cannot be sure. I think the question of the existence of the human soul is not a dead issue today; Athanasius’ theological anthropology seems fairly reasonable as a description of modern human life. Also, it is worth noting that Athanasius’ paradigm does *not* seem to reflect a Stoic detached approach to human emotions, although that can be a matter for further scholarly debate (which must also include, of course, what the apostolic writers believed about Stoic and other Greek philosophies).¹⁷¹ Athanasius seems more interested to locate the proper cause and object of human joy, delight, and pleasure than to deny those emotions altogether. Furthermore, Athanasius is also trying to engage a Jewish audience,¹⁷² not just Greek, as shown by his commentary on the Jewish Scriptures and Jewish story. This is strongly suggested by the fact that Athanasius quotes frequently from the *Wisdom of Solomon*, an extracanonical Jewish work that *critiques* Hellenism, perhaps Epicureanism and Stoicism especially, in its own way.¹⁷³ Athanasius apparently believes his portrait of the soul at an equilibrium of rest in God, and taking joy in God, compared to the disorder of the soul restless in sin, is inherently attractive, and broadly so.

This cultivation of emotional self-awareness and emotional health must be included as part of Athanasius’ overall definition of sanctification. He is not only concerned about the moral and ethical quality of people’s lives, although that certainly does concern him. He is quite interested in the quality of people’s emotions and desires: joy, being awe-struck, pleasure, and experiencing a freedom unembarrassed by shame. He believes that desires can be shaped, oriented, and cultivated in a partnership between the human being and God. And being filled with right desire – that is, *orthopathy* – is a mark of developing as individual temples of God. It is, in Athanasius’ mind, as we shall continue to see, a mark of our participation in Christ because it is a participation in what the incarnate Word actually did in his lived experience as a human being.

Second, Athanasius seems to be aiming for an intellectual conviction that a good God can only be maintained in Christian faith.¹⁷⁴ He does not take for granted that his readers believe in a good God, but he does assume they want to, and to understand how a good God is possible given human evil. The longing of the human mind and heart for a good, trustworthy God is something to which Athanasius believes he can appeal.

Third, Athanasius wants his readers to come to admire God for His goodness and love. He does not want his readers to feel ‘indebted’ to God. So even though he produces very fine expositions of the death of Christ, he does so in a way that stresses *who* died on the cross, i.e. the Word of God, not how much

¹⁶⁸ Ibid 2.4

¹⁶⁹ Ibid 3.2

¹⁷⁰ Ibid 3.4

¹⁷¹ See especially the excellent work by C. Kavin Rowe, *One True Life: The Stoics and Early Christians as Rival Traditions* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2016), ch.8 – 9 on how semantic similarities do not lead anywhere near conceptual agreement

¹⁷² Athanasius of Alexandria, 45.4; 46.1 – 4; *On the Incarnation* 22 – 25

¹⁷³ N.T. Wright, *Paul and the Faithfulness of God, Parts 1 and 2* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2013), p.238 – 243

¹⁷⁴ Athanasius of Alexandria, *Against the Heathen* 6 – 9

physical or spiritual pain he endured, what Jesus' social conditions surrounding his death meant for him emotionally, and so on. And because Athanasius does not believe in a penal substitutionary account of Jesus' death, he is not trying to produce the corresponding emotions that belong to that theory: guilt, relief, gratitude for the sacrifice, indebtedness. He wants to help people appreciate the sheer goodness of God, and the atonement is a reflection of that goodness. But Athanasius is not trying to call forth an emotional response to the atonement per se, but rather God considered as God.

Fourth, Athanasius wants his readers to know and experience this God through His Word. In other writings, he will make clear that he also means, 'and His Spirit.' There is much more to knowing God than knowing rational content, but Athanasius' stress on the Word, and the Scriptures in a subordinate sense, as something to be mediated to the soul and through the soul to the body, make clear that he views 'the healing of creation'¹⁷⁵ as the restoration of true contemplation of God: 'taking pleasure in contemplating Him, and gaining renewal by its desire toward Him.'¹⁷⁶ Athanasius believes that we are to grow in our desire for God, admiration for God, joy that this good God can be known and communicated and shared, and longing to be the human being God intended. And if these emotions are developmental and not static, progressively filling us, then this confirms that we are indeed temples in whom Christ dwells by his Spirit. It is a mark of our participation in Jesus' own human response to his Father.

Athanasius on Meditating on Scripture: *The Letter to Marcellinus on the Interpretation of the Psalms* (date unknown)

Christians have held that proper sanctification involves holy Scripture in some way. Whether it is memorized, studied, chanted, sung, or otherwise recited, the content of Scripture – if not the very words themselves – has long been thought to be vitally important and precious to our growth. Although we do not know the dating of this letter from Athanasius to a certain Marcellinus, as the full letter has not been preserved, the paragraph gives us a wide window into Athanasius' pastoral perspective:

'Well, then, they who do not read the Scriptures in this way, that is to say, who do not chant the divine Songs intelligently but simply please themselves, most surely are to blame, for praise is not befitting in a sinner's mouth. [Ecclesiasticus 15:9] But those who do sing as I have indicated, so that the melody of the words springs naturally from the rhythm of the soul and her own union with the Spirit, they sing with the tongue and with the understanding also, and greatly benefit not themselves alone but also those who want to listen to them. So was it with the blessed David when he played to Saul: he pleased God and, at the same time, he drove from Saul his madness and his anger and gave back peace to his distracted spirit. In like manner, the priests by their singing contributed towards the calming of the people's spirits and helped to unite them with those who lead the heavenly choir. When, therefore, the Psalms are chanted, it is not from any mere desire for sweet music but as the outward expression of the inward harmony obtaining in the soul, because such harmonious recitation is in itself the index of a peaceful and well-ordered heart. To praise God tunefully upon an instrument, such as well-tuned cymbals, cithara, or ten-stringed psaltery, is, as we know, an outward token that the members of the body and the thoughts of the heart are, like the instruments themselves, in proper order and control, all of them together living and moving by the Spirit's cry and breath. And similarly, as it is written that 'By the Spirit a man lives and mortifies his bodily actions [Romans 8:13],' so he who sings well puts his soul in tune, correcting by degrees its faulty rhythm so that at last, being truly natural and integrated, it has fear of nothing, but in peaceful freedom from all vain imaginings may apply itself with greater longing to the good things to come. For a soul rightly ordered by chanting the sacred words forgets its own afflictions and contemplates with joy the things of Christ alone.'¹⁷⁷

Athanasius explicitly links proper understanding of the Scriptures to the Spirit, and movement of the Spirit within the human soul. Here we have a clear case where Athanasius links 'the soul' with 'her own union with the Spirit.' How does the Spirit operate within the soul? In the case of the Psalms, Athanasius makes

¹⁷⁵ Ibid 1.4

¹⁷⁶ Ibid 2.3

¹⁷⁷ Athanasius of Alexandria, *Letter to Marcellinus on the Interpretation of the Psalms* paragraph 30

an extended metaphor. There are those who chant the 'divine Songs intelligently but simply please themselves.' That is, they enjoy the melody but not the substance. But those who 'sing as I have indicated' enjoy a double benefit. Of course there is a melodic enjoyment. But Athanasius seems to have experienced the Psalms in a way that is connected to the 'rhythm of the soul,' or at least is thought to be. There are probably aspects of the singing of the Psalms involving cadence, clarity, and melodic instruments which lead the worshiper to 'a peaceful and well-ordered heart.'

There are two examples Athanasius gives from Scripture for this: David playing for King Saul, and the Israelite priests calming the people. The first comes from 1 Samuel 16. The second is a general inference from a broad sweep of Scriptures, including the Psalms themselves. The analogies function for Athanasius on both social and personal dimensions. On the social level, one or more people singing praises to God can have a positive spiritual impact on others. But also, on the personal level, the Spirit influencing the mind or heart can have a positive spiritual impact on other parts of the soul.

Athanasius admires musicians who play instruments and chant the Psalms worshipfully because of the integration of body with soul, where the soul in turn is integrated with the words of the Psalms and God's Spirit. Such bodily skill is 'an outward token that the members of the body and the thoughts of the heart are, like the instruments themselves, in proper order and control, all of them together living and moving by the Spirit's cry and breath.' This whole symphonic scene illustrates what Athanasius described about the relation between the body and soul in *Against the Heathen*, only positively.

Our theologian also subtly sounds an ethical note concerning emotional and relational maturity. He quotes from Romans 8:13 on how the human person must, by the Spirit, condemn sin in his or her own flesh. In context, this is where the apostle Paul describes his inward battle against his own greed, jealousy, and 'covetousness,' (Rom.7:14 – 25). Consistently defeated, Paul realized that only Jesus condemned sin in the flesh perfectly (Rom.8:3). But Jesus shares his Spirit with us that we too might walk in victory over sin, and not defeat. Hence Athanasius describes the human life from the vantage point of the fall as singing to a 'faulty rhythm.' He seems to be mindful of emotional states: 'fear,' 'vain imaginings,' 'longing,' and 'afflictions.' But he likens being free from these negative emotions and thoughts as removing musical error and producing a beautiful melody: 'he who sings well puts his soul in tune,' and starts 'correcting by degrees' this rhythm.

The goal of orienting one's self towards God, using the Psalms as a medium, Athanasius says, is to be 'truly natural and integrated,' which attests to Athanasius' commitment to being a creational theologian where the good creation is natural, whereas the fall is unnatural. The music and thoughts and prayers embedded in the Psalms will allow the worshiper to 'apply [his or her soul, and thence, body as well] with greater longing to the good things to come.' Athanasius recognizes 'longing' and desire as part of our sanctification. This is not just about Scripture memorization or cognitive information, but developing and refining one's tastes and emotions. It is about developing a hunger and thirst for the things of Christ to be disclosed when he returns. The 'afflictions' of this life will be forgotten. The 'things of Christ alone' will fill the person with joy.

Indeed, one reads this paragraph with longing for the complete letter. If Athanasius had an artistic or musical temperament, he clearly applied it with literary skill to the act of worship. In fact, he seems to have seen it not only as a *tool*, but a gift given by God to be looked backward *through*, in order to perceive something about the Creator. Rhythm and musical resonance, like language, have an inherent structure. One thinks of J.R.R. Tolkien's magnificent introduction to his saga of Middle-Earth: the creation story in *The Silmarillion* cast in the form of a song sung by Iluvatar (the God figure) and the Valar (the angels). One also sees the significance in the rest of Tolkien's work of singing and poetry undertaken by all creatures, like ents, elves, humans, and dwarves; this is an enactment of their structured correspondence to their Creator, as well as their partnership and participation in the sub-creation for which they were, in fact, created. Athanasius would naturally be drawn to the Psalms and to worship because he believed that the soul also had a structure, and was meant to take its mediating place in a structured relation between the Spirit and Word of God, and the human body. The Psalms contain in themselves the human response to God, and enact the most basic function of the human being as 'priest' of creation, the 'mediator' in the

most basic sense, since we are made of earth and the Spirit-breath of God. We give voice to the praise of all creation through Word and Spirit to the Father.

Moreover, Athanasius is, of course, aware that the Psalms were sung (though not exclusively) in the Jerusalem temple, and then by Jesus himself. So their placement in time, space, and human history also remind Athanasius and the Christian worshipers of their identity as new temples individually, as members of the new temple of Christ's church corporately, and as image-bearers of God in the temple of creation, the world which Christ will renew. And if music generally brings some power, life, and hope to people, how much more the spiritual music of the Spirit-inspired Psalms still bring the Spirit of power, life, and hope into the human soul.

Athanasius' Vision of Unity and Diversity in the Temple Community: *First Festal Letter* (329 AD)

Beginning in his first year in his office as bishop of Alexandria, Athanasius sought to build a rhythm of community spiritual practices by which he believed the Christian community in Roman Egypt gave evidence of its distinctiveness from the culture around it. He also sought to unify a broad range of Christians, as I mentioned above, against the heretical Arians and the schismatic Melitians. One of those practices included fasting, as a contrast to the over-indulgent life of feasting that Athanasius believed characterized his surroundings.¹⁷⁸ To be clear, Athanasius sought to put into practice the teaching he had put to writing in *Against the Heathen – On the Incarnation* about the soul-body relation. Thus, Athanasius began to write annual letters to mark off the feast prior to Easter.

Athanasius' *First Festal Letter* is quite charming. Already in his first year in office, Athanasius puts into practice the perspective on the soul and body which he articulated in his two volume *Against the Heathen – On the Incarnation*. The ease and familiarity with which Athanasius makes this case suggests that Alexandrian Christians had been accustomed to hearing it before.

Athanasius exhorts his listeners to fast, declaring optimistically that fasting is an essential spiritual practice. He recalls Israel's history of anticipating the messiah through their calendar. He blends that with insights into how the people benefited spiritually from their annual practices:

'Come, my beloved, the season calls us to keep the feast. Again, 'the Sun of Righteousness' [Malachi 4:2], causing His divine beams to rise upon us, proclaims beforehand the time of the feast, in which, obeying Him, we ought to celebrate it, lest when the time has passed by, gladness likewise may pass us by. For discerning the time is one of the duties most urgent on us, for the practice of virtue; so that the blessed Paul, when instructing his disciple, teaches him to observe the time, saying, 'Stand (ready) in season, and out of season [2 Timothy 4:2]'— that knowing both the one and the other, he might do things befitting the season, and avoid the blame of unseasonableness. For thus the God of all, after the manner of wise Solomon, distributes everything in time and season, to the end that, in due time, the salvation of men should be everywhere spread abroad. Thus the 'Wisdom of God [1 Corinthians 1:24],' our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, not out of season, but in season, 'passed upon holy souls, fashioning the friends of God and the prophets [Wisdom 7:27];' so that although very many were praying for Him, and saying, 'O that the salvation of God had come out of Sion! — the Spouse also, as it is written in the Song of Songs, was praying and saying, 'O that You were my sister's son, that sucked the breasts of my mother [Song of Songs 8:1]!' that You were like the children of men, and would take upon You human passions for our sake!— nevertheless, the God of all, the Maker of times and seasons, Who knows our affairs better than we do, while, as a good physician, He exhorts to obedience in season— the only one in which we may be healed— so also does He send Him not unseasonably, but seasonably, saying, 'In an acceptable time have I heard You, and in the day of salvation I have helped You [Isaiah 49:8].''¹⁷⁹

¹⁷⁸ Brakke 1995, p.285

¹⁷⁹ Athanasius of Alexandria, *First Festal Letter* 1

Athanasius presents two reasons for Christian fasting. First, it was a participation in Jesus' own healing of human nature, as he brought his body under the rule of his soul by the Spirit. Invoking Paul's counsel to Timothy to be ready to preach 'in season and out of season' (2 Tim.4:2), Athanasius plays on Paul's motif of minding 'seasons,' saying that the advent of Jesus makes this the appropriate 'season.' Jesus, 'as a good physician,' calls us to fast ('exhorts to obedience') in this 'season – the only one in which we may be healed.' Athanasius ties the quotation from Isaiah 49:8 together with this, which speaks of God hearing His people 'in an acceptable time... in the day of salvation.' In effect, Athanasius says, the season of salvation and healing is now because of the advent of Christ.

