



THE ANÁSTASIS CENTER  
FOR CHRISTIAN EDUCATION & MINISTRY

# Reconstruction

The Deep Roots of Early Christian Theology

# Reconstruction: Objectives

- Deconstructing Christian faith is common
- Common outcomes: Collapse? Holes?
- Why construct at all?
- Early Christianity helps us discern a strong foundation

# Reconstruction: Objectives

- Identify controversial issues commonly debated in Western Christianity
- Examine early Christian views on the issue
- Identify if, where, and why Christians shifted on the issue
- Recover a framework for approaching the issue in today's context



# Reconstruction

## The Deep Roots of Early Christian Theology

- 4/30 Slavery: How the Early Church Got It Right
- 5/7 Women in the Early Church
- 5/14 The Goodness of God and the Healing of Creation:  
Ministry According to Athanasius of Alexandria
- 5/21 Does God Have a Dark Side? Hell in the Early Church
- 5/28 Scripture: How Authoritative Is It? Why Do We Need It?
- 6/4 Scripture: Is the Bible the Product of Empire? Violence?
- 6/11 Politics, the Church, and Jesus' Restorative Justice
- 6/18 Sexual Ethics and the New Creation
- 6/25 The Person, the Face, and the Climb Up the Mountain:  
Gregory of Nyssa and the Shaping of Desire



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# Sexual Ethics and the New Creation

Mako A. Nagasawa

The Anástasis Center for Christian Education and Ministry

# Outline

- Introduction: The Collision of Worlds (25 min)
- Discussion (5 min)
- The Diverse Community: Athanasius' *Letter 48* to Amun and *Festal Letter 10* (25 min)
- Discussion (10 min)
- The Value of Struggle: Athanasius' *Life of Anthony* (20 min)
- Open Q&A

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# Introduction: The Collision of Worlds

- Judaism and Female Sexual Pleasure in Marriage
  - “Conjugal rights”
    - Exodus 21:10; Deuteronomy 24:5
  - “A man is forbidden to compel his wife to have intercourse with him”
    - *Talmud Eirubin* 100b
  - “...from time immemorial”
    - Judge David Belchior, *Cohen v. State of Israel* 1981
  - “According to Jewish law, sexual satisfaction is primarily the husband’s duty and the wife’s right. Married women need legal protection to ensure that their husbands treat them sensitively in the potentially volatile area of sexual relations. Men do not need to be protected; they need to be restrained and educated to think of their wives and not to view them as their sex objects.”
    - Rabbi Dr. Warren Goldstein, *Defending the Human Spirit* (2006), 168
- Other Marital Rights
  - Jesus: Wife can divorce husband in Mark 10:12; cf. Deuteronomy 24:1 – 4



# Introduction: The Collision of Worlds

<b>Biblical, Judaic</b>	<b>Greco-Roman</b>
Our physical bodies are good	Our bodies house the immortal soul, which wants to return to its source
Hope for resurrection and the renewal of the physical world	Hope for disembodiment, the separation of soul from body
Caring for the poor is important	Caring for the poor is not important because the body is not important
Sexual ethics are important and derived from God's story	Sex itself is a distraction (Stoicism, Platonism); sexual ethics are not that important, except for inheritance (paganism; Epicureanism, Roman)
Death is the enemy of God's good creation; God will overthrow it	Death is inevitable; no human comes back from the dead (Homer)
Our story is linear, based on God's pattern of promise and fulfillment	Our story is circular and repetitious; nothing is new

# Introduction: The Collision of Worlds

- The Epistle to Diognetus: early 2<sup>nd</sup> century
  - Ascribed to Justin Martyr of Rome
  - “Diognetus” was the name of the tutor of Emperor Marcus Aurelius

“They have a common table, but not a common bed.”

Or: “They share all things but their spouses”

- *Epistle to Diognetus* 5

# Introduction: The Collision of Worlds

- The Epistle to Diognetus: early 2<sup>nd</sup> century
  - “They dwell in their own countries, but simply as sojourners. As citizens, they share in all things with others, and yet endure all things as if foreigners. Every foreign land is to them as their native country, and every land of their birth as a land of strangers. They marry, as do all; they beget children; but they do not destroy their offspring. They have a common table, but not a common bed. They are in the flesh, but they do not live after the flesh. They pass their days on earth, but they are citizens of heaven. They obey the prescribed laws, and at the same time surpass the laws by their lives. They love all men, and are persecuted by all. They are unknown and condemned; they are put to death, and restored to life. They are poor, yet make many rich; they are in lack of all things, and yet abound in all; they are dishonoured, and yet in their very dishonour are glorified. They are evil spoken of... they are assailed by the Jews as foreigners, and are persecuted by the Greeks; yet those who hate them are unable to assign any reason for their hatred.”
    - *Epistle to Diognetus* 5

# Introduction: The Collision of Worlds

- A Growing Influence: Stoicism and Platonism
  - Paul, *First Epistle to Timothy* 4:1 – 5 (64/65 AD) from Corinth to Ephesus
    - “But the Spirit explicitly says that in later times some will fall away from the faith, paying attention to deceitful spirits and doctrines of demons, by means of the hypocrisy of liars seared in their own conscience as with a branding iron, men **who forbid marriage** and advocate abstaining from foods which God has created to be gratefully shared in by those who believe and know the truth. For **everything created by God is good**, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with gratitude; for it is sanctified by means of the word of God and prayer.”
  - “Jewish Christianity”
    - Strongly “creational” and embodied
    - “Let no one keep defrauding you of your prize by delighting in self-abasement” (Col.2:18)
  - Stoicism
    - Most popular religion in the Roman army

