

Athanasius as Nicene Interpreter of Jesus' Humanity
Third Discourse Against the Arians / Contra Arianos 3 (345 AD)

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Introduction: The Father-Son Relation and the Gospel of John

Athanasius did not write a commentary on the Gospel of John. But, he was bound to make extensive remarks about it somewhere in his written corpus, because the Gospel of John was bound to become contested territory between the Arians and the pro-Nicenes. John's understanding of the Father-Son relationship is, without doubt, one of the most significant features of his Gospel, and his contribution to the New Testament corpus. Athanasius, in his *Third Discourse Against the Arians / Contra Arianos 3*, considers the breadth and depth of Jesus' own statements about his relationship with his Father. This is a prized work of the defender of the Nicene doctrine of the Trinity, and the deity of the Son. We now find him turning a corner in his debates with the Arians. Athanasius must now attend to the humanity of the Son, how the qualities of Jesus' humanity relate to his divinity, and how Jesus perfected his humanity.

I reproduce here the summary of *Contra Arianos 3* by George Dion. Dragas, with some slight changes for how to organize 3.26 – 58.¹

<i>Part 1: The Son's Unity with the Father</i>	
1 – 4a	The Arian understanding of John 14:10
4b – 5a	The Orthodox understanding of John 14:10
5b – 9	The One God of the OT and John 14:10
10 – 11	The Unity of Father and Son is essential
12 – 14	The one grace of Father and Son and their unity
15 – 16	The Trinity between Judaism and Polytheism
17 – 25	The unity of the Father and the Son compared to our unity with the Father (John 17:11, 17:20 – 23; 18:2); The patristic understanding of John 17:11, 22 – 25: The patristic understanding of John 17:22
<i>Part 2: The Humanity and Divinity of the Son</i>	
26	New Arian theses backed up with Gospel verses (a) The Son is not like the Father in essence nor is He from the Father by nature, because "He received authority and ...everything from the Father (Mt.28:18; Jn.5:22; 3:35 – 36; Mt.11:27; Jn.6:37) (b) He is not true and natural Power of the Father, because He was troubled and asked for the Cup of death to be removed (Jn.12:27 – 28; Mt.26:30; Jn.13:21) (c) He is not the Father's own and true Wisdom, because He grew up in wisdom and asked questions which implied ignorance (Lk.2:52; Mt.16:13; Jn.11:18; Mk.6:38). (d) He is not the genuine Logos of the Father, without whom the Father never existed and through whom He created everything, because 1) He cried on the Cross the cry of dereliction, 2) He asked the Father to glorify Him, 3) He prayed in times of temptation and 4) He confessed that He was ignorant of the time of the end (Mt.27:46; Jn.12:28; 17:5; Mt.26:41; Mk.13:32). Assessment of the above these and general orthodox reply. Methodological considerations: The scope and character of Scripture (i.e. the double kerygma concerning the Saviour) as the basis of exegesis. Orthodox exegesis of Gospel verses.
27 – 28	Assessment of the above theses and general orthodox reply
29 – 30	Methodological considerations: the scope and character of Scripture (i.e. the double kerygma concerning the Saviour) as the basis of exegesis; Orthodox exegesis of Gospel verses connected with the Arian theses (a)
31 – 35	Orthodox exegesis of Gospel verses connected with the Arian theses (b, d.3): <i>Divine</i>

¹ George Dion Dragas, *St. Athanasius Contra Apollinarem* (Athens: Church and Theology, VI, 1998),

	<i>Impassibility and Jesus' Human Affections (3.31 – 35)</i>
36 – 50	Orthodox exegesis of Gospel verses connected with the Arian theses (d.4): <i>Divine Omniscience and Jesus' Claims to be Ignorant (3.36 – 50)</i>
51 – 53	Orthodox exegesis of Gospel verses connected with the Arian (c): <i>Divine Wisdom in Jesus' Human Growth in Wisdom</i>
54 – 58	Orthodox exegesis of Gospel verses connected with the Arian (d.1): <i>Divine Unity in Jesus' Human Cry of God-Forsakenness</i>
<i>Part 3: Is the Son Son of the Father by Will? Or by Nature?</i>	
59	The Arian claim and the scriptural evidence
60a	The Arian claim resembles the Valentinian position
60b – 61	Scripture links will with creation and not with the Son
62	Nature, necessity, and will
63 – 64	The Son as the Living counsel of the Father
65	"boulesei" or "phronesei"
66	The Son not by will, but not unwanted either. Nature, love, and will
67	The human relationship between fathers and sons. Epilogue

Part 1: The Son's Unity with the Father (3.1 – 25)

Right away, Athanasius moves to qualify what the words 'in' and 'fill' signify. He sees 'bodies' and container-spaces as imperfect and misleading connotations for the relationship between the Father and the Son. Neither the Son nor the Father has empty space or emptiness within themselves (3.1). Neither one or the other is 'discharged into Each Other' (3.1). Athanasius 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. 'The Father is full and perfect,' he says, 'and the Son is the fullness of Godhead.' 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.'² The Son is 'in' the Father as a marker of relation, by nature and not by participation, by essence and not by one decision of will.

Athanasius then challenges Asterius the Sophist (3.2), the latest in a long string of 'Ario-maniacs' (3.1). Asterius appears to take John 5:19 – 20 and the statement that the Son only does what he sees the Father doing, and deduces that the Son receives information and power and verbal content from the Father. Athanasius ridicules Asterius' explanation. On the one hand, how can the very Power and Wisdom and Word and Image of the Father receive something to be added to him? Asterius' conception of the Father-Son relation is not as 'tight' as Athanasius'. For Athanasius, who takes very seriously Paul's dictum that Christ is – not just receives or shares in – the Power and Wisdom of God (1 Cor.1:24), there is no possibility that Asterius' teaching is acceptable, except if he were a little child who lacked the ability to mature in his thinking (3.2). If the Son merely received information and power and words from the Father, then he would be one among many such recipients, and Jesus should then have said, 'I too and in the Father, and the Father is in me too' (3.3).

Instead, 'the whole Being of the Son is proper to the Father's essence,' says Athanasius (3.3). Then he enlists the help of his favorite touchstone analogies: 'For the Father is in the Son, since the Son is what is from the Father and proper to Him, as in the radiance the sun, and in the word the thought, and in the stream the fountain' (3.3). The Father and Son have an 'identity of Godhead and unity of essence' (3.4). That is why the orthodox can speak of one God, just as speaking of one sun and its radiance is proper, or as speaking of one fountain and its stream is perfectly appropriate to the reality one is indicating. 'They are Two,' he says, but 'neither is the Son another God... still He is the same God.' Athanasius develops his argument one step further by saying that all attributes of the Father are the Son's own also (3.5). He argues that 'there is one and the same sense in these three passages,' meaning John 10:30 ('I and the Father are one'), John 14:20 ('that you may know that I am in the Father and the Father in Me') and John 14:10 ('He that has seen Me, has seen the Father'). He makes a parallel to beholding an image of the Emperor, and imagines how the image itself might speak of being 'one' with the Emperor, being 'in' the Emperor, and having the

² 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.'

Emperor 'in' itself (3.5). To further interpret the phrase, 'the Father is in me,' Athanasius then enlists the help of Philippians 2:6, in which the Son is said to be 'in the form of God,' and argues that this is an eternal, unbroken relation between the Father and Son (3.6). Thus, Athanasius says, could the apostle Paul say that it was God Himself who was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself (2 Cor.5:19) (3.6).

In 3.7 – 9, Athanasius addresses various Scriptures that speak of God – or where God speaks – as being 'One.' Two biblical texts that the Arians seem to bring up are the Shema found in Deuteronomy 6:4 ('The Lord is one') and repeated by Jesus (Mk.12:29 and parallels), and Isaiah 44:24 ('I only stretch out the heavens'). Athanasius argues that because this is the God who is Father begetting the Son from His essence, that the Son is implied in the words 'one' and 'only.'

The Arians posit that this oneness is to be defined differently. They suggest that the oneness is of will, but not essence (3.10). 'For they say, since what the Father wills, the Son wills also, and is not contrary either in what He thinks or in what He judges, but is in all respects concordant with Him, declaring doctrines which are the same, and a word consistent and united with the Father's teaching, therefore it is that He and the Father are One; and some of them have dared to write as well as say this.' If such is the case, then many things should be called 'one' with the Father: angels, planets, stars, etc. Then each of these things should be called, equivalently, 'God's Image and Word' (3.10). But what, then, becomes of Jesus' claims to be uniquely related to the Father? Therefore, says Athanasius, 'the likeness and the oneness must be referred to the very Essence of the Son' (3.11).

Athanasius then appeals to a practice of prayer: 'No one, for instance, would pray to receive from God and the Angels, or from any other creature, nor would any one say, 'May God and the Angel give you;' but from Father and the Son, because of Their oneness and the oneness of Their giving' (3.12). This raises the question in Athanasius' mind of various Old Testament theophanies. The biblical text describes Jacob as blessing 'God' and an 'Angel' and asking them to bless his grandsons. But Athanasius argues that the Angel was the Word of God. Even though the local terminology used in Scripture is 'Angel,' nevertheless, Athanasius argues, the context demands that we interpret this 'Angel' as God, and the Word of God pre-incarnate, to be precise (3.13).

Athanasius makes a careful distinction about God's use of other efficient causes. 'When the Father works, it is not that any Angel works, or any other creature; for none of these is an efficient cause, but they are of things which come to be; and moreover being separate and divided from the only God, and other in nature... they can neither work what God works, nor, as I said before, when God gives grace, can they give grace with Him. Nor, on seeing an Angel would a man say that he had seen the Father; for Angels, as it is written, are 'ministering spirits sent forth to minister'' (3.14). Thus, in some Old Testament theophanies, various people saw not simply an Angel, but God: Isaiah, Moses, Abraham. And what God spoke, He spoke by His Word (3.14).