Athanasius makes this especially clear regarding the sexual appetite. After discussing how, in the Old Testament, God used the sound of the trumpet to call Israel into worship or to battle, Athanasius notes that the trumpet sound made the association of observing the law, or word, of God.¹⁸⁰ He connects the Israelite practice of fasting and feasting to the Christian one to which he is calling his followers; Christians are called not to physical warfare but spiritual.¹⁸¹ Apparently as part of that spiritual warfare, Athanasius thinks especially of Christians' sexual conduct. This is partly because he wants to honor the three different categories of Christian sexual obedience, and also because he views tempering sexual desire with a key challenge to the soul governing the body with the help of God. Thus, he makes the intriguing remark:

'At another time the call is made to virginity, and self-denial, and conjugal harmony, saying, To virgins, the things of virgins; and to those who love the way of abstinence, the things of abstinence; and to those who are married, the things of an honourable marriage; thus assigning to each its own virtues and an honourable recompense.'¹⁸²

'Virginity' is the 'activity' of those who, as we will see explicitly in other writings of the theologian, have undertaken the vow of chastity; to them Athanasius presents by the 'trumpet sound' the call to 'the things of virgins.' 'Self-denial' is probably the activity of those who are exploring the vow of chastity; to them, Athanasius presents 'the things of abstinence.' 'Conjugal harmony' is probably the activity of married couples who practice abstinence for the period of the fast; to them, the bishop presents 'the things of an honourable marriage.' The practice of disciplined abstinence in whichever state is partly an end in itself, but more so to make space for reflection on the word of God, as we see below.

It is important to see here Athanasius' concern and respect for a wide range of vocations among the Christian community, especially virgins and the married, and other domains of ethical life.¹⁸³ David Brakke writes:

'In his first *Festal Letter*, Athanasius used the Mosaic trumpets from Numbers to explain how Christians, married and celibate, practised diverse disciplines at diverse times and seasons and yet answered a single call from God; he also articulated his understanding of fasting as a process by which the soul brings the body under the control of its will and gains access to special revelatory knowledge from God. The following year Athanasius devoted his *Festal Letter* to the theme of 'withdrawal from the world'; he said that such withdrawal, achieved through practices of renunciation, was necessary for the life of every Christian, not just an ascetic élite.'¹⁸⁴

I will comment more on Athanasius' recognition of different marital/sexual 'vocations' (my term) when we examine his *First Letter to Virgins*, below. For now, I wish to call attention to Athanasius' quotation in the beginning of his festal letter from the Wisdom of Solomon 7:27. This is a familiar Athanasian text by which he honors these different vocations, connecting the diversity of his church to the activity of the Spirit and Word/Wisdom. Athanasius' affection for this book is important. Despite not including Wisdom as one of the books 'accredited as Divine,'¹⁸⁵ Athanasius nevertheless quotes from Wisdom with high frequency in his writings. James B. Ernest comments, 'From the way Athanasius uses it [it] might as well be part of his

¹⁸⁰ Ibid 2

¹⁸¹ Ibid 3

¹⁸² Ibid 3

¹⁸³ Ibid 9

¹⁸⁴ Brakke 1995, p.267

¹⁸⁵ Athanasius of Alexandria, *Thirty-Ninth Festal Letter* 3

Old Testament canon.¹⁸⁶ He seems to have viewed it as a helpful *commentary* on sacred Scripture, as he included it as recommended reading for catechumens (recent converts studying and preparing for baptism and full membership in the church). In the three *Discourses Against the Arians* alone, Athanasius quotes from Wisdom fifty-two times; this compares with five or six times in *Against the Heathen* and twenty-six in *On the Incarnation*.¹⁸⁷ This tells us something about how Athanasius valued the work especially in *Discourses* when he wanted to tie together the Spirit with the Word/Wisdom following Jewish precedent.

A few comments about the Wisdom of Solomon are in order. The book portrays King Solomon as being filled with *the Spirit* of wisdom *after praying and asking God for it*. In his *Tenth Festal Letter*,¹⁸⁸ as I explore below, Athanasius quotes this passage:

7:7 Therefore I prayed,
and understanding was given me;
I called upon God,
and the Spirit of wisdom came to me...
21 I learned both what is secret and what is manifest,
22 for wisdom, the fashioner of all things, taught me.
For in her there is a spirit that is intelligent, holy,
unique, manifold, subtle, mobile, clear, unpolluted,
distinct, invulnerable, loving the good, keen, irresistible,
23 beneficent, humane, steadfast, sure, free from anxiety,
all-powerful, overseeing all,
and penetrating through all spirits that are intelligent and pure and most subtle.
24 For wisdom is more mobile than any motion;
because of her pureness she pervades and penetrates all things.
25 For she is a breath of the power of God,
and a pure emanation of the glory of the Almighty;
therefore nothing defiled gains entrance into her.
26 For she is a reflection of eternal light,
a spotless mirror of the working of God,
and an image of his goodness.
27 Though she is but one, she can do all things,
and while remaining in herself, she renews all things;
in every generation she passes into holy souls
and makes them friends of God, and prophets;

The use of creational motifs to describe God's wisdom – even the 'image' language – should not be surprising. Following Proverbs 8:22 – 36, the Wisdom of Solomon sees God's wisdom as a quality that undergirds all reality starting by virtue of its *creation by God*. Wisdom already sees a temple structure in creation. *Theos* (God), *pneuma* (Spirit), and *sophia* (Wisdom) act together to uphold it, pervading and penetrating all things (7:24). That includes human beings. I will comment more on why Athanasius was drawn to this passage in his *Tenth Festal Letter*, and the use he makes of it, below.

Wisdom of Solomon, like the canonical biblical wisdom writings, stress a unity between God's ethical commands and humanity as God's creation. That point of unity is found in God's wisdom. If God's ethical commands are rooted in God's wisdom, and if God made creation and humanity out of His wisdom, then God's commands are natural to us. They are appropriate for us. And they are meant for our growth. To suggest otherwise would be to say that God commands things that are inappropriate for us, which would cast grave doubts on both His wisdom and His goodness. Hence, peppered throughout the biblical Book of Proverbs is the admonition to increasingly internalize the commands of God:

5 A wise man will hear and *increase in learning*,

¹⁸⁶ Ernest 2004, p.83

¹⁸⁷ Ibid p.85, 87 – 89, 418

¹⁸⁸ Athanasius of Alexandria, *Tenth Festal Letter* 4; quoting *Wisdom of Solomon* 7:27; cf. Brakke 1995, p.176 - 177

- And a man of understanding will acquire wise counsel,
⁶To understand a proverb and a figure,
 The words of the wise and their riddles.
⁷The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge;
 Fools despise wisdom and instruction.
⁸Hear, my son, your father's instruction
 And do not forsake your mother's teaching;
⁹Indeed, they are a graceful wreath to your head
 And ornaments about your neck. (Proverbs 1:5 – 9, emphasis mine)

In the biblical narrative, God's commandments reflect the wisdom of God for humanity, to be passed down from one generation to the next ('your father's instruction...your mother's teaching'). This has to do with the archetypal place of wise teaching in the human community. God gave Adam and Eve a wise commandment, which they broke. Rather than give up on the story, God began a new instantiation of the story. God brought Israel into a garden land and gave them wise commandments (Dt.4:5 – 6) so that they might be in the role of a new Adam and Eve. Hence there is an identification of God's commandments as an expression of God's wisdom. The Wisdom of Solomon calls God's wisdom 'a spotless mirror of the working of God and an image of His goodness.' That is, God's character can be perceived in His commandments. His commandments do not exhaust the meaning of His wisdom, but the one flows from the other. And Israel's task in the world is to live out the wisdom of God and bear witness to it. They were to do this in the pattern which Adam and Eve were originally supposed to do it: To spread out over the earth and proclaim it.

The conceptual content of God's ethical commandments is surely not everything involved in knowing and experiencing God, but it is one of the key building blocks. This is arguably why the apostle Paul, *reflecting on his Jewish pre-Christian experience* (Rom.7:14 – 25) says that he *wanted* to obey God. He notes that the effect of the Sinai law upon him was to help him distinguish between the 'I myself' and the 'sin which indwells me' (Rom.7:14 – 25). There was in him an 'I myself' which was the true self which wanted to obey God and live out the commandments. But there was also 'sin which indwells me' which resisted God and that true self. This is essential in understanding what the problem of sin is, and what kind of solution it requires.

This Jewish wisdom emphasis on the retention of the original goodness of creation must be allowed to challenge any notion of 'total depravity' taught by Lutherans and Calvinists which would make the fall so devastating that it completely annulled the goodness of humanity, and the commands of Jesus so inappropriate for us so as to be torturous. Although we are certainly corrupted and do evil, even to the point where Jesus can say that we *are* evil on balance (Lk.11:13), humanity still retains an awareness of moral goodness and a desire for it, as the Jewish wisdom tradition and the apostle Paul attest. To suggest that human depravity means the eradication of the original image of God, and no residual desire at all to obey God, would mean that God Himself gave up on human beings in a providential sense. It would mean that God no longer worked by His Word and Spirit – and the wisdom therein – to sensitize people to His goodness and presence, to help them want their own spiritual healing, and to draw people to Himself.

It is also important to point out that the early Christians, like Athanasius and perhaps Maximus the Confessor most of all, insisted that we say that the natural state of humanity is the created state, the good state. Our human nature is good. Sin is an unnatural infection, invasion, or condition. There is no 'sin nature' because sin does not come naturally from creation. It may be in our nature, but it does not have a 'nature' per se. The way they defined their terms is important, because they sought to protect the doctrine of creation along with the goodness of God.

So Wisdom of Solomon is correct in portraying the ongoing presence of God's wisdom in the world and in humanity. In fact, like the biblical Book of Proverbs, Wisdom says that a human being must learn, internalize, and apply the wisdom God offers. In other words, there is a temple-filling paradigm at work here *within each individual person*, where wisdom and the Spirit are upholding the human being by the fact of creation, and God's wisdom and Spirit are also the content by which the human being (with King Solomon as an example) fills himself and grows:

9:17 Who has *learned* thy counsel, unless thou hast given wisdom
and sent thy holy Spirit from on high?

12:1 For thy immortal spirit/Spirit is in all things.
2 Therefore thou dost correct *little by little* those who trespass,
and dost remind and warn them of the things wherein they sin,
that they may be freed from wickedness
and put their trust in thee, O Lord.

Notice the human process assumed: Counsel must be ‘learned’ from the Spirit because we grow, and even regarding sin, God’s Spirit ‘corrects little by little.’ Whether this ‘little by little’ shares something with Paul in Philippians speaking of spiritual ‘progress’ and ‘learning’ (Phil.1:6, 25; 2:12; ‘I have learned’ in 4:11, 12) or with Isaiah (‘Order on order, order on order, line on line, line on line, a little here, a little there’; Isa.28:10) and the vision there of a new Temple being built on a new cornerstone, is intriguing.

Returning to Athanasius’ *First Festal Letter*, we find him emphasizing this human process of more deeply internalizing the word of God during the season of fasting. Fasting reminds us to seek nourishment from God. Surfacing his previous material on the soul-body relation from *Against the Heathen*, which he probably just finished writing, Athanasius shows that he is truly committed to deploying his stated paradigm for human spiritual development. This was no mere intellectual defense of Christian faith. He says that virtue and unfortunately, vice as well, can be food for the soul:

‘5. Behold, my brethren, how much a fast can do, and in what manner the law commands us to fast. It is required that not only with the body should we fast, but with the soul. Now the soul is humbled when it does not follow wicked opinions, but feeds on becoming virtues. For virtues and vices are the food of the soul, and it can eat either of these two meats, and incline to either of the two, according to its own will. If it is bent toward virtue, it will be nourished by virtues, by righteousness, by temperance, by meekness, by fortitude, as Paul says; ‘Being nourished by the word of truth [1 Timothy 4:6].’ Such was the case with our Lord, who said, ‘My meat is to do the will of My Father which is in heaven [John 4:34].’ But if it is not thus with the soul, and it inclines downwards, it is then nourished by nothing but sin. For thus the Holy Ghost, describing sinners and their food, referred to the devil when He said, ‘I have given him to be meat to the people of Æthiopia [Psalm 74:14 LXX].’ For this is the food of sinners. And as our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, being heavenly bread, is the food of the saints, according to this; ‘Unless you eat My flesh, and drink My blood [John 6:53];’ so is the devil the food of the impure, and of those who do nothing which is of the light, but work the deeds of darkness. Therefore, in order to withdraw and turn them from vices, He commands them to be nourished with the food of virtue; namely, humbleness of mind, lowliness to endure humiliations, the acknowledgment of God. For not only does such a fast as this obtain pardon for souls, but being kept holy, it prepares the saints, and raises them above the earth.’¹⁸⁹

In Athanasius’ mind, ‘virtues’ are anchored in the person of Christ and overflow from him as our spiritual ‘nourishment,’ but they are named and described in Scripture, ‘the word of truth,’ in connection with the Lord. While Athanasius may be speaking in too elevated a manner about fasting as to say that the fast per se is what ‘obtains pardon for souls,’ I take his overall point as valid: the human soul must learn to feast on *the word* of the Word while the human body learns to fast from ordinary food. Athanasius also names ‘the Holy Ghost’ as the author of Scripture, thus showing that he believes that the Spirit infuses the words of Scripture, and in particular, the words of Jesus.