# Introduction: The Collision of Worlds

- A Growing Influence: Stoicism and Platonism
  - Clement of Rome: bishop or elder of Rome from 88 – 99
    - “Shall we become **slothful** in well-doing, and cease from the practice of love? God forbid...! But rather let us **hasten with all energy** and readiness of mind to perform **every good work**. For the Creator and Lord of all Himself **rejoices** in His **works**. For by His infinitely great power He established the heavens, and... **adorned** them... Above all, with His holy and undefiled hands He formed man [Genesis 2:7], the most excellent [of His creatures], and truly great through the understanding given him — the express likeness of His own image. For thus says God: ‘Let us make man in our image, and after our likeness. So God made man; male and female He created them.’ [Genesis 1:26 – 27] Having thus finished all these things, He **approved** them, and **blessed** them, and said, ‘Increase and multiply.’ [Genesis 1:28] We see, then, how **all righteous men** have been **adorned** with **good works**, and how **the Lord Himself**, **adorning** Himself with His **works**, **rejoiced**. Having therefore such an example, let us without delay accede to His will, and let us **work** the **work** of righteousness with **our whole strength...** **Not sloth**, because, “Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which He has prepared for them that wait for Him. [1 Corinthians 2:9]”
      - Clement of Rome, *1 Clement / Epistle of the Romans to the Corinthians* 33 – 34 (~90 AD)
      - Against “overthrowing their church elders” (3, 14, 42 – 57), probably because they were married
      - God works, then commissions our work of righteousness in love and virtue, in both married and celibate modes of life

# Introduction: The Collision of Worlds

- A Growing Influence: Stoicism and Platonism
  - Ignatius of Antioch: bishop or elder of Antioch until martyrdom, 108 – 140 (earlier is more likely)
    - “If any one can continue in a **state of purity** [Matthew 19:12; 1 Corinthians 7:1 – 6], to the honour of Him who is Lord of the flesh, **let him so remain without boasting**. If he begins to boast, he is undone; and if he reckon himself greater than the bishop, he is ruined. But it becomes both men and women who marry, to form their union with the approval of the bishop, that their marriage may be according to God, and not after their own lust. Let all things be done to the honour of God [1 Corinthians 10:31].”
      - Ignatius of Antioch, *Epistle to Polycarp of Smyrna* 5 (~110 AD)
      - Note: Interweaving of 1 Corinthians into the conceptual order of 1 Timothy
  - Context: Jesus and Paul on singleness as a gift
    - Matthew 19:12; 1 Corinthians 7:7
    - “A state of purity” to honor Jesus, and then marriage
    - “Greater than the bishop”

# Introduction: The Collision of Worlds

- A Growing Influence: Stoicism and Platonism
  - Tertullian of Carthage (c.155 – c.220), a teacher, on remarriage and subsequent singlehood
    - *Letter to His Wife* (c.200 – 206): remarriage is acceptable and worthy of celebration
    - *An Exhortation to Chastity* (c.208 – 210): remarriage is only permissible
    - *On Monogamy* (217): remarriage is unacceptable
  - Remarriage in Scripture: approved and encouraged
    - For widows (1 Cor.7:9; Rom.7:3; 1 Tim.5:14)
    - For the abandoned, they are “not under bondage” (1 Cor.7:15)
  - Tertullian of Carthage’s influence?
    - Not a bishop
    - Writes as if layperson, not a priest
    - Reputation tarnished by his later participation in Montanism
    - Did Cyprian, bishop of Carthage (c.210 – 258), admire him?

# Introduction: The Collision of Worlds

- A Growing Influence: Stoicism and Platonism
  - Clement of Alexandria (c.150 – c.215), *The Stromata (Miscellanies)* 2.20
    - “For the **feeling of pleasure is not at all a necessity**, but the accompaniment of certain natural needs—hunger, thirst, cold, marriage. If, then, it were possible to drink without it, or take food, or beget children, no other need of it could be shown. For **pleasure** is neither a function, nor a state, nor any part of us; but has been introduced into life as an auxiliary, as they say salt was to season food. But when it casts off restraint and rules the house, it generates first concupiscence, which is an irrational propension and impulse towards that which gratifies it; and it induced Epicurus to lay down **pleasure** as the aim of the philosopher.”
  - Jewish vision of ordered pleasures
    - Of marital sex: Prov.5:19 – 20; Song 4:7 – 5:1; etc.
    - Of creation: Gen.1:1 – 2:3; 2:4 – 25; Isa.25:6 – 9; 55:1 – 13; Prov.8:22 – 36; etc.
  - Clement of Alexandria’s influence?
    - Teacher in the School in Alexandria, somewhat influenced by Stoicism, Platonism
    - Not a bishop
    - Moderate influence on Middle Platonist Christian teacher, Origen of Alexandria (c.185 – c.253), a brilliant biblical scholar who had a similarly negative view of sex



# Outline

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# Discussion

1. How have various Christian streams of tradition passed down an “anti-body” posture?
2. Stoic/Platonic attitudes towards the body/sex/desires were negative. How could violence, sexual trauma, or other factors lead to similar attitudes today?

Note: We will discuss later the pagan and Epicurean *indulgence* of the body/sex/desires.