Athanasius says that Scripture allows Christians to defend themselves against monotheistic Jews on the one hand, who he suggests would insist on a monad, and polytheistic Gentiles on the other. 'We do not introduce three Origins or three Fathers,' he says, 'since we have not suggested three suns, but sun and radiance. And one is the light from the sun in that radiance' (3.15). He chides the Arians for worshiping both a Creator and a created thing, in their theological system (3.16). They should 'rank themselves with the Gentiles' (3.16).

In 3.17 – 25, Athanasius responds to the Arian interpretation of the phrase, 'that they may be one, even as we are one' from John 17:11 and 20 – 23. The Arians use this statement as if Jesus were indicating that he had started as a creature and became one with God by will and by participation (3.17). In other words, they place Jesus on the same side of the ontological divide we are, and make him a role model for us, so that we must become one with God purely on the basis of will and participation. Athanasius sees Arianism as promoting among humans the same attitude of the devil! He says:

'since it is saying after his pattern, 'We will ascend to heaven, we will be like the Most High.' [Isaiah 14:13] For what is given to man by grace, this they would make equal to the Godhead of the Giver.'³

³ Athanasius of Alexandria, *Contra Arianos* 3.17

Athanasius' point is that the Arians, by negating the downwards movement of the Godhead in the Son and the Spirit towards us, turn the devil's upward ambitions into godliness. If everyone should ascend to God, what makes this any different from the devil? And if the devil had the right idea, then why is he condemned?

Athanasius then points out that Scripture makes for us examples from beings who are of a different nature than us, and expects us to deal with those comparisons appropriately, while respecting the fact that it is talking about beings of different natures (3.18). For example, Athanasius says, we are compared, sometimes unfavorably and sometimes favorably, to horses, foxes, serpents, and doves. The lesson is not that we actually behave like these animals in all ways at all times, still less that we actually change our natures from human to animal. Rather, we are to receive them as 'images and illustrations' (3.18).

Similarly, when Scripture takes 'patterns for man from divine subjects' (3.19), we are not to think that we can change our natures from human to God. Rather, we might learn a moral lesson ('Be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect'), or more to the point, 'become sons through Him by adoption and grace, as partaking of His Spirit' (3.19). Thus, oneness with other human beings is possible for us. Not that we change our natures from human to divine, and so become one with the Father by nature as the Son is one with the Father by nature (3.19). Instead:

'By so becoming one, as the Father and the Son, we shall be such, not as the Father is by nature in the Son and the Son in the Father, but according to our own nature, and as it is possible for us thence to be moulded and to learn how we ought to be one, just as we learned also to be merciful. For like things are naturally one with like; thus all flesh is ranked together in kind; but the Word is unlike us and like the Father. And therefore, while He is in nature and truth one with His own Father, we, as being of one kind with each other (for from one were all made, and one is the nature of all men), become one with each other in good disposition, having as our copy the Son's natural unity with the Father. For as He taught us meekness from Himself, saying, 'Learn of Me for I am meek and lowly in heart' [Matthew 11:29], not that we may become equal to Him, which is impossible, but that looking towards Him, we may remain meek continually, so also here wishing that our good disposition towards each other should be true and firm and indissoluble, from Himself taking the pattern, He says, 'that they may be one as We are,' whose oneness is indivisible; that is, that they learning from us of that indivisible Nature, may preserve in like manner agreement one with another.'⁴

Here, Athanasius points out that the ministry of the Spirit towards us and in us occurs inseparably with the teaching of Jesus, that is, the words of the Word. He quotes from Matthew 11:29 and positions Jesus' teaching on imitating his meekness as central to the question. How do we become one with each other in the church? Through taking from Jesus 'the pattern,' which in this case is the Son's meekness towards his Father. But the question may be asked, as Athanasius answers, with whom are we one by nature? Other human beings, because 'from one [we] were all made.' In our case, however, being one by nature with other human beings does not mean a moral or relational oneness. To this fact of nature must be added the oneness of the Son with the Father, and the Son's meekness as taught and lived by Jesus. Thus, we *become*, 'as it is possible for us to be moulded and to learn how we ought to be one, just as we learned also to be merciful' (3.20), inasmuch as we participate in a reality in God which already *is*. This pattern, which is found in Athanasius' other pastoral writings, helps answer the question of why 'participation' in Christ also means 'progress' for us, necessarily. They are not opposed to each other, as Karl Barth and T.F. Torrance thought. For example, Athanasius explains in his *Tenth Festal Letter* why the seed of the word (participation) yields different amounts of fruit (progress) because of human choices, and in *First Letter to Virgins* how people can engage Jesus' word (participation) and choose a superior vocation by choosing singleness over marriage (progress), and supremely in *Life of Antony* how one responds to the teaching of Jesus (participation) to develop certain spiritual gifts – especially discernment of spirits – to varying degrees (progress). All this refers us to the ministry of the Word through his word and Spirit. Elsewhere, Athanasius explains that part of our nature as human beings is to be rational – especially via human language – and therefore we receive the Spirit through the words of the Word. This is why the appropriate reception of biblical language is so important.

In order to arrive at 'a right sense' of many biblical passages, says Athanasius, especially the words 'that they be one in Us' (3.21), we must maintain an awareness of the difference in the natures of the subjects being discussed in Scripture: animal, human, divine. The Father-Son relation as depicted in the phrase 'in Us' is 'a pattern and a

⁴ Ibid 3.20

lesson' (3.21), just like the phrase 'in us' was used by the apostle Paul, when he was referring to himself and Apollos and their partnership in ministry (1 Cor.4:6) (3.21). It is 'not identity, but an image and example of the matter in hand' (3.21).

Correspondingly, respecting our nature as human beings, 'to us it is given to imitate' the oneness of the Son with the Father (3.22). Athanasius then appeals to Jesus' progression of life in his human body:

'Here at length the Lord asks something greater and more perfect for us; for it is plain that the Word has come to be in us, for He has put on our body. 'And Thou Father in Me;' 'for I am Your Word, and since You are in Me, because I am Your Word, and I in them because of the body, and because of You the salvation of men is perfected in Me, therefore I ask that they also may become one, according to the body that is in Me and according to its perfection; that they too may become perfect, having oneness with It, and having become one in It; that, as if all were carried by Me, all may be one body and one spirit, and may grow up unto a perfect man.' For we all, partaking of the Same, become one body, having the one Lord in ourselves.'⁵

Athanasius appears to be joining together various biblical phrases from John's Gospel and the Epistle to the Hebrews. For example, through his suffering, Jesus was made perfect (Heb.5:9), and Jesus is the perfecter of faith (Heb.12:2). His human body, as a result of his human obedience, both is and contains a perfected 'new humanity' which is free from the corruption of sinfulness, the source of eternal salvation (Heb.5:9). In Athanasius' words, 'because of the body, and because of You [Father] the salvation of men is perfected in Me [says the Son]' (3.22). Athanasius then makes the parallel: As Jesus did in his humanity, so do we 'become perfect' in ours, 'having oneness with [Jesus' perfected humanity], and having become one in it... may grow up unto a perfect man' (3.22). Once again, 'participation' in Christ means 'progress' in us, collectively and not just individually.

Athanasius then considers how the word 'as' in the phrase 'as we are One' does not necessarily function to signify an absolute identity or equality between the two things compared (3.23). Arians apparently take the phrase to mean that human beings can become one with God as the created Son became one with the Father. But the comparison is constructed for a more limited purpose. It is an ethical example. As evidence that comparisons must be limited to the purpose for which they were constructed, Athanasius notes that Jesus made a parallel between Jonah and himself, using the word 'as': 'For as Jonah was three days...' Obviously, Jesus did not imitate Jonah in every detail. Comparisons made by Scripture need to be respected for the specific purpose they are made. 'In like manner then we too, when the Lord says 'as,' neither become as the Son in the Father, nor as the Father is in the Son. For we become one as the Father and the Son in mind and agreement of Spirit, and the Saviour will be as Jonah in the earth' (3.23). Thus, it is by the Spirit, and 'in mind and agreement' that our oneness with each other becomes an ethical reality, informed as it is by the oneness which the Father and Son have by nature.

Athanasius then furnishes decisive proof from the apostle John against the Arian claim that the Christian life consists simply of ethical imitation of a Son who is not fully divine, who supposedly achieved oneness with God nevertheless (3.24). That proof is the Son sharing His Spirit with us. Quoting 1 John 4:13, 'Hereby know we that we dwell in Him and He in us, because He has given us of His Spirit,' Athanasius argues that because the Son supplies the Spirit to us, that indicates that the Son is not another mere participant among others in the Father's Spirit, which he would be if he were a mere creature. The Son, being by nature in the Father as the Father's 'own Word and Radiance,' has the fullness of the Spirit. 'But we, apart from the Spirit, are strange and distant from God.' Only 'by the participation of the Spirit' are we 'knit into the Godhead; so that our being in the Father is not ours, but is the Spirit's which is in us and abides in us' because we have confessed faith in the Son of God (3.24). Does not John prove, therefore, against the Arian position, that 'the Son is in the Father in one way, and we become in Him in another,' which proves that the Son is to be located on the ontological side of the Creator, with the Father, and not on the side of the creation, with us? This kind of 'adoptionism' would render any idea of atonement moot, because the Son himself, according to the Arians, must be interpreted as achieving acceptability by the Father and oneness with the Father simply 'by improvement of conduct' (3.24). It would be unclear why ethical imitation of Jesus would be less demanding than the ethical life demanded under the Sinai covenant. Would it not actually be more demanding? Who, then, would ever achieve oneness with the Father by that standard?