Of the soul, Athanasius uses the intriguing words ‘incline’ and ‘bent’ to describe a person’s *habituation* and *desire*. The soul can ‘incline to either of the two’ sources of nourishment. Rhetorically, perhaps Athanasius finds this an opportune moment to deploy these terms because he has used the image of food as the governing paradigm. Most people, then and now, would probably relate to the experience of

¹⁸⁹ Athanasius of Alexandria, *First Festal Letter* 5

habituating themselves to a certain diet, desiring certain foods more than others. Some people, then and now, would probably also relate to the experience of desiring healthy food and desiring unhealthy food. So portraying virtue and vice, indeed Jesus and the devil, as food permits Athanasius to get at a quality of the soul that is developed by human choices. Our choices shape our desires. Our desires may not be determined by our choices, as changes in direction, growth in virtue or vice, is possible. But the cultivation of a desire for Jesus, and habituation according to his virtues, ‘prepares the saints,’ presumably for the life eternal to come, ‘and raises them above the earth,’ to experience spiritual realities that will, we surmise, further train the appetite for God more and more. The ultimate state of the sorry soul which ‘inclines downward,’ Athanasius does not draw out the conclusion.

As positive reinforcement, the new bishop names Moses, Elijah, and Daniel as among those who fasted, and received special ‘transcendent nourishment’ from God in the form of words or visions.¹⁹⁰ The implication is that the average Christian might be able to experience special confirming spiritual experiences, too. Given what we know of *Life of Antony*, Athanasius’ most mature work and spiritual biography which I discuss below, he does seem to be encouraging the cultivation of spiritual gifts involving the reception of words, wisdom, visions, etc. from God. This would likely make the Christian fast much more attractive, spiritually dynamic, and interesting. Moses ‘was nourished by divine words.’¹⁹¹ And Christians have ‘our souls nourished with divine food, with the Word, and according to the will of God.’¹⁹²

In connection with Christians drawing our nourishment from the Word, Athanasius finds it appropriate to connect the Word and the Spirit. After describing how the ‘shadows’ of the Passover and other aspects of Jewish worship typology give way to the ‘end of the shadow’¹⁹³ in Jesus, Athanasius goes on to stress the presence of Christ among his people by his Spirit. He cites John 20:22 where Jesus breathed upon the apostles, connecting that event to the end of the Jewish altar, temple, curtain, etc.¹⁹⁴ Then, in a move which I cannot help but find very significant for trinitarian theology, Athanasius quotes 2 Corinthians 3:17, where Paul says, ‘for the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty.’¹⁹⁵ This important text is the clearest in the New Testament corpus which connects the Spirit with the Lord Jesus, that is, the Word-Son.¹⁹⁶ Paul bound them in a relational identity statement. Athanasius appears to punctuate his discourse at this point with this particular text to draw together in the minds of his audience the identity of the Spirit in connection with the Word, and the role of the Spirit in connection with *the words* of the Word. This is no mere ink on pages, or words from memory, that Christians recite. These are words infused with the power of the Spirit who brings the Word directly *into* the Christian. This anticipates his pneumatological doctrine which he will put into dogmatic form in his *Letters to Serapion on the Holy Spirit* three decades from now.

Athanasius’ Vision of Purification in the Temple Community: *Third Festal Letter* (331 AD)

In his third *Festal Letter*, Athanasius, still a relatively young bishop from his seat in Alexandria, as yet untroubled by the persecution which will befall him in 335 AD, writes something about the Holy Spirit that is attention grabbing:

‘For a servant of the Lord should be diligent and careful, yea, moreover, burning like a flame, so that when, by an ardent spirit, he has destroyed all carnal sin, he may be able to draw near to God who, according to the expression of the saints, is called ‘a consuming fire [Exodus 24:17; Deuteronomy 4:26; Hebrews 12:29].’ Therefore, the God of all, ‘Who makes His angels [spirits],’ is a spirit, ‘and His ministers a flame of fire [Psalm 104:4; Hebrews 1:7].’ Wherefore, in the departure from Egypt, He forbade the multitude to touch the mountain, where God was appointing them the law, because they were not of this character. But He called blessed Moses to it, as being

¹⁹⁰ Ibid 6

¹⁹¹ Ibid 6

¹⁹² Ibid 7

¹⁹³ Ibid 8 – 9

¹⁹⁴ Ibid 8

¹⁹⁵ Ibid 9

¹⁹⁶ See Wesley Hill, *Paul and the Trinity: Persons, Relations, and the Pauline Letters* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2015), especially chapter 5 for an excellent discussion of this passage and its significance for trinitarian theology

fervent in spirit, and possessing unquenchable grace, saying, 'Let Moses alone draw near [Exodus 24:2].' He entered into the cloud also, and when the mountain was smoking, he was not injured; but rather, through 'the words of the Lord, which are choice silver purified in the earth [Psalm 12:6],' he descended purified. Therefore the blessed Paul, when desirous that the grace of the Spirit given to us should not grow cold, exhorts, saying, 'Quench not the Spirit [1 Thessalonians 5:19].' For so shall we remain partakers of Christ, if we hold fast to the end the Spirit given at the beginning. For he said, 'Quench not;' not because the Spirit is placed in the power of men, and is able to suffer anything from them; but because bad and unthankful men are such as manifestly wish to quench it, since they, like the impure, persecute the Spirit with unholy deeds. 'For the holy Spirit of discipline will flee deceit, nor dwell in a body that is subject unto sin; but will remove from thoughts that are without understanding [Wisdom 1:5].' Now they being without understanding, and deceitful, and lovers of sin, walk still as in darkness, not having that 'Light which lights every man that comes into the world [John 1:9].' Now a fire such as this laid hold of Jeremiah the prophet, when the word was in him as a fire, and he said, 'I pass away from every place, and am not able to endure it [Jeremiah 20:9].' And our Lord Jesus Christ, being good and a lover of men, came that He might cast this upon earth, and said, 'And what? Would that it were already kindled [Luke 12:49]!' For He desired, as He testified in Ezekiel, the repentance of a man rather than his death [Ezekiel 18:32]; so that evil should be entirely consumed in all men, that the soul, being purified, might be able to bring forth fruit; for the word which is sown by Him will be productive, some thirty, some sixty, some an hundred. [Mark 4:20] Thus, for instance, those who were with Cleopas, although infirm at first from lack of knowledge, yet afterwards were inflamed with the words of the Savior, and brought forth the fruits of the knowledge of Him [Luke 24:13 – 34]. The blessed Paul also, when seized by this fire, revealed it not to flesh and blood, but having experienced the grace, he became a preacher of the Word [Acts 9]. But not such were those nine lepers who were cleansed from their leprosy, and yet were unthankful to the Lord who healed them [Luke 17:11 – 17]; nor Judas, who obtained the lot of an apostle, and was named a disciple of the Lord, but at last, 'while eating bread with the Savior, lifted up his heel against Him, and became a traitor.' But such men have the due reward of their folly, since their expectation will be vain through their ingratitude; for there is no hope for the ungrateful, the last fire, prepared for the devil and his angels, awaits those who have neglected divine light. Such then is the end of the unthankful.'¹⁹⁷

The theme of this letter is thankfulness. The word 'thank' occurs in different forms some twenty one times; the word 'grateful' occurs one more time; the word 'praise' occurs nine times. This concentration is unique among the *Festal Letters*. Athanasius is calling Christians in the region of Alexandria to enter into Lent, a forty day fast prior to Easter. The fast is 'the service of the soul,' which is 'prolonged prayer to God and unceasing thanksgiving.'¹⁹⁸ It also manifests in 'virtue.'¹⁹⁹

In this exhortation, Athanasius shows his fondness for using biblical imagery to make inferences about ontology. Fire was a common motif deployed by the patristic writers because it was perhaps the clearest biblical image for how God could co-inhabit an object in His creation. God manifested Himself by the fire in the burning bush, the fire in the pillar guiding Israel, the fire on Mount Sinai into which Moses walked, the fire on the face of Moses that shone like light, and so on. The fire of God's presence descended into the tabernacle-temple sanctuary until it departed (Ezk.1 – 10). But the fire of the Holy Spirit conceived Jesus, anointed him at his baptism, and ultimately caused him to shine with transfigured glory in a preliminary sense on the mountaintop, and then fully in his resurrection. Then the fire of the Spirit manifested at Pentecost as tongues of fire atop the heads of the apostles.

Obviously, Athanasius makes much use of this theme of fire in this letter. Three decades later, in his first *Letter to Serapion on the Holy Spirit*, Athanasius, will again quote 1 Thessalonians 5:19, 'Quench not the Spirit,' with the understanding that the Spirit is akin to fire; Paul is to be understood as cautioning Christians 'lest through lack of care they should quench the grace of the Spirit which had been kindled

¹⁹⁷ Athanasius of Alexandria, *Third Festal Letter* 3 – 4

¹⁹⁸ *Ibid* 2

¹⁹⁹ *Ibid* 3

within them.²⁰⁰ Athanasius does not seem to use this Pauline phrase in the other *Festal Letters* translated into English and available to me, nor in *Life of Antony*, but I think it likely that he used it with some frequency in his preaching because of his obvious appreciation for the imagery of fire to portray positively the Spirit's divine action in purifying and cleansing humanity.

Also intriguing is Athanasius' citation of the extracanonical book *Wisdom of Solomon* as a source, once again. The work uses King Solomon as the central character who receives God's Spirit of wisdom. The book portrays wisdom as from God given by the Spirit of God, but also having a conceptual, literary, and verbal character. That is, wisdom has a human character. God intends for His wisdom to spread through Solomon and by the participation of others to the ends of the earth. This corresponds with the self-consciousness of Israel, cultivated in the canonical books, as bearers of God's wisdom for the sake of the rest of humanity (e.g. Dt.4:5 – 6). This corroborates my thesis above that the biblical view of creation was that it was a temple which God desired for His human partners to progressively fill. In this case, God's wisdom is the content with which God intends to fill the creation. But God's wisdom is not an in-filling that displaces human beings. It complements human beings and brings forth the life of God in human expression.

Moreover, Athanasius compresses the quotation, which involves the first three times out of fourteen that the word 'spirit' appears in *Wisdom*. Notice that in the character of King Solomon, the speaker in *Wisdom*, praises wisdom in the following way:

- ¹ Love righteousness, you rulers of the earth,
think of the Lord with uprightness,
and seek him with sincerity of heart;
- ² because he is found by those who do not put him to the test,
and manifests himself to those who do not distrust him.
- ³ For perverse thoughts separate men from God,
and when his power is tested, it convicts the foolish;
- ⁴ because wisdom will not enter a deceitful soul,
nor dwell in a body enslaved to sin.
- ⁵ For a holy and disciplined spirit will flee from deceit,
and will rise and depart from foolish thoughts,
and will be ashamed at the approach of unrighteousness.
- ⁶ For wisdom is a kindly spirit and
will not free a blasphemer from the guilt of his words;
because God is witness of his inmost feelings,
and a true observer of his heart, and a hearer of his tongue.
- ⁷ Because the Spirit of the Lord has filled the world,
and that which holds all things together knows what is said;
- ⁸ therefore no one who utters unrighteous things will escape notice,
and justice, when it punishes, will not pass him by.
- ⁹ For inquiry will be made into the counsels of an ungodly man,
and a report of his words will come to the Lord,
to convict him of his lawless deeds;
- ¹⁰ because a jealous ear hears all things,
and the sound of murmurings does not go unheard.
- ¹¹ Beware then of useless murmuring,
and keep your tongue from slander;
because no secret word is without result,
and a lying mouth destroys the soul. (*Wisdom of Solomon 1:1 – 11*)

²⁰⁰ Athanasius of Alexandria, *Letters to Serapion on the Holy Spirit* 1.4

Athanasius takes what might be a reference to the human 'spirit' as more or less synonymous with the 'soul,'²⁰¹ and turns it into a sure and certain description of the *Holy Spirit*: 'The Holy Spirit of discipline will flee deceit...' It is very important to note that Athanasius repeated this very quote in his magnum opus on the Holy Spirit, his *Letters to Serapion*.²⁰² So this is no accidental gloss. But the move is not at all unwarranted, as the Hebrew could carry both meanings naturally. By doing this, Athanasius appears to be at the very least conflating the 'wisdom [which] will not enter a deceitful soul' in 1:4 with 'the Holy Spirit' in 1:7. By the time we read from verse 4 to verse 8, we have the impression that God's wisdom is mediated by, or communicated through, the Spirit. Athanasius has no doubt that is, in fact, the case.

Athanasius involves this temple-wisdom-filling motif in his message on the Spirit's activity in us and our human responsibility to receive the Spirit. When he speaks of Moses ascending Mount Sinai to meet with God, he quotes Psalm 12:6 about the words of God being choice silver, purified in the earth. Athanasius also quotes Jeremiah 20:9 about Jeremiah's experience bearing God's word. Jesus shared the fulfilled words from Scripture with Cleopas and the other disciple on the Emmaus Road. And Paul became a preacher of the Word. As I have explored above in his *Against the Heathen – On the Incarnation*, Athanasius has a working understanding of the Holy Spirit inhabiting *the word* of the Word.

