

Human Free Will and God's Grace in the Early Church Fathers

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'Moreover although the Greek Fathers, above others, and especially Chrysostom, have exceeded due bounds in extolling the powers of the human will, yet all ancient theologians, with the exception of Augustine, are so confused, vacillating, and contradictory on this subject, that no certainty can be obtained from their writings.'

- John Calvin, *Institutes*, book 2, chapter 2, section 4

Below are a few of the many passages from the early theologians that demonstrate that Calvin was mistaken. They were not 'confused, vacillating, and contradictory.' In fact, on this subject, they were very clear, and there is a consensus among them about human free will. Two prominent church historians, Philip Schaff and J.N.D Kelly, write respectively:

'The Greek, and particularly the Alexandrian fathers, in opposition to the dualism and fatalism of the Gnostic systems, which made evil a necessity of nature, laid great stress upon human freedom, and upon the indispensable cooperation of this freedom with divine grace; while the Latin fathers, especially Tertullian and Cyprian, Hilary and Ambrose, guided rather by their practical experience than by speculative principles, emphasized the hereditary sin and hereditary guilt of man, and the sovereignty of God's grace, without, however, denying freedom and individual accountability. The Greek church adhered to her undeveloped synergism, which coordinates the human will and divine grace as factors in the work of conversion; the Latin church, under the influence of Augustine, advanced to the system of a divine monergism, which gives God all the glory, and makes freedom itself a result of grace; while Pelagianism, on the contrary, represented the principle of a human monergism, which ascribes the chief merit of conversion to man, and reduces grace to a mere external auxiliary. After Augustine's death, however the intermediate system of Semi-Pelagianism, akin to the Greek synergism, became prevalent in the West.'¹

'A point on which they (the Eastern Fathers) were all agreed was that man's will remains free; we are responsible for our acts. This was a vital article in their anti-Manichaeon propaganda, but it raised the question of man's need of divine grace. This issue is usually posed in the terms which the later Augustinian discussion is made familiar, and so viewed their position was that grace and free will co-operate. Our salvation comes, stated Gregory Nazianzen, both from ourselves and from God. If God's help is necessary for doing good and if the good will itself comes from Him, it is equally true that the initiative rests with man's free will... Although we have only cited these two (Ambrose and Ambrosiaster), there is little doubt that their views were representative (of the Western Fathers). On the related question of grace, the parallel truths of man's free will and his need of God's help were maintained, although we can discern increasing emphasis being laid on the latter. 'We must be and directed', wrote Hilary, 'by His grace'; but he makes it plain the initial move in God's direction lies at our own disposition. God's mercy, he points out elsewhere, does not exclude man's desert, and a man's own will must take the lead in lifting him from sin. 'It is for God to call', remarks Jerome, 'and for us to believe'. The part of grace, it would seem, is to perfect that which the will has freely determined; yet our will is only ours by God's mercy.'²

As one can see, Calvin's conclusion about the literary evidence is incorrect. Furthermore, Calvin is suggesting something which is historically implausible: That the earliest theologians, including those who reportedly knew the apostles personally, and including those who were one or two generations removed, completely fell away from them on this very central issue. Either the apostles themselves were so muddled in their communication, or the early church theologians were so dull of hearing, that this central truth was lost in quick order, and it took Augustine, who lived four hundred years after the fact, to 'rediscover' the truth about God's sole, overpowering, omnicausal will in what is now called 'monergism' (one will in the universe – that of God). And even that is subject to vigorous

¹ Philip Schaff, *History of the Christian Church* Vol.III (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmann's Publishing, 1867), ch.9, sec.146

² J.N.D. Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines* (New York, NY: Harper One, 1978), p.352, 356

debate, because Augustine himself said contradictory things about human free will. Contrary to Calvin's assessment, Augustine was perhaps the most 'confused, vacillating, and contradictory' of the early fathers.

This early church consensus stands against the Augustinian-Reformed monergist interpretation of (say) predestination in Romans 9 – 11. Humanity's free will was a central component of orthodox theology. Before Augustine's debates with the Pelagians, and arguably in Augustine himself (he did write *The Freedom of the Will*) there is no evidence that anyone interpreted Romans 9 – 11 to support a 'double predestination' or a 'sovereignty of God' view that is logically mutually exclusive with human free will. Even more damaging to the Augustinian monergist tradition is the fact that Augustine did not understand Greek well enough to translate Romans into Latin. American Eastern Orthodox theologian David Bentley Hart attributes Augustine's mistake about Paul's definition of 'predestination' to his unfamiliarity with Greek, which had a more flexible sense of the word than Latin. Greg Boyd notes, 'This in part explains why Calvin cannot cite ante-Nicene fathers against his libertarian opponents (e.g. Pighuis). Hence, when Calvin debates Pighuis on the freedom of the will, he cites Augustine abundantly, but no early church fathers are cited.'

This early church consensus laid the groundwork for St. John Cassian in the fifth century to disagree with the later Augustine, in debating Pelagius, on the question of monergism for not making sufficient space for human free will, and to claim that Augustine was defining 'predestination' and 'God's sovereignty' in ways that, until that point, had not been defined thus. Augustine, then, was known to have broken with the theological consensus of church tradition. This consensus also laid the foundation for the Eastern Orthodox to articulate the doctrine called synergism, in contrast to Augustine's monergism.

Clement of Rome (died circa 99 AD)

(Tradition has identified him with the Clement who is mentioned in Philippians 4:3, who would have thus known Peter and Paul personally. He was the third or fourth bishop of Rome.)

'For no other reason does God punish the sinner either in the present or future world, except because He knows that the sinner was able to conquer but neglected to gain the victory.' (Clement of Rome, *Recognitions* 111. 23, V. 8, IX. 30.)

The Epistle of 'Mathetes' to Diognetus (date 1st – 2nd century, once attributed to Justin Martyr)

(The true author is unknown, as 'Mathetes' was not a proper name but means 'a disciple.' Possibly he was a disciple of the apostles, because of this comment: 'I do not speak of things strange to me, nor do I aim at anything inconsistent with right reason; but having been a disciple of the Apostles, I am become a teacher of the Gentiles' - chapter 11, verse 1)

'As a king sends his son, who is also a king, so sent He Him; as God He sent Him; as to men He sent Him; as a Saviour He sent Him, and as seeking to persuade, not to compel us; for violence has no place in the character of God. As calling us He sent Him, not as vengefully pursuing us; as loving us He sent Him, not as judging us.' (*Epistle to Diognetus*, chapter 7, verse 4)

'And do not wonder that a man may become an imitator of God. He can, if he is willing.' (*Epistle to Diognetus*, chapter 10)

Describes the positive side of spiritual growth and choices of faithfulness to God and with God: Growth in virtue. 'When you have read and carefully listened to these things, you shall know what God bestows on such as rightly love Him, being made [as you are] a paradise of delight, presenting in yourselves a tree bearing all kinds of produce and flourishing well, being adorned with various fruits. For in this place the tree of knowledge and the tree of life have been planted; but it is not the tree of knowledge that destroys — it is disobedience that proves destructive. Nor truly are those words without significance which are written, how God from the beginning planted the tree of life in the midst of paradise, revealing through knowledge the way to life, and when those who were first formed did not use this [knowledge] properly, they were, through the fraud of the Serpent, stripped naked. For neither can life exist

without knowledge, nor is knowledge secure without life. Wherefore both were planted close together. The Apostle, perceiving the force [of this conjunction], and blaming that knowledge which, without true doctrine, is admitted to influence life, declares, Knowledge puffs up, but love edifies. For he who thinks he knows anything without true knowledge, and such as is witnessed to by life, knows nothing, but is deceived by the Serpent, as not loving life. But he who combines knowledge with fear, and seeks after life, plants in hope, looking for fruit. Let your heart be your wisdom; and let your life be true knowledge inwardly received. Bearing this tree and displaying its fruit, you shall always gather in those things which are desired by God, which the Serpent cannot reach, and to which deception does not approach; nor is Eve then corrupted, but is trusted as a virgin; and salvation is manifested, and the Apostles are filled with understanding, and the Passover of the Lord advances, and the choirs are gathered together, and are arranged in proper order, and the Word rejoices in teaching the saints — by whom the Father is glorified: to whom be glory forever. Amen.’ (*Epistle to Diognetus*, chapter 12)

Ignatius of Antioch (30 – 107 AD, traditionally held to be a disciple of the Apostles John and Peter)

Describes us by using an analogy of the coin becoming stamped and minted; the longer version reads, ‘Seeing, then, all things have an end, and there is set before us life upon our observance [of God’s precepts], but death as the result of disobedience, and every one, according to the choice he makes, shall go to his own place, let us flee from death, and make choice of life. For I remark, that two different characters are found among men—the one true coin, the other spurious. The truly devout man is the right kind of coin, stamped by God Himself. The ungodly man, again, is false coin, unlawful, spurious, counterfeit, wrought not by God, but by the devil. I do not mean to say that there are two different human natures, but that there is one humanity, sometimes belonging to God, and sometimes to the devil. If any one is truly religious, he is a man of God; but if he is irreligious, he is a man of the devil, made such, not by nature, but by his own choice. The unbelieving bear the image of the prince of wickedness. The believing possess the image of their Prince, God the Father, and Jesus Christ, through whom, if we are not in readiness to die for the truth into His passion, His life is not in us.’

The Shepherd of Hermas (circa 100 AD)

Comment from John Cassian: ‘For it was not given only to David to think what is good of himself, nor is it denied to us naturally to think or imagine anything that is good. It cannot then be doubted that there are by nature some seeds of goodness in every soul implanted by the kindness of the Creator: but unless these are quickened by the assistance of God, they will not be able to attain to an increase of perfection, for, as the blessed Apostle says: ‘Neither is he that planteth anything nor he that watereth, but God that giveth the increase.’ *But that freedom of the will is to some degree in a man’s own power is very clearly taught in the book termed the Pastor [i. e., the Shepherd of Hermas], where two angels are said to be attached to each one of us, i. e., a good and a bad one, while it lies at a man’s own option to choose which to follow.* And therefore the will always remains free in man, and can either neglect or delight in the grace of God. For the Apostle would not have commanded saying: ‘Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling,’ had he not known that it could be advanced or neglected by us. But that men might not fancy that they had no need of Divine aid for the work of Salvation, he subjoins: ‘For it is God that worketh in you both to will and to do, of His good pleasure.’ And therefore he warns Timothy and says: ‘Neglect not the grace of God which is in thee;’ and again: ‘For which cause I exhort thee to stir up the grace of God which is in thee...’ (John Cassian, *Conferences*, XIII.12, emphasis added)

St. Justin Martyr (circa 100 – 165 AD)