⁵ Athanasius of Alexandria, *Contra Arianos* 3.22

By comparison, says Athanasius, Jesus prayed to request of the Father that ‘the Spirit should be vouchsafed through Him to those who believe, through whom we are found to be in God, and in this respect to be conjoined in Him’ (3.25). The giving of the Spirit of God proves that the Word of God who gives the Spirit is properly and by nature from the essence of the Father. Athanasius says that the person who sins (‘falls from the Spirit’) but repents retains the Spirit. ‘The grace remains irrevocable to such as are willing’ (3.25). These comments show that Athanasius has pastoral concerns in mind. So it is a relational posture towards God, genuine repentance and ongoing transformation, which gives us the confidence to keep receiving the Spirit. ‘Otherwise,’ he says, repentance would not even be enough.

‘Otherwise, he who has fallen is no longer in God (because that Holy Spirit and Paraclete which is in God has deserted him), but the sinner shall be in him to whom he has subjected himself, as took place in Saul’s instance, for the Spirit of God departed from him and an evil spirit was afflicting him. [1 Samuel 16:14]’⁶

Presumably, Athanasius is referring to the devil or some other categorically evil spirit.

Athanasius then labels the Arians as ‘God’s enemies’ who ought to ‘be henceforth abashed, and no longer to feign themselves equal to God.’ Ethical imitation can never be the grounds for becoming one with God. ‘For to become [perfect] as the Father [is perfect], is *impossible* for us creatures’ (3.19). To become meek as the Son is meek ‘is *impossible*, but that looking towards Him, we may remain meek continually’ (3.20). ‘For without God this [call to oneness] is *impossible*’ (3.21). It is no surprise that the word ‘impossible’ occurs only these three times in *Contra Arianos* 3, and in this section. For the Arians suppose through their defective christology that we can achieve oneness with God like this creaturely Son has achieved it, in their view. Athanasius insists that such a thing is impossible, and urges the Arians ‘no longer to feign themselves equal to God’ in God’s own perfection. Rather, it is the other way round. Our oneness with God is grounded in the humanity of the Son, who has made human nature one with the Father in himself, by perfecting it in the power of the Spirit. Only through the Spirit of the Son do we participate in the new humanity of the Son, and progress in these things.

Part Two: The Humanity and Divinity of the Son (3.26 – 58)

In 3.26 – 58, Athanasius answers the Arian interpretive questions about the Son’s apparent reception of power from the Father, or growth in wisdom since he was a boy, or fear, or cry of forsakenness. If the Son is from the Father’s essence, and one in Godhead with the Father, then how could he be spoken of in these ways (3.26)? Athanasius argues that the Arians are closer to the Jewish leaders of Jesus’ day who could not believe that he was divine (3.27). He accuses them of cloaking their Judaism with Christianity (3.28).

Athanasius then responds by reminding the Arians and his readers of the ‘scope’ (Greek *skopos*) of Scripture. Five out of the six times in *Contra Arianos* 3 that he uses the term *skopos* occur in 3.28 – 29 (four times), and 3.35 (one time). The last time occurs in 3.58 (one time) as a closing reminder of this lengthy section. Namely, the scope of Scripture ‘contains a double account of the Savior’ (3.29): one according to his divinity, and one according to his humanity. He cites John 1:1 – 3 for the divinity, and John 1:14 for the humanity. He then cites Philippians 2:6 for the divinity, and Philippians 2:7 – 8 for the humanity. For good measure, he offers the birth announcement of Matthew 1:23, which describes the humanity of Jesus’ birth from a virgin, and also the divinity of this one who is named ‘God with us.’

Athanasius argues that the Arians take passages that pertain to Jesus’ humanity in such a way so as to negate his true divinity. This is the purpose of Athanasius’ insistence that the very ‘Word of the Lord,’ who ‘came to this or that of the Prophets,’ has now ‘endured to become also Son of man’ (3.30). The Word has not just come into a man, or into man, but became a man. The growth of Jesus as a human being explains, for Athanasius, why Scripture records such things as him receiving power or authority from the Father, or growing in wisdom, etc.

Before fully expositing those passages raised by the Arians, Athanasius recalls our attention to the fact that the Son became man and suffered (perhaps recalling the language of the Nicene Creed of 325) ‘from Mary once at the end of the ages for the abolition of sin’ (3.31). He cites Galatians 4:4 to affirm his genuinely human birth from Mary, 1 Peter 4:1 to affirm that Christ suffered in the flesh, Colossians 2:9 to affirm that he who came was ever God and ordered all created things but became man and bodily, and John 1:14 to affirm once more that the Godhead dwelt in

⁶ Athanasius of Alexandria, *Contra Arianos* 3.25

the flesh ‘for our sakes’ (3.31). The humanity of Jesus from birth to adulthood explains why ‘the properties of the flesh are said to be his, since he was in it, such as to hunger, to thirst, to suffer, to weary, and the like’ (3.31). At the same time, Jesus did miracles which reflected his divine origin, such as raising the dead, healing the sick, restoring sight to the blind. This reality makes it incumbent upon us to speak of both the properties of humanity and divinity with one subject, the person of the Word.

Athanasius then makes an intriguing connection. By quoting Isaiah 53:4, a *locus classicus* of atonement texts, Athanasius connects what the incarnate Word did external to himself (i.e. healing others) with what He did internal to himself:

‘And the Word bore the infirmities of the flesh, as His own, for His was the flesh; and the flesh ministered to the works of the Godhead, because the Godhead was in it, for the body was God’s. And well has the Prophet said ‘carried [Isaiah 53:4];’ and has not said, ‘He remedied our infirmities,’ lest, as being external to the body, and only healing it, as He has always done, He should leave men subject still to death; but He carries our infirmities, and He Himself bears our sins, that it might be shown that He has become man for us, and that the body which in Him bore them, was His own body; and, while He received no hurt Himself by ‘bearing our sins in His body on the tree,’ as Peter speaks [1 Peter 2:24], we men were redeemed from our own affections, and were filled with the righteousness of the Word.’⁷

Athanasius insists that Isaiah’s word ‘carried’ as opposed to ‘remedied’ requires that the Word’s saving work be connected to his *conception* into human flesh and lifelong journey as a man. In Athanasius’ debate with the Arians, this scriptural observation is important because in Isaiah 53, Athanasius finds that the atonement involves taking the ‘infirmities’ of ‘the flesh’ and ‘the body.’ Athanasius may also be reading Matthew’s citation of Isaiah 53:4 in the context of Jesus healing people (Mt.8:17). So as far as biblical exegesis is concerned, Athanasius seems to be understanding Isaiah 53 guided by the apostle Matthew’s usage. For Isaiah, to say that the Servant ‘carried’ our infirmities necessitates the view that he ‘carried’ it from underneath the weight of its weakness and infirmity – that is, as one of us, a human being bearing the weight of fallen human nature. When Jesus healed other people of disease, he was symbolizing outside of himself what he was doing inside himself.

Athanasius’ citation of Isaiah 53:4 is yet another piece of evidence that the Nicene theologian would not have endorsed the Lutheran-Calvinist theory of atonement called penal substitution. For that Protestant tradition interprets Isaiah 53 as a whole as if a divine retributive punishment fell upon Jesus at his human death on the cross. Athanasius would not agree. The theologian even interprets 1 Peter 2:24 in the framework of an understanding of the atonement as rooted in the incarnation and following a medical, healing paradigm. Athanasius’ soteriology is his christology. He does not separate the work of Christ from the person of Christ, because for him, the work of Christ involves the perfecting of the human nature of Christ by the single subject, the Word of God, who carried it through his long human journey into its death and resurrection to be a cleansed, deified new humanity.

II.A. Divine Impassibility and Jesus’ Human Affections (3.31 – 35)

Athanasius even sees in the atonement a subject of deep pastoral significance: the Word ‘redeemed [us] from our own affections,’ and by comparison are ‘filled [instead] with the righteousness of the Word.’ The word ‘affections’ in Athanasius needs to be handled carefully. He does not mean ‘emotions’ categorically, since in *Contra Gentes* he refers to the ‘pleasure’ we should have contemplating God. He uses the word ‘affections’ six times in the next chapter, 3.32; three times in 3.33; three times in 3.34; three times in 3.41; and one time each in 3.55, 3.56, and 3.57. His use of this word indicates that he refers to negative, sinful desires: Men are ‘liable to the affections proper to their nature. But now the Word having become man and having appropriated what pertains to the flesh, no longer do these things touch the body, because of the Word who has come in it, but they are destroyed by Him, and henceforth men no longer remain sinners and dead according to their proper affections’ (3.33). Athanasius’ entire argument hangs on the assumption that Jesus assumed a fallen human nature, and cleansed it not at conception but through his faithful obedience to the Father.

‘These things were so done, were so manifested, because He had a body, not in appearance, but in truth; and it became the Lord, in putting on human flesh, to put it on *whole with the affections proper to it*; that, as

⁷ Athanasius of Alexandria, *Contra Arianos* 3.32; cf.3.33 – 34, emphasis mine

we say that the body was His own, so also we may say that *the affections of the body were proper to Him alone*, though they did not touch Him according to His Godhead.’⁸

Athanasius appears to mean that we are freed from cowardice, fear, anxiety, and other emotions which would cause us to shrink back from a robust declaration of faith in Christ. Why? Because Jesus shook himself free of those ‘affections.’ In this context, ‘affections’ relate to human mortality and sinfulness, especially human shortcomings in the face of persecution against Christians. Athanasius argues that we are freed from the ‘affections’ of the flesh because Jesus shared in our flesh and its affections, and conquered them.

Athanasius’ argument logically requires that Jesus assumed a fallen human nature, and cleansed it through his faithful obedience to the Father. Almost certainly, Athanasius would say that the mere presence of the affections themselves, as he was using this term, did not make Jesus sinful in terms of action or inward disposition. Regardless, Athanasius takes a complementary step to erect a conceptual barrier between Jesus’ fallen human nature and any accusation that he actually personally sinned: ‘though they did not touch Him according to His Godhead.’ Although Athanasius does not explicitly quote from Hebrews 4:15 or 5:6 – 10 in his surviving writings,⁹ likely because those he called ‘Arians’ were not contesting Jesus’ authentic humanity, probably his mind was not too far off from the encouragement that in Jesus, God the Son did experience temptation in all things like we do, yet successfully resisted those temptations and, in the power of the Spirit, turned his humanity back to the Father.