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# The Diverse Community: Athanasius on Christian Sexual Ethics

- Why Athanasius of Alexandria?
  - His position and influence
    - Ecumenically-minded: deacon at Council of Nicaea, the first ecumenical council, in 325
    - Bishop (Archbishop) of Egypt and Libya from 328
    - Ethiopia: appointed Frumentius as “abuna” in 328
    - Eastern, Greek-speaking Church:
      - Mobilized anti-Arian, pro-Nicene leaders
      - Jerusalem: pro-Nicene alliance with Cyril of Jerusalem
      - Antioch: wrote *Tome to the Antiochenes* in 362
      - Revered, by Basil of Caesarea and Gregory of Nazianzus
      - “Fountainhead of Christian theology”
    - Western, Latin-speaking Church:
      - Beloved, from his first exile (Trier) and second (Rome, Milan, Gaul, Córdoba, Serdica)
      - Admired, as Hilary of Poitiers was called “the Athanasius of the West”
        - See Lewis Ayres, *Nicaea and its Legacy*, p.182
      - Authoritative, by the “Athanasian Creed” in fifth century
    - Commended the New Testament as 27 books in *Festal Letter* of 367

# The Diverse Community: Athanasius on Christian Sexual Ethics

- Why Athanasius of Alexandria?
  - When and where he lived: 298 – 373
    - Fourth century: flourishing of Christian literature and collaboration
    - Alexandria, Egypt: multicultural crossroads of learning; demographic diversity
      - Developments in science, epistemology, and language
      - Very large population of Diaspora Jews; Septuagint translated there
      - Many Jewish Christian migrants since 70 and 135 AD
        - T.F. Torrance, *Divine Meaning: Studies in Patristic Hermeneutics* (1995), p.179 – 180
      - Earliest flourishing Christian monasticism
        - Possibly related to earlier Jewish monasticism: Philo's *Therapeutae*

# The Diverse Community: Athanasius on Christian Sexual Ethics

- Why Athanasius of Alexandria?
  - Exceptional biblical scholar and pastoral theologian
    - “There is very little if any trace of Hellenistic rationalism to be found.”
      - T.F. Torrance, *Divine Meaning: Studies in Patristic Hermeneutics* (1995), p.179 – 180; Georges Florovsky, ‘The Concept of Creation in Saint Athanasius,’ *Studia Patristica* (1962)
      - Resisted the speculative Hellenism of Philo, Clement, and Origen
      - Connected to Alexandria’s large Jewish community: concern for real history, reasoning from God’s activities rather than speculative assumptions
      - Perceived the inner structure linking redemption and revelation, and Father-Son relations
    - Intellectual lineage through the bishops
      - In Alexandria: Alexander; Peter; Dionysius; Demetrius
      - Elsewhere: Cyril of Jerusalem (contemporary); Melito of Sardis (3<sup>rd</sup> century); Irenaeus of Lyons (2<sup>nd</sup> century)

# The Diverse Community: Athanasius on Christian Sexual Ethics

- Why Athanasius of Alexandria?
  - Pastoral concerns
    - “Athanasius represents not an intellectual elite but the “silent majority” of Alexandrian Christians who hoped for salvation in Christ and had no use for notions that might undercut the biblical basis for that hope. That is, Athanasius’s concerns as a theologian were not speculative but ecclesial and pastoral.”
      - James D. Ernest, *The Bible in Athanasius of Alexandria* (2004), p.3
    - Demonstrably pro-body
    - Virtue ethicist (which is Jewish and Christian): we partner with God to shape what becomes “second nature” for us

# The Diverse Community: Athanasius on Christian Sexual Ethics

- Why Athanasius of Alexandria?
  - Personally connected to the Christian approach to prostitution
    - Through Hosius of Córdoba
      - Had been at the Synod of Elvira (306), which formalized Christian approach to prostitution
      - Athanasius' strong ally since the Council of Nicaea (325)
      - Defended Athanasius' innocence at the Council of Serdica (343)
  - Prostitutes regarded as slaves; see *Reconstruction 2022 Session 1: Slavery*
    - Not guilty of personal sin; sins are social and coerced/involuntary
    - Customers, kidnappers are guilty of personal sin
    - Former prostitutes carried no stigma
    - Lasted into the European medieval period
    - Like the “Nordic progressive model” against trafficking



# The Diverse Community: Athanasius' *Letter 48*, to Amun

- Why Athanasius of Alexandria?
  - Before 354, *Letter 48*, to Amun: On “bodily emissions” of monks
    - Key issue: God’s creation of the body is good
      - “All things made by God are beautiful and pure, for the Word of God has made nothing useless or impure... For ‘to the pure all things are pure,’ but both the conscience and all that belongs to the unclean are defiled [Genesis 1:1 – 2:3; 1 Timothy 4:4; Titus 1:15].”
    - Key issue: intention, will
      - “When any bodily excretion takes place **independently of will**, then we experience this, like other things, by a necessity of nature”
      - Like a runny nose, or vomit: “the watery discharges from the head, and the purgings of the belly”
      - Does not refer to the Jewish ceremonial standards about clean vs. unclean (Lev.11 – 15)
    - God’s vision for individual body and relational vision
      - “But since we must grapple with the objections of evil persons, as they may say, ‘If the organs have been severally fashioned by the Creator, then there is no sin in their genuine use,’ let us stop them by asking this question: **What do you mean by use?**”
      - That “lawful use in marriage [Genesis 1:28; Hebrews 13:4]”
      - Or “that use which is public, yet carried on stealthily and in adulterous fashion?”