‘God’s foreknowledge is intuitive, not active, and is caused by man’s choices.’ And also, ‘We have learned from the prophets, and we hold it to be true, that punishments, chastisements, and rewards are rendered according to the merit of each man’s actions. Otherwise, if all things happen by fate, then nothing is in our own power. For if it be predestined that one man be good and another man evil, then the first is not deserving of praise or the other to be blamed. Unless humans have the power of avoiding evil and choosing good by free choice, they are not accountable for their actions-whatever they may be... For neither would a man be worthy of reward or praise if he did not of himself choose the good, but was merely created for that end. Likewise, if a man were evil, he would not deserve

punishment, since he was not evil of himself, being unable to do anything else than what he was made for.’ (Justin Martyr, *First Apology*, chapter 43)

‘...God, wishing men and angels to follow His will, resolved to create them free to do righteousness; possessing reason, that they may know by whom they are created, and through whom they, not existing formerly, do now exist; and with a law that they should be judged by Him, if they do anything contrary to right reason: and of ourselves we, men and angels, shall be convicted of having acted sinfully, unless we repent beforehand. But if the word of God foretells that some angels and men shall be certainly punished, it did so because it foreknew that they would be unchangeably [wicked], but not because God had created them so. So that if they repent, all who wish for it can obtain mercy from God...’ (Justin Martyr, *Second Apology for the Christians addressed to the Roman Senate*, chapter CXLI)

‘But lest some suppose, from what has been said by us, that we say that whatever happens, happens by a fatal necessity, because it is foretold as known beforehand, this too we explain. We have learned from the prophets, and we hold it to be true, that punishments, and chastisements, and good rewards, are rendered according to the merit of each man’s actions. Since if it be not so, but all things happen by fate, neither is anything at all in our own power. For if it be fated that this man, e.g., be good, and this other evil, neither is the former meritorious nor the latter to be blamed. And again, unless the human race have the power of avoiding evil and choosing good by free choice, they are not accountable for their actions, of whatever kind they be. But that it is by free choice they both walk uprightly and stumble, we thus demonstrate. We see the same man making a transition to opposite things. Now, if it had been fated that he were to be either good or bad, he could never have been capable of both the opposites, nor of so many transitions. But not even would some be good and others bad, since we thus make fate the cause of evil, and exhibit her as acting in opposition to herself; or that which has been already stated would seem to be true, that neither virtue nor vice is anything, but that things are only reckoned good or evil by opinion; which, as the true word shows, is the greatest impiety and wickedness. But this we assert is inevitable fate, that they who choose the good have worthy rewards, and they who choose the opposite have their merited awards. For not like other things, as trees and quadrupeds, which cannot act by choice, did God make man: for neither would he be worthy of reward or praise did he not of himself choose the good, but were created for this end; nor, if he were evil, would he be worthy of punishment, not being evil of himself, but being able to be nothing else than what he was made.’ (Justin Martyr, *First Apology*, chapter XLIII)

‘For God, wishing both angels and men, who were endowed with free-will, and at their own disposal, to do whatever He had strengthened each to do, made them so, that if they chose the things acceptable to Himself, He would keep them free from death and from punishment; but that if they did evil, He would punish each as He sees fit.’ (Justin Martyr, *Dialogue with Trypho*, chapter 88)

‘But yet, since He knew that it would be good, He created both angels and men free to do that which is righteous, and He appointed periods of time during which He knew it would be good for them to have the exercise of free-will; and because He likewise knew it would be good, He made general and particular judgments; each one’s freedom of will, however, being guarded.’ (Justin Martyr, *Dialogue with Trypho*, chapter 102)

‘In the beginning, He made the human race with the power of thought and of choosing the truth and doing right, so that all men are without excuse before God.’ (Justin Martyr, 160 AD, 1.177)

‘Unless the human race has the power of avoiding evil and choosing good by free choice, they are not responsible for their actions.’ (Justin Martyr, 160 AD, 1.177)

‘We maintain that each man acts rightly or sins by his free choice....Since God in the beginning made the race of angels and men with free will, they will justly suffer in eternal fire the punishment of whatever sins they have committed.’ (Justin Martyr, 160 AD, 1.190)

‘It was God’s desire for both angels and men, who were endowed with free will...that if they choose the things acceptable to Him, He would keep them from death and from punishment. However, if they did evil, He would punish each as He sees fit.’ (Justin Martyr, 160 AD, 1.243)

‘He created both angels and men free to do that which is righteous. And He appointed periods of time during which He knew it would be good for them to have the exercise of free will.’ (Justin Martyr, 160 AD, 1.250)

‘I have proved in what has been said that those who were foreknown to be unrighteous, whether men or angels, are not made wicked by God’s fault. Rather, each man is what he will appear to be through his own fault.’ (Justin Martyr, 160 AD, 1.269)

Tatian the Assyrian (110 – 172 AD)

‘The Logos...before the creation of men, was the Framer of angels. And each of these two orders of creatures was made free to act as it pleased, not having the nature of good, which again is with God alone, but is brought to perfection in men through their freedom of choice, in order that the bad man may be justly punished...but the just man be deservedly praised...Such is the constitution of things in reference to angels and men.’

Also, ‘...our free-will has destroyed us...Nothing evil has been created by God; we ourselves have manifested wickedness.’ (Tatian, Address to the Greeks)

‘Each of these two orders of creatures [men and angels] was made free to act as it pleased. They did not have the nature of good, which again is with God alone. However, it is brought to perfection in men through their freedom of choice. In this manner, the bad man can be justly punished, having become depraved through his own fault. Likewise, the just man can be deservedly praised for his virtuous deeds, since in the exercise of his free choice, he refrained from transgressing the will of God.’ (Tatian, 160 AD, 2.67)

‘We were not created to die. Rather, we die by our own fault. Our free will has destroyed us. We who were free have become slaves. We have been sold through sin. Nothing evil has been created by God. We ourselves have manifested wickedness. But we, who have manifested it, are able again, to reject it.’ (Tatian, 160 AD, 2.69)

Athenagoras of Athens (177 AD)

‘Just as with men, who have freedom of choice as to both virtue and vice, so it is among the angels...Some free agents, you will observe, such as they were created by God, continued in those things for which God had made and over which he had ordained them; but some outraged both the constitution of their nature and the government entrusted to them.’ (Athenagoras of Athens, *A Plea for the Christians* 24)

Irenaeus of Lyons (130 – 202 AD)

‘For He who makes the chaff and He who makes the wheat are not different persons, but one and the same, who judges them, that is, separates them. But the wheat and the chaff, being inanimate and irrational, have been made such by nature. But man, being endowed with reason, and in this respect like to God, having been made free in his will, and with power over himself, is himself the cause to himself, that sometimes he becomes wheat, and sometimes chaff. Wherefore also he shall be justly condemned because, having been created a rational being, he lost the true rationality, and living irrationally, opposed the righteousness of God, serving all lusts; as says the prophet, ‘Man, being in honor, did not understand: he was assimilated to senseless beasts, and made like to them.’ (Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, book 4, chapter 4, 3)

‘1. This expression [of our Lord], ‘How often would I have gathered thy children together, and thou wouldest not,’ set forth the ancient law of human liberty, because *God made man a free [agent] from the beginning, possessing his own power, even as he does his own soul, to obey the behests (ad utendum sententia) of God voluntarily, and not by compulsion of God. For there is no coercion with God, but a good will [towards us] is present with Him continually.* And therefore does He give good counsel to all. And in man, as well as in angels, He has placed the power of choice (for angels are rational beings), so that those who had yielded obedience might justly possess what is good, given indeed by God, but preserved by themselves. On the other hand, they who have not obeyed shall, with justice, be not found in possession of the good, and shall receive condign punishment: for God did kindly bestow on them what

was good; but they themselves did not diligently keep it, nor deem it something precious, but poured contempt upon His super-eminent goodness. Rejecting therefore the good, and as it were spewing it out, they shall all deservedly incur the just judgment of God, which also the Apostle Paul testifies in his Epistle to the Romans, where he says, 'But dost thou despise the riches of His goodness, and patience, and long-suffering, being ignorant that the goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance? But according to thy hardness and impenitent heart, thou treasurest to thyself wrath against the day of wrath, and the revelation of the righteous judgment of God.' 'But glory and honour,' he says, 'to every one that doeth good.' *God therefore has given that which is good, as the apostle tells us in this Epistle, and they who work it shall receive glory and honour, because they have done that which is good when they had it in their power not to do it; but those who do it not shall receive the just judgment of God, because they did not work good when they had it in their power so to do.*

'2. But if some had been made by nature bad, and others good, these latter would not be deserving of praise for being good, for such were they created; nor would the former be reprehensible, for thus they were made [originally]. But since all men are of the same nature, able both to hold fast and to do what is good; and, on the other hand, having also the power to cast it from them and not to do it,--some do justly receive praise even among men who are under the control of good laws (and much more from God), and obtain deserved testimony of their choice of good in general, and of persevering therein; but the others are blamed, and receive a just condemnation, because of their rejection of what is fair and good. And therefore the prophets used to exhort men to what was good, to act justly and to work righteousness, as I have so largely demonstrated, because it is in our power so to do, and because by excessive negligence we might become forgetful, and thus stand in need of that good counsel which the good God has given us to know by means of the prophets.

'3. For this reason the Lord also said, 'Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good deeds, and glorify your Father who is in heaven.' And, 'Take heed to yourselves, lest perchance your hearts be overcharged with surfeiting, and drunkenness, and worldly cares.' And, 'Let your loins be girded about, and your lamps burning, and ye like unto men that wait for their Lord, when He returns from the wedding, that when He cometh and knocketh, they may open to Him. Blessed is that servant whom his Lord, when He cometh, shall find so doing.' And again, 'The servant who knows his Lord's will, and does it not, shall be beaten with many stripes.' And, 'Why call ye me, Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say?' And again, 'But if the servant say in his heart, The Lord delayeth, and begin to beat his fellow-servants, and to eat, and drink, and to be drunken, his Lord will come in a day on which he does not expect Him, and shall cut him in sunder, and appoint his portion with the hypocrites.' *All such passages demonstrate the independent will of man, and at the same time the counsel which God conveys to him, by which He exhorts us to submit ourselves to Him, and seeks to turn us away from [the sin of] unbelief against Him, without, however, in any way coercing us.*

'4. No doubt, if any one is unwilling to follow the Gospel itself, it is in his power [to reject it], but it is not expedient. For *it is in man's power to disobey God, and to forfeit what is good;* but [such conduct] brings no small amount of injury and mischief. And on this account Paul says, 'All things are lawful to me, but all things are not expedient;' referring both to the liberty of man, in which respect 'all things are lawful,' God exercising no compulsion in regard to him; and [by the expression] 'not expedient' pointing out that we 'should not use our liberty as a cloak of maliciousness,' for this is not expedient. And again he says, 'Speak ye every man truth with his neighbour.' And, 'Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth, neither filthiness, nor foolish talking, nor scurrility, which are not convenient, but rather giving of thanks.' [4406] And, 'For ye were sometimes darkness, but now are ye light in the Lord; walk honestly as children of the light, not in rioting and drunkenness, not in chambering and wantonness, not in anger and jealousy. And such were some of you; but ye have been washed, but ye have been sanctified in the name of our Lord.' *If then it were not in our power to do or not to do these things, what reason had the apostle, and much more the Lord Himself, to give us counsel to do some things, and to abstain from others? But because man is possessed of free will from the beginning, and God is possessed of free will, in whose likeness man was created, advice is always given to him to keep fast the good, which thing is done by means of obedience to God.*

'5. And not merely in works, but also in faith, has God preserved the will of man free and under his own control, saying, 'According to thy faith be it unto thee;' thus showing that there is a faith specially belonging to man, since he has an opinion specially his own. And again, 'All things are possible to him that believeth;' and, 'Go thy way; and as thou hast believed, so be it done unto thee.' Now all such expressions demonstrate that man is in his own power with respect to faith. And for this reason, 'he that believeth in Him has eternal life while he who believeth not

the Son hath not eternal life, but the wrath of God shall remain upon him.’ In the same manner therefore the Lord, both showing His own goodness, and *indicating that man is in his own free will and his own power*, said to Jerusalem, ‘How often have I wished to gather thy children together, as a hen [gathereth] her chickens under her wings, and ye would not! Wherefore your house shall be left unto you desolate.’