This is a very helpful pastoral connection point to Christ. To hold out to other people a Jesus who has experienced our struggle as a fallen human being can minister comfort to people, especially under persecution and duress. And the fact that Jesus *was successful* at resisting every temptation to actually sin is important in ministering appropriate Christ-centered challenges, as well. One might surmise that Athanasius was appealing to his fellow bishops and priests in their shared capacity as preachers and teachers. If they took an Arian christology, and made the Son a creature, would they not have to say that Jesus was simply a moral exemplar? In what sense does he actually *redeem* us, or any aspect of our lives?

Athanasius’ heir Cyril of Alexandria (c.376 – 444 AD), who served a long stint as bishop of Alexandria from 412 to his death, and a renowned theologian in his own right, continued down this line of thought a bit more explicitly with regards to a wider range of human emotions. In his commentary on the Gospel of John, for example, Cyril writes:

‘Moreover, just as death was brought to naught in no other way than by the Death of the Savior, so also with regard to each of the sufferings of the flesh: for unless He had felt dread, human nature could not have become free from dread; unless He had experienced grief, there could never have been any deliverance from grief; unless He had been troubled and alarmed, no escape from these feelings could have been found. And with regard to every one of the affections to which human nature is liable, thou wilt find exactly the corresponding thing in Christ. The affections of His flesh were aroused, not that they might have the upper hand as they do indeed in us, but in order that when aroused they might be thoroughly subdued by the power of the Word dwelling in the flesh, the nature of man thus undergoing a change for the better.’¹⁰

In this passage, Cyril assumes that Jesus took to himself a fallen human nature. For how else were ‘the affections of his flesh’ first ‘aroused’ and then ‘thoroughly subdued’?

However, my hesitation with Athanasius’ statement, and Cyril’s development of this trajectory, is that there appears to be no clear term for Jesus’ *positive* human emotions (joy, compassionate sorrow, etc.), especially how they might relate to Jesus’ divine nature. Hence, at times, *all* of Jesus’ human emotions appear to be considered as if they were only human, only reactive, and only meant to be categorized with his suffering, fear, anguish, anger, etc. Emmanuel Hatzidakis, for instance, considers Jesus’ human emotion, but in my view unevenly.¹¹ I affirm Hatzidakis when he says that Jesus ‘was not under the sway of uncontrolled passions.’ He also grants to Jesus, ‘Behind His humanity lies the inexhaustible ocean of divinity,’ and, ‘Christ’s personality was formed, as that of every human being, by His genetic makeup that carried the divine imprint and His environs, His home upbringing and all the other factors that

⁸ Athanasius of Alexandria, *Discourses Against the Arians* 3.32; cf. 3.33 – 34, emphasis mine

⁹ James D. Ernest, *The Bible in Athanasius of Alexandria* (Atlanta, GA: Society of Biblical Literature, 2004), p.416

¹⁰ Cyril of Alexandria, *Commentary on John’s Gospel* 12.27, 28

¹¹ Emmanuel Hatzidakis, *Jesus: Fallen? The Human Nature of Christ Examined from an Eastern Orthodox Perspective* (Clearwater, FL: Orthodox Witness, 2013), p.232 – 234

shape a human character.’ Beautiful is the sentiment, ‘His human thoughts, emotions, feelings, and actions were never purely or merely human thoughts, emotions, feelings, and actions. They swelled in Him by the inrushing of the divinity into His human experience in an unfathomable way...’ But I am not sure why he immediately adds the modifier, ‘beyond and above human capacity.’ For if Jesus came to share and participate in our humanity that we might do so in his, what is it that lies beyond human capacity?

Moreover, saying that Jesus ‘did not laugh, because He was not startled or surprised,’ as Hatzidakis does, goes a step too far, making assumptions about the sources of human laughter and taking the absence of evidence as evidence of absence categorically, which is a logical mistake in how one handles New Testament material, and any historical material for that matter. When Hatzidakis asserts, ‘He was neither happy nor sad,’ he offers no interpretation of precisely those occasions when Jesus is said to be happy and sad. On the one hand, Jesus ‘rejoiced greatly in the Holy Spirit’ (Lk.10:21) or refers to his own joy at the return of the lost (Lk.15:1 – 32). On the other hand, Jesus wept angrily over Lazarus’ condition (Jn.11:44) and wept over Jerusalem’s rejection and its consequences (Lk.19:41). Hatzidakis applies to Jesus adjectives such as ‘serene,’ ‘balanced,’ ‘peaceful,’ ‘resolute,’ and other descriptors that indicate steadiness and constancy. But was Jesus’ emotional life as absolute and constant as Hatzidakis suggests, as if Jesus’ divine nature served him first as a wall beyond which no human emotion entered, and second as a short anchor from which his human nature did not wander?

Was the true source of Jesus’ emotions his external environment, as opposed to the character of God? Was the true source of Jesus’ emotions his external environment? There was a tendency among some Jews and Christians alike to feel discomfort with anything which can be considered divine ‘emotions.’ The source of this discomfort is most decidedly not the Hebrew Bible, which attributes many anthropomorphic human emotions to God. Rather, unquestionably some flavor of Hellenistic philosophy – or a combination, say, of Stoicism and Neo-Platonism – provides the source of the discomfort with human emotions. The Hellenistic assumption that emotions meant personal change, and personal change meant imperfection, seemed to affect their assessment of Jesus, especially how he suffered at his trial and crucifixion.

The discomfort appears among the Alexandrian Jewish scholars who translated the Hebrew Bible into the Greek Septuagint translation.¹² Similarly, Irenaeus chastised the heretical Marcionites for stripping God of anger. The heretical Marcionites, who were unhappy with the Old Testament presentation of God as not only creator of the material universe but also emotional, wanted to ‘take away the vindictive and judicial power from the Father, imagining that to be unworthy of God, and thinking that they had found a god *angerless* (*sine iracundia*) and good.’¹³ Human emotionality was similarly called into question. In some Christian accounts, emotions were thought to fall away at some point. For example, Lewis Ayres notices that in Gregory of Nyssa’s *On the Soul and Resurrection*, Gregory asks his sister and spiritual mentor Macrina about how ‘passions’ can be redirected or refocused on God.¹⁴ ‘If the passions stimulate the life of virtue but are extinguished when the soul is purified, then, he asks, will desire for God also be extinguished? In a famous passage Macrina reiterates her position that it is only the faculty of contemplation that is the godlike part of the soul and that the passions do indeed fall away. Nevertheless, the soul that passes beyond desire, hope and memory remains in the activity of love, thus imitating the divine life.’ Others, however, maintain that the term ‘*ta pathe*’ (*the passions*) in Byzantine theology refers not to all emotionality per se, but emotionality energized by sinfulness and operating outside the governance of the rational-moral faculty, as in the related word *pathology*, meaning vice.¹⁵ The Greek assumption that emotions meant personal change, and personal change meant imperfection, seemed to affect their assessment of Jesus, especially how he suffered at Gethsemane, his trial, and his crucifixion. Perhaps this corresponds with Christian art tending to portray Christ as unflappably serene even on the cross, and Mary as calm and composed as she held the dead body of Jesus in the Pieta. Alister E. McGrath comments, ‘An excellent example of the influence of a Hellenistic milieu upon Christian theology is provided by the doctrine of the impassibility of God, which clearly suggests the subordination of a biblical to a philosophical view of God.’¹⁶

¹² Paul Gavriluk, *The Suffering of the Impassible God: The Dialectics of Patristic Thought* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), p.37 – 46

¹³ Irenaeus of Lyons, *Against Heresies* 1.27.2

¹⁴ Lewis Ayres, ‘Deification and the Dynamics of Nicene Theology: The Contribution of Gregory of Nyssa,’ *St. Vladimir’s Theological Quarterly*, 49 4 (2005), p.378,

¹⁵ Martin Hinterberger, ‘Emotions in Byzantium,’ edited by Liz James, *A Companion to Byzantium* (West Sussex, UK: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), ch.10 has an excellent discussion of how ‘passions’ in the Greek language referred to certain ‘movements’ of the soul and body.

¹⁶ Alister E. McGrath, *Iustitia Dei: A History of the Doctrine of Justification* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986; third edition 2005), p.32

By contrast, what if Jesus' human emotions can be considered to have their true source in his *divinity*? What if they are not reactionary, but *revelatory, even in his responsiveness*? For example, what happens when we try to make sense of Jesus' angry grief in a text like John 11, the incident where Jesus weeps by the tomb of Lazarus? Is the thought of his impending suffering and death affecting Jesus from the outside in? Or is the direction of the emotion rather inside out? What if Jesus weeping in anger and sorrow over Lazarus' death because that is the inner anger and sorrow of God now being manifested in the physical body of Jesus? Similarly, the suffering felt by Jesus on the cross is not primarily a 'problem' of how something outside Jesus could press into his inner reality as the unchanging, divine Son of God. Rather, the grief long felt by the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit since the fall – and we know God can feel grief because the apostle Paul tells us that the Holy Spirit can be 'grieved' (Eph.4:30) – is now revealed and made manifest by Jesus on the cross.