# The Diverse Community: Athanasius' *Letter 48*, to Amun

- Why Athanasius of Alexandria?
  - Shape of Christian sexual ethics: implications
    - Power dynamics acknowledged
    - A person's intentions central
    - Sexual history: straightforwardly acknowledged (not modern "purity culture" per se)
    - Wisdom culture: formation in virtue, shaping of desire
  - Formation of a relational "wisdom culture," not simply a "purity culture"

# The Diverse Community: Athanasius' *Festal Letter* 10

- Why Athanasius of Alexandria's *Festal Letter* 10?
  - In 337, Athanasius wrote *First Letter to Virgins* in Coptic (and Greek?)
    - Referenced by Ambrose of Milan, *On Virgins* (c.372)
  - In 338, during Athanasius' second exile (338 – 346), in Rome
    - In 338, in Rome, hosted by Julius of Rome, wrote *Festal Letter* 10
    - Wrote annual letters to the church in Alexandria and thereabouts
    - In 342, stayed in Milan, probably with a copy of *First Letter to Virgins*

# The Diverse Community: Athanasius' *Festal Letter* 10

- Biblical and Pastoral Balance: Marriage and Celibacy
  - “But God, who is good, multiplied His loving-kindness towards us... He does not then possess one method only of healing, but being rich, He works in **various** manners for our salvation by means of His Word, Who is not restricted or hindered in His dealings towards us; but since He is rich and manifold, He **varies** Himself according to the individual capacity of each soul. For He is the Word [John 1:1] and the Power and the Wisdom of God [1 Corinthians 1:24], as Solomon testifies concerning Wisdom, that ‘being one, it can do all things, and remaining in itself, it makes all things new; and passing upon holy souls, fashions the friends of God and the prophets.’ [Wisdom of Solomon 7:27]”
    - Athanasius of Alexandria, *Festal Letter* 10.4

# The Diverse Community: Athanasius' *Festal Letter* 10

- Biblical and Pastoral Balance: Marriage and Celibacy
  - “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 a **hundred**, and some **sixty**, and some **thirty** [Matthew 13:1 – 23]... 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.
  - “To this intent He has prepared many mansions [John 14:2] with the Father, so that although **the dwelling-place is various in proportion to the advance in moral attainment**, yet all of us are within the wall, and all of us enter within the same fence, the adversary being cast out, and all his host expelled thence.”
    - Athanasius of Alexandria, *Festal Letter* 10.4

# The Diverse Community: Athanasius' *Festal Letter* 10

- Biblical and Pastoral Balance: Marriage and Celibacy

State	Person in a Stage of Maturing	Form the Word Takes	Diet and Maturity	Soil Harvest
Married honorably	'Those who have not attained to the perfect way'	'He becomes like a sheep giving milk'	'I have fed you with milk, not meat' (1 Cor.3:2)	Thirty
Monk	'Those who have advanced beyond the full stature of childhood, but still are weak as regards perfection'	'He is their food'	'Let him that is weak eat herbs' (Rom.14:2)	Sixty
Virgin	'As ever a man begins to walk in the perfect way'	'The Word [is his] bread,' 'flesh for food,' and 'strong meat'	'Strong meat is for those who are of full age' (Heb.5:14)	Hundred

# The Diverse Community: Athanasius' *Festal Letter* 10

- Celibate Singleness Reflects the Dawning of the New Creation
  - Jewish precursors
    - Jephthah's daughter dedicated to temple service (Judg.11:29 – 40)
    - A particular form of the Nazirite vow (Num.6)
    - God told the prophets Jeremiah and Ezekiel not to marry
  - Jesus
    - The “eunuch for the kingdom” in Jesus' teaching (Mt.19:12; cf. 1 Cor.7)
    - Marries his bride, the Church (Rev.19:7 – 16; Eph.5:21 – 33; Jn.2:1 – 12; etc.)
    - No human, male-female marriage in the resurrection (Mt.22:23 – 33)

# The Diverse Community: Athanasius' *Festal Letter* 10

- Celibate Singleness Reflects the Dawning of the New Creation
  - “The Monk” and “The Virgin”: Why the distinction?
    - Probably partial vs. lifetime commitment (like an early Order)
    - Probably not sexual history per se
      - “Morally, virginity signifies the reverence for bodily integrity which is suggested by a virtuous motive. Thus understood, it is common to both sexes, and may exist in a women even after bodily violation committed upon her against her will.” (New Advent Catholic Encyclopedia; <https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/15458a.htm>)
  - “Virgin” as vocation, not sexual history
    - Reclaiming biblical language for people
    - Like “new creation/humanity”
    - An attempt to connect with “Virgin Mary” and “virgin” categories in Scripture
    - But later use is problematic



# The Diverse Community: Athanasius' *Festal Letter* 10

- Celibate Singleness Reflects the Dawning of the New Creation
  - “The Monk” and “The Virgin”
    - Celibate singleness, as with Jesus himself, is a “sign” of the resurrected new creation
      - Holy Spirit inhabits the human body; new creation inhabits the old; resurrection inhabits the mortal
      - Transfiguration is purification
    - Intensification of community and service
    - Intensification of union with Jesus:
      - Struggle within one body, not the two-in-one of marriage: “For there are two ways in life, as touching these matters. The one the more moderate and ordinary, I mean marriage; the other angelic and unsurpassed, namely virginity. Now if a man choose the way of the world, namely marriage, he is not indeed to blame; yet he will not receive such great gifts as the other. For he will receive, since he too brings forth fruit, namely thirtyfold. But if a man embrace the holy and unearthly way, **even though, as compared with the former, it be rugged and hard to accomplish, yet it has the more wonderful gifts: for it grows the perfect fruit, namely an hundredfold.**”  
(Athanasius, *Letter* 48, to Amun)