‘6. Those, again, who maintain the opposite to these [conclusions], do themselves present the Lord as destitute of power, as if, forsooth, He were unable to accomplish what He willed; or, on the other hand, as being ignorant that they were by nature ‘material,’ as these men express it, and such as cannot receive His immortality. ‘But He should not,’ say they, ‘have created angels of such a nature that they were capable of transgression, nor men who immediately proved ungrateful towards Him; for they were made rational beings, endowed with the power of examining and judging, and were not [formed] as things irrational or of a [merely] animal nature, which can do nothing of their own will, but are drawn by necessity and compulsion to what is good, in which things there is one mind and one usage, working mechanically in one groove (inflexibiles et sine iudicio), who are incapable of being anything else except just what they had been created.’ *But upon this supposition, neither would what is good be grateful to them, nor communion with God be precious, nor would the good be very much to be sought after, which would present itself without their own proper endeavour, care, or study, but would be implanted of its own accord and without their concern. Thus it would come to pass, that their being good would be of no consequence, because they were so by nature rather than by will, and are possessors of good spontaneously, not by choice; and for this reason they would not understand this fact, that good is a comely thing, nor would they take pleasure in it. For how can those who are ignorant of good enjoy it? Or what credit is it to those who have not aimed at it? And what crown is it to those who have not followed in pursuit of it, like those victorious in the contest?’*

‘7. On this account, too, did the Lord assert that the kingdom of heaven was the portion of ‘the violent;’ and He says, ‘The violent take it by force;’ that is, those who by strength and earnest striving are on the watch to snatch it away on the moment. On this account also Paul the Apostle says to the Corinthians, ‘Know ye not, that they who run in a racecourse, do all indeed run, but one receiveth the prize? So run, that ye may obtain. Every one also who engages in the contest is temperate in all things: now these men [do it] that they may obtain a corruptible crown, but we an incorruptible. But I so run, not as uncertainty; I fight, not as one beating the air; but I make my body livid, and bring it into subjection, lest by any means, when preaching to others, I may myself be rendered a castaway.’ This able wrestler, therefore, exhorts us to the struggle for immortality, that we may be crowned, and may deem the crown precious, namely, that which is acquired by our struggle, but which does not encircle us of its own accord (sed non ultro coalitam). And the harder we strive, so much is it the more valuable; while so much the more valuable it is, so much the more should we esteem it. And indeed those things are not esteemed so highly which come spontaneously, as those which are reached by much anxious care. Since, then, this power has been conferred upon us, both the Lord has taught and the apostle has enjoined us the more to love God, that we may reach this [prize] for ourselves by striving after it. For otherwise, no doubt, this our good would be [virtually] irrational, because not the result of trial. Moreover, the faculty of seeing would not appear to be so desirable, unless we had known what a loss it were to be devoid of sight; and health, too, is rendered all the more estimable by an acquaintance with disease; light, also, by contrasting it with darkness; and life with death. Just in the same way is the heavenly kingdom honourable to those who have known the earthly one. But in proportion as it is more honourable, so much the more do we prize it; and if we have prized it more, we shall be the more glorious in the presence of God. The Lord has therefore endured all these things on our behalf, in order that we, having been instructed by means of them all, may be in all respects circumspect for the time to come, and that, having been rationally taught to love God, we may continue in His perfect love: for God has displayed long-suffering in the case of man’s apostasy; while man has been instructed by means of it, as also the prophet says, ‘Thine own apostasy shall heal thee;’ God thus determining all things beforehand for the bringing of man to perfection, for his edification, and for the revelation of His dispensations, that goodness may both be made apparent, and righteousness perfected, and that the Church may be fashioned after the image of His Son, and that man may finally be brought to maturity at some future time, becoming ripe through such privileges to see and comprehend God.’ (Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, book 4, chapter 37, paragraphs 1 – 7)

‘In the previous books I have set forth the causes for which God permitted these things to be made, and have pointed out that all such have been created for the benefit of that human nature which is saved, ripening for immortality that which is [possessed] of its own free will and its own power, and preparing and rendering it more adapted for eternal subjection to God.’ (Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, book 5, chapter 29)

Tertullian of Carthage (160 – 220 AD)

‘...it is not the part of good and solid faith to refer all things to the will of God...as to make us fail to understand that there is something within our power.’ (Tertullian, *Exhortation on Chastity*, 2)

‘I find, then, that man was constituted free by God. He was master of his own will and power....Man is free, with a will either for obedience or resistance.’ (Tertullian, 207 AD, 3.300, 301)

‘You must necessarily correspond to the seed from which you sprang – if indeed it is true that the originator of our race and our sin, Adam, willed the sin which he committed.’ (Tertullian, 212 AD, 4.51)

Clement of Alexandria (153 – 217 AD)

‘So in no respect is God the author of evil. But since free choice and inclination originate sins...punishments are rightly inflicted.’ - Stromata 1:17.

Also, ‘This was the law from the first, that virtue should be the object of voluntary choice.’ - Stromata 7:2.

‘A man by himself working and toiling at freedom from sinful desires achieves nothing. But if he plainly shows himself to be very eager and earnest about this, he attains it by the addition of the power of God. God works together with willing souls. But if the person abandons his eagerness, the spirit from God is also restrained. To save the unwilling is the act of one using compulsion; but to save the willing, that of one showing grace.’ - Salvation of the Rich Man chap. 21

‘Neither praise nor condemnation, neither rewards nor punishments, are right if the soul does not have the power of choice and avoidance, if evil is involuntary.’ Miscellanies bk. 1, chap. 17

‘But if any occasion of converse with God becomes prayer, no opportunity of access to God ought to be omitted. Without doubt, the holiness of the Gnostic, in union with [God’s] blessed Providence, exhibits in voluntary confession the perfect beneficence of God. For the holiness of the Gnostic, and the reciprocal benevolence of the friend of God, are a kind of corresponding movement of providence. For neither is God involuntarily good, as the fire is warming; but in Him the imparting of good things is voluntary, even if He receive the request previously. Nor shall he who is saved be saved against his will, for he is not inanimate; but he will above all voluntarily and of free choice speed to salvation. Wherefore also man received the commandments in order that he might be self-impelled, to whatever he wished of things to be chosen and to be avoided. Wherefore God does not do good by necessity, but from His free choice benefits those who spontaneously turn. For the Providence which extends to us from God is not ministerial, as that service which proceeds from inferiors to superiors. But in pity for our weakness, the continual dispensations of Providence work, as the care of shepherds towards the sheep, and of a king towards his subjects; we ourselves also conducting ourselves obediently towards our superiors, who take the management of us, as appointed, in accordance with the commission from God with which they are invested. Consequently those who render the most free and kingly service, which is the result of a pious mind and of knowledge, are servants and attendants of the Divinity. Each place, then, and time, in which we entertain the idea of God, is in reality sacred.’ (*Elucidations*, ch.7)

We...have believed and are saved by voluntary choice.
(Clement of Alexandria, 195 AD, 2.217)

Each one of us who sins with his own free will, chooses punishment. So the blame lies with him who chooses. God is without blame.
(Clement of Alexandria, 195 AD, 2.226)

Neither praises nor censures, neither rewards nor punishments, are right if the soul does not have the power of inclination and disinclination and if evil is involuntary.... In no respect is God the author of evil. But since free choice and inclination originate sins,...punishments are justly inflicted.

(Clement of Alexandria, 195 AD, 2.319)

We have heard from the Scriptures that self-determining choice and refusal have been given by the Lord to men. Therefore, we rest in the infallible criterion of faith, manifesting a willing spirit, since we have chosen life.
(Clement of Alexandria, 195 AD, 2.349)

To obey or not to obey is in our own power, provided we do not have the excuse of ignorance.
(Clement of Alexandria, 195 AD, 2.353)

Sin, then, is voluntary on my part.
(Clement of Alexandria, 195 AD, 2.362)

The Lord clearly shows sins and transgressions to be in our own power, by prescribing modes of cure corresponding to the maladies.
(Clement of Alexandria, 195 AD, 2.363)

Their estrangement is the result of free choice.
(Clement of Alexandria, 195 AD, 2.426)

Believing and obeying are in our own power.
(Clement of Alexandria, 195 AD, 2.527)

Nor will he who is saved be saved against his will, for he is not inanimate. But above all, he will speed to salvation voluntarily and of free choice.
(Clement of Alexandria, 195 AD, 2.534)

Choice depended on the man as being free. But the gift depended on God as the Lord. And He gives to those who are willing, are exceedingly earnest, and who ask. So their salvation becomes their own. For God does not compel.
(Clement of Alexandria, 195 AD, 2.593)

Origen of Alexandria (185 – 255 AD)

In response to a claim (much like the Calvinist doctrine of God's exhaustive sovereignty) that 'whatever happens in the universe, whether it be the work of God, of angels [or] of other demons...is regulated by the law of the Most High God,' Origen says, 'This is...incorrect; for we cannot say that transgressors follow the law of God when they transgress; and Scripture declares that it is not only wicked men who are transgressors, but also wicked demons and wicked angels...When we say that 'the providence of God regulates all things,' we utter a great truth if we attribute to that providence nothing but what is just and right. But if we ascribe to the providence of God all things whatsoever, however unjust they may be, then it is no longer true that the providence of God regulates all things.' Against Celsus 7:68.

'He makes Himself known to those who, after doing all that their powers will allow, confess that they need help from Him.' Against Celsus 7:42

Let us begin, then, with those words which were spoken to Pharaoh, who is said to have been hardened by God, in order that he might not let the people go; and, along with his case, the language of the apostle also will be considered, where he says, 'Therefore He has mercy on whom He will, and whom He will He hardens.' For it is on these passages chiefly that the heretics rely, asserting that salvation is not in our own power, but that souls are of such a nature as must by all means be either lost or saved; and that in no way can a soul which is of an evil nature become good, or one which is of a virtuous nature be made bad. (De Principiis Book III, Chapter I: On the Freedom of the Will VIII)

This is also clearly defined in the teaching of the church, that every rational soul has free will and volition....we are not forced by any necessity to act either rightly or wrongly.
(Origen, 225 AD, 4.240)

It seems a plausible thing that rational natures, from whom the faculty of free will is never taken away, may be again subjected to movements of some kind.