But Athanasius subsumes the Spirit, preaching, and the linguistic-conceptual content of wisdom (word) into the image of *fire*. Here in the *Third Festal Letter*, he begins, 'A servant of the Lord should be... burning like a flame, so that when, by an ardent spirit, he has destroyed all carnal sin, he may be able to draw near to God who... is called a consuming fire.' Then he describes Moses as 'purified' by ascending the mountain which was on fire. Jeremiah felt like God's word had a fiery quality within him. The disciples on the Emmaus Road felt like their hearts were aflame when Jesus interpreted Scripture to them. Paul met Jesus not in the form of a 'light' as Luke describes in Acts 9, but as a fire. And so on. These biblical exempla serve as illustrative material for Athanasius to make his main point: Humans must not quench the Spirit. The fire of the Spirit, in conjunction with the word, was meant to fill the human. Thus the human will is necessarily involved and vitally important. As the human being in the creation, so the human soul in the human body.

We can make some limited sense, then, of Athanasius' main admonition at the start of the passage I quoted: 'For a servant of the Lord should be diligent and careful, yea, moreover, burning like a flame, so that when, by an ardent spirit, he has destroyed all carnal sin, he may be able to draw near to God, who is... a consuming fire.' This is about purity of life and focus on the expression of ministry. But those sensitive to 'works-righteousness' might balk at the language of destroying carnal sin and then being able to draw near to God. Is our theologian suggesting that there is a causal relationship there?

Yes, but although Athanasius uses language which might be interpreted as connoting 'separation' or 'distance' from God which must then be overcome by being 'able to draw near,' he probably thought that this spatial metaphor should be understood as a moral quality and not a spatial one. A better English translation might be 'able to *approximate* God, who is a consuming fire.' For Athanasius wants his audience to be 'burning like a flame' and 'ardent' in love for God. He already thinks of that fire and love as the Spirit himself. This is probably why he quotes in the middle of the passage from 1 Thessalonians 5:17 that the Spirit not be quenched. So the Spirit has already begun a process in the believer. The believer must be 'burning like a flame': 'diligent and careful' to destroy 'carnal sin,' i.e. 'of the flesh' (cf. Rom. 7:14 – 8:11). But this process, undertaken by the grace of the Spirit, moves one to become more like God, and to manifest God. If God is a consuming fire who appeared once in a bush to Moses, who then took up residence as a column of light and fire in the tabernacle-temple of Israel, who then took up residence in the physical humanity of Jesus to cleanse it and transfigure it with light and fire, then surely we too must become like fire in us and for us. God has always manifested Himself in a temple-structure.

²⁰¹ The author of *Wisdom of Solomon* refers to the human 'spirit' in 2:3 ('When it is extinguished, the body will turn to ashes, and the spirit will dissolve like empty air'); 5:3 ('They will speak to one another in repentance, and in anguish of spirit they will groan...'); 15:11 ('Because he failed to know the one who formed him and inspired him with an active soul and breathed into him a living spirit'); and 16:14 ('A man in his wickedness kills another, but he cannot bring back the departed spirit'). On the other hand, KJV renders 1:5 the way Athanasius does straightaway.

²⁰² Athanasius of Alexandria, *Letters to Serapion on the Holy Spirit* 1.26; Ernest (2004), p.418 does not list this

Along with other masters of rhetoric such as Isaiah, Jesus, and Paul before him, Athanasius deploys the motif of fire in connection with hell. He uses it to warn against unthankfulness: 'For there is no hope for the ungrateful, the last fire, prepared for the devil and his angels, awaits those who have neglected divine light. Such then is the end of the unthankful.' Perhaps Athanasius sensed that people might be tempted to think of the created world and its agricultural wealth as their own possessions and therefore something to which they were entitled. Perhaps he was thinking about his Christian audience fasting needing some encouragement to be filled with gratitude rather than jealousy while looking at what their pagan, non-Christian neighbors were enjoying. In the context of this letter and its subject matter, Athanasius would appear to be saying that we either approximate God in 'burning like a flame' by internalizing His word, or we experience ourselves as a combustible material that somehow resists the spoken will of God, and perhaps even the very nature of God. The reason why 'there is no hope' for the devil and his angels is presumably because they have made a choice that affected their natures. They have aligned themselves with a *lie* or *lies*, defined as such in comparison with the truth God has spoken. Most fundamentally, Athanasius presumably has in mind the truth about the Word incarnate as our Savior, and us as his beloved creations. This goes back to Athanasius' paradigm of the human being as a temple, whose frame is built and maintained by the Word of God whose power is the Spirit of God, and whose inner content is the result of a partnership between God and the human person, involving internalizing the word of the Word of God, received as a personal address by the Spirit of God, and filling our minds. Athanasius could apparently envision the Word of God in his incarnation and atoning work saving all human nature and all creation categorically from death and non-existence, while still insisting that how we experience our own existence and progress in relationship with the Word depends on our reception of what he says to us.

To the extent that we can take the Alexandrian as a model for pastoral ministry today, we can see that Athanasius is not shy about mentioning hell as a categorical warning. He does not threaten particular people per se, but simply marks out a category of people in connection with a vice. Behind the sinful vice lies the deeper root of lack of trust in God and resistance to Jesus. The root problem is *evidenced* by resistance to Jesus' word and the Hebrew Scriptures, presumably understood in the Christ-centered manner somewhat typical of early church readings of Scripture, especially in Alexandria which excelled in the allegorical readings of the Hebrew Scriptures.

Athanasius' Vision of Unity and Diversity by Jesus' Spoken Word: *First Letter to Virgins* (337 AD)

In summarizing this letter and its occasion, I rely heavily on David Brakke's work *Athanasius and Asceticism*. He translated the letter from Coptic, in which Athanasius seems to have originally composed it. Brakke provides it in an appendix to his book. He added the chapter divisions and content headings which I will use here. My interest in this letter is to explore Athanasius' deployment of 'temple' language and the concept of being filled, any explicit mention of the Holy Spirit, the ethical dimension of Christian life, and other noteworthy aspects of Athanasius' pastoral strategy, rhetorically. I will also highlight points of connection between this letter, which is relatively lesser known, and Athanasius' other writings.

Athanasius is generally quite enthusiastic about Christians undertaking the vow of chastity and pledging themselves not to be married. He is also enthusiastic about married life as well, but sees the ascetic life as a helpful training ground for ordering the body to the soul, and the soul to the Word. Interestingly, he sees it as a context in which one can better focus on developing gifts of the Spirit.

By 337 AD, Athanasius must respond to a certain false teacher named Hieracas. Hieracas led a community of celibate men and women in the Nile Delta region.²⁰³ He taught that true Christian faith led inexorably to celibacy. He interpreted marriage as a mode of life belonging to the period of time before Christ. The practice reflected the theology: Hieracas taught that married people would not inherit the kingdom of God, therefore needed to be excluded from his worship services. His community of celibate people worshiped and lived entirely separately from married Christian people. Athanasius countered Hieracas' teaching not only through biblical argument, which I will examine below, but through concrete forms of social life that are connected to the local church community supervised by an orthodox priest or bishop. He is also enthusiastic about chastity as well, but not at the expense of marriage.

²⁰³ Brakke 1995, p.4

Athanasius must also respond to the Arian heresy. At this point in time, Athanasius perceives that the propagators of the Arian camp operate through academically oriented study circles that prey especially on single women. Athanasius also suggests that the Arians also had 'their own' virgins. Women who had taken a vow to be chaste can be somewhat vulnerable to this movement. Here Athanasius claims the figure of Alexander, his predecessor as bishop of Alexandria. He gives an exposition of doctrine of Christ's divine nature cast in the idiom of the spiritual marriage into which the virgins have entered. Athanasius reminds the virgins of who their bridegroom is.

In chapters 1 – 3, Athanasius introduces the topic of virginity (chastity) from the use of biblical materials, celebrating it as a spiritual form of marriage to Christ. He cites Jesus' teaching about ordinary marriage from Matthew 19:6 ('What God has joined together let no man separate') as the basis for poetically speaking about chastity as a spiritual union with Christ that is 'indivisible and immortal.'²⁰⁴ He says that Elijah was taken up in the fiery chariot because of his godly virginity, and Elisha was able to raise the woman's son from the dead because of his godly virginity.²⁰⁵ Significantly, Athanasius argues that while ordinary human marriage comes from creation, citing Genesis 2:24, and 'the nature of humanity,' virginity 'surpasses human nature.'²⁰⁶ Virginity imitates the angels in heaven. This is a remarkable treatment of chastity. He quotes 1 Corinthians 6:17 as he argues that the vow of chastity is a spiritual marriage to Christ that they might 'become one spirit with him.'²⁰⁷ And he moves quickly to apparently misquote Isaiah 26:17 – 18, which speaks of giving birth to 'wind' as a futile hope. Athanasius, however, reads the verse as if Isaiah were speaking of begetting 'saving spirit' as a positive fruit of faithfulness to God.²⁰⁸

In chapters 4 – 8, Athanasius argues that virginity/chastity is a virtue that is unique to Christian faith. He says, 'For on this account nothing has ever been heard among the Greeks or the non-Greeks about virginity, nor has it ever been possible for such virtue to exist among them.'²⁰⁹ He observes that no one has written about Egyptian priestesses that they were virgins, nor of Roman priestesses except the virgins of Pallas, who were, I assume, forced to be virgins.²¹⁰ Athanasius insists that free will is essential to one's virginal state: 'What kind of virginity exists hypocritically for a time and later gets married? Or what kind of virtue is there in virginity when it exists for some without their free will, but rather they have others to watch over them, who teach them by force to choose for themselves something against their will?'²¹¹ Only among some of the Hebrew prophets, by virtue of their office of anticipating Christ, do we find virgins.²¹² Remarkably, he says, 'But when the Lord came into the world, having taken flesh from a virgin and become human, at that time what used to be difficult became *easy* for people, and what was impossible became possible.'²¹³ Obviously, Athanasius wants to provide a theological and historical perspective on the state in which Christian virgin women are participating. This is part of his pastoral appeal to consider the honor and significance they have.

I'd like to make a few comments about Athanasius' use of Scripture and language. I deem Athanasius to be accurate in handling Scripture insofar as he talks about ordinary human marriage. He could have strengthened his case by explicitly citing Jesus' reminder that in the resurrection, human beings will be like the angels, practicing neither marriage nor genital sexuality (Mt.22:30), leaving aside the mysterious question of whether and how 'maleness' and 'femaleness' will be expressed. I think it would fit his theological anthropology and semantic categories better to speak of this kind of chaste spiritual marriage to Christ as a 'fulfillment' of human nature rather than 'surpassing' it. For if the human Jesus was chaste and virginal, then it becomes awkward to maintain a clear doctrinal position about his human nature. How can one say that he took human nature to himself at his incarnation while at the same time saying that he 'surpassed' human nature?

²⁰⁴ Athanasius of Alexandria, *First Letter to Virgins* 1

²⁰⁵ *Ibid* 1

²⁰⁶ *Ibid* 3

²⁰⁷ *Ibid* 3

²⁰⁸ *Ibid* 3

²⁰⁹ *Ibid* 4

²¹⁰ *Ibid* 5

²¹¹ *Ibid* 6

²¹² *Ibid* 7

²¹³ *Ibid* 8

However, Athanasius' enthusiasm for encouraging those Christians who have undertaken some kind of vow of chastity to continue as chaste draws him into more poetic uses of Scripture that are frankly irresponsible. The biblical narrative does not explicitly attribute Elijah and Elisha's spiritual power to their virginity per se; so this is an intriguing reading but ultimately speculation. Moses and Joshua, on whom the author of Kings bases his literary portrayal of Elijah and Elisha upon, also did great miracles by the power of God, and they were married men. Unfortunately, in my opinion, Athanasius will continue this tendency when he holds up the virgin Mary as a model for the female ascetics.

His misquotation of Isaiah 26:18 may be a playful twist or an honest mistake rooted in an Alexandrian Christian tradition that read the Hebrew word *ruach* as 'spirit' and not as the more generic 'wind.' Either way, I find it of interest. Speaking of a union which gives rise to children, even in a metaphorical sense, fits the biblical and Athanasian motif of 'filling' and 'overflowing.' There is a 'temple' pattern here. It is present in its inverse form if we read Isaiah accurately, where Isaiah complains that the 'children' born to the faithful but frustrated Israelites are 'wind' or emptiness. It is also present in Athanasius' reading where virgins happily give birth to 'saving spirit' through their union with Christ.

But I view Athanasius' deployment of 1 Corinthians 6:17 to be problematic. Athanasius is surely aware that Paul was not referring exclusively to chastity or virginity in that context. Athanasius' handling of 1 Corinthians is something that must be carefully considered throughout this letter, and his other literature about female chastity (see below), because 1 Corinthians contains the important Pauline material about chastity (1 Cor.7:1 – 40) and also female giftedness and leadership (1 Cor.11:2 – 16). The apostle Paul did not think of 'chastity' as a spiritual marriage to Christ in the same way Athanasius does. Paul argued that 'becom[ing] one spirit' with Christ rules out 'prostitution,' for example (1 Cor.6:16) as well as other sexual sins that he had enumerated earlier (1 Cor.6:9). But Paul did not make this spiritual union mutually exclusive with ordinary marriage. In fact, the apostle encouraged Christian widows to remarry rather than stay chaste (1 Cor.7:39; 1 Tim.5:14). So for Paul, 'becoming one spirit' with the Lord leads to *either* chastity *or* faithful sexual expression within marriage alone (1 Cor.6:12 – 20 and 7:1 – 40). And in either case, further availability to the church and to Christian mission frames the Christian's priorities.

Throughout his literature to virgins and about virginity, Athanasius subtly changes the direction of how Paul used temple language in 1 Corinthians. It is noteworthy that the apostle Paul made a connection between 'body' language and 'temple' language in 1 Corinthians 6:12 – 20, especially if we follow Kenneth E. Bailey's suggestion that this is a chiasmic passage.²¹⁴ My comments here do not depend on agreement about the presence of the chiasm, but I think that the point is more clearly made if we do perceive it.