Cyril and the tradition that followed him had tendencies to see 'suffering' and 'emotions' as threats to divine impassibility from outside Jesus. But if God's impassibility is defined as God's love, based on His unchanging and eternal nature as a Trinity, then the threat vanishes.¹⁷ If God is love because He is Triune, and if God cannot change His Triune being then His love is what is impassible and steady about Him, so then it also stands to reason that He will have the divine equivalent of human emotions towards us. If the apostle Paul can command Christians to 'rejoice with those who rejoice, and weep with those who weep' (Rom.12:15), then emotionally mature responsiveness varies according to the person to whom one is relating. And if that is true for human beings, then it must logically also be true for God. But there is no need to fear that I am proposing a fundamental 'changeability' or 'instability' in God, or in us. For if a *character of love* is what is constant and unchanging in the divine Trinity, and what is hoped-for in us, then a certain healthy variability in human emotion and in divine emotion is *expected* and *necessary*. To suggest that God's divine emotions, or our human emotions, should be unchanging suggests either stoicism, narcissism, or autism. God is both impassible and passible, understood properly. He is *impassible* in His love, for that is His nature, but He is *passible* in His divine emotions for us. He is *unmoving* from His loving commitment towards us, which results from His nature, and *most moved* on our behalf because of that unshakeable love.

So if we consider Jesus' human emotions to be not just redemptive but *revelatory*, then Athanasius' twin emphases in *De Incarnatione* – redemption and revelation – are cemented together in this aspect of Jesus' incarnate life. Jesus refused to fall into the temptation of feeling jealous, lustful, greedy, anxious, competitive, etc. For those feelings and emotions are but manifestations of 'covetousness,' and Jesus condemned the sin of covetousness in his own sinful flesh (Rom.8:3), by never coveting anything. Paul's exposition in Romans illustrates the fact that the quality of Jesus' emotional life is indeed *redemptive* for us as he shares himself with us by his Spirit. Since Jesus also *reveals* a normative humanity, his demonstrated emotions reflect a normative kind of emotional health for human beings: compassion for the lost and the marginalized (e.g. Mt.9:36), joy at the conversion of a lost one (Lk.15:6 – 7, 9 – 10, 22 – 24), humor even including amusing innuendo about sexual matters (e.g. Lk.14:18 – 20; Jn.4:1 – 18), angry sorrow at human death and the condition of sin that led up to it (Jn.11:44; Lk.13:35), etc. We can retain all the strength and resolve that Athanasius and Cyril perceived in Jesus as he faced persecution. But rather than label Jesus' resolution a 'lack of passion' or a 'lack of emotion,' we can see the determination of the Father to perfect the *emotional* quality of human nature despite the obstacles, and thereby reveal God's own self emotionally, in some sense. The full range of the emotions Jesus showed can be seen to reflect the 'divine emotions' of the Father, by the Spirit.

Not only that, but this account of Jesus' emotional life can be squared with what we now understand from neuroscience and epigenetics about the relationship between our emotional health, physical health, and even brain development. Hellenistic thought, especially Neo-Platonism, emphasized the separation between soul and body, and not the interrelation, and Stoicism provided more ammunition to use against human emotionality. As Christians including Athanasius inherited these views, they developed some helpful insights about how the human soul was to mediate the knowledge of God and even the life of God into the body. But this prioritization of the soul over the body in all cases came with a high price. Some, including Athanasius, began to speak of the soul itself as being the

¹⁷ David Bentley Hart, *The Beauty of the Infinite* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2003), p.155 – 167, esp. p.167, 'Here I can at least offer a definition of divine apatheia as trinitarian love: God's impassibility is the utter fullness of an infinite dynamism, the absolutely complete and replete generation of the Son and procession of the Spirit from the Father, the infinite 'drama' of God's joyous act of self-outpouring – which is his being as God... Nor is this some kind of original unresponsiveness in the divine nature; it is divine beauty, that perfect joy in the other by which God is God: the Father's *delectatio* in the beauty of his eternal Image, the Spirit as the light and joy and sweetness of that knowledge.'

image of God in a way that was distinct from the body,¹⁸ which is clearly a departure from Irenaeus and a more Judaic understanding of the human person. Christians began to frown upon sexual pleasure in marriage, which was an obvious example of a bodily experience that flowed ‘backward’ or ‘upstream’ into the soul and our emotional experience. This view that childraising was the only legitimate reason for a married couple to have sex came from Stoicism,¹⁹ but not 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). Any experiences in that general category were increasingly seen as problematic. Emotionality itself was called into question. In some Christian accounts, including Gregory of Nyssa’s, emotions were thought to fall away at some point.²⁰

By contrast, neuroscience now tells us that sexual intercourse produces oxytocin, a chemical that influences our brain development and produces in us emotions about bonding with a partner. A mother, while breastfeeding her infant, experiences an increase in oxytocin as well, to help her emotionally bond with her baby. We also know that emotional bonding, especially with our parents, through physical affection and even laughter, is essential for our neurological and emotional development, whereas relational separation, malnutrition, and the presence of toxins like lead, plastic, and black mold lead to stress and anxiety which registers in the body. It causes mental, emotional, and sexual dysfunction. Moreover, the relatively new field of epigenetics tells us that our traumatic experiences can impact the genes of our children. Realizations like this reinforce what Christians have long called the indissoluble union of soul and body, and even the way the Eastern Orthodox have called human beings the personalization (hypostasis) of nature. But they require us to drop the ‘one-way street’ view of the soul taking priority over the body for our knowledge of God. These understandings of the human body and our interior life require us to deeply revise the Christian appropriation of the Neo-Platonic and Stoic views of our emotions, and our understanding of body and soul. They require us to fall back upon the Hebrew Scriptures, which tells us that God wanted us to grow up in the healthy physical environment of a garden, and have a strong but appropriate bodily and emotional life as part of our earthy and image-of-God nature. The body must be developed and/or redeveloped to know in its own way what the soul wants it to know about the goodness of God.

I believe *orthopathy*, right feeling, is both redemptive and revelatory. It is a relational and emotional posture Jesus himself perfected and shares with us by his Spirit. For he *redeemed* human emotion back to the ‘divine emotion’ of the Godhead, and in so doing *revealed* how God feels, and how God’s true humanity feels in dynamic relationship with others and God. What to do about the direction taken by Emmanuel Hatzidakis (and others) about how to interpret Jesus’ emotional life? I would gently critique it for being insufficiently *Athanasian*. If Jesus’ human emotions mirrored God’s divine emotions in such a way that they impacted his own neurological and bodily development, then his human emotions were *redemptive* of human nature and *revelatory* of divine nature, simultaneously. In fact, if Jesus’ human dependence on Mary his mother, on Israel his cultural environment, and planet earth his physical environment, impacted his humanity in such a way that helped him to hear and obey his heavenly Father, then we must properly account for the role of Israel and the role of creation in whatever story of redemption we tell. To say with Irenaeus that Jesus recapitulates humanity and creation as he gathered up humanity and creation within himself to properly worship the Father now takes on greater meaning.

II.B. Divine Omniscience and Jesus’ Claims to be Ignorant (3.36 – 50)

In 3.36 – 50, Athanasius warns against Sabellianism (3.36) and turns his attention to the statements Jesus made to be ignorant of something, or questions he asked which might be interpreted as lacking knowledge and seeking answers. Athanasius responds by pointing out that some questions are asked for the benefit of the other person, not for Jesus. That includes the question, ‘How many loaves do you have?’ which contains the editorial comment from John that Jesus knew what he was going to do (Jn.6:6). Also in this category falls the question Jesus asked about where Lazarus’ dead body lay. Athanasius insists that Jesus could not be truly ignorant of these matters because of the Father-Son relation, ‘I in the Father and the Father in me’ (Jn.14:10) (3.37).

¹⁸ E.g. Athanasius of Alexandria, *Contra Gentes* 32.3

¹⁹ David Brakke, *Athanasius and Asceticism* retitled from *Athanasius and the Politics of Asceticism* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), p.186

²⁰ For example, Lewis Ayres, ‘Deification and the Dynamics of Nicene Theology: The Contribution of Gregory of Nyssa,’ *St. Vladimir’s Theological Quarterly*, 49 4 (2005), p.378, notices that in Gregory of Nyssa’s *On the Soul and Resurrection*, Gregory asks his sister and spiritual mentor Macrina about how ‘passions’ can be redirected or refocused on God. ‘If the passions stimulate the life of virtue but are extinguished when the soul is purified, then, he asks, will desire for God also be extinguished? In a famous passage Macrina reiterates her position that it is only the faculty of contemplation that is the godlike part of the soul and that the passions do indeed fall away. Nevertheless, the soul that passes beyond desire, hope and memory remains in the activity of love, thus imitating the divine life.’

Athanasius then provides a paradoxical conclusion rooted in his soteriology. On the one hand, ‘the flesh is ignorant, but the Word himself, considered as the Word, knows all things even before they come to be’ (3.38). This would seem to imply that divine omniscience should take precedence in the person of Christ, and displace his human ignorance. But, on the other hand, ‘the All-holy Word of God, who endured all things for our sakes, did this, that so carrying our ignorance, He might vouchsafe to us the knowledge of His own only and true Father, and of Himself, sent because of us for the salvation of all’ (3.38). Apparently, Jesus’ human ignorance was *real* based on the Word having restricted his awareness in some way because of his incarnate humanity. This would also seem to be an acceptable solution.

But Athanasius makes a detour to frame knowledge in the same category as Jesus receiving power and glory. If Jesus received power and glory into his humanity from the Father, then knowledge might also follow in the same pattern (3.38). It is not the Word, considered as Word per se, which is promoted, or given power, or given glory, etc. (3.39). Instead, God promoted the humanity of the incarnate Word, gave humanity a share in the power of the Word, etc. (3.39). And as evidence, Athanasius quotes Jesus’ prayer in the Upper Room, when he asked for ‘the glory which I had with You before the world was’ (Jn.17:5) (3.39). Athanasius then adds that ‘what He had as Word,’ prior to his incarnation, meaning glory and power and presumably knowledge and wisdom, he ‘received humanly; that for His sake men might henceforward upon earth have power against demons, as having become partakers of a divine nature; and in heaven, as being delivered from corruption, might reign everlastingly’ (3.40). Thus, Athanasius rebukes the Arians for degrading the Word by their confusion about him. For the very thing he needed to do for our salvation, that is, becoming a man and showing forth faithfulness to the Father and the works of Godhead, ‘as when He spat, and stretched forth the hand, and called Lazarus’ (3.41), is what they mistakenly say he did of himself to elevate himself to Godhead.