(Origen, 225 AD, 4.272)

Since those rational creatures themselves... were endowed with the power of free will, this freedom of the will incited each one to either progress (by imitation of God), or else it reduced a person to failure through negligence.

(Origen, 225 AD, 4.292)

In the preaching of the church, there is included the doctrine concerning a just judgment of God. When this teaching is believed to be true, it incites those who hear it to live virtuously and to shun sin by all means. For they clearly acknowledge that things worthy of praise and blame are within our own power.

(Origen, 225 AD, 4.302)

Melito of Sardis

There is, therefore, nothing to hinder you from changing your evil manner of life, because you are a free man.

(Melito, 170 AD, 8.754)

Hippolytus of Rome (170 – 235 AD)

‘Now the world was made from nothing; wherefore it is not God; as also because this world admits of dissolution whenever the Creator so wishes it. But God, who created it, did not, nor does not, make evil. He makes what is glorious and excellent; for He who makes it is good. Now man, that was brought into existence, was a creature endued with a capacity of self-determination, yet not possessing a sovereign intellect, nor holding sway over all things by reflection, and authority, and power, but a slave to his passions, and comprising all sorts of contrarities in himself. But man, from the fact of his possessing a capacity of self-determination, brings forth what is evil, that is, accidentally; which evil is not consummated unless you actually commit some piece of wickedness. For it is in regard of our desiring anything that is wicked, or our meditating upon it, that what is evil is so denominated. Evil had no existence from the beginning, but came into being subsequently. Since man has free will, a law has been defined for his guidance by the Deity, not without answering a good purpose. For if man did not possess the power to will and not to will, why should a law be established? For a law will not be laid down for an animal devoid of reason, but a bridle and a whip; whereas to man has been given a precept and penalty to perform, or for not carrying into execution what has been enjoined. For man thus constituted has a law been enacted by just men in primitive ages. Nearer our own day was there established a law, full of gravity and justice, by Moses, to whom allusion has been already made, a devout man, and one beloved of God. Now the Logos of God controls all these; the first begotten Child of the Father, the voice of the Dawn antecedent to the Morning Star. Afterwards just men were born, friends of God; and these have been styled prophets, on account of their foreshowing future events. And the word of prophecy was committed unto them, not for one age only; but also the utterances of events predicted throughout all generations, were vouchsafed in perfect clearness. And this, too, not at the time merely when seers furnished a reply to those present; but also events that would happen throughout all ages, have been manifested beforehand; because, in speaking of incidents gone by, the prophets brought them back to the recollection of humanity; whereas, in showing forth present occurrences, they endeavoured to persuade men not to be remiss; while, by foretelling future events, they have rendered each one of us terrified on beholding events that had been predicted long before, and on expecting likewise those events predicted as still future. Such is our faith, O all you men, — ours, I say, who are not persuaded by empty expressions, nor caught away by sudden impulses of the heart, nor beguiled by the plausibility of eloquent discourses, yet who do not refuse to obey words that have been uttered by divine power. And these injunctions has God given to the Word. But the Word, by declaring them, promulgated the divine commandments, thereby turning man from disobedience, not bringing him into servitude by force of necessity, but summoning him to liberty through a choice involving spontaneity.’ (Hippolytus of Rome, *Against All Heresies*, book 10, chapter 29)

Novatian of Rome (circa 200 – 258 AD)

‘When he had given man all things for his service, he willed that man alone should be free. And lest an unbounded freedom would lead man into peril, He had laid down a command, in which man was taught that there was no evil in the fruit of the tree. Rather, he was forewarned that evil would arise if man were to exercise his free will in contempt of the law that had been given him....As a result, he could receive either worthy rewards or a just punishment. For he had in his own power that which he might choose to do.’ (Novatian, 235 AD, 5.612)

Cyprian of Carthage (circa 200 – 258 AD)

The liberty of believing or not believing is placed in free choice. In Deuteronomy, it says, ‘Look! I have set before your face life and death, good and evil. Choose for yourself life, that you may live.’ (Cyprian, 250 AD, 5.547)

Archelaus (circa 250 – circa 300 AD)

‘All the creatures that God made, He made very good. And He gave to every individual the sense of free will, by which standard He also instituted the law of judgment...And certainly whoever will, may keep the commandments. Whoever despises them and turns aside to what is contrary to them, shall yet without doubt have to face this law of judgment....There can be no doubt that every individual, in using his own proper power of will, may shape his course in whatever direction he pleases.’ (Archelaus, *Disputation With Manes* 32, 33)

Methodius of Olympus (died 311 AD)

‘Because there is nothing evil by nature, but it is by use that evil things become such. So I say, says he, that man was made with a free-will, not as if there were already evil in existence, which he had the power of choosing if he wished, but on account of his capacity of obeying or disobeying God. For this was the meaning of the gift of Free Will. And man after his creation receives a commandment from God; and from this at once rises evil, for he does not obey the divine command; and this alone is evil, namely, disobedience, which had a beginning. For man received power, and enslaved himself, not because he was overpowered by the irresistible tendencies of his nature, nor because the capacity with which he was gifted deprived him of what was better for him; for it was for the sake of this that I say he was endowed with it (but he received the power above mentioned), in order that he may obtain an addition to what he already possesses, which accrues to him from the Superior Being in consequence of his obedience, and is demanded as a debt from his Maker. For I say that man was made not for destruction, but for better things. For if he were made as any of the elements, or those things which render a similar service to God, he would cease to receive a reward befitting deliberate choice, and would be like an instrument of the maker; and it would be unreasonable for him to suffer blame for his wrong-doings, for the real author of them is the one by whom he is used. But man did not understand better things, since he did not know the author (of his existence), but only the object for which he was made. I say therefore that God, purposing thus to honour man, and to grant him an understanding of better things, has given him the power of being able to do what he wishes, and commends the employment of his power for better things; not that He deprives him again of free-will, but wishes to deprive him again of free-will, but wishes to point out the better way. For the power is present with him, and he receives the commandment; but God exhorts him to turn his power of choice to better things. For as a father exhorts his son, who has power to learn his lessons, to give more attention to them inasmuch as, while he points out this as the better course, he does not deprive his son of the power which he possessed, even if he be not inclined to learn willingly; so I do not think that God, while He urges on man to obey His commands, deprives him of the power of purposing and withholding obedience. For He points out the cause of His giving this advice, in that He does not deprive him of the power. But He gives commands, in order that man may be able to enjoy better things. For this is the consequence of obeying the commands of God. So that He does not give commands in order to take away the power which He has given, but in order that a better gift may be bestowed, as to one worthy of attaining greater things, in return for his having rendered obedience to God, while he had power to withhold it. I say that man was made with free-will, not as if there were already existing some evil, which he had the power of choosing if he wished, ... but that the power of obeying and disobeying God is the only cause.’ (Methodius of Olympus, *Concerning Free-Will* 6.362)

‘[Methodius] says that it is in our power to do, or to avoid doing, evil. Otherwise, we would not be punished for doing evil nor be rewarded for doing good.’ (Methodius, 290 AD, 6.370, as quoted by Photius)

‘Those [pagans] who decide that man does not have free will, but say that he is governed by the unavoidable necessities of fate, are guilty of impiety toward God Himself, making Him out to be the cause and author of human evils.’ (Methodius of Olympus, *The Banquet of the Ten Virgins* discourse 8, ch.16)

Eusebius of Caesarea (260 – 340 AD)

(semi-Arian, Origenist)

‘The Creator of all things has impressed a natural law upon the soul of every man, as an assistant and ally in his conduct, pointing out to him the right way by this law; but, by the free liberty with which he is endowed, making the choice of what is best worthy of praise and acceptance, because he has acted rightly, not by force, but from his own free-will, when he had it in his power to act otherwise. As, again, making him who chooses what is worst, deserving of blame and punishment, as having by his own motion neglected the natural law, and becoming the origin and fountain of wickedness, and misusing himself, not from any extraneous necessity, but from free will and judgment. The fault is in him who chooses, not in God. For God has not made nature or the substance of the soul bad; for he who is good can make nothing but what is good. Everything is good which is according to nature. Every rational soul has naturally a good free-will, formed for the choice of what is good. But when a man acts wrongly, nature is not to be blamed; for what is wrong, takes place not according to nature, but contrary to nature, it being the work of choice, and not of nature.’ (The Christian Examiner, Volume One, published by James Miller, 1824 Edition, p.66)

Athanasius of Alexandria (circa 298 – 373 AD)

‘Having then made themselves at home in these things, and not being willing to leave what was so near to them, they entangled their soul with bodily pleasures, vexed and turbid with all kind of lusts, while they wholly forgot the power they originally had from God.’ (Athanasius of Alexandria, *Against the Heathen* 3.2)

‘But having fallen in love with pleasure, she began to work it out in various ways. For being by nature mobile, even though she have turned away from what is good, yet she does not lose her mobility. She moves then, no longer according to virtue or so as to see God, but imagining false things, she makes a novel use of her power, abusing it as a means to the pleasures she has devised, since she is after all made with power over herself. For she is able, as on the one hand to incline to what is good, so on the other to reject it; but in rejecting the good she of course entertains the thought of what is opposed to it, for she cannot at all cease from movement, being, as I said before, mobile by nature. And knowing her own power over herself, she sees that she is able to use the members of her body in either direction, both toward what is, or toward what is not.’ (Athanasius of Alexandria, *Against the Heathen* 4.2 – 3)

‘Evil has not from the beginning been with God or in God, nor has any substantive existence; but that men, in default of the vision of good, began to devise and imagine for themselves what was not, after their own pleasure. For as if a man, when the sun is shining, and the whole earth illumined by his light, were to shut fast his eyes and imagine darkness where no darkness exists, and then walk wandering as if in darkness, often falling and going down steep places, thinking it was dark and not light—for, imagining that he sees, he does not see at all—so, too, the soul of man, shutting fast her eyes, by which she is able to see God, has imagined evil for herself, and moving therein, knows not that, thinking she is doing something, she is doing nothing. For she is imagining what is not, nor is she abiding in her original nature; but what she is is evidently the product of her own disorder. For she is made to see God, and to be enlightened by Him; but of her own accord in God's stead she has sought corruptible things and darkness, as the Spirit says somewhere in writing, ‘God made man upright, but they have sought out many inventions [Ecclesiastes 7:29].’ Thus it has been then that men from the first discovered and contrived and imagined evil for themselves. But it is now time to say how they came down to the madness of idolatry, that you may know that the invention of idols is wholly due, not to good but to evil. But what has its origin in evil can never be pronounced good in any point—being evil altogether.’ (Athanasius of Alexandria, *Against the Heathen* 7.3 – 5)

From my seminary paper *Athanasius as Theologian of Sanctification: Life of Antony / Vita Antonii* (c.362 AD):

‘This was Antony’s first struggle against the devil, or rather this victory was the Saviour’s work in Antony, ‘Who condemned sin in the flesh that the ordinance of the law might be fulfilled in us who walk not after the flesh but after the Spirit.’ [Romans 8:3 – 4] But neither did Antony, although the evil one had fallen, henceforth relax his care and despise him; nor did the enemy as though conquered cease to lay snares for him. For again he went round as a lion seeking some occasion against him [1 Peter 5:8]. But Antony having learned from the Scriptures that the devices [Ephesians 6:11] of the devil are many, zealously continued the discipline, reckoning that though the devil had not been able to deceive his heart by bodily pleasure, he would endeavour to ensnare him by other means.’³

Athanasius’ language doubles the active agency and provides a dual lens on Christian growth and sanctification. On the one hand, this was Antony’s agency. But at the same time, it was Christ’s work in and through him. For Athanasius, the logic of participation in Christ requires progress in ‘virtue’ in us. He is not here answering the question of which is ‘prior’ to the other. Athanasius merely calls attention to the dynamic.