# The Diverse Community: Athanasius' *Festal Letter* 10

- A Side Note: Practicalities of Christian Singleness
  - More flexibility in ministry: Paul in 1 Corinthians 6 – 7
  - Travel and itinerant ministry
  - Schools of teachers
  - “Parabolani” entering plague-stricken cities
  - Care for travelers, poor, and traumatized at the edge of cities “the soul readers” (Anthony of Egypt)
  - Copying and translation of biblical manuscripts
  - Urban monastics staffed the Basileiad and other hospitals
  - Restoration of ex-prostitutes
- Legacy of Christian Singleness: Vocation in Community
  - Vocation more important than family duty, especially for women
  - Monasteries
  - Roman Catholic Orders, guilds, unions
  - Corporations
  - Protestant parachurches and benevolent societies

# The Diverse Community: Athanasius' *Festal Letter* 10

- Marital Faithfulness Reflects the Restoration of the Original Creation
  - Jesus: Matthew 19:3 – 12; Mark 10:1 – 12
  - Athanasius, *Against the Heathen*
    - Theme: “the Cross has been not a disaster, but a **healing of Creation**” (*Against the Heathen* 1.4)
    - God’s witness in creation includes the male-female life-bearing union (*Against the Heathen* 35 – 37) and other opposites which produce life in union
  - Athanasius, *On the Incarnation*
    - Theme: “It is, then, proper for us to begin... by speaking of the creation of the universe, and of God... so it may be duly perceived that **the renewal of Creation** has been the work of the self-same Word that made it at the beginning” (*On the Incarnation* 1.4)
    - “For whereas the Lord says to the Jews: ‘Have you not read that **from the beginning** He who **created** them ‘made them male and female,’ and said, ‘For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh?’ and then, referring to the **Creator**, says, ‘What, therefore, God has joined together let not man put asunder’: how come these men to assert that the **creation** is independent of the Father?” (*On the Incarnation* 1.2; Mt.19:3 – 8; Gen.1:27; 2:24 – 25)

# The Diverse Community: Athanasius' *Festal Letter* 10

- Marital Faithfulness Reflects the Restoration of the Original Creation
- The Structure of Christian Ethics: Creation and New Creation
  - *Slavery (Session 1)*: shared dominion of earth (Gen.1); Jesus' lordship over the body, in the body (1 Cor.6 – 7)
  - *Women (Session 2)*: mutual authority (Gen.1 – 2; Prov.1); speaking authority and prophecy (Gen.2; Joel 2; Acts 2; 1 Cor.11); eldership and prophetic office (Judg.4 – 5; 2 Ki.24; Prov.31)
  - *God's Goodness and the Healing of Creation (Session 3)*: humanity corrupted and exiled (Gen.1 – 4); human nature of Israel and Gentiles; Jesus as healing human nature
  - *Hell as the Love of God (Session 4)*: human being – human becoming (Gen.1 – 4; etc.); God's purifying love ("fiery sword" of Gen.3; etc.)

# The Diverse Community: Athanasius' *Festal Letter* 10

- Marital Faithfulness Reflects the Restoration of the Original Creation
- The Structure of Christian Ethics: Creation and New Creation
  - *Scripture's Authority (Session 5)*: happy ending story; creation – new creation in Four Gospels vs. Gospels of Thomas, Judas
  - *Scripture and Violence (Session 6)*: Israel was partial restoration of Adam and Eve in a garden land (Gen.1 – 2); Israel was unique precursor to Jesus' restored humanity among the Gentiles; Israel's broad literacy and conviction as creational and anti-empire (Gen.1 – 4)
  - *Politics and Restorative Justice (Session 7)*: restoration of creational vision (human freedom of religious conscience; broad human development in health and education; universal human dependence on land and economic justice is creational; restorative criminal justice) hangs on Jesus' restoration of human nature and divine justice being restorative
  - *Sexual Ethics and the New Creation (Session 8)*: creation, new creation

# The Diverse Community: Athanasius' *Festal Letter* 10

- Marriage and Singleness in Athanasius: Paradigms of Varied Growth
  - “The dwelling-place is various in proportion to the advance in moral attainment” (Athanasius, *Festal Letter* 10.4)
  - Jewish precursor:
    - Wisdom “fashions the friends of God and the prophets” (Wisdom 7:27)
  - Soil, Fruit (Mt.13:1 – 23; Mk.4; Lk.8:1 – 21)
  - Talents/Minas (Mt.25:14 – 30; Lk.19:11 – 27)
  - Diet and Maturity

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- Open Q&A

# Discussion

1. Some Christians have taught or suggested that if you can “stay a virgin for now,” then you will have “unlimited sex within marriage later” as a “reward.” There are multiple male-biases to that: name them.
2. Does your church assume that people (especially from youth to young adults) will get married? Why or why not? What effects does that have on the community?