14 Now God has not only raised the Lord, but will also raise us up through His power.	bodily resurrection – Jesus and us
15 Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ?	your bodies: members of Christ
Shall I then take away the members of Christ and make them members of a prostitute? May it never be!	no prostitution
16 Or do you not know that the one who joins himself to a prostitute is one body with her?	joins to a prostitute one body with her
For He says, 'The two shall become one flesh.'	two become one (Genesis 2:24)
17 But the one who joins himself to the Lord is one spirit with Him.	joins to the Lord one spirit with him
18 Flee immorality.	

²¹⁴ Kenneth E. Bailey, *Paul Through Mediterranean Eyes: Cultural Studies in 1 Corinthians* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2011)

Every other sin that a man commits is outside the body, but the immoral man sins against his own body.	flee immorality
¹⁹ Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and that you are not your own?	your body: temple of the Spirit
²⁰ For you have been bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body.	glorify God in your body

To make the point more clearly, I would summarize the chiasm as follows:

body, resurrection
 body, members of Christ
 body, defilement
 body, union with prostitute
 oneness
 body-temple, union with the Lord
 body-temple, defilement
 body-temple, Holy Spirit
body-temple, glory overflowing

In the first half of the chiasm, Paul uses language that pertains to the body; he speaks of the resurrection of the body, uses the metaphor of us being ‘members’ of ‘the body of Christ,’ and discusses sexual activities which are of course done by physical bodies. In the second half of the chiasm, Paul complements that with language that pertains to the temple, informed by the institution of the tabernacle and temple from Jewish tradition, making clear how he thinks of the human body as a temple. The body is a temple in the sense of housing the Spirit. Sexual sin is a desecration of the temple’s holiness and purpose. And each person is meant to be indwelt by the Holy Spirit in the same way that the shekinah glory of God once indwelt the tabernacle, and then the temple in Jerusalem. The Christian community is also a corporate body and temple through which God makes Himself known. Paul elides between singular and plural pronouns but clearly means both. The apostle Paul connects the portrait of glory emanating from the temple to appropriate behavior coming forth from Christian men and women. Clearly, to Paul, moral behavior is highly significant. The entire section 1 Corinthians 4:18 – 7:40 concerns the individual body and the corporate body with regards to sexual behavior.

However, moral behavior is not the only appropriate behavior the apostle wants to see pouring forth from Christians. Paul values relational availability (1 Cor.7:35) and even cross-cultural competence in mission (1 Cor.9:19 – 22). His affirmation of Chloe, who seems to be a reliable house church leader (1 Cor.1:11) and Prisca, who co-leads a house church in Ephesus with her husband Aquila (1 Cor.16:19), give evidence that Paul considers gifted women to be ‘partners’ and ‘co-workers’ in Christian mission. He is also concerned to see Christian men and women cultivate the gifts of the Spirit (1 Cor.12:1 – 14:40), many of which involve some form of speech. Correspondingly, in a critical and complex passage where he discusses men and women praying and prophesying in the worship service (1 Cor.11:2 – 16), Paul deploys the term ‘glory’ three times. His use of the term ‘glory’ is an important link between the two passages, and the use of the terms ‘disclosed’ (1 Cor.14:25) and ‘revealed’/‘revelation’ (1 Cor.14:6, 26, 30) form a strong conceptual link to the passage on tongues and prophecy. One’s speech, especially on behalf of the Christian community, and not just one’s sexual conduct, is part of the ‘glory’ shining forth from the ‘temple.’

Given this weight given to speech in 1 Corinthians, I am unable to excuse Athanasius for silencing and cloistering Christian women who took this vow of chastity. Athanasius will become more explicit about this in his *Second Letter to Virgins*, dated between 346 – 373 AD, but the model is already present here in his *First Letter*. In chapters 9 – 17, he holds up the virgin Mary as the model of chastity for them. He makes the case for Mary’s perpetual virginity: Since Jesus entrusted his mother to the care of his disciple John, Athanasius argues this is evidence that Mary had no other children who could care for her materially

once Jesus died, rose, and ascended.²¹⁵ Therefore, he reasons, Jesus gave Mary to the church as a perpetual virgin as a model for others, especially women, to emulate.²¹⁶ He provides his own account of Mary's early life prior to receiving the angel Gabriel's announcement.²¹⁷

'13. Thus, Mary was a holy virgin, having the disposition of her soul balanced and doubly increasing. For she desired good works, doing what is proper, having true thoughts in faith and purity. And she did not desire to be seen by people; rather, she prayed that God would be her judge. Nor did she have an eagerness to leave her house, nor was she at all acquainted with the streets; rather, she remained in her house being calm, imitating the fly in honey. She virtuously spent the excess of her manual labour on the poor. And she did not acquire eagerness to look out the window, rather to look at the Scriptures. And she would pray to God privately, taking care about these two things: That she not let evil thoughts dwell in her heart, and also that she not acquire curiosity or learn hardness of heart. And she did not permit anyone near her body unless it was covered, and she controlled her anger and extinguished the wrath in her inmost thoughts. Her words were calm; her voice, moderate; she did not cry out. And, being glad in her heart, she did not slander anyone, nor did she willingly listen to slander. She did not grow weary in her heart or become envious in her soul. She was not a braggart, but completely humble. There was no evil in her heart nor contentiousness with those related to her, except concerning the civic life. Straining forward daily, she made progress (cf. Phil.3:13). When she first arose, she strove that her works might be new, beyond what she had already done. She forgot her good works and her merciful deeds: She did them secretly. But she remembered the Lord, struggling to add to what she had done before, and the works of this age she removed from her heart. And she was not anxious about death; rather, she grieved and sighed daily that she had not yet entered the gates of heaven.

'14. The desire of the belly did not overcome her, only up to the measure of the body's necessity. For she ate and drank, not luxuriously, but so that she might not neglect her body and it die contrary to its time. Moreover, she did not sleep beyond measure, but so that the body alone might rest, and afterwards she would be awake for her work and the Scriptures. Fasting was as gladsome for her as feasting is for other people. Instead of visible bread, she flourished all the more on the words of truth. Instead of wine, she had the teachings of the Saviour, and she took more pleasure in the latter than in the former, so that she too received the profitable teachings and said, 'Your breasts, my brother, are better than wine' (Song 1:2).

'15. And she did not come and go, but only as was necessary for her to go to the temple. For she did not neglect it (the temple); rather, she went with her parents, walking in a good manner, reverent in her dress and in the gaze of her eyes as well, so that those who saw her thought that she had someone watching over her, making her remember and edifying her in everything she would do. For the good thought that she acquired for herself was her guardian and teacher, that which she acquired from the beginning through her prayers. For she did not gaze at external things with her eyes, nor was she ever heard crying out. Rather, when she prayed, her parents and the other women with her were amazed at her. For they did not hear her voice, but from the movement of her lips they saw her continuing and perceived that they were movements of holy inner thoughts.

'16. And her parents, when they saw these things, gave thanks to God, not only because he had given to them a daughter, but because he had given them a blessing like this for them to have. And she, for her part, knew what was fitting: First she would pray to God, and afterwards she would submit to her parents. But as for fighting with her father or mother, she considered it an abomination to God. And she had this desire before her eyes: To submit to her parents more than like a slave.

'17. And as for her being familiar with a male slave or with any other male, it is superfluous to speak, for she was a stranger to them in this way, so that she did not endure their voice. And they

²¹⁵ Athanasius of Alexandria, *First Letter to Virgins* 9 – 10

²¹⁶ *Ibid* 11 – 12

²¹⁷ *Ibid* 13 – 17

were distant from her and did not become acquainted with her, [except for her form]. And it is the gospel that bears witness to this saying: For when the archangel Gabriel was sent to her—and it was as a man that he came to her because he had assumed human nature—he spoke with her, saying: ‘Greetings, Mary, O favoured one, the Lord is with you!’ (Lk.1:28) And the girl, when she heard that she was being addressed by a male voice, immediately became very disturbed because she was not familiar with the male voice. And Mary took counsel in the purity of her intellect whether to flee or to die until he who was speaking to her took her fear from her by revealing to her his name, saying, ‘Do not fear, Mary! It is I, Gabriel!’ (Lk.1:30) Then after this she remained and took courage, greeting him, because she knew that the words of archangels addressed to virgins are true. This is the image of virginity, for holy Mary was like this. Let her who wishes to be a virgin look to her, for on account of things like this the Word chose her so that he might receive this flesh through her and become human for our sake.’²¹⁸

For those familiar with Athanasius’ biography of the Egyptian monk Antony, *Life of Antony*, we can see certain similarities: a balanced soul; a healthy body fully submitted to the soul; a life of solitude; etc. Mention of the soul and body in the context of a spiritual biography recalls Athanasius’ argument of the soul-body relation in his two volume *Against the Heathen – On the Incarnation*. That paradigm appears here in 337 AD, not in the context of an evangelistic appeal, but as a pastoral framework, showing that Athanasius was deeply committed to it as a paradigm of developing his fellow Christians. By portraying the virgin Mary as exemplifying it, Athanasius is able to commend this model of life to other virgin women and ascetic men. Unlike Antony, however, who was a contemporary of Athanasius and many others, Mary is separated from Athanasius by the distance of nearly three and a half centuries and hundreds of miles. So whatever materials about the historical Mary of Nazareth that Athanasius has at his disposal, the bishop is refashioning into a portrait of his own ideal Christian woman who remains a virgin *for her entire lifetime*.

I am happy to grant that the historical Mary of Nazareth was chosen by God for the incarnation of the Word because of some level of receptiveness to Him. Luke’s portrayal of Mary suggests that she internalized Scripture in Jewish faith and hope, as shown by her timely quotation of Psalm 107:9 in her Magnificat (Lk.1:53). Psalm 107 begins the fifth ‘book’ of Psalms, and this fifth ‘book’ seems to correspond with the prophetic destiny of the house of David in the person of the messiah, so Mary’s weaving of the first of that set of psalms in her celebration of the coming birth of the heir of David is a testament to her perceptive familiarity with the Hebrew Scriptures. Luke himself seems to use her song at the start of his narrative to also draw attention to later places where he provides a quotation from Psalms 107 – 150 in connection with Jesus as the final Davidic king. From the genealogies provided by both Luke and Matthew, we also get the distinct impression that Mary’s betrothal/pre-consummated marriage to Joseph was important as a factor in God selecting both Joseph and Mary because of their descent from King David. This made Jesus a biological descendent of David through Nathan to Mary, and a claimant to the throne by the royal line through Solomon to Joseph.

However, I must challenge Athanasius’ rendering of Mary as excessive hagiography. Even if these details about Mary’s early life are reliable, which I doubt, Athanasius is in error about their relevance for any Christian adult. Luke’s account of Mary is difficult to reconcile with that of our Alexandrian theologian. According to Luke, Mary composed a very thoughtful poem with rich theological meaning, in relatively little time, and was apparently happy to teach it to others to convey her experience (Lk.1:45 – 55). Is this the same woman who only moved her lips but uttered no sound? Is this the same woman who ‘did not cry out’? Also, in Luke’s narrative, Mary traveled about a hundred miles from Nazareth to Ain Karim, five miles from Jerusalem, to visit her distant older relative Elizabeth, who was of course pregnant with John the Baptist (Lk.1:39 – 40). Mary ‘stayed with her for about three months, and then returned home’ (Lk.1:56). Is this the same person who had no ‘eagerness to look out the window’? Is this the same woman who ‘did not come and go, but only as was necessary for her to go to the temple’ and that ‘only with her parents’?

From a historical perspective, we can be fairly certain that Mary traveled with companions to keep her safe. But from a literary perspective, Luke seems completely unconcerned to portray Mary as needing to ask

²¹⁸ Ibid 13 – 17

anyone's permission to take this journey and stay for so long – neither her parents nor Joseph seem to have been consulted. In fact, this portrayal of Mary of Nazareth serves *Luke's* narrative and theological interest in presenting allegiance to Jesus as tempering all other previous bonds of blood. Notice, for example, that Jesus intervenes when Martha of Bethany attempts to exert her older sisterly authority per se over her younger sister, also named Mary (Lk.10:38 – 42). This theme emerges again and again (Lk.2:41 – 52; 9:57 – 62; 12:13 – 15; 14:25 – 35; 18:29 – 30). Allegiance to Jesus and his word calls into being a new family of God (e.g. Lk.8:1 – 21). As a theologian in his own right, Luke has an interest in portraying Mary as entering into a somewhat more egalitarian relationship with those around her because of the announcement of the word of God concerning Jesus, and the direct claim of authority that God makes on her through the gospel message, even in this way.

The apostle Paul also made this same point when he argued in 1 Corinthians 6 – 7 that human authority structures like slavery and marriage have to be tempered, if not disrupted, by Jesus who has primary authority over people's bodies (1 Cor.6:18 – 20; 7:21 – 23, 29 – 35). Every other form of authority – whether slavery which is from the fall, or marriage which is from the creation – must be subordinated in some sharp way. Paul goes so far as to say that even the bonds of Christian marriage ought to be somewhat *loosened* for the sake of freeing the two spouses up for service and ministry outside their marriage: 'from now on those who have wives [and implicitly, husbands] should be as though they had none.' This is set off by an echo²¹⁹ of Genesis 2:24 in 1 Corinthians 6:16 at the center of the chiasmic structure of 6:12 – 20. Paul quotes, 'The two shall become one flesh.' But directly connected to this phrase in the original text of Genesis is the normative description of leaving one's parents in order to enter into the bond of marriage. Genesis' priority of one's marriage over one's family of origin is now made to serve the Christian priority of one's union with Christ over all other relationships. Paul makes the echo resonating in 1 Corinthians 6:16 explicit in 7:1 – 40.