What follows is Antony’s intensification of his monastic practice. He ‘repressed the body and kept it in subjection, lest haply having conquered on one side, he should be dragged down on the other’ (7). He bore the labor ‘easily’ because of his ‘eagerness of soul’ and ‘great zeal.’ Antony would ‘often’ go ‘the whole night without sleep,’ eat ‘bread and salt and water’ only once a day or two days, ‘often even in four.’ He slept on the bare ground, not a mat. Antony then speaks himself, commenting on the cultivation of ‘virtue’:

‘Progress in virtue, and retirement from the world for the sake of it, ought not to be measured by time, but by desire and fixity of purpose.’⁴

Athanasius connects the cultivation of ‘virtue’ with Jesus’ own victory over spiritual temptation as summarized in Romans 8:3 – 4. Athanasius uses the word ‘virtue’ twenty three times in *Life of Antony*. Athanasius writes in his prologue to the work as ‘training in the way of virtue.’ Athanasius then allows Antony to compare himself in his own voice to the apostle Paul and the prophet Elijah through biblical quotations. Philippians 3:14 connects Antony’s monastic practice to the apostle, ‘Forgetting the things which are behind and stretching forward to the things which are before.’ First Kings 18:15 connects Antony to Elijah, whose lengthy experience in the wilderness and characterization as a prophet provide a template for Antony, who similarly kept his focus on being in God’s presence ‘today,’ whichever day that was: ‘the Lord lives before whose presence I stand today.’ The figure of Elijah is a powerful one in the background of Antony’s mind and life, for many obvious reasons: wilderness sojourn, spiritual battles, miracles of healing, prophetic ministry, inspiration of others. References to Elijah occasionally emerge explicitly in the narrative of *Life of Antony*.

Placing *Life of Antony* alongside Athanasius’ other theological works shows how integrated his christology, soteriology, and pastoral ministry were. I propose that we look at how Athanasius uses Romans 8:3 to inform us about that integration. Athanasius uses it in strategic places in his corpus; and the passage itself plays a vital role to Paul on those subjects, as Paul linked Jesus to us, his followers, by the Spirit on the theme of sanctification. Around 15 – 20 years prior, when Athanasius deployed Romans 8:3 – 4 in the first of his dogmatic works *Contra Arianos* 1, he did so in order to discuss both Christ’s atoning work, and Christ’s ministry towards us by his Spirit to provide us with virtue:

‘For since of things originate the nature is alterable, and the one portion had transgressed and the other disobeyed, as has been said, and it is not certain how they will act, but it often happens that he who is now good afterwards alters and becomes different, so that one who was but now righteous, soon is found unrighteous, wherefore there was here also need of one unalterable, *that men might have the immutability of the righteousness of the Word as an image and type for virtue...* For since the first man Adam altered, and through sin death came into the world, therefore it became the second Adam to be unalterable; that, should the Serpent again assault, even the Serpent’s deceit might be baffled, and, the Lord being unalterable and unchangeable, the Serpent might become powerless in his assault against all. For as when Adam had transgressed, his sin reached unto all men, so, when the Lord had become man and had overthrown the Serpent, that so great strength of His is to extend through all men, so that each of us may

³ Athanasius of Alexandria, *Life of Antony* 7

⁴ *Ibid* 7

say, 'For we are not ignorant of his devices. [2 Corinthians 2:11]' Good reason then that the Lord, who ever is in nature unalterable, loving righteousness and hating iniquity, should be anointed and Himself sent, that, He, being and remaining the same, by taking this alterable flesh, 'might condemn sin in it [Romans 8:3],' and might secure its freedom, and its ability henceforth 'to fulfil the righteousness of the law [Romans 8:4]?' in itself, so as to be able to say, 'But we are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if so be that the Spirit of God dwells in us [Romans 8:9].'⁵

Created things, most notably human nature, have an alterable nature, shown especially by the fall and subsequent sinful decisions on the part of people. This shows that Athanasius' focus when discussing atonement is ontological, not legal or forensic. Human beings require 'the immutability of the righteousness of the Word as an image and type for *virtue*.' To accomplish this, the Word of God had to become incarnate in sinful flesh in order to condemn the sin in it, and, through his resurrection, to secure human nature's 'freedom' from sin for us, who walk by the Spirit. This is what qualifies the Son, says Athanasius immediately afterwards, to be *the dispenser of virtue*: 'as being God and the Father's Word, He is a just judge and lover of virtue, or rather its dispenser.'⁶ Jesus is not just the intellectual reference point for what virtue looks like, lived out in a human life, but from a distance. Rather, he is the dispenser of virtue into us as the Spirit of God dwells in us, which means, reciprocally, that we participate in him by his Spirit.

A second reference to Romans 8:3 in *Contra Arianos 2* demonstrates the same idea. In this passage, Athanasius specifically rejects the idea that we only have Christ 'externally' and 'not in ourselves' by the Spirit.

'To give a witness then, and for our sakes to undergo death, to raise man up and destroy the works of the devil, the Saviour came, and this is the reason of His incarnate presence... This the Apostle, learning from Him, thus sets forth... 'For what the Law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God, sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh; that the ordinance of the Law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh but after the Spirit [Romans 8:3 – 4]'... Not for Himself then, but for our salvation, and to abolish death, and to condemn sin, and to give sight to the blind, and to raise up all from the dead, has He come; but if not for Himself... For if, as they [the Arians] hold... we have Him not in ourselves but externally; as, for instance, as receiving instruction from Him as from a teacher. And it being so with us, sin has not lost its reign over the flesh, being inherent and not cast out of it. But the Apostle opposes such a doctrine a little before.'⁷

Athanasius maintains in his *Letters to Serapion on the Holy Spirit* that 'the Spirit is the *energeia* of the Son,'⁸ and is 'in the Word,'⁹ while simultaneously, 'the Son is in the Spirit.'¹⁰ He does not, however, reject the importance of 'receiving instruction from him' categorically. The Spirit brings into the believer both spiritual power and intellectual content. The role of our human mind is notably important, as it was in Paul's usage in Romans 8:5 – 8, and as Athanasius says again in both *Contra Arianos 1* and 2. In both discussions, Athanasius quotes from Romans 8:3 – 4 and 8:9 to connect Christ's humanity to ours by the Spirit, as before. What Jesus did in his humanity and to his humanity, he will do in us by the Spirit, as we are led by *words and instruction*. This requires *our mental assent*:

'Since here also the ministry through Him has become better, in that 'what the Law could not do in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin condemned sin in the flesh [Romans 8:3],' ridding it of the trespass, in which, being continually held captive, it admitted not *the Divine mind*. And having rendered the flesh capable of the Word, He made us walk, no longer according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit [Romans 8:4], and say again and again, 'But we are not in the flesh but in the Spirit [Romans 8:9].'¹¹

⁵ Athanasius of Alexandria, *Contra Arianos* 1.51

⁶ *Ibid* 1.52

⁷ *Ibid* 2.55 – 56

⁸ Athanasius of Alexandria, *Letters to Serapion on the Holy Spirit* 1.20, 30

⁹ *Ibid* 3.5

¹⁰ *Ibid* 1.20; see C.R.B. Shapland's footnote 10 on page 115 of his translation and commentary for how other patristic writers used this phrase both before and after Athanasius

¹¹ Athanasius of Alexandria, *Contra Arianos* 1.60

‘When for our need He became man, consistently does He use language, as ourselves, ‘The Lord has created Me,’ that, by His dwelling in the flesh, sin might perfectly be expelled from the flesh [Romans 8:3], and we might have a *free mind* [Romans 8:5 – 8].’¹²

The probable reason I can discern for Athanasius stressing the mind is because of his interrelated view, based on Scripture, of God’s relationship with humanity centered through rational language. Three major biblical texts – the creation hymn of Genesis 1:1 – 2:3 which introduces Genesis, the first genealogy (of ten in Genesis) which follows in Genesis 2:4 – 4:26, and especially the story of Babel in Genesis 11:1 – 9 – display a keen interest in the role of language in the relationship between God and human beings. Appropriately, Athanasius uses the terminology of God’s Son as Word and Wisdom impressing himself upon the human mind when he created us. One result of which is that we, through our minds, might be capable of knowing him, and through him, the Father. Thus, says Athanasius, we might ‘not only be, but be good’:

‘Now the Only-begotten and very Wisdom of God is Creator and Framer of all things; for ‘in Wisdom have You made them all,’ he says, and ‘the earth is full of Your creation.’ But that what came into being might not only be, but be good, it pleased God that His own Wisdom should condescend to the creatures, so as to introduce an impress and semblance of Its Image on all in common and on each, that what was made might be manifestly wise works and worthy of God. For as of the Son of God, considered as the Word, *our word is an image*, so of the same Son considered as Wisdom *is the wisdom which is implanted in us an image*; in which wisdom we, having the power of knowledge and thought, *become recipients* of the All-framing Wisdom; and through It we are able to know Its Father.’¹³

We are designed by God by His Wisdom (Word and Son) and in His Wisdom. We participate in God’s Wisdom by virtue of our creation, and we resemble God in our capacity for rationality. If Jesus pressed the ‘Divine Mind’ into the flesh, then we must have had, at the very least, an originally ‘rational nature’ which he restored. And that rational human nature was, and still is, a human nature that needs development, through the human mind and soul, reflecting on *words*, which Athanasius discussed in *Against the Heathen* 2 – 6. If God spoke creation into existence *ex nihilo*, and if God brought creation into being with stable rational concepts and interrelationships, then human beings had to learn that language and those concepts and those interrelationships by experience. Even in God’s first interactions with Adam and Eve, language is presupposed. God spoke. But what did He utter? And God must have anchored certain words in the human mind, and probably some very preliminary sense of their meaning (‘be fruitful and multiply’; ‘eating’; ‘dying’; etc.). But the meaning of those words had to be filled out in the divine-human partnership and through human experience. Moreover, Adam and Eve were entrusted with the task of producing more language (naming animals, children, etc.). And Jesus’ speech cannot be divided into an operation of his divine nature or his human nature; curiously most patristic writers seem willing to assign miracles to his divinity and suffering to his humanity, but never address his speech, which seems to me to be both, significantly.