# Outline

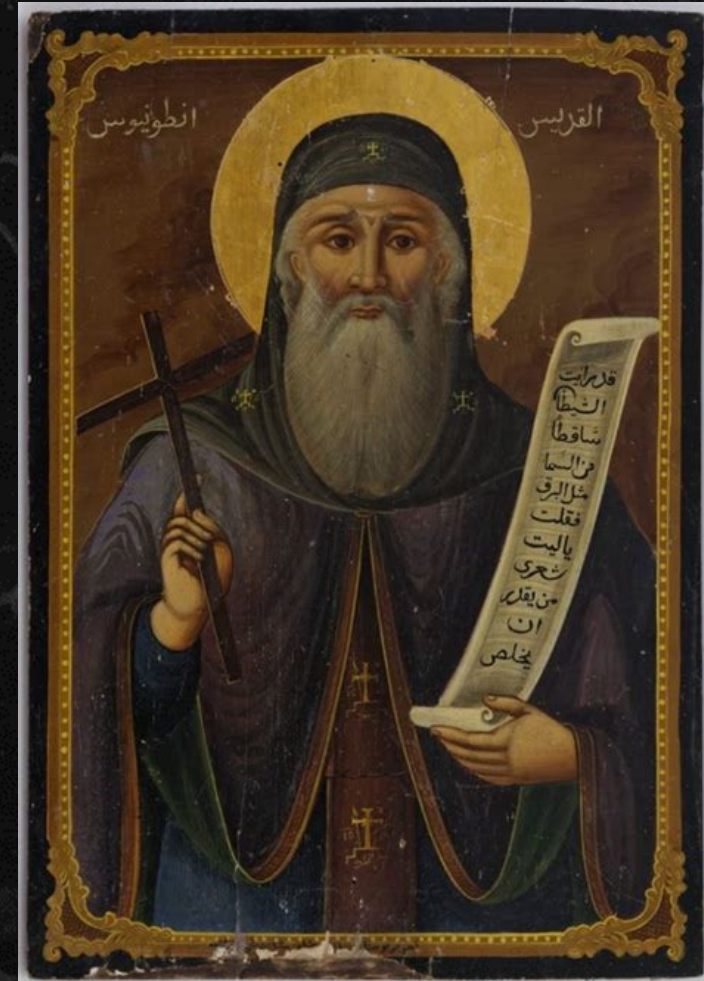
- Introduction: The Collision of Worlds (25 min)
- Discussion (5 min)
- The Diverse Community: Athanasius' *Letter 48* to Amun and *Festal Letter 10* (25 min)
- Discussion (10 min)
- **The Value of Struggle: Athanasius' *Life of Anthony* (20 min)**
- Open Q&A

# Marriage and Celibacy: Athanasius' *Life of Anthony*

- Why engage with the presentation of sexual ethics in *Life of Anthony*?
  - Response to Epicurean hedonism
    - Not Stoicism or Platonism alone
  - Descriptions of sexual temptation
    - Heterosexual temptation
    - Homoerotic pedophilia temptation
  - Christian monastic struggle and practices
    - Anti-body?
    - As response to trauma (e.g. of Greco-Roman sexual violence? modern violence?)
    - Purity culture or wisdom culture?
  - What benefits?
    - Fruits of virtue
    - Possibilities for experiencing Jesus

# Marriage and Celibacy: Athanasius' *Life of Anthony*

- “One of the five most influential books in the world”
  - Dr. Gary VanderPol
  - cf. Peter Brown, *The Body and Society: Men, Women, and Sexual Renunciation in Early Christianity* (1988)



# Marriage and Celibacy: Athanasius' *Life of Anthony*

- Egyptian Christian Monasticism: A Broad Movement
  - Early communities? Solitaries Paul of Egypt, Anthony of Egypt (c.251 – 356)
  - Mary of Egypt, Moses the Black, Evagrius of Pontus
- Athanasius wrote *Life of Anthony* for all Christians (356 – 362)
  - Other sayings of Anthony
    - Circulate in Coptic, Syriac, Georgian, Latin, Arabic, and Greek; collected in *Philokalia*
  - Jerome the Translator
    - Wrote *Life of Paul* as a complement (374 – 375)
    - Knew of *Life of Anthony* in both Greek and Latin (376)
  - Gregory of Nazianzus
    - *In Praise of Athanasius*, celebrated Athanasius for writing *Life of Anthony* (380)
  - Augustine of Hippo, *Confessions* 8, discusses *Life of Anthony* (400)
    - Ponticianus and friend read *Life of Anthony*; inspired, they commit to Christ
    - Augustine hears *Life of Anthony*, reads *Romans*, commits to Christ

# Marriage and Celibacy: Athanasius' *Life of Anthony*

- Literary Structure of *Life of Anthony*: Anthony and Jesus
  - Anthony's Five Speeches: each ending with a phrase that begins with the Greek word *tauta* ('however')
    - The Long Speech (16 – 43)
    - The Usual Exhortation (55)
    - The Speech to the Greeks (74 – 80)
    - The Prophecy (82)
    - The Farewell (91)
  - Literary Parallels
    - Pentateuch (Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy)
    - Psalms (Psalms 1 – 41; 42 – 72; 73 – 89; 90 – 106; 107 – 150)
    - Megillot (Ruth, Song of Songs, Ecclesiastes, Lamentations, Esther)
    - Gospel of Matthew (five blocks of Jesus' teaching)
      - When Jesus had finished these words (Mt.7:28)
      - When Jesus had finished giving instructions (Mt.11:1)
      - When Jesus had finished these parables (Mt.13:53)
      - When Jesus had finished these words (Mt.19:1)
      - When Jesus had finished all these words (Mt.26:1)

# Marriage and Celibacy: Athanasius' *Life of Anthony*

- Literary Structure of *Life of Anthony*: Anthony and Jesus

Chapter(s)	Topic
1 – 2	Anthony's upbringing; he responds to Jesus' teachings
3 – 4	Anthony moves outside the village; he observes other Christian ascetics and their disciplines
5 – 7	Anthony struggles successfully against the devil's temptations
8 – 10	Anthony moves to the tombs; he struggles successfully against the demons
11 – 15	Anthony moves to the desert; he is filled with the Holy Spirit; others imitate him
16 – 43	<i>Speech 1: The Long Speech</i>
44 – 47	Anthony's impact, his practices ordering soul over body; his longing to be a martyr
48 – 54	Anthony moves to 'the inner mountain' like Eden
55	<i>Speech 2: The Usual Exhortation</i>
56 – 73	Anthony ministers at the mountain, refuses schismatic Melitians and heretical Arians
74 – 80	<i>Speech 3: The Speech to the Greeks</i>
81	Anthony sought after by Emperor Constantine by letter
82	<i>Speech 4: The Prophecy – the Arians Despoil the Church</i>
83 – 90	Anthony sought after by many
91	<i>Speech 5: The Farewell</i>
92 – 94	Anthony dies with joy, strong of body; the work of God