Unfortunately, unlike Luke and Paul, Athanasius deploys his portrait of Mary to encourage Christian female virgins of all ages to stay at home, becoming almost 'unfamiliar' with the voices of men, save the Athanasian representative at the local church. Athanasius places undue restrictions on these women, compared to what the New Testament admonishes, especially Paul in 1 Corinthians. In my view, Athanasius overcorrects because of his fears of unsupervised virgin women in his Athanasian churches interacting with anyone in the Melitian or Arian factions. Athanasius' virgin Mary is unusually home-bound and silent, even in a context of worship: 'She did not acquire eagerness to look out the window, rather to look at the Scriptures. And she would pray to God privately... she did not cry out.'²²⁰ 'And she did not come and go, but only as was necessary for her to go to the temple. For she did not neglect it (the temple); rather, she went with her parents... For she did not gaze at external things with her eyes, nor was she ever heard crying out. Rather, when she prayed, her parents and the other women with her were amazed at her. For they did not hear her voice, but from the movement of her lips they saw her continuing and perceived that they were movements of holy inner thoughts.'²²¹ How does Athanasius deal with the admonition of Paul, in the very letter which features chastity so prominently, for Christian women to speak forth powerfully the word of the Lord?

Athanasius must substantially qualify and reshape Paul's teaching in 1 Corinthians 6 – 7 and 11 – 14, which he does by *subordinating* Paul to his own portrait of the virgin Mary! He says:

'18. Moreover, perhaps Paul learned about her lifestyle, for when he had received a pattern in her, he brought forth this opinion about virginity. Therefore, he wrote to the Corinthians, saying: 'Concerning the virgins I have no command of the Lord, but I offer an opinion as one who by the Lord's mercy is trustworthy' (1 Cor.7:25). And I think that you too have understood this well, because it was said carefully, especially if you will remember what we said about virginity being beyond human nature, because in Mary its image has appeared. For it was not commanded by the

²¹⁹ Richard B. Hays, *Echoes of Scripture in the Letters of Paul* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1989) defines 'echo' as the broader Old Testament context which is always implicated when the New Testament quotes a passage; see also his *The Conversion of the Imagination: Paul as Interpreter of Israel's Scriptures* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2005), *Reading Backwards* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2014), and *Echoes of Scripture in the Gospels* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2016)

²²⁰ Athanasius of Alexandria, *First Letter to Virgins* 13

²²¹ *Ibid* 15

law to do, so that we would not think that marriage, which is in accordance with nature, were contrary to the law or acting as a constraint, hindering people from virginity, and so that the person who was not a virgin would not be condemned as having not performed a commandment. Indeed, Paul himself did not learn about it (virginity) through the law, but rather through the way of life of Mary, and he commanded these things as I have already said. Hence, he gave it to the free will of those who desire it so that its virtue might be for those who have chosen it for themselves.’²²²

The notion that the apostle Paul learned about virginity from *Mary of Nazareth* is without precedent in patristic literature before this. It appears to fall from the pen of Athanasius for the first time. The apostle Paul was referring to *himself* when he referred to ‘one who by the Lord’s mercy is trustworthy’ (1 Cor.7:25). This is why Paul feels the need to circle back at the end of this section and remind the Corinthians, ‘I think that I also have the Spirit of God’ (1 Cor.7:40). Surprisingly, Athanasius suggests that Paul was instead referring to *Mary*. He first offers this idea with some uncertainty: ‘*perhaps* Paul learned about her lifestyle...’ But then he rapidly moves to a higher level of certainty about it: ‘Indeed, Paul himself did not learn about it through the law, but rather through the way of life of Mary...’ Athanasius does this to *displace* the actual point Paul was making in 1 Corinthians 7 when he talked about singleness. Paul was encouraging *more* speech and service in the church community. Athanasius is encouraging *less*.

Athanasius reminds his audience that, although virginity is greater, marriage is still good.²²³ This prepares him to rebut the heretic Hieracas. How then, do people make the choice to marry or remain chaste? Athanasius anticipates that by insisting on human free will. ‘Virginity persuades people to itself and urges them by counsel and advice... so that no one will act as though he was forced to do something.’²²⁴ The Alexandrian bishop then deploys two parables which describe variable Christian response to the word, and commensurate results or rewards:

‘20. But someone will say this: ‘Why did the same seed produce a hundredfold and sixty and thirty?’ Is it not the Word who is the sower?’ (Mt.13:3 – 8) The reason for the hundredfold, the sixty, and the thirty, why they differ from one another, is that human beings have chosen for themselves. We will all bear fruit to the Lord who sowed. Moreover, it is the same Lord who says to the virgin, ‘Be set over ten cities,’ and to the married woman, ‘Be set over five cities’ (Lk.19:17 – 19). ‘There are many places in the house of my Father’ (Jn.14:2). But it is a single age that exists, the kingdom of heaven: Everyone whose actions are according to the law and who are pure in faith will be found there. But each one will receive the crown of victory according to how well he carried out the way of life belonging to his vow: Even if one star differs from another in glory, it is nevertheless the same sky in which the stars are and which contains them (1 Cor.15:40)’²²⁵

To depict that glory, Athanasius then imagines a celebratory procession led by Mary, where virgins come first, and those who were sexually faithful in their marriages follow after.²²⁶ All will be honored, but in a certain order: ‘Virginity leads and walks in front, as she is accustomed, with great boldness, and they all will be a single chorus and a single symphony in the faith, praising God.’²²⁷ He imagines that this celebration will culminate in Jesus the bridegroom repeating the words of the parable of the wise and foolish virgins: ‘Enter into the joy of your master!’ (Mt.25:21, 23)

Earlier, I stated my belief that Athanasius is being a bit creative with these parables. In the bishop’s defense, however, he might be wresting the parable of the four soils away from Hieracas and his faction. Athanasius names Hieracas at last in ch.22. Brakke notes:

‘From Athanasius’ presentation of it, Hieracas’ answer appears to have been that each soil is of a different ‘nature’ (*physis*): one soil (the good) has a nature that permits it to receive the seed and

²²² Ibid 18

²²³ Ibid 19

²²⁴ Ibid 19

²²⁵ Ibid 20

²²⁶ Ibid 21

²²⁷ Ibid 21

bear fruit; the others do not. By analogy, human beings must have different natures that determine their ability to receive the good, to practice celibacy, and thus to be saved. Athanasius rejected this interpretation: the soils that are not good in fact receive the seed at first, demonstrating that by nature they are 'persons capable of receiving the good'; when these soils later reject the seed, it is therefore 'not because of nature, but rather because of neglect and worldly desire.'²²⁸

In my judgment, while Athanasius is taking certain liberties with these parables by narrowing the outcomes to marriage or celibacy, I also think he is being quite insightful. He explains why the crop yields (or rewards in the parable of the talents/minas) are different. His answer is 'human choices:' 'Why they differ from one another is that human beings have chosen for themselves,' he says.²²⁹ He establishes the general rule and moves to the particular. The general: There is a single 'house of my Father,' 'a single age,' and 'everyone whose actions are according to the law and who are pure in faith will be found there.' But there are particularities: 'But each one will receive the crown of victory according to how well he carried out the way of life belonging to his vow.' He then imitates Paul's appeal to the different brightness levels of the stars.

Judging from the parable of the four soils, Athanasius is fully committed to crediting God's word for providing the raw material for spiritual growth and the categories for that growth. But he believes that human free will alone, responding to the word, not some inscrutable activity of God, explains the *differences* in results. He stated his appeal to human free will when he said, 'He gave it to the free will of those who desire it so that its virtue might be for those who have chosen it for themselves.'²³⁰ The seed of the word, to Athanasius, produces different results, not because Jesus shares content with one person that is different from that which he shares with another. Rather, the seed of the word germinates based on the human response. Its crop form, in other words, is manifested by the decision of the human person receiving it, not according to their *natures* as if their human natures differ, but according to their *choices*. 'And so if they have rejected the word because of persecution, it is clear that they have not rejected it because of *nature*, but rather because of *negligence and worldly desire*.'²³¹

This is as rich a source for understanding Athanasius' view of human free will as any statements in his Christological treatises. Although he is deploying the concept of free will in a pastoral context to defend a church that embraces both married and celibate people, Athanasius explains other human categories as well. Our theologian then cites Judas as someone who held the word at first, and then fell 'became negligent' with 'worldly desire' and began to 'be greedy.'²³² He also gives the negative examples of two people Paul named in 2 Timothy 1:15 as men who 'demonstrated a good free will at first, but finally they withdrew from Paul, having fallen in love with this age.'²³³ In other words, it was by their free will that they made these choices. The seed:

'produces fruits that differ from one another so as to make manifest the zeal of free will and progress. Wherever there is free will, there is inferiority. And this is nothing other than a revelation that humanity is free and under its own power, having the capacity to choose for itself what it wants. Moreover, the virgin reveals that she exists not by nature, but by free will, when she heeds the opinion of Paul and becomes a bride of Christ, and justly they will receive the crown of purity in heaven. Those who receive these words are trampled upon, for they are cast on the ground.'²³⁴

The bishop's comments here remind us of his teaching in *Against the Heathen*, when he spoke of the soul. Within the soul, human persons have a 'power they originally had from God.'²³⁵ Even in a fallen state, the

²²⁸ Brakke 1995, p.49

²²⁹ Athanasius of Alexandria, *First Letter to Virgins* 20

²³⁰ *Ibid* 18

²³¹ *Ibid* 22, emphasis mine

²³² *Ibid* 22

²³³ *Ibid* 22

²³⁴ *Ibid* 23

²³⁵ Athanasius of Alexandria, *Against the Heathen* 3.2

soul, which is 'mobile,' has 'power over herself.'²³⁶ Of course, when he has the luxury of making fuller statements, Athanasius says that existence itself comes by the power of the Word of God, and at every point we are dependent on the Word for our existence and capacity to respond to him. Nevertheless, Athanasius' view of human free will gives rise to his view of the church as morally diverse according to people's varied decisions to receive the power of the Word through the content of his spoken words.

Four years after penning this letter, Athanasius will use the language of the parable of the four soils again, not with reference to the vocations of chastity or marriage. Possibly, Athanasius has learned that the parable's usefulness extends beyond that immediate question. In his *Thirteenth Festal Letter*, that of 341, relating the principle to receiving the hope of eternity and using the patriarch Issachar as his example, Athanasius says, 'The Word scattered the seed, but he watchfully cultivated it, so that it brought forth fruit, even a hundred-fold.'²³⁷ Since Issachar was a son of Jacob and founder of one of the twelve tribes, we know that this cannot be a commentary on chastity. Athanasius nevertheless ascribes the hundred-fold fruitfulness to Issachar's reception of the word of the Word.

Athanasius admonishes his audience to 'take courage and condemn Hieracas, who says that marriage is evil inasmuch as virginity is good.'²³⁸ He repositions the value judgments made on marriage by employing the parable of the soils again: The number sixty, while less than one hundred, is not evil or insignificant! He then mockingly queries where Hieracas might have deduced his position. He briefly surveys creation and the blessing on procreation, the patriarchs and the saints, castigating Hieracas for condemning even Abraham for being married. But of course Athanasius knows that Hieracas' argument is that the New Testament now abrogates what was tolerated before:

'26. But he says that this institution was given to humanity at first, but now it has been taken away and forbidden. When was it taken away and forbidden? Let the worthless man instruct us about this. For indeed in the gospel the angel first informed Zechariah about him who would be born through him, John (Lk.1:8 – 23). And he who earlier gave the law through Moses, the Lord, it is he who commends marriage by his presence in Cana of Galilee (Jn.2:1 – 11). Moreover, he prevented the Pharisees, who desired to transgress the law, from divorcing; rather, (he commanded) that each one be satisfied with his wife piously (Mt.19:3 – 9). And when he spoke about virginity, he taught about it off to the side, because no one could bear it, and said, 'There are eunuchs who have made themselves eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom of heaven' (Mt.19:10 – 12). And here the Lord was not commanding that people become virgins by force of law, but rather giving it to the free will of those who desire it. Therefore, marriage did not cease, as the birth of John instructs us, and the marriage in Cana was not hindered, as the Lord commanded. Where does the lawless man get these ideas? Where has he ever become acquainted with virginity?'²³⁹

In response to Hieracas' hermeneutic of abrogation which divides the Testaments, Athanasius connects Old and New Testaments. The pattern of marriage from the Old Testament is honored in the New. The birth of John the Baptist occurred through a marriage. And even though Jesus was born through the virgin Mary, nevertheless, 'he who earlier gave the law through Moses, the Lord, it is he who commends marriage by his presence in Cana.'²⁴⁰ He also points out a pivotal passage, Matthew 19:3 – 12, which ties together marriage and chastity (the 'eunuch'), creation and new creation, command of God and human free will.

Next, Athanasius moves to counter Hieracas' final appeal to Scripture: Paul's words in 1 Corinthians 7.

'27. He condemns the law, saying: 'I have read the epistle that Paul wrote to the Corinthians, in which he wrote about virginity, but about married people (he wrote), 'The time is short,' and then, 'Let those who have wives live like those who have none' (1 Cor.7:29). But it is clear that Paul has not been well understood. For if he had said, 'Let not those who have (wives) abandon them',

²³⁶ Ibid 4.2; cf. 44.3, 'For as by His own providence bodies grow and the rational soul moves, and possesses life and thought...'

²³⁷ Athanasius of Alexandria, *Thirteenth Festal Letter* 5

²³⁸ Ibid 24

²³⁹ Ibid 26

²⁴⁰ Ibid 26

that would have truly been a prohibition. But he said, 'Let them live like those who have none'; that is, let them not continually make use of the institution, but rather refrain for a time for prayer, lest they end the marriage (1 Cor.7:5). For this reason he said this. Moreover, he commanded this as well: 'Are you bound to a wife? Do not seek to be free. Are you free from a wife? Do not seek a wife' (1 Cor.7:27). Furthermore, he says, 'I want the young women to marry, to produce children, and to govern their households' (1 Tim.5:14). And concerning virginity he tells us: 'Those who are forbidding marriage and abstaining from food are heretics and apostates' (1 Tim.4:3). Again, the saint writes these things so that the measure of virginity's great virtue might be according to free will and desire, saying, 'He who gives his daughter in marriage does well, but he who does not give her does better', and, 'The virgin is blessed when she remains like this in my opinion' (1 Cor.7:38 – 40). For she has lack of anxiety, purity, and confirmation like Mary, so that she too need not be anxious about others, but rather stand before the Lord with unceasing prayers.'²⁴¹

Hieracas condemns the law supporting marriage by appealing to 1 Corinthians 7:29. Athanasius retorts that Hieracas has deeply misunderstood Paul here. First, Athanasius argues, Paul did not tell husbands to 'abandon' their wives. That important difference in word choice might point to how Hieracas admonished married people. Second, Athanasius connects Paul's 'loosening' of the bond of marriage to Paul's earlier emphasis on 'prayer' in 7:1 – 5. That is, Paul was speaking about a practical issue concerning making time for another form of ministry; he was not making a declaration about marriage as a principle per se. I must note, in connection with my earlier comments about the development of spiritual gifts, that what Paul meant by 'prayer' and what Athanasius envisions by it may or may not be the same thing. Third, Paul flatly said to those who are married to not seek to be free from that marriage, in 7:27. Fourth, in 1 Timothy 5:14, he commends remarriage to young widows, including childbearing and household governance. While his mind is on 1 Timothy, Athanasius points out that the apostle Paul condemned those who condemn marriage (1 Tim.4:3), like Hieracas does. He stresses the role of human free will again, in the maintenance of one's virginity (i.e. to not get married) and stay chaste instead.

I point out as a criticism of Athanasius that he truncates his quotation of 1 Corinthians 7:40. He does not want to call attention to the weakness of his earlier exegesis. In 7:40, Paul answered an apparent question that the Corinthians were asking him. Once again, as in 7:12 and 7:25, Paul needed to provide an answer to a practical and pressing question that Jesus himself had not addressed in his earthly ministry. Thus, Paul adds the critical phrase, 'in my opinion.' The full quotation from Paul would have included that phrase reminiscent of the Hebrew prophets saying, 'Thus says the Lord:' 'And I think that I also have the Spirit of God.' Had he included that phrase, Athanasius would have implicitly called attention to 7:12 and 7:25 where Paul gave 'his own opinion,' as opposed to a teaching of Jesus handed down by all the apostles. But that would have undermined Athanasius' own claim that Paul, when he said, 'one who by the mercy of the Lord is trustworthy,' was referring to the virgin Mary and not himself. Athanasius therefore makes a very convenient omission.

Athanasius then argues that Hieracas should be cast out publicly, his teaching condemned.²⁴² Hieracas thinks he is elevating virginity, but is actually despising it. By denigrating marriage as sinful, he is injecting an inappropriate motivation into the decision-making of those who decide to be virgins. Athanasius reminds his audience that the thirty, sixty, and hundred come from one seed.²⁴³ He declares, 'The Lord is one who has legislated marriage and speaks symbolically about virginity.' Athanasius must surely know that the rhetorical power of invoking a creedal statement, 'The Lord is one,' found in Jewish tradition (Dt.6:5 – 6) and Paul's first letter to the Corinthians in modified form (1 Cor.8:4 – 6), would drive his point home. For he then turns from Hieracas to simply exhorting the virgins to adoring prayer to the Lord Jesus and worship of him, summoning the romantic language from the Song of Songs in an allegorical fashion.²⁴⁴ He concludes this section by reminding the virgins of the sufficiency of Holy Scripture, and

²⁴¹ Ibid 27

²⁴² Ibid 28

²⁴³ Ibid 29

²⁴⁴ Ibid 30 – 34

‘particularly the life of Mary, the bearer of God.’²⁴⁵ He holds in high esteem the older women who ‘have grown old in virginity [who] inspire with their beauty.’²⁴⁶ They serve as an ‘image’ of Mary herself.

Having dispatched the heresy of Hieracas, Athanasius turns to the Arian heresy,²⁴⁷ the other heresy he believes is threatening the piety and loyalty of the virgins of Egypt. He reminds the virgins of the earlier interactions between virgins of the previous generation, and the bishop of the previous generation, Athanasius’ mentor Alexander. He makes portrays this meeting with spiritually honoring language:

‘For when virgins like you came to him and asked to hear some word from him, he saw them boiling in the Spirit and the grace of their prepared heart, and he received them. And the gospels were in his hand, for he was a long-time lover of reading. Then he immediately spoke about their bridegroom—and yours—and brought them to love for the Word and zeal for virginity.’²⁴⁸

Describing the virgins of one generation past as ‘boiling in the Spirit and the grace of their prepared heart’ is another of Athanasius’ ways of describing *synergia*. God was doing something, and these faithful women were responsive in some way. Athanasius does not recollect what these women had learned previously, or how they had evidently formed a community of ascetic women in some sense. The rest of this encounter remains lost to history. But Athanasius’ brief commentary does give evidence of his theological interpretation of what happens when anyone hears and responds faithfully to ‘the gospels,’ or the words of the Word.

Athanasius cautions them, for knowledge about the eternal Son of God, to rely on the Scriptures and ‘the people who speak about God just as the Scriptures do.’²⁴⁹ Obviously, he excludes the Arian teachers from that circle. From there, the bishop moves quickly through affirmations about the Son: his co-eternity with and co-equality from the Father, his being from the substance and not the will of the Father, his role as creator of the universe, his appearance to Moses in giving Israel the Jewish law, and then this curious phrase:

‘It is he who enters the souls of the saints in every generation, making them friends and prophets of God.’²⁵⁰

Once more, Athanasius deploys his soul-body anthropology. In describing the pre-incarnate Word’s interactions with Israel in the Old Testament, Athanasius says that Word entered the soul. Presumably, he also means that the Word entered the mind via specific content of his words, empowered by the Holy Spirit. For the effect, ‘making them friends and prophets of God,’ reminds us of Abraham, the first character whose internalization of the words of God is explained in great detail in Genesis 12 – 22, and the prophets, who repeated the words of God given to them.

As he urges the virgins to stay faithful to the Son of God, as presented in an orthodox way, Athanasius presents bishop Alexander quoting the erotic love language of the Song of Songs, which he applies allegorically to the relationship between Christ and the believer.

‘40. He is radiant because he is the Word and the true light that lives in everyone, but he is ruddy on account of the flesh that he bore for our sake. But in a myriad of ways it is clear that he lived and that his birth was not like that of any human being. For he took flesh from a virgin alone, having become human so that in this way you too might be with him and he might be for you brother and bridegroom.

41. Now, therefore, it is he to whom you cling, beside whom you sleep, with whom you watch, and for whom you are at leisure. He is sufficient for you in every way, and so do not give yourself

²⁴⁵ Ibid 35

²⁴⁶ Ibid 35

²⁴⁷ Ibid 36 – 45

²⁴⁸ Ibid 36

²⁴⁹ Ibid 37

²⁵⁰ Ibid 38

to another. For he is sufficient for hearing you when you pray, healing you when you are sick, and moreover rescuing you from those who plot against you and saving you when you are in danger. Indeed, Peter would have gone down into the depths, but it was he who helped him (Mt.14:28 – 33) he who cast the devil behind when he wanted to rebuke the disciples (Mt.8:32 – 33). For you have him in your heart, and so you will not stumble in your inner thoughts. For you have a light concerning his commandments, and you do them, and so you will inherit blessedness in the kingdom of heaven.²⁵¹

Notably, Athanasius repeats the language of John's Gospel when he says that the Word is 'the true light that lives in everyone.'²⁵² Even in glancing form, Athanasius sees the Word of God already being involved in the existence of every human being by virtue of *creation*, not just *redemption*. But those who 'have him in your heart,' who 'have a light concerning his commandments' have received his words, and by extension, his Spirit. His intimate involvement in every aspect of life will culminate in their blessed inheritance.

Athanasius warns the virgins of Arian slogans, and why these slogans are wrong.²⁵³ Curiously and sadly, he does not commission these virgins to debate the Arians. For one so invested in teaching Christological orthodoxy to people, including these women, Athanasius' reticence to share that task with them can only strike me as erroneous: overprotective and well-meaning perhaps, but paternalistically erroneous nonetheless.

But Athanasius places this interesting recollection in the mouth of Alexander:

'If the Word had not become flesh, how would you now be joined with him and cling to him? But when the Lord bore the body of humanity, the body became acceptable to the Word. Therefore, you have now become virgins and brides of Christ.'²⁵⁴

By saying this, Athanasius pithily anchors the vow of virginity in Christology and soteriology, as an emblem. The union of Word with the human body made the human body acceptable to the Word. Given Athanasius' prior treatment of Matthew 19:10 – 12 and 1 Corinthians 7 – the places where Jesus and Paul, respectively, provide *words* about virginity/chastity – I read Athanasius as saying here that the power of the Word accompanies *the words he speaks, even when these words are about a vocational option and not commanded*. Those words can still be received by the soul and mediated to the body. Athanasius may be returning to the statement he made at the start of the *First Letter*: Jesus made virginity not only possible and desirable, but 'easy.'²⁵⁵

How has Jesus made it easy to maintain one's virginity or commit to chastity? Surely setting up monastic communities of people to support one another in upholding this ideal is one aspect of Jesus' accomplishment. But the deeper answer lies in not in sociology, but Christology and soteriology. Jesus made chastity 'easy' because the Word who bore the human body is also present in his words, including the words about chastity, should anyone choose to receive them. In his concluding thoughts, Athanasius reminds the virgins 'to do' things 'from the gospel.'²⁵⁶ What things? 'Now, these are the things that the Lord *said* [the beatitudes from Matthew 5:3 – 12]... For all these things and for each of these deeds that we have spoken of there is a written beatitude given by the Saviour.'²⁵⁷

If Athanasius and I are understanding the beatitudes in roughly the same way, his reference to them is well placed. The beatitudes are Jesus' verbal invitation to a process of heart-level transformation, which happens by his word across a multitude of topics which he (or Matthew) organized into a single unit (Mt.5:13 – 7:29) as emblematic of Jesus' entire teaching. For Athanasius to make the Sermon on the

²⁵¹ Ibid 40 – 41

²⁵² Ibid 40

²⁵³ Ibid 40 – 41

²⁵⁴ Ibid 43

²⁵⁵ Ibid 8

²⁵⁶ Ibid 46

²⁵⁷ Ibid 47

Mount fairly central to his paradigm for spiritual and ethical growth is discerning. It is part of Matthew's larger point that Jesus filled to the full Israel's story. God once led Israel through water, then wilderness, and then a mountain to receive His commandments, which they immediately broke. They failed in their opportunity to present their human nature to God. But now, God led human nature in the person of Jesus through water, then wilderness, and then a mountain to receive His commandments into his very flesh. He was the sole Israelite – the true Israel – who kept these commandments. By his Spirit, he shares his Word-embracing humanity with us, as well as the words which he inscribed onto the tablet of his own heart as the one who inaugurated the 'new covenant' (Jer.31:31 – 34) in the style and form of the old. This is the 'word' on which Jesus instructed his disciples to build their lives (Mt.7:24 – 27) which now overflows from him in the same way that Jesus overflowed the story of Israel.

The word that Jesus gives as redeemer is coordinated with his role as our creator and sustainer. It may be a figure of speech that Athanasius deploys when he attributes deep-seated memory to human nature itself. In the beginning of his letter, Athanasius says that 'human nature, aware of the rib that was taken from Adam for a woman, seeks to join her with him...' ²⁵⁸ This is an intriguing statement. Is this merely a colorful way of explaining a pull that men and women feel towards monogamous marriage? Or does our human nature have a memory for things long forgotten consciously? If so, where is this memory stored? I am inclined to take Athanasius seriously on this point, despite the unanswered questions it leaves me. If the Word of God created us and stamped us with his *logikon*, then our human nature remembers not just the origin of marriage, and not just the garden of Eden, but the one who placed us there, in whose image marriage is. Jesus Christ, the now-incarnate Word, the one who has life in himself, in whose image is the oneness of the original human marriage which has life in itself, joined human nature to himself and renewed all its memories. Now, from his renewed humanity, he speaks to us. Arguably, this is how he is 'invisibly persuading' ²⁵⁹ us, as Athanasius said in *On the Incarnation*. Out of the overflow of his Spirit, who inheres in his words, he awakens the deepest memory woven into the very fabric of who we are. This is the one to whom we all long to return, who walked and talked with us long ago in the cool of the day. He is the one we long to walk and talk with once more.

This has enormous bearing on our study on matters of the Holy Spirit, conversion, and sanctification. Conversion, then, is not entirely against our will, although assuredly resistance to Jesus exists in us. There is a deep, mysterious part of us which 'seeks to join' our creator in rational union, in response to what our creator has done in his incarnation to join with us. Sanctification, moreover, is the restoration of proper human *memories and desires* – memories and desires that go all the way back to God's original garden. In other words, there is a conceptual aspect to the subjective pole of our sanctification which includes, but is not restricted to, our minds.