The Johannine stress on the words of the Word appears to have made a deep impression on Athanasius. Jesus says, ‘If you *continue in my word*, then you are truly disciples of mine’ (Jn.8:31). ‘If anyone loves me, he will *keep my word...*’ (Jn.14:23). ‘If you abide in me, and *my words abide in you...*’ (Jn.15:7). To work out our union with Christ in human experience, the Spirit acts through the *words* of the Word of God. The Spirit accompanies the Son’s words: ‘For he whom God has sent speaks the *words* of God; for he gives the *Spirit* without measure’ (Jn.3:34). Another Johannine statement links Spirit and *words* as an overflowing of the linking of Spirit and *the Word* in the humanity of Jesus: ‘It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh profits nothing; the words that I have spoken to you are spirit and are life’ (Jn.6:63). The truth of the Son’s incarnation is vitally important, but it is not Jesus’ physical human flesh that must be consumed in cannibalistic ritual, Jesus says to qualify that misunderstanding. Rather, it is the Spirit, who takes of the union of divine and human natures in the person of Jesus, who overflows Jesus through his spoken words, and comes into other human beings as food and drink on a different plane of human

¹² Ibid 2.56

¹³ Ibid 2.78 emphasis mine. At least two second century Christian writers strongly suggest this awareness – important to note because both of them came from Asia Minor, which was the mission field of the apostles, intentionally. Irenaeus of Lyons, *Against Heresies* 4.38.1 refers to Adam and Eve as ‘infants.’ John E. Toews, *The Story of Original Sin* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2013), p.50 credits Theophilus of Antioch (d.183 – 185 AD), *Letter to Autolytus* 25 with being the first to write that Adam had been *nepios*, ‘a child,’ and needing to properly mature. Irenaeus repeats that in *Demonstration of the Apostolic Preaching* 11, 14. I suspect that Theophilus and Irenaeus meant that Adam and Eve were mentally, not biologically, children. In any case, the minds of Adam and Eve needed to be gradually filled by experiential knowledge which they could coordinate with the abstract words God shared with them from the outset.

need. For the apostle John, the Spirit is personally involved in the disciples testifying about Jesus: ‘The Spirit of truth who proceeds from the Father, he will testify about me, and you will testify also’ (Jn.15:26 – 27). The Spirit takes the words of the Word and so develops the believer that way. For John, this does not appear to be reducible to one or the other of the two natures of the now-incarnate Word. As the apostle John records Jesus praying to the Father on behalf of the disciples as distinct from the rest of the world, ‘The *words* which You have given me, I have given them... I have given them Your *word*... Sanctify them in the truth; Your *word* is truth’ (Jn.17:8, 14, 17). Not without reason does Luke call Christians ‘servants of the word’ (Lk.1:2) – ‘word’ not in the sense of ‘Word’ the eternal Logos, although neither Luke nor Athanasius would disagree with that, but the particular teaching and peculiar narrative of Jesus of Nazareth rendered into human words. Pastorally as Athanasius engages this inheritance of ‘the words of the Word’ from Jesus and the apostles, he deploys the creational framework of Wisdom imprinting itself upon us with our human wisdom, which contains the capacity for receiving more wisdom. Thus must the human mind operate, not only here in *Life of Antony*, but in his *Letters*.

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

‘Now, it produces fruits that differ from one another so as to make manifest the zeal of free will and progress. Wherever there is free will, there is inferiority. And this is nothing other than a revelation that humanity is free and under its own power, having the capacity to choose for itself what it wants.’¹⁴

‘And further, when the word is sown it does not yield a uniform produce of fruit in this human life, but one various and rich; for it brings forth, some an hundred, and some sixty, and some thirty, as the Saviour teaches— that Sower of grace, and Bestower of the Spirit. And this is no doubtful matter, nor one that admits no confirmation; but it is in our power to behold the field which is sown by Him; for in the Church the word is manifold and the produce rich. Not with virgins alone is such a field adorned; nor with monks alone, but also with honourable matrimony and the chastity of each one. For in sowing, He did not compel the will beyond the power. Nor is mercy confined to the perfect, but it is sent down also among those who occupy the middle and the third ranks, so that He might rescue all men generally to salvation.’¹⁵

Athanasius also used the parable of the talents/minas (Mt.25:14 – 30; Lk.19:11 – 27) in like manner. However much we might question Athanasius for being overly specific with these parables per se (e.g. marriage vs. singleness; etc.), we see the consistency in his overall paradigm. Human choices alone explain the difference in crop yield or financial return. Hence, in his *Tenth Festal Letter*, when he refers to the parable of the sower, the Alexandrian bishop explicitly equates ‘the Saviour [who] teaches’ with his identity as ‘Bestower of the Spirit.’ By 338 AD, in a very practical, pastoral context, Athanasius already offers an explanation of *word* and Spirit, rooted in the union of *Word* and Spirit from which the former issues forth.

Demonstrating his consistency, Athanasius counsels a leading monk named Amun about male ‘nocturnal emissions’ with sensitive discernment about the *will* and the *mind*: To the extent that it happens ‘independently of will,’¹⁶ regard it as any natural bodily secretion; only explore the matter to the extent that someone is plagued in his conscience by profane thoughts. Thoughts to be repented of must also be expressible in *words*, and measurable by qualitative moral comparison against the *words* of Jesus. The apostles seem to have also held the view that an informed *and* errant will is constitutive of sin: per Romans 7:7 (‘On the contrary, I would not have come to know sin except through the Law’); James 4:17 (‘Therefore, to one who knows the right thing to do and does not do it, to him it is sin’); and the incident in Acts 23:1 – 5 where Paul unknowingly reviles a/the high priest (‘I was not aware, brethren, that he was high priest; for it is written, ‘You shall not speak evil of a ruler of your people’’).

To render my suggestion in biblical-historical and covenantal terms, if Jesus is a ‘new Adam,’ then just as Adam contained within himself the material for all genetic variation subsequently, or at least was a channel for such,

¹⁴ Athanasius of Alexandria, *First Letter to Virgins* 20, 23 (see Brakke, p.48ff., 280ff.)

¹⁵ Athanasius of Alexandria, *Tenth Festal Letter* 4

¹⁶ Athanasius of Alexandria, *Letter #48 to Amun*

inclusive of Eve and the unusual nutrition of the garden, so also Jesus contains within himself all the material for all the variation for his renewed people, which is infinitely vast because he is the creator who became incarnate (Jn.1:3). Similarly, if Jesus is a 'new Israel,' then just as Jacob-Israel contained within himself, or was the channel for, the vocations of twelve or thirteen tribes (depending on how we count Levi and Joseph), so Jesus contains within himself, or is the channel for, all the various vocations of his people. If Jesus is a new Moses, or mediator of the new covenant, then he contains all the words needed to represent each person to the Father. If Jesus is a new David, then just as David contained within himself the songs and praises with which he led his people in worship, so Jesus contains within himself not just one human response but all true human responses to the Father. It appears that the figures of Adam, Jacob/Israel, Moses, and David were particular covenantal persons in whom *words* were specially 'stored up.' Adam is associated with the naming of creation (Gen.2:19 – 20); Jacob spoke words of prophetic blessing upon his twelve sons (Gen.49); Moses spoke words of mediation on behalf of Israel to maintain the covenant (Ex.32:30 – 33:23). David is connected to the Book of Psalms as the worship leader par excellence. For Jesus to renew, surpass, and fill to the full those figures means something about his own humanity, or role as an emblematic human being, that makes him *unlike* other human beings. His humanity is our humanity *ontologically*, but his humanity is a corporate humanity *vocationally* because it is the humanity of the Word, the humanity of the new covenant, the humanity of the new head of all humanity. Central to this observation is the connection between being the human partner with God in the formation of a covenant and being the bearer of words.

Cyril of Jerusalem (circa 312 – 386 AD)

The soul is self-governed: and though the devil can suggest, he has not the power to compel against the will. He pictures to you the thought of fornication: if you will, you accept it; if you will not, you reject. For if you were a fornicator by necessity, then for what cause did God prepare hell? If you were a doer of righteousness by nature and not by will, wherefore did God prepare crowns of ineffable glory? The sheep is gentle, but never was it crowned for its gentleness: since its gentle quality belongs to it not from choice but by nature. (Cyril of Jerusalem, *Catechetical Lectures* IV)

Basil of Caesarea (circa 300 – 379 AD)

If the origin of our virtues and of our vices is not in ourselves, but is the fatal consequence of our birth, it is useless for legislators to prescribe for us what we ought to do, and what we ought to avoid; it is useless for judges to honour virtue and to punish vice. The guilt is not in the robber, not in the assassin: it was willed for him; it was impossible for him to hold back his hand, urged to evil by inevitable necessity. Those who laboriously cultivate the arts are the maddest of men. The labourer will make an abundant harvest without sowing seed and without sharpening his sickle. Whether he wishes it or not, the merchant will make his fortune, and will be flooded with riches by fate. As for us Christians, we shall see our great hopes vanish, since from the moment that man does not act with freedom, there is neither reward for justice, nor punishment for sin. Under the reign of necessity and of fatality there is no place for merit, the first condition of all righteous judgment. But let us stop. You who are sound in yourselves have no need to hear more, and time does not allow us to make attacks without limit against these unhappy men. (Basil of Caesarea, *Hexaemeron*, Homily VI, Chap VII)

Gregory of Nyssa (335 – 395 AD)

9. And here, I think there is a view of the matter more close to nature, by which we may learn something of the more refined doctrines. For since the most beautiful and supreme good of all is the Divinity Itself, to which incline all things that have a tendency towards what is beautiful and good, we therefore say that the mind, as being in the image of the most beautiful, itself also remains in beauty and goodness so long as it partakes as far as is possible in its likeness to the archetype; but if it were at all to depart from this it is deprived of that beauty in which it was. And as we said that the mind was adorned by the likeness of the archetypal beauty, being formed as though it were a mirror to receive the figure of that which it expresses, we consider that the nature which is governed by it is attached to the mind in the same relation, and that it too is adorned by the beauty that the mind gives, being, so to say, a mirror of the mirror; and that by it is swayed and sustained the material element of that existence in which the nature is contemplated.

10. Thus so long as one keeps in touch with the other, the communication of the true beauty extends proportionally through the whole series, beautifying by the superior nature that which comes next to it; but when there is any interruption of this beneficent connection, or when, on the contrary, the superior comes to follow the inferior, then is displayed the misshapen character of matter, when it is isolated from nature (for in itself matter is a thing without form or structure), and by its shapelessness is also destroyed that beauty of nature with which it is adorned through the mind; and so the transmission of the ugliness of matter reaches through the nature to the mind itself, so that the image of God is no longer seen in the figure expressed by that which was moulded according to it; for the mind, setting the idea of good like a mirror behind the back, turns off the incident rays of the effulgence of the good, and it receives into itself the impress of the shapelessness of matter.