# Marriage and Celibacy: Athanasius' *Life of Anthony*

- Parallels Between Anthony and Jesus: Childhood (1)
  - Like Jesus' boyhood (1)

Life of Antony 1	Gospel of Luke 2:41 - 52
With his parents he used to attend the Lord's house.	Now his parents went to Jerusalem every year at the Feast of the Passover.
was obedient to his father and mother	and he continued in subjection to them
and attentive to what was read, keeping in his heart what was profitable in what he heard.	and his mother treasured all these things in her heart

# Marriage and Celibacy: Athanasius' *Life of Anthony*

- Parallels Between Anthony and Jesus: Early Adulthood (2 – 4)
  - Challenge of family and wealth (2)
    - Scriptures: Matthew 4:20; Acts 4:35; Matthew 19:21
  - Faithful responses concerning sister and wealth (3 – 4)
    - Scripture: Matthew 6:34
  - Goes to live on the outskirts of town, learns spiritual practices and rhythms from other Christian ascetics (3 – 4)
    - Christian women already had convents
    - A few monasteries
    - “practiced the discipline in solitude near their own village”
  - Memorizes: “For he had given such heed to what was read that none of the things that were written fell from him to the ground, but he remembered all, and afterwards his memory served him for books” (3)
    - Like Jesus’ own devotion to Scripture (e.g. Lk:4:14 – 30; Isa.61:1 – 2)
  - Others “call him God-beloved” (4)
    - Like God the Father calling Jesus “beloved” at baptism



# Marriage and Celibacy: Athanasius' *Life of Anthony*

- Parallels Between Anthony and Jesus: Temptation and Virtue (5)
  - The devil tempts him
    - Memories of comfort: “whispering to him the remembrance of his wealth”
    - Ordinary responsibilities: “care for his sister, claims of kindred”
    - Egotistical motivations: “love of money, love of glory, the various pleasures of the table and the other relaxations of life”
    - Despair: “the infirmity of the body and the length of the time”
    - **Sexual Temptation: “took the shape of a woman and imitated all her acts simply to beguile Antony”**
  - The devil was thwarted
    - “conquered by the other’s [Anthony’s] firmness, overthrown by his great faith and falling through his constant prayers...”
    - “For he [the devil], deeming himself like God, was now mocked by a young man; and he who boasted himself against flesh and blood was being put to flight by a man in the flesh”

# Marriage and Celibacy: Athanasius' *Life of Anthony*

- Parallels Between Anthony and Jesus: Temptation and Virtue (6)
  - The devil tempts him
    - Sexual Temptation: the devil appeared “to Antony like a black boy, taking a visible shape in accordance with the colour of his mind”
      - Exoticism: Black skin of Nubia (conquered Egypt in 745 BC) or Aksum (conquered Nubia 350)
      - Pedophilia: The Greek pagan gods (etc.) promoted “adultery and the seduction of boys” (74)
  - Jesus and Anthony together:
    - Anthony uses irony: “you are black-hearted and weak as a child”
    - Deploys Ps.118:7, “The Lord is my helper, and I shall look down on mine enemies”
    - The devil shudders and flees, “dreading... to come near the man”
    - “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.**’ [Rom.8:3 – 4] (7)

# Marriage and Celibacy: Athanasius' *Life of Anthony*

- Temptation: Sexual and Otherwise
  - Candor about sexual temptation in various forms
  - Purity culture or wisdom culture?
    - Does “virgin” mean “having no past sexual experience”?
    - A second-generation Christian challenge?
    - “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.” (7)
- Anthony and Jesus
  - The pastoral significance of Jesus
    - “Tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin” (Hebrews 4:14 – 15)
  - Anthony and Jesus linked via Romans 8:3 – 4
    - Jesus accomplished a Medical Substitutionary Atonement (Romans 8:3 – 4)
    - Participation in a victory within a victory
  - From within: Fallen human nature, yet faithful
  - From without: Temptation on a high tower: King David vs. Jesus

# Marriage and Celibacy: Athanasius' *Life of Anthony*

- Anthony Sees Jesus (10)
  - “Nor was the Lord then forgetful of Antony’s wrestling, but was at hand to help him. So looking up he saw the roof as it were opened, and a ray of light descending to him. The demons suddenly vanished, the pain of his body straightway ceased, and the building was again whole. But Antony feeling the help, and getting his breath again, and being freed from pain, besought the vision which had appeared to him, saying, ‘Where were thou? Why did you not appear at the beginning to make my pains to cease?’ And a voice came to him, ‘Antony, I was here, but I waited to see your fight; wherefore since you have endured, and hast not been worsted, I will ever be a succour to you, and will make your name known everywhere.’ Having heard this, Antony arose and prayed, and received such strength that he perceived that he had more power in his body than formerly. And he was then about thirty-five years old.”
- Parallels to Jesus’ Baptism (Mt.3:13 – 17; Lk.3:21 – 22)
  - Opened: roof vs. heavens
  - Descended: ray of light vs. Holy Spirit
  - Voice: Jesus vs. God the Father
  - Age: about 35 vs. about 30
  - Effect: power in his body vs. anointing for service
  - Mission: desert (11 – 15) then mountain (48ff.) vs. desert then ultimately Mt. Zion