Athanasius' Vision of Unity and Diversity in the Temple Community: *Tenth Festal Letter* (338 AD)

In his *Tenth Festal Letter*, written from his second exile, this time in Rome, in 338 AD, returns to the same themes that occupied him in the *First Letter to Virgins* written just one year prior. Athanasius regrets the 'affliction' and 'great distance [which] has separated' him and his fellow Egyptians. ²⁶⁰ Nevertheless, he knows that in the Lord and in the Spirit, geographical distance can be curiously overcome:

'2. While I then committed all my affairs to God, I was anxious to celebrate the feast with you, not taking into account the distance between us. For although place separate us, yet the Lord the Giver of the feast, and Who is Himself our feast, Who is also the Bestower of the Spirit, brings us together in mind, in harmony, and in the bond of peace. For when we mind and think the same things, and offer up the same prayers on behalf of each other, no place can separate us, but the Lord gathers and unites us together. For if He promises, that 'when two or three are gathered together in His name, He is in the midst of them [Matthew 18:20],' it is plain that being in the

²⁵⁸ Ibid 3

²⁵⁹ Athanasius of Alexandria, *On the Incarnation* 31.4: 'For now that the Saviour works so great things among men, and *day by day is invisibly persuading* so great a multitude from every side, both from them that dwell in Greece and in foreign lands, to come over to His faith, and all to obey His teaching, will any one still hold his mind in doubt whether a Resurrection has been accomplished by the Saviour, and whether Christ is alive, or rather is Himself the Life?' (emphasis mine); also 53.1: 'invisibly exposing each man's error'

²⁶⁰ Athanasius of Alexandria, *Tenth Festal Letter* 1

midst of those who in every place are gathered together, He unites them, and receives the prayers of all of them, as if they were near, and listens to all of them, as they cry out the same Amen. I have borne affliction like this, and all those trials which I mentioned, my brethren, when I wrote to you.²⁶¹

Athanasius appeals to ‘the Lord’ and ‘the Spirit’ in a striking manner when dealing with his separation from his fellow Egyptians. I find it curious that he does not appeal to the fast per se, despite the fast being the occasion for his writing, nor any type of sacramental act. Based on what other patristic writers say about the eucharist or baptism, Athanasius would surely not object to speaking of the sacraments as gathering the church either. But for him in exile in Rome, the fast not only occasions a practice not specified by Jesus sacramentally, the exile also magnifies the problem of separation. Geographical separation would ordinarily exist anyway, given that Athanasius’ Egypt was a far flung ‘parish,’ and Frumentius’ ministry in Ethiopia lay further south. But the reality of that separation would have been symbolically mitigated if the bishop were sitting in his seat in Alexandria. Athanasius must appeal then to something else. Therefore, he says tellingly, it is ‘when we mind and think the same things, and offer up the same prayers on behalf of each other’ that ‘the Lord gathers and unites us together’ in the Spirit. As we saw above, the whole purpose of the fast prior to Easter is to discipline the body and focus the mind on the words of the Lord found in Scripture. So the word is central. The quotation from Matthew 18:20 about two or three gathering in the name of Jesus also has a spoken word in view, since the original context of the verse involves church discipline, correction, and possibly two or three Christians verbally excommunicating an unrepentant individual. These constraints appear to draw to the surface his most basic concept of the church. The objective reality of the Lord who is present to his people by his Spirit constitutes the church. ‘He unites them, and receives the prayers of all of them, as if they were near [to each other], and listens to all of them, as they cry out the same Amen.’

After reminding the Egyptians to be thankful, Athanasius uses language of God which he used in *Against the Heathen – On the Incarnation*.

‘God, who is good, multiplied His loving-kindness towards us, not only when He granted the common salvation of us all through His Word, but now also, when enemies have persecuted us, and have sought to seize upon us. As the blessed Paul says in a certain place, when describing the incomprehensible riches of Christ: ‘But God, being rich in mercy, for the great love wherewith He loved us, even when we were dead in follies and sins, quickened us with Christ [Ephesians 2:4 – 5].’ For the might of man and of all creatures, is weak and poor; but the Might which is above man, and uncreated, is rich and incomprehensible, and has no beginning, but is eternal.²⁶²

Because God’s mercy is rich in expression, Athanasius again turns his attention to the theme of a diversity of vocations, especially between married and celibate Christians:

‘He does not then possess one method only of healing, but being rich, He works in various manners for our salvation by means of His Word, Who is not restricted or hindered in His dealings towards us; but since He is rich and manifold, He varies Himself according to the individual capacity of each soul. For He is the Word and the Power and the Wisdom of God, as Solomon testifies concerning Wisdom, that ‘being one, it can do all things, and remaining in itself, it makes all things new; and passing upon holy souls, fashions the friends of God and the prophets [Wisdom 7:27].’²⁶³

Athanasius is once more striking a balance between what is general among all Christians, and what is particular based on individual choices. His explanation of the Word’s sensitivity to each person is remarkable. He deploys Wisdom 7:27, which remarks on the *Spirit’s* sensitivity to each person, which results in an apparent Hebrew merism: many become ‘friends of God’ and a few become ‘prophets.’ Thus, for all practical purposes, he anticipates his formal statements on the Holy Spirit’s inherence in the Word

²⁶¹ Ibid 1

²⁶² Ibid 4

²⁶³ Ibid 4

which he will give in his *Letters to Serapion on the Holy Spirit* over twenty years later. He is already thinking it here. Also, he says that the Word is ‘rich’ and then ‘rich and manifold,’ and ‘varies himself’ to each person’s capacity of soul. This coheres with a sense that Jesus’ humanity is our humanity ontologically, but larger than our humanity vocationally because it is the humanity of the creative Word. He will make clear that he does not mean that people’s capacity of soul is a fixed and given quantity; to the contrary, there is a progression of growth in the soul. He simply means that different people are at different spiritual places at any given time.

Our theologian then uses biblical language of varied nourishment:

‘To those then who have not yet attained to the perfect way He becomes like a sheep giving milk, and this was administered by Paul: ‘I have fed you with milk, not with meat [1 Corinthians 3:2].’ To those who have advanced beyond the full stature of childhood, but still are weak as regards perfection, He is their food, according to their capacity, being again administered by Paul, ‘Let him that is weak eat herbs [Romans 14:2].’ But as soon as ever a man begins to walk in the perfect way, he is no longer fed with the things before mentioned, but he has the Word for bread, and flesh for food, for it is written, ‘Strong meat is for those who are of full age, for those who, by reason of their capacity, have their senses exercised [Hebrews 5:14].’²⁶⁴

The comparison rests on combining the general and the specific. The Word ‘varies himself’ by nourishing Christians in various ways. The stages go from ‘milk’ to ‘herbs’ to ‘bread’ and ‘flesh/meat.’ This is a progression of human diet from infancy onward. When used as an analogy for spiritual growth, we see:

<i>Person in a Stage of Maturing</i>	<i>Form the Word Takes</i>	<i>Scriptural Support</i>
‘Those who have not attained to the perfect way’	‘He becomes like a sheep giving milk’	‘I have fed you with milk, not meat’ (1 Cor.3:2)
‘Those who have advanced beyond the full stature of childhood, but still are weak as regards perfection’	‘He is their food’	‘Let him that is weak eat herbs’ (Rom.14:2)
‘As ever a man begins to walk in the perfect way’	‘The Word [is his] bread,’ ‘flesh for food,’ and ‘strong meat’	‘Strong meat is for those who are of full age’ (Heb.5:14)

What is ‘the perfect way?’ Athanasius appears to be thinking of the chaste life of the Christian ascetic, as this is what he discusses next (see below). The chaste life is the perfect life because in eternity, there will be neither marriage nor sexual expression, at least in the genital form we know in the present. But furthermore, Athanasius believes that the chaste life reflects a greater degree of ordering of the body by the soul. How does the Word tailor the nourishment he gives varied believers? He knows that in the writings of Paul and Hebrews (he did think Paul wrote Hebrews), for example, that phrase refers to the way biblical content can be grouped into categories. He goes on to use the parable of the four soils as he did in the *First Letter to Virgins*:

‘And further, when the word is sown it does not yield a uniform produce of fruit in this human life, but one various and rich; for it brings forth, some an hundred, and some sixty, and some thirty, as the Saviour teaches— that Sower of grace, and Bestower of the Spirit. And this is no doubtful matter, nor one that admits no confirmation; but it is in our power to behold the field which is sown by Him; for in the Church the word is manifold and the produce rich. Not with virgins alone is such a field adorned; nor with monks alone, but also with honourable matrimony and the chastity of each one.’²⁶⁵

²⁶⁴ Ibid 4

²⁶⁵ Ibid 4

In Athanasius' hands, the parable of the four soils serves as a diagnostic tool for pastoral discernment. Once again, this parable and the other parables of the talents/minas (Mt.25:14 – 30; Lk.19:11 – 27) seem to draw the bishop's interest because they reflect the relationship of one to many. This confirms the earlier quotation of *Wisdom of Solomon* which Athanasius uses in his very *First Festal Letter* about the Spirit customizing what the appropriate step of sanctification is next for each person. God's Spirit, precisely because God acts wisely, addresses each person in a personal way. She makes some 'friends of God,' and others, 'prophets.'

7:27 Though she is but one, she can do all things,
and while remaining in herself, she renews all things;
in every generation she passes into holy souls
and makes them friends of God, and prophets

In the ministry of Athanasius, as in the parable, the Lord Jesus is the same source of the same words for everyone. Yet the responses to him are many. Athanasius sets aside the three of the four soils which are unfruitful, and discusses the differences among the fruitbearing seed: the thirty, sixty, and one hundred. The sole factor that explains the differences in fruitfulness is human free will:

'For in sowing, He did not compel the will beyond the power. Nor is mercy confined to the perfect, but it is sent down also among those who occupy the middle and the third ranks, so that He might rescue all men generally to salvation. To this intent He has prepared many mansions [John 14:2] with the Father, so that although the dwelling-place is various in proportion to the advance in moral attainment, yet all of us are within the wall, and all of us enter within the same fence, the adversary being cast out, and all his host expelled thence.'²⁶⁶

'Salvation' is general. The word 'salvation' appears to refer to rescue from corruption and death. In other words, it is ontological and basic. But there is some reward that is relational: 'in proportion to the advance in moral attainment.' This 'advance' is specifically in relationship to Jesus as expressed by the person's willingness to receive power over sexual desire from Jesus' word. Athanasius would agree that the will's power is not so much instantaneous but cultivated and developed over time. That is because, as we observed when we examined his *First Letter to Virgins*, that Jesus' word about chastity was not a command. In Matthew 19:10 – 12, Jesus outlines it as an option in parallel with marriage, although chastity enjoys more honor. So it is taught but never commanded. Paul expanded on that in 1 Corinthians 7, always honoring the freedom of the will. This, to Athanasius, was extremely significant. From the Godward side, chastity was a signifier that God gives power in the word of Christ even when it does not take the form of a command. From the human side, chastity was the supreme signifier that the human person was willing to participate in the power of the Spirit via that spoken word.

Along with the topic of spiritual gifts, this is one aspect of Christian teaching that gave rise to a framework which could honor differences in people's life choices and vocational choices. Brian Rosebury, commenting on J.R.R. Tolkien's imagined world of Middle Earth, speaks of 'the diversity of good and the sameness of evil.'²⁶⁷ C.S. Lewis used the analogy of the tree, in his preface to *The Great Divorce*: 'We are not living in a world where all roads are radii of a circle and where all, if followed long enough, will therefore draw gradually nearer and finally meet at the centre: rather in a world where every road, after a few miles, forks into two, and each of those into two again, and at each fork you must make a decision. Even on the biological level life is not like a river but like a tree. It does not move towards unity but away from it and the creatures grow further apart as they increase in perfection. Good, as it ripens, becomes continually more different not only from evil but from other good.'²⁶⁸ Tolkien and Lewis were both famously rejecting the modernist project and returning to a medieval Christian mindset. That mindset had been shaped by Christian churchmen like Athanasius. The burst of energy among Christians in late antiquity into the monastic movement led to serious reflections on human nature, human will and desire, and psychological and spiritual discernment on behalf of the individual. It is probable that Athanasius,

²⁶⁶ Ibid 4

²⁶⁷ Brian Rosebury, *Tolkien: A Cultural Phenomenon* (Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), p.42

²⁶⁸ C.S. Lewis, *The Great Divorce* (New York: Harper One, 2015)

while in exile in Rome in 338 and then Milan in 342, was actually teaching the church in Western Europe how to establish and resource these monastic communities which were spreading in his native Egypt.²⁶⁹ Sociologically, we are observing the leading Christian theologian of the early and middle fourth century encourage this diverse expression of human vocation. Theologically, we are observing the humanity of Christ, by his Spirit and word, empowering different *charisms* of his humanity within the humanity of his followers.

For Athanasius, 'bearing fruit' was God's command to us which He Himself empowered. It drew its language from the basic nature of life to bear life in itself from Genesis 1. God commissioned us to 'bear fruit' from creation, and reissued the command in redemption with fresh and transfigured content. In his third *Discourse Against the Arians*, written within about a decade of the *Tenth Festal Letter*, Athanasius quotes Psalm 32:9, 'Do not be as the horse.'²⁷⁰ In the Psalm, God wants to lead His people by His word: 'I will instruct you and teach you in the way which you should go; I will counsel you with My eye upon you.' There must be rational communication, or *words*, from God to humanity in order for there to be 'trust' (Ps.32:10) from humanity to God. Brakke notes:

'Because they were both rational and created out of nothing, human beings, Athanasius believed, stood in an ontological hierarchy between God and irrational beasts; people determined their ultimate status by imitating the conduct of either God or animals.'²⁷¹

The interaction of human beings with the words of the Word of God gave us the occasion for trust, direction of growth, and eternal reward.

If Athanasius believed it was pastorally important to use a framework which we today would call 'systematic theology,' he does not show it in his *Festal Letters*. In these exhortations, Athanasius was far more interested in discussing how a Christian might grow in trust by receiving from the word of the prophets and the words of Christ, by and in the Spirit. He appeals to various motivations which his audience might have, such as the desire for reward, a desire for spiritual gifts, a desire for joy, a desire to be part of the biblical story, but chief among them is the desire to grow in one's knowledge of God and experience of God, pure and simple. To Athanasius, true believers wanted to grow spiritually. That growth of the person, in his mind, was not only observable by oneself and one's Christian community, but designed by Jesus himself to be observable and discussed. Latent in Jesus' teaching was a framework in which human responses – and in Athanasius' mind, the basic human vocation of being either chaste or married – were differentiated according to a human being's free will to trust and appropriate the power of the Spirit into one's soul and body. At least two parables point directly to this differentiation.

MORE TO COME

²⁶⁹ Catholic tradition accords Athanasius the status of having introduced communal monastic life for female virgins to the Christians of Western Europe: 'Common life among them would seem to have commenced in the East, and St. Athanasius, when, seeking refuge from the Arians, he came to Rome, introduced the custom to the Western Church.' (New Advent website; <http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/34071.htm>; last accessed August 19, 2016).

²⁷⁰ Athanasius of Alexandria, *Discourse Against the Arians* 3.19

²⁷¹ Brakke 1995, p.168