11. And in this way is brought about the genesis of evil, arising through the withdrawal of that which is beautiful and good. Now all is beautiful and good that is closely related to the First Good; but that which departs from its relation and likeness to this is certainly devoid of beauty and goodness. If, then, according to the statement we have been considering, that which is truly good is one, and the mind itself also has its power of being beautiful and good, in so far as it is in the image of the good and beautiful, and the nature, which is sustained by the mind, has the like power, in so far as it is an image of the image, it is hereby shown that our material part holds together, and is upheld when it is controlled by nature; and on the other hand is dissolved and disorganized when it is separated from that which upholds and sustains it, and is dissevered from its conjunction with beauty and goodness.

12. Now such a condition as this does not arise except when there takes place an overturning of nature to the opposite state, in which the desire has no inclination for beauty and goodness, but for that which is in need of the adorning element; for it must needs be that that which is made like to matter, destitute as matter is of form of its own, should be assimilated to it in respect of the absence alike of form and of beauty.

13. We have, however, discussed these points in passing, as following on our argument, since they were introduced by our speculation on the point before us; for the subject of enquiry was, whether the intellectual faculty has its seat in any of the parts of us, or extends equally over them all; for as for those who shut up the mind locally in parts of the body, and who advance for the establishment of this opinion of theirs the fact that the reason has not free course in the case of those whose cerebral membranes are in an unnatural condition, our argument showed that in respect of every part of the compound nature of man, whereby every man has some natural operation, the power of the soul remains equally ineffective if the part does not continue in its natural condition. And thus there came into our argument, following out this line of thought, the view we have just stated, by which we learn that in the compound nature of man the mind is governed by God, and that by it is governed our material life, provided the latter remains in its natural state, but if it is perverted from nature it is alienated also from that operation which is carried on by the mind.

14. Let us return however once more to the point from which we started — that in those who are not perverted from their natural condition by some affection, the mind exercises its own power, and is established firmly in those who are in sound health, but on the contrary is powerless in those who do not admit its operation; for we may confirm our opinion on these matters by yet other arguments: and if it is not tedious for those to hear who are already wearied with our discourse, we shall discuss these matters also, so far as we are able, in a few words. (Gregory of Nyssa, *On the Making of Man*, chapter 12, paragraphs 9 – 14)

11. Thus there is in us the principle of all excellence, all virtue and wisdom, and every higher thing that we conceive: but pre-eminent among all is the fact that we are free from necessity, and not in bondage to any natural power, but have decision in our own power as we please; for virtue is a voluntary thing, subject to no dominion: that which is the result of compulsion and force cannot be virtue. (Gregory of Nyssa, *On the Making of Man*, chapter 16, paragraph 11)

Note: Gregory wrote *On the Making of Man* to accompany his brother Basil's *Hexaemeron*. The two should be read together, at the very least to reflect Gregory's efforts to make clear what he believed they believed in common about that Genesis material and theological anthropology.

Gregory of Nazianzus (330 – 390 AD)

12. What does he mean by this? As I take it, that goodness can with difficulty gain a hold upon human nature, like fire upon green wood; while most men are ready and disposed to join in evil, like stubble, I mean, ready for a spark and a wind, which is easily kindled and consumed from its dryness. For more quickly would any one take part in evil with slight inducement to its full extent, than in good which is fully set before him to a slight degree. For indeed a little wormwood most quickly imparts its bitterness to honey; while not even double the quantity of honey can impart its sweetness to wormwood: and the withdrawal of a small pebble would draw headlong a whole river, though it would be difficult for the strongest dam to restrain or stay its course.

13. This then is the first point in what we have said, which it is right for us to guard against, viz.: being found to be bad painters of the charms of virtue, and still more, if not, perhaps, models for poor painters, poor models for the people, or barely escaping the proverb, that we undertake to heal others [Luke 4:23] while ourselves are full of sores.

14. In the second place, although a man has kept himself pure from sin, even in a very high degree; I do not know that even this is sufficient for one who is to instruct others in virtue. For he who has received this charge, not only needs to be free from evil, for evil is, in the eyes of most of those under his care, most disgraceful, but also to be eminent in good, according to the command, Depart from evil and do good. And he must not only wipe out the traces of vice from his soul, but also inscribe better ones, so as to outstrip men further in virtue than he is superior to them in dignity. He should know no limits in goodness or spiritual progress, and should dwell upon the loss of what is still beyond him, rather than the gain of what he has attained, and consider that which is beneath his feet a step to that which comes next: and not think it a great gain to excel ordinary people, but a loss to fall short of what we ought to be: and to measure his success by the commandment and not by his neighbours, whether they be evil, or to some extent proficient in virtue: and to weigh virtue in no small scales, inasmuch as it is due to the Most High, from Whom are all things, and to Whom are all things. [Romans 11:35]

15. Nor must he suppose that the same things are suitable to all, just as all have not the same stature, nor are the features of the face, nor the nature of animals, nor the qualities of soil, nor the beauty and size of the stars, in all cases the same: but he must consider base conduct a fault in a private individual, and deserving of chastisement under the hard rule of the law; while in the case of a ruler or leader it is a fault not to attain to the highest possible excellence, and always make progress in goodness, if indeed he is, by his high degree of virtue, to draw his people to an ordinary degree, not by the force of authority, but by the influence of persuasion. For what is involuntary apart from its being the result of oppression, is neither meritorious nor durable. For what is forced, like a plant violently drawn aside by our hands, when set free, returns to what it was before, but that which is the result of choice is both most legitimate and enduring, for it is preserved by the bond of good will. And so our law and our lawgiver enjoin upon us most strictly that we should tend the flock not by constraint but willingly. [1 Peter 5:2]

16. But granted that a man is free from vice, and has reached the greatest heights of virtue: I do not see what knowledge or power would justify him in venturing upon this office. For the guiding of man, the most variable and manifold of creatures, seems to me in very deed to be the art of arts and science of sciences. Any one may recognize this, by comparing the work of the physician of souls with the treatment of the body; and noticing that, laborious as the latter is, ours is more laborious, and of more consequence, from the nature of its subject matter, the power of its science, and the object of its exercise. The one labours about bodies, and perishable failing matter, which absolutely must be dissolved and undergo its fate, [Genesis 3:19] even if upon this occasion by the aid of art it can surmount the disturbance within itself, being dissolved by disease or time in submission to the law of nature, since it cannot rise above its own limitations.

17. The other is concerned with the soul, which comes from God and is divine, and partakes of the heavenly nobility, and presses on to it, even if it be bound to an inferior nature. Perhaps indeed there are other reasons also for this, which only God, Who bound them together, and those who are instructed by God in such mysteries, can know, but as far as I, and men like myself can perceive, there are two: one, that it may inherit the glory above by means of a struggle and wrestling [Ephesians 6:12] with things below, being tried as gold in the fire [1 Peter 1:7] by things here, and gain the objects of our hope as a prize of virtue, and not merely as the gift of God. This, indeed, was the will of Supreme Goodness, to make the good even our own, not only because sown in our nature, but because cultivated by our own choice, and by the motions of our will, free to act in either direction. The second reason is, that it may draw to itself and raise to heaven the lower nature, by gradually freeing it from its grossness, in order that

the soul may be to the body what God is to the soul, itself leading on the matter which ministers to it, and uniting it, as its fellow-servant, to God. (Gregory of Nazianzus, *Oration 2*, paragraphs 12 – 17)

Ambrose of Milan (340 – 397 AD)

‘Ambrose, Bishop, to the most blessed Prince and most Christian Emperor Valentinian...No one is injured because God is set before him. He keeps his own opinion. You do not compel a man against his will to worship what he dislikes. Let the same liberty be given to you, O Emperor, and let every one bear it with patience, if he cannot extort from the Emperor what he would take it ill if the Emperor desired to extort from him. A shuffling spirit is displeasing to the heathen themselves, for everyone ought freely to defend and maintain the faith and purpose of his own mind.’ (Ambrose of Milan, *Letter 17*, paragraph 7. Ambrose is admittedly encouraging the Emperor to express toleration at the political level for people who are not Christians. Ambrose is not giving a theological anthropology or an exegesis of Scripture. Nevertheless, the language of free will is present, and presumably anchors the policy posture that Ambrose urges.)

John Chrysostom (circa 349 – 407 AD)

God never draws anyone to Himself by force and violence. He wishes all men to be saved, but forces no one (Sermon on the words ‘Saul, Saul...’ 6 (P.G. 51, 144)).

Augustine of Hippo (354 – 430 AD)

‘Clearly the wicked do not know that you are everywhere. But you are not bound within the limits of any place. You alone are always present, even to those who set themselves apart from you. Let them then turn back and look for you. They will find that you have not deserted your creatures as they have deserted their Creator. Let them turn back, and they will find you in their hearts, in the hearts of all who confess to you and throw themselves upon your mercy, in the hearts of all who have left the hard path and come to weep upon your breast. Gently you wipe away their tears. They weep the more, but now their tears are tears of joy, because it is not some man of flesh and blood but you, O Lord, their Maker, who remakes them and consoles them.’ (*Confessions* book 5.2)

It will be I who wills and I who does not will; I, I will be the one. I did not used to fully will nor did I used to fully not will. Hence there arose my struggle with myself... (*Confessions* 8, 10, 22).

God has created me with free will; if I have sinned, I have sinned... I, I; not fate, not chance, not the devil. (In ps. 31, 2, 6) cited in Angelo Berardino, editor, *Patrology, Volume IV: The Golden Age of Latin Patristic Literature from the Council of Nicea to the Council of Chalcedon* (Westminster, Maryland: Christian Classics Inc., 1991), p.414)

Our will would not be a will were it not in our power. Precisely because it is within our power it is free for us. (*De libero arbitrio* 3, 3, 8)

Prosper of Aquitaine (c.390 – c.455 AD), *Calling of All the Nations (450 AD)*

This was Prosper’s attempt to reconcile Augustine of Hippo’s teaching on grace in which he suggests that God wishes all men to be saved. The argument is that although all human beings do not receive the grace that saves, they do receive God’s general grace. Written in AD 450, the *Calling of All Nations* was Prosper’s most original contribution to theology. (Wikipedia, Prosper of Aquitaine)

John Cassian (360 – 435 AD)

‘It cannot then be doubted that *there are by nature some seeds of goodness in every soul implanted by the kindness of the Creator: but unless these are quickened by the assistance of God, they will not be able to attain to an increase of perfection...* And therefore the will always remains free in man, and can either neglect or delight in the grace of God. For the Apostle would not have commanded saying: ‘Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling’

[Phil.2:13] had he not known that it could be advanced or neglected by us. But that men might not fancy that they had no need of Divine aid for the work of Salvation, he subjoins: '*For it is God that works in you both to will and to do, of His good pleasure.*' And therefore he warns Timothy and says: 'Neglect not the grace of God which is in thee;' and again: 'For which cause I exhort thee to stir up the grace of God which is in thee...'' (John Cassian, *Conferences*, XIII.12)

Vincent of Lerins

TBA

The Council of Orange (529 AD)

Canon 13. Concerning the restoration of free will. The freedom of will that was destroyed in the first man can be restored only by the grace of baptism, for what is lost can be returned only by the one who was able to give it. Hence the Truth itself declares: "So if the Son makes you free, you will be free indeed" (John 8:36).