# Marriage and Celibacy: Athanasius' *Life of Anthony*

- Anthony's Partnership with Jesus (14 – 15)
  - Emotional stability: soul was “free from blemish” and steady, “neither contracted as if by grief, nor relaxed by pleasure, nor possessed by laughter or dejection, for he was not troubled when he beheld the crowd, nor overjoyed at being saluted by so many”
  - “Filled with the Holy Spirit” and did healings and miracles
  - “He gave grace to Antony in speaking, so that he consoled many that were sorrowful, and set those at variance at one, exhorting all to prefer the love of Christ before all that is in the world. And while he exhorted and advised them to remember the good things to come, and the loving-kindness of God towards us, ‘Who spared not His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all [Romans 8:32],’ he persuaded many to embrace the solitary life. And thus it happened in the end that cells arose even in the mountains, and the desert was colonised by monks, who came forth from their own people, and enrolled themselves for the citizenship in the heavens.”
    - Compare to Jesus, especially Isaiah 50:4

# Marriage and Celibacy: Athanasius' *Life of Anthony*

- Anthony's Long Speech on Virtue (16 – 43)
  - “...as though making a beginning daily let us increase our earnestness. For the whole life of man is very short, measured by the ages to come, wherefore all our time is nothing compared with eternal life.” (16)
  - “For our life is naturally uncertain, and Providence allots it to us daily. But thus ordering our daily life, we shall neither fall into sin, nor have a lust for anything, nor cherish wrath against any, nor shall we heap up treasure upon earth. But, as though under the daily expectation of death, we shall be without wealth, and shall forgive all things to all men, nor shall we retain at all the desire of women or of any other foul pleasure. But we shall turn from it as past and gone, ever striving and looking forward to the day of Judgment. For the greater dread and danger of torment ever destroys the ease of pleasure, and sets up the soul if it is like to fall... And as we have received the soul as a deposit, let us preserve it for the Lord, that He may recognise His work as being the same as He made it.” (19 – 20)

# Marriage and Celibacy: Athanasius' *Life of Anthony*

- Anthony's Spiritual Growth, Continued
  - Finds deeper friendship and community
    - "While Antony was thus speaking all rejoiced; in some the love of virtue increased, in others carelessness was thrown aside, the self-conceit of others was stopped; and all were persuaded to despise the assaults of the Evil One, and marveled at the grace given to Antony from the Lord for the discerning of spirits. So their cells were in the mountains, like filled with holy bands of men who sang psalms, loved reading, fasted, prayed, rejoiced in the hope of things to come, labored in almsgiving, and preserved love and harmony one with another." (44)
  - Acquires spiritual gifts like prophetic sight in 59 – 60
  - Increases his evangelistic wit and strategy in 73 – 80
  - Calls the emperor and judges to do justice in 81, 84

# Marriage and Celibacy: Athanasius' *Life of Anthony*

- Are Anthony, Athanasius “Anti-Body”?
  - Anthony's treatment of his body
    - Deprivation?
    - Development
  - The body and the body: community to solitude to community again
  - The body, self-knowledge, and other-knowledge
  - Bodily rhythms, bodily locations
    - Three vocations: married; monk/nun; virgin
    - Three locations: village; outskirts; wilderness
    - Anthony and Athanasius' pastoral vision for dynamic community
    - Testing as a biblical pattern, in the hero's journey
    - Cathedral and monastery; the parish and the order
  - A healthy body: Anthony in death
  - Physical beauty and moral beauty



# Marriage and Celibacy: Athanasius' *Life of Anthony*

- Jesus' Resurrection Body, the Body of Christ, Our Bodies
  - The earthly body : the resurrected body :: seed : plant
    - Paul, 1 Corinthians 15:35 - 48
  - "The diversity of good and the sameness of evil"
    - Brian Rosebury, *Tolkien: A Cultural Phenomenon* (2003), p.42
  - "We are not living in a world where all roads are radii of a circle and where all, if followed long enough, will therefore draw gradually nearer and finally meet at the centre: rather in a world where every road, after a few miles, forks into two, and each of those into two again, and at each fork you must make a decision. Even on the biological level life is not like a river but like a tree. It does not move towards unity but away from it and the creatures grow further apart as they increase in perfection. Good, as it ripens, becomes continually more different not only from evil but from other good."
    - C.S. Lewis, *The Great Divorce*, preface

# Marriage and Celibacy: Athanasius' *Life of Anthony*

- Motivations of Hope and Desire: Anthony and Jesus
  - “Stretching forward”
    - “Forgetting the things which are behind and stretching forward to the things which are before” (Philippians 3:13; *Life of Anthony* 7)
    - Epektasis; ekstasis → ecstasy, coming out of one's self
  - “I have lusted to eat this Passover with you” (Lk.22:14)
  - “For the joy set before him” (Heb.12:1 – 2)
  - Resurrection: The goal of human being and human becoming
- Next Question: How to Develop and Interpret Desires
  - For Jesus
  - Of Jesus
  - See: Reconstruction 2022 Session 9: The Person, the Face, and the Climb Up the Mountain: Gregory of Nyssa and the Shaping of Desire

# Reflection

1. Is having sex fundamental to being human?
2. Whose vision for human relationship should win? Why?
  - “Crossing paths with last night’s hookup in the server, I can see him looking at everything but my face. At the seasonal gourd display. At the breakfast pizza. Now, he doesn’t know my name. What’s up with that? [...] I’m not saying we have to be friends with everyone we sleep with. We don’t have to want to date them. We don’t even have to introduce them to our relatives at parties. (“Look, Grandma!”) We do, however, have to acknowledge that our sexual partners are individuals with subjectivities, and