Athanasius then circles back around to the topic of the professed ignorance of Jesus on some occasions (3.42). The first biblical passage that concerns him is: ‘But of that day and that hour knows no man, neither the Angels of God, nor the Son, but the Father alone’ (Mt.24:36; Mk.13:32). The Arians cite this saying of Jesus as evidence that the Son and the Father do not share the same divine essence. Athanasius responds by asking, ‘Is the Framer of all said to be ignorant of His work?’ (3.42) He also argues that the context of Jesus’ saying indicates that Jesus was actually aware of ‘the day and the hour.’

‘For after saying, ‘nor the Son,’ He relates to the disciples what precedes the day, saying, ‘This and that shall be, and then the end.’ But He who speaks of what precedes the day, knows certainly the day also, which shall be manifested subsequently to the things foretold. But if He had not known the hour, He had not signified the events before it, as not knowing when it should be. And as any one, who, by way of pointing out a house or city to those who were ignorant of it, gave an account of what comes before the house or city, and having described all, said, ‘Then immediately comes the city or the house,’ would know of course where the house or the city was (for had he not known, he had not described what comes before lest from ignorance he should throw his hearers far out of the way, or in speaking he should unawares go beyond the object), so the Lord saying what precedes that day and that hour, knows exactly, nor is ignorant, when the hour and the day are at hand.’²¹

This is a somewhat surprising argument, in my opinion. For I think Athanasius tries to make the context prove too much. Passages like this led British scholar R.P.C. Hanson – one of the greatest patristics scholars in the latter half of the 20th century – to say that ‘when Athanasius has to deal with Jesus as a human person with human limitations he is immediately in difficulties.’²² Admittedly, it is not clear why Athanasius thinks that simply being aware that biblical salvation history repeats itself thematically (‘the days of Noah’ in Mt.24:37 – 51) necessitates knowing ‘the day and the hour.’ Moreover, what is more problematic for Athanasius is that he has already made an assertion in 3.38 about Jesus’ human ignorance. Previously, he said, ‘the All-holy Word of God, who endured all things for our sakes, did this, that so carrying our ignorance’ (3.38). How the Word was able to do this can be considered a mystery, but as long as Jesus’ human life had this quality of ignorance consistently, we could attribute the ignorance to the Son’s inhumanity. Yet Athanasius concludes, somewhat surprisingly, ‘so the Lord saying what precedes that day and that hour, knows exactly, nor is ignorant, when the hour and the day are at hand’ (3.42). Athanasius’ view

²¹ Athanasius of Alexandria, *Contra Arianos* 3.42; cf. Ambrose of Milan, *Exposition of the Christian Faith*, 5.194 – 207

²² R.P.C. Hanson, *The Search for the Christian Doctrine of God: The Arian Controversy 318 – 381* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1988), p.453. Hanson’s criticism of Athanasius’ theology of the incarnation and the humanity of Christ is insightful but more aggressive than mine.

almost certainly anchored in his refusal to countenance any separation between the Son and the Father, which is named as an explicit category in the biblical passage under examination.

From that point, Athanasius cites biblical support for the Son knowing information supernaturally, particularly information about the timing of God's plan (3.43). Jesus knew when to say, 'Father, the hour has come, glorify Your Son' (Jn.17:1) (3.43). He suggests that the incarnate Word knew these matters of timing from the Holy Spirit (3.44), and Athanasius cites Matthew 11:27 ('No one knows the Father save the Son'), perhaps to propose how a Spirit-based christology involving Jesus' human nature and human mind preserves the true Sonship of the Word with respect to knowing what the Father plans. On the principle that 'all that is the Father's is the Son's, and it is the Father's attribute to know the day,' Athanasius adduces, 'it is plain that the Son too knows it' (3.43).

Why, then, did Jesus say he was ignorant? Athanasius argues that it was for our benefit, because we are human, and 'to be ignorant is proper to man' (3.44). Because *we* are ignorant of the day and the hour, we must live in such a way that drew the compassion of the incarnate Word to identify with us (3.44 – 46). Yet is this rationale compelling? Would this not make Jesus a liar?

Athanasius then returns a question to his Arian counterparts (3.47). He brings up the example of the apostle Paul narrating his vision experience in 2 Corinthians 12:1 – 6. There, Paul says, 'Whether in the body I do not know, or out of body I do not know.' Apparently, the Arians argued that Paul actually knew the matter in question. Athanasius insists on two things here, unfortunately. First, he insists that because 'he had Christ within him revealing to him all things' (3.47), that Paul knew what was happening in the vision. So, second, in effect, Athanasius agrees with his Arian opponents that Paul knew. He thinks he can turn this shared understanding against the Arians by asking how the apostle Paul knew such a thing unless Christ himself knew it first (3.48). For Athanasius, union with Christ by the Spirit provides a sufficient rationale for the apostles, at least, to share the same level of information as Jesus himself. This is a surprising conclusion.

This way of reasoning from apparently shared convictions leads Athanasius back to the 'day and hour' statement of Jesus to say of it that Jesus actually did know the day and hour (3.49). When trying to answer the obvious question of why Jesus would not simply tell the truth, Athanasius says that it was for our benefit, to keep us on our guard from demons disguised as angels, or other deceptive people like the anti-Christ who would claim to know the day and hour (3.49).

Khaled Anatolios provides an excellent rebuttal to Hanson in a general sense.²³ He studies Athanasius' rhetoric in attributing this or that experience to the one subject of the Son. This can adequately explain Jesus' mortality as human, yet immortality as God. And so on. Unfortunately, however, Anatolios does not circle back to explore how Jesus can be both ignorant as human, yet knowing as God. It is conceptually challenging to understand how Jesus could be both mortal and immortal in different respects, but possible. It is perplexing to consider how Jesus might be both ignorant and knowing about 'the day and the hour.'

By contrast, I submit that Athanasius' argument might have been stronger had he held to a more flexible sense of divine omniscience that came from the Old Testament. How does God demonstrate His 'knowledge' or 'knowing' in Scripture? While certainly God's powerful speech-acts made His promises certain (Gen.1:1 – 2:3; Am.3:7; Heb.6:18), and while God certainly knew in advance of many things that would come to pass, nevertheless, there were some things that God seemed not to know. He did not know in advance whether Abraham would actually sacrifice Isaac (Gen.22:1, 12). Similarly, He humbled Israel in the wilderness for forty years, 'testing you, to know what was in your heart, whether you would keep His commandments or not' (Dt.8:2). God 'left [Hezekiah] alone only to test him, that He might know all that was in his heart' (2 Chr.32:21). God showed uncertainty about human choices on certain occasions, some of them quite critical to salvation history (Ex.4:8; Jer.26:3; 36:3; Ezk.12:3; Mt.21:1 – 3). And Jesus also commanded the disciples to 'pray that your flight may not be in the winter, or on a Sabbath' (Mt.24:20), which indicates some uncertainty on his part regarding when they would have to flee Jerusalem.

Therefore, it is equally possible to interpret 'the day and the hour' being known by the Father in a dynamic sense, as being decided by the Father after certain criteria are met, *not* as if the Father knows a chronological datum that the

²³ Khaled Anatolios, *Athanasius: The Coherence of His Thought* (London and New York: Routledge, 1998), p.142 – 165

Son and Spirit do not. If, for instance, the Father is waiting for certain important decisions or events in the human realm, then this would honor the meaning of Jesus' statement. The timing of 'the day and the hour' has a certain human element included in it, which the Father takes into account. Jesus can simply be understood as finding it humanly impossible to express to his disciples what factors go into the Father's determination of when to act. The problem, on this reading, is Athanasius' biblical exegesis and his apparent decision to accept a Hellenistic ideal about divinity ('complete omniscience' irrespective of human free will) over the biblical record. But the problem is not Athanasius' theological commitment to preserve a unity between the Son and Father on this point.

II.C. Divine Wisdom and Jesus' Growth in Wisdom (3.51 – 53)

Athanasius then considers the statement of Luke 2:52 concerning Jesus' boyhood and maturation: 'Jesus advanced in wisdom and in stature, and in grace with God and man' (3.51). Here, he asks the question of whether Jesus was man as all other men, or rather is He God bearing flesh? If Jesus was an ordinary man, Athanasius reasons, 'then let Him, as man, advance' (3.51). If, however, Jesus is God bearing flesh, which Athanasius insists upon, then 'what advance had He who existed equal to God? Or how had the Son increase, being ever in the Father?' (3.51) For what is there beyond the Father into which to advance (3.51)?

Men are able to advance and grow in virtue (3.52). In fact, all things advance by looking at the Son (3.52). Therefore, the Son could not advance, when considered as the Son per se (3.52).

'But humanly is He here also said to advance, since advance belongs to man. Hence the Evangelist, speaking with cautious exactness, has mentioned stature in the advance; but being Word and God He is not measured by stature, which belongs to bodies. Of the body then is the advance; for, it advancing, in it advanced also the manifestation of the Godhead to those who saw it. And, as the Godhead was more and more revealed, by so much more did His grace as man increase before all men.'²⁴

Perhaps giving us some relief that he still trusts Luke the apostolic writer, Athanasius refers the term 'advance' to 'the body' of Jesus. As he hungered and thirsted and suffered in the flesh, so Jesus can be said to have advance in the flesh (3.53). 'The manhood advanced in Wisdom, transcending by degrees human nature, and being deified, and becoming and appearing to all as the organ of Wisdom for the operation and the shining forth of the Godhead' (3.53).