Conclusion: 'We not only do not believe that any are foreordained to evil by the power of God, but even state with utter abhorrence that if there are those who want to believe so evil a thing, they are anathema. We also believe and confess to our benefit that in every good work it is not we who take the initiative and are then assisted through the mercy of God, but God himself first inspires in us both faith in him and love for him without any previous good works of our own that deserve reward, so that we may both faithfully seek the sacrament of baptism, and after baptism be able by his help to do what is pleasing to him. We must therefore most evidently believe that the praiseworthy faith of the thief whom the Lord called to his home in paradise, and of Cornelius the centurion, to whom the angel of the Lord was sent, and of Zacchaeus, who was worthy to receive the Lord himself, was not a natural endowment but a gift of God's kindness.'

The Latin-speaking bishops who gathered at Orange viewed baptism as restoring 'freedom of the will' because they coordinated baptism as washing away the corruption of sin from the fall. This is the doctrine of ancestral sin, where the original corruption is passed down. It is not Augustine's doctrine of original guilt being passed down to all the descendants of Adam and Eve.

John of Damascus (675 – 749 AD)

'Moreover, it is to be observed that the choice of what is to be done is in our own hands : but the final issue depends, in the one case when our actions are good, on the cooperation of God, Who in His justice brings help according to His foreknowledge to such as choose the good with a right conscience, and, in the other case when our actions are to evil, on the desertion by God, Who again in His justice stands aloof in accordance with His foreknowledge. Now there are two forms of desertion: for there is desertion in the matters of guidance and training, and there is complete and hopeless desertion. The former has in view the restoration and safety and glory of the sufferer, or the rousing of feelings of emulation and imitation in others, or the glory of God: but the latter is when man, after God has done all that was possible to save him, remains of his own set purpose blind and uncured, or rather incurable, and then he is handed over to utter destruction, as was Judas. Matthew 26:24 May God be gracious to us, and deliver us from such desertion. Observe further that the ways of God's providence are many, and they cannot be explained in words nor conceived by the mind. And remember that all the assaults of dark and evil fortune contribute to the salvation of those who receive them with thankfulness, and are assuredly ambassadors of help. Also one must bear in mind that God's original wish was that all should be saved and come to His Kingdom. 1 Timothy 2:4 For it was not for punishment that He formed us but to share in His goodness, inasmuch as He is a good God. But inasmuch as He is a just God, His will is that sinners should suffer punishment. The first then is called God's antecedent will and pleasure, and springs from Himself, while the second is called God's consequent will and permission, and has its origin in us. And the latter is two-fold; one part dealing with matters of guidance and training, and having in view our salvation, and the other being hopeless and leading to our utter punishment, as we said above. And this is the case with actions that are not left in our hands. But of actions that are in our hands the good ones depend on His antecedent goodwill and pleasure, while the wicked ones depend neither on His antecedent nor on His consequent

will, but are a concession to free-will. For that which is the result of compulsion has neither reason nor virtue in it. God makes provision for all creation and makes all creation the instrument of His help and training, yea often even the demons themselves, as for example in the cases of Job and the swine. (John of Damascus, *Exposition of the Orthodox Faith*, book 2, chapter 29, 'Concerning Prescience and Predestination')

'We ought to understand that while God knows all things beforehand, yet He does not predetermine all things. For He knows beforehand those things that are in our power, but He does not predetermine them. For it is not His will that there should be wickedness nor does He choose to compel virtue... Bear in mind, too, that virtue is a gift from God implanted in our nature, and that He Himself is the source and cause of all good, and without His co-operation and help we cannot will or do any good thing. But we have it in our power either to abide in virtue and follow God, Who calls us into ways of virtue, or to stray from paths of virtue, which is to dwell in wickedness, and to follow the devil who summons but cannot compel us. For wickedness is nothing else than the withdrawal of goodness, just as darkness is nothing else than the withdrawal of light. While then we abide in the natural state we abide in virtue, but when we deviate from the natural state, that is from virtue, we come into an unnatural state and dwell in wickedness.' (John of Damascus, *Exposition of the Orthodox Faith*, book 2, chapter 30, 'Concerning Prescience and Predestination')

'We hold, therefore, that free-will comes on the scene at the same moment as reason, and that change and alteration are congenital to all that is produced. For all that is produced is also subject to change. For those things must be subject to change whose production has its origin in change. And change consists in being brought into being out of nothing, and in transforming a substratum of matter into something different. Inanimate things, then, and things without reason undergo the aforementioned bodily changes, while the changes of things endowed with reason depend on choice. For reason consists of a speculative and a practical part. The speculative part is the contemplation of the nature of things, and the practical consists in deliberation and defines the true reason for what is to be done. The speculative side is called mind or wisdom, and the practical side is called reason or prudence. Every one, then, who deliberates does so in the belief that the choice of what is to be done lies in his hands, that he may choose what seems best as the result of his deliberation, and having chosen may act upon it. And if this is so, free-will must necessarily be very closely related to reason. For either man is an irrational being, or, if he is rational, he is master of his acts and endowed with free-will. Hence also creatures without reason do not enjoy free-will: for nature leads them rather than they nature, and so they do not oppose the natural appetite, but as soon as their appetite longs after anything they rush headlong after it. But man, being rational, leads nature rather than nature him, and so when he desires aught he has the power to curb his appetite or to indulge it as he pleases. Hence also creatures devoid of reason are the subjects neither of praise nor blame, while man is the subject of both praise and blame. Note also that the angels, being rational, are endowed with free-will, and, inasmuch as they are created, are liable to change. This in fact is made plain by the devil who, although made good by the Creator, became of his own free-will the inventor of evil, and by the powers who revolted with him, that is the demons, and by the other troops of angels who abode in goodness.' (John of Damascus, *Exposition of the Orthodox Faith*, book 2, chapter 27, 'Concerning the reason of our endowment with free will')

Man, however, being endowed with reason and free will, received the power of continuous union with God through his own choice, if indeed he should abide in goodness, that is in obedience to his Maker. Since, however, he transgressed the command of his Creator and became liable to death and corruption, the Creator and Maker of our race, because of His bowels of compassion, took on our likeness, becoming man in all things but without sin, and was united to our nature. Hebrews 2:17 For since He bestowed on us His own image and His own spirit and we did not keep them safe, He took Himself a share in our poor and weak nature, in order that He might cleanse us and make us incorruptible, and establish us once more as partakers of His divinity. (John of Damascus, *Exposition of the Orthodox Faith*, book 4, chapter 13)

It is to be observed that it is the custom in the Holy Scripture to speak of God's permission as His energy, as when the apostle says in the Epistle to the Romans, Hath not the potter power over the clay, of the same lump to make one vessel unto honour and another unto dishonour? And for this reason, that He Himself makes this or that. For He is Himself alone the Maker of all things; yet it is not He Himself that fashions noble or ignoble things, but the personal choice of each one. And this is manifest from what the same Apostle says in the Second Epistle to Timothy, In a great house there are not only vessels of gold and of silver, but also of wood and of earth: and some to honour and some to dishonour. If a man therefore purge himself from these, he shall be a vessel unto honour sanctified, and meet for the master's use, and prepared unto every good work. 2 Timothy 2:20-21 And it is evident that the

purification must be voluntary: for if a man, he says, purge himself. And the consequent antistrophe responds, If a man purge not himself he will be a vessel to dishonour, unmeet for the master's use and fit only to be broken in pieces. Wherefore this passage that we have quoted and this, God has concluded them all in unbelief Romans 11:32, and this, God has given them the spirit of slumber, eyes that they should not see, and ears that they should not hear, all these must be understood not as though God Himself were energising, but as though God were permitting, both because of free-will and because goodness knows no compulsion.

His permission, therefore, is usually spoken of in the Holy Scripture as His energy and work. Nay, even when He says that God creates evil things, and that there is no evil in a city that the Lord has not done, he does not mean by these words Amos 3:6 that the Lord is the cause of evil, but the word 'evil' is used in two ways, with two meanings. For sometimes it means what is evil by nature, and this is the opposite of virtue and the will of God: and sometimes it means that which is evil and oppressive to our sensation, that is to say, afflictions and calamities. Now these are seemingly evil because they are painful, but in reality are good. For to those who understand they became ambassadors of conversion and salvation. The Scripture says that of these God is the Author.

It is, moreover, to be observed that of these, too, we are the cause: for involuntary evils are the offspring of voluntary ones.

This also should be recognised, that it is usual in the Scriptures for some things that ought to be considered as effects to be stated in a causal sense, as, Against You, You only, have I sinned and done this evil in Your sight, that You might be justified when You speak, and prevail when You judge. For the sinner did not sin in order that God might prevail, nor again did God require our sin in order that He might by it be revealed as victor. For above comparison He wins the victor's prize against all, even against those who are sinless, being Maker, incomprehensible, uncreated, and possessing natural and not adventitious glory. But it is because when we sin God is not unjust in His anger against us; and when He pardons the penitent He is shown victor over our wickedness. But it is not for this that we sin, but because the thing so turns out. It is just as if one were sitting at work and a friend stood near by, and one said, My friend came in order that I might do no work that day. The friend, however, was not present in order that the man should do no work, but such was the result. For being occupied with receiving his friend he did not work. These things, too, are spoken of as effects because affairs so turned out. Moreover, God does not wish that He alone should be just, but that all should, so far as possible, be made like Him. (John of Damascus, *Exposition of the Orthodox Faith*, book 4, chapter 19)

God in His goodness brought what exists into being out of nothing, and has foreknowledge of what will exist in the future. If, therefore, they were not to exist in the future, they would neither be evil in the future nor would they be foreknown. For knowledge is of what exists and foreknowledge is of what will surely exist in the future. For simple being comes first and then good or evil being. But if the very existence of those, who through the goodness of God are in the future to exist, were to be prevented by the fact that they were to become evil of their own choice, evil would have prevailed over the goodness of God. Wherefore God makes all His works good, but each becomes of its own choice good or evil. Although, then, the Lord said, Good were it for that man that he had never been born Mark 14:21, He said it in condemnation not of His own creation but of the evil which His own creation had acquired by his own choice and through his own heedlessness. For the heedlessness that marks man's judgment made His Creator's beneficence of no profit to him. It is just as if any one, when he had obtained riches and dominion from a king, were to lord it over his benefactor, who, when he has worsted him, will punish him as he deserves, if he should see him keeping hold of the sovereignty to the end. (John of Damascus, *Exposition of the Orthodox Faith*, book 4, chapter 21)