I assume here, as elsewhere in Athanasius' early two volume work *Contra Gentes* and *De Incarnatione*, that when Athanasius refers to 'the body' of a human being, even in the case of the incarnate Word, that he is including the human brain, and 'the human soul' of Jesus with 'the body.' For it would be difficult to argue that Jesus' mental capacities were already fully those of a mature human adult when he was an infant, given what we know about human brain development and intellectual ability. That Athanasius did in fact have this in his mind is attested to the very last sentence of this section, where he refers not simply to 'the body,' or even to 'the flesh,' but to 'human nature.' 'So the advance is of the human nature in such wise as we explained above' (3.53). The more his human life increased, the more the Godhead was revealed in and through Jesus.

II.D. Divine Unity and Jesus' Cry of Forsakenness (3.54 – 58)

Athanasius denies that Jesus uttered his cry, 'My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?' for his own sake. The Arians apparently leveraged this quotation to argue that Jesus was not fully divine. In 3.54 – 58, Athanasius circles back to address this saying of Christ from the cross. He builds the rhetorical tension of how could Jesus, who told his disciples to not fear death, actually fear death, even being the Word of life (3.54)? Correcting his earlier statement from *De Incarnatione*, where he asserted that the Word had to make use of the murderous intentions of others because he could not, by nature, cause the death of his own body, now he cites the sayings of Jesus, 'I have power to lay down My life, and I have power to take it again,' and, 'No one takes it from Me.' But now he deploys these sayings to underscore the puzzlement readers should feel: Why would the Word who has the power to give up his body, presumably from the Father, say that he feels forsaken by the Father? (3.54)

Athanasius' explanation proceeds along the lines of what pertains to the humanity of Jesus, not his divinity. 'For He said not all this prior to the flesh; but when the 'Word became flesh,' and has become man, then is it written that He said this, that is, humanly' (3.55) He categorizes this experience along with the fact that Jesus wept, hungered, and

²⁴ Ibid 3.52

showed 'other properties of a body' (3.55). 'Though God impassible,' he notes, 'He had taken a passible flesh.' Athanasius is still concerned to defend the true meaning of the phrase, 'I am in the Father, and the Father is in me.' The Arians 'separate the unity of the Father and the Son.' Athanasius retorts by pointing to the works done by the incarnate Word which prove his divinity, and placing the Arians in the same category as those Jews who ascribed the power of Jesus to Beelzebub rather than the Holy Spirit (3.55).

Jesus' humanity provides us with an 'intelligible ground' for explaining this statement and other human experiences, genuinely (3.56). Then he argues that Jesus' utterance was to 'lighten these very sufferings of the flesh,' presumably because we as humans suffer feelings of God-forsakenness, 'and free it from them.'

'And that the words 'Why have You forsaken Me?' are His, according to the foregoing explanations (though He suffered nothing, for the Word was impassible), is notwithstanding declared by the Evangelists; since the Lord became man, and these things are done and said as from a man, that He might Himself lighten these very sufferings of the flesh, and free it from them.'²⁵

Curiously, Athanasius then denies that Jesus could have been genuinely forsaken by the Father. And here, Athanasius retracts what he suggested earlier about Jesus being in any state of terror, even humanly:

'Whence neither can the Lord be forsaken by the Father, who is ever in the Father, both before He spoke, and when He uttered this cry. Nor is it lawful to say that the Lord was in terror, at whom the keepers of hell's gates shuddered and set open hell, and the graves did gape, and many bodies of the saints arose and appeared to their own people. Therefore be every heretic dumb, nor dare to ascribe terror to the Lord whom death, as a serpent, flees, at whom demons tremble, and the sea is in alarm; for whom the heavens are rent and all the powers are shaken. For behold when He says, 'Why have You forsaken Me?' the Father showed that He was ever and even then in Him; for the earth knowing its Lord who spoke, straightway trembled, and the veil was rent, and the sun was hidden, and the rocks were torn asunder, and the graves, as I have said, did gape, and the dead in them arose; and, what is wonderful, they who were then present and had before denied Him, then seeing these signs, confessed that 'truly He was the Son of God.'²⁶

Athanasius' understanding of the Father-Son relation prevents him from understanding this moment on the cross as if the Father had punished the Son, or as if the Father had in any way abandoned the Son, or even as if the Father and Son shared a different consciousness such that the Son experienced something mentally that was different from the Father.

I am in basic agreement with Athanasius in his theological approach to the Father-Son relationship. However, I am puzzled why Athanasius did not repose on John's recorded statement of Jesus, which indicates that while the disciples abandoned Jesus, the Father never did:

'Behold, an hour is coming, and has already come, for you to be scattered, each to his own home, and to leave Me alone; and yet I am not alone, because the Father is with Me.' (John 16:32)

Moreover, I am surprised that Athanasius does not attempt any real exegesis of Psalm 22. The fact that the Alexandrian theologian first attempts a Christological interpretation by considering the two natures of Christ without attempting a biblical interpretation of Psalm 22, Matthew 27, and Mark 15 weakens his position. And I think his explanation of Jesus' experience undermines the pastoral purpose he perceives in the text: If Jesus merely said these words about being God-forsaken but experienced no God-forsakenness in truth, in what sense should this provide us with any comfort? If someone else merely said words of suffering that had no basis in their inner experience, is that a mark of empathic identification, or mockery?

I believe Athanasius would have been more accurate to first see this as an intertextual reference: Jesus was invoking King David's journey of exile before enthronement for the sake of the criminals being crucified beside him who thought that the Messiah should not face death at Gentile hands. Jesus' point is that if King David suffered at the hands of the Gentiles (Ps.22), how much more would the heir of David?

²⁵ Ibid 3.56

²⁶ Ibid 3.56

In Matthew and Mark, Jesus' quotation of Psalm 22:1 fits into the sustained parallel to David's pre-enthronement story which Jesus was living out and repeating.²⁷ Like David, Jesus was anointed king (at his baptism) by John the Baptist who played the role of Samuel. Like David, after being anointed, Jesus defeated a 'Goliath' (Satan in the wilderness). Like David, Jesus had to build a kingdom of his own in the wilderness. Like David, Jesus was chased by those in power with murderous intent, which is why Jesus referred to David's life on the run in 1 Samuel 22, when Jesus and his disciples picked grain on the Sabbath (Mt.12:1 – 4; Mk.2:23 – 27; Lk.6:1 – 4). In fact, this reference to David taking five loaves from the tabernacle sanctuary serves as an anchor point from which to interpret Jesus' action of taking five loaves in Jewish lands (Mt.14:13 – 21; Mk.6:30 – 44; Lk.9:11 – 17; Jn.6:1 – 15) and then seven loaves in Gentile lands (Mt.15:29 – 39; Mk.7:31 – 8:10), and multiplying those amounts, on mountains which invoked the Temple in Jerusalem so that Jesus could depict his own statement, 'Something greater than the temple is here' (Mt.12:6). John tells us that the Jewish crowd in the first instance recognized that Jesus was making a claim to be a king like David, because they wanted to make him king (Jn.6:15). When Jesus entered Jerusalem for the last time, Davidic titles were showered upon him, and he invoked Davidic actions, Psalms, and language himself. Like David, Jesus was pushed into the hands of the Gentile enemies of Israel. A fuller literary exegesis of the Gospel accounts would demonstrate the sustained literary connections that each narrator was making between Jesus and David, a parallel Jesus himself certainly invoked.

What place did Psalm 22 have in the life of David, then? David did feel extremely vulnerable among the Gentiles, and penned Psalm 22 as part of that experience. But David did not believe that God had forsaken him in an absolute sense. What he meant was, 'Why have You forsaken me to the Gentiles?' David still experienced God as accessible, which he states in Psalm 22 itself: 'You are He who brought me forth...upon You I was cast from birth; You have been my God from my mother's womb; be not far from me, for trouble is near...' (Ps.22:9 – 11). David still experienced God as loving and protecting him, as having His face turned toward him with favor: 'For He has not despised nor abhorred the affliction of the afflicted; nor has He hidden His face from him' (Ps.22:24). David at least partially based his trust in God on his anointing by the prophet Samuel, which was the anointing of the Holy Spirit: 'the Spirit of the Lord came mightily upon David from that day forward' (1 Sam.16:13). The phrase 'from that day forward' includes whatever period David felt forsaken to the Gentiles in the wilderness, the occasion of Psalm 22. So David's very basis for trusting God in the wilderness was the presence of the Holy Spirit anointing him for the kingship. Finally, we believe that God's Spirit spoke through David, even in the season of feeling forsaken to hostile Gentile kings. Put another way, Psalm 22 is in the canonical Scriptures which is believed to be inspired, in which David is said to speak prophetically by the Spirit (Acts 2:29 – 30). So how could God have forsaken David in an absolute sense? Such a notion defies exegesis. It is not what David actually said in Psalm 22.

Therefore, Jesus' quote of Psalm 22:1 is not for himself, but for the criminals crucified on either side of him. In Matthew and Mark, these two men expressed disbelief that the Messiah could ever be treated this way, least of all crucified by the very Gentile powers holding Israel captive. Wasn't the Messiah supposed to be victorious over the Gentiles? But Jesus was pointing out to them that King David was exposed to great danger in his early life, too, prior to being enthroned. And if David was forsaken by God to the Gentiles, the much greater heir of David could also be forsaken by God to the Gentiles, and in a much greater way. Like David, Jesus still lived in the power of the Spirit of God, even while quoting Psalm 22:1. Jesus is communicating that he will be enthroned and vindicated, just as David was, because like David, he has never lost his anointing to be king. And Jesus' anointing is the Holy Spirit, who proceeds from the Father (in Eastern theology), and is the very bond of love between Father and Son (in Western theology).

Finally, (especially if I am correct in perceiving a literary chiasm running through Matthew's Gospel as a whole, although my point here stands independently) then the baptism of Jesus (Mt.3:13 – 17) – his symbolic dying and rising – parallels his actual dying and rising in his death and resurrection (Mt.27:52ff.). And if that is the case, then God's quotation of Psalm 2:7, 'You are my Son,' from the coronation Psalm spoken over the kings of Judah, parallels Jesus' own use of Psalm 22:1, which is Jesus' confident claim to the throne of David. His confidence was based on his consistent, lived parallel to the pre-enthronement life of David, the hunted king in the wilderness. And

²⁷ See scholars as diverse as literary scholars Mark Drury, 'Mark,' edited by Robert Alter and Frank Kermode, *The Literary Guide to the Bible* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1987), p.414 – 416; N.T. Wright, *The New Testament and the People of God* (Minneapolis, MI: Fortress Press, 1992), ch.13; Jerome H. Neyrey, *Honor and Shame in the Gospel of Matthew* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1998), p.156 – 161; Matthew Skinner, *The Trial Narratives: Conflict, Power, and Identity* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2010), p.37 – 39.

since this literary parallel between Psalm 2 and Psalm 22 seems compelling, even without the weight of the chiasm behind it, then I once again propose that the anointing of the Holy Spirit in Jesus' baptism and blessing of the Father must have been the constant reality in Jesus' life, without exception. If David never lost his anointing to be king, then we can say with confidence that Jesus never lost his anointing to be king, either, and his anointing was in fact the Spirit of God. Therefore, the Trinitarian disclosure of Father, Spirit, and Son revealed in Jesus' baptism was not momentary. Quite to the contrary, it was the hidden, spiritual stability throughout Jesus' entire life, as Athanasius properly insists. It follows, as Athanasius says, that Jesus never faced a closed, silent heaven. At every moment on the cross, and especially as he was finally putting to death the corruption of sin lodged in his human nature, Jesus heard the blessing of his ever-constant, ever-loving Father, as always: 'This is My Son, in whom I am well pleased.' Jesus' parallel announcement to others was, 'Like David was, I am the hunted king in exile, on my way to the throne.'

Athanasius' argument is weakened by his assumption that Jesus' quotation of Psalm 22:1 has to do with his humanity in a generic sense. He should have recognized that the decisive factor is not Jesus' humanity per se but his human *role* as grounded in his Davidic, kingly role within Israel. That is, Jesus' humanity needed to take its particular shape because of the role he played as the human descendent of King David on Mary's side (Lk.3:23 – 38), and as a claimant to the Davidic throne on Joseph's side (Mt.1:1 – 17). For Jesus was the Son of David who was the greater David. He was not simply human in a general sense.

I do agree with Athanasius, therefore, in his assessment that Jesus was not forsaken by the Father in a way that their conscious communion was broken, or in a way that Jesus experienced 'wrath' from the Father, as even David did not feel those things (Ps.22:9 – 10, 19, 24). Rather, Jesus was forsaken by the Father *to the Gentiles* in the sense of losing his physical protection (e.g. Ps.34:6 – 7). And Athanasius' argument that Jesus' experience is a mirror to us of our experience, and a participation in our general human experience, has merit with this foundation. Understood this way, Jesus indeed 'lighten[s] these very sufferings of the flesh,' and, by passing through death into resurrection, 'free[s] it from them' (3.56).

Interestingly enough, the Arian claim that Jesus was forsaken by his Father on the cross is repeated by Protestant penal substitution advocates. In the penal substitution framework, people reason from our human experience that separation and distance from any parent or authority figure is a fitting punishment for wrongdoing. It's like being sent to your room, or sent to prison. You want to get out, and be reunited on good terms with the authority figure, but you cannot. They are punishing you. Then they project that meaning onto Jesus' quotation of Psalm 22:1 to render Jesus as a penal substitute. But this interpretation depends on a shallow understanding of the biblical texts, and distorted understanding of the Father-Son relationship. Athanasius' understanding of the relationship between the Father and the Son was sufficient to prevent him from going down the path required by penal substitution where the Son somehow retained his divinity while experiencing the Father turn against him. Athanasius would have considered this flatly impossible, if only because of the thread of mutual Father-Son indwelling that runs through John's Gospel, which Athanasius is keen to stand on as an anchor point. I am disappointed that he did not use the literary and exegetical tools that I believe are required for a proper understanding of Jesus' cry. Not only because his argument could have been the stronger for it, but also because it represents a tendency in early Christianity to bypass the story of biblical Israel in developing an understanding of what being human means. But with a better understanding of literary intertextuality, in particular, we are on much firmer ground and can strengthen the insight resting at the heart of Athanasius' theology: the Father-Son relation.

No one in the early church believed in the 'broken Trinity' view. As the wilderness temptation and the Garden of Gethsemane stories indicate, at the very moment when Jesus needed the strength and love of the Father the most – at his crucifixion and death – the Father was there with him and for him through the bond of the Spirit. The Father spoke a word of blessing and identity, gave the Spirit without measure, strengthened Jesus supernaturally, and gave Jesus the conviction to be victorious over sinfulness all the way to the end. The wrath of God did not pass from the Father upon the Son. It was not an inner-Trinitarian rupture of their relationship. No, rather this: Not upon the Son but within the Son. Not the Father's wrath alone but the Son's and Spirit's wrath as well. The Son's wrath against the corruption of sin within his own humanity was the wrath of his Father empowered by the purifying fire of the Holy Spirit. Not a divided Trinity but a united Trinity. The united Trinity poured out divine wrath upon the corruption of sin in the humanity of Jesus, expressed in the will of the Son.

Part Three: Is the Son Son of the Father by Will? Or by Nature?

Athanasius then turns to consider the Arian assertion that the Son was made by the Father through an act of the Father's *will and pleasure* (3.59). This claim was meant to provide some explanation into the mystery of the generation of the Son. The Arians drew on biblical language regarding our salvation and redemption as being 'according to the kind intention of his will' (Eph.1:5, 9; cf. 3.61). If that was true for us as adopted sons of God, the Arians probably reasoned, the same must be true of the original Son of God. Athanasius retorts that the Arians rival the doctrine of Valentinus and his followers (3.60). The Valentinians asserted that God had a pair of attributes, Thought and Will. And Thought could not accomplish anything without Will. Athanasius accuses the Arians of making Will and Pleasure precede the Word. Asterius the Sophist apparently believed God's creative acts depended on the coordination of these two attributes (3.60).

Athanasius objects on the principle that, if God willed to create the Son, there must be some antecedent Word: 'some other Word, through whom He in turn comes to be' (3.61). This is because God must have had to apply some rationality to every creation, including the Arian Son, and speak it into existence. But this runs afoul of Athanasius' objection head on.

'If then,' Athanasius continues, 'there is another Word of God... does not this expose the many-headed craftiness of these men,' the Arians? The Arians object to the idea that 'God had a Son by necessity and against His good pleasure' (3.62), but Athanasius insists they misunderstand the orthodox presentation. It is not that someone or something 'imposes necessity' on God (3.62). So it is not some will higher than God's which has caused the generation of the Son. 'For what is contrary to will they see; but what is greater and transcends it has escaped their perception,' and that is nature. Nature is higher than will. 'So what is according to nature transcends and precedes counselling' (3.62). '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' (3.62).

Athanasius objects further to the application of 'will' to be the foremost attribute in God. If the Father willed the Son into existence in a one-time creative act, then does the Father 'will' his own existence (3.63)? If so, might the Father 'will' his non-existence also (3.63)? Athanasius regards it as 'unseemly and self-destructive' to ask this (3.63). Does God take counsel within Himself to make creative decisions? If so, then 'Counsel' is prior to creation in God. And Athanasius sees the opening there: The Son of God is his Father's Counsel (3.63).

Athanasius, now having properly identified the Word as also the Father's Counsel and Good Pleasure, argues that this identity prevents the Word from being a creature (3.64). Rather, the Word must be co-equal in Godhead with the Father, and co-eternal. Athanasius then shows that Understanding and Counsel are the same quality (3.65) and that they are both titles of the one Word of God, who exists by God's nature, not by God's will (3.65). For the Father to exercise Will would seem to require that he thought with Understanding and Counsel beforehand – a point which seems eminently reasonable. So there must be some quality in God which preceded Will: the rational Word.

Critically, Athanasius sees the Father's pleasure as being independent of the Father's will (3.66). The Father takes pleasure in the Son by nature. So even though the Son is not generated by the Father by a single act of will, this does not mean that the Father is complacent about the Son. The Son does not need to be generated by an act of will in order for the Father to take pleasure in the Son. Athanasius considers one hypothetical case of the Son not existing, and so identifies the Father's goodness with his Fatherhood that we might be stunned at both Athanasius' insight, and the reality about God which he glimpsed:

'But to say of the Son, 'He might not have been,' is an irreligious presumption reaching even to the Essence of the Father, as if what is His own might not have been. For it is the same as saying, 'The Father might not have been good.' And as the Father is always good by nature, so He is always generative by nature; and to say, 'The Father's good pleasure is the Son,' and 'The Word's good pleasure is the Father,' implies, not a precedent will, but genuineness of nature, and propriety and likeness of Essence. For as in the case of the radiance and light one might say, that there is no will preceding radiance in the light, but it is its natural offspring, at the pleasure of the light which begot it, not by will and consideration, but in nature and truth, so also in the instance of the Father and the Son, one might rightly say, that the Father has love and good pleasure towards the Son, and the Son has love and good pleasure towards the Father.'²⁸

²⁸ Athanasius of Alexandria, *Contra Arianos* 3.66

This is a remarkable insight which Athanasius has into the Father-Son relation. There is eternal love and good pleasure between Father and Son, which has always existed, is now, and will be forevermore. This is the love and goodness which characterizes the Triune God, which must therefore condition and direct all God's actions.

The Alexandrian theologian concludes by reiterating the Johannine verse which opened the whole work, 'I in the Father and the Father in Me' (3.67). He reiterates his conclusion: 'The Son is begotten not by will, but in nature and truth' (3.67). Being true to His nature, the Lord, says Athanasius, is loving towards man (3.67). But, unfortunately and sadly for them, the Arians make themselves into Christ's enemies on their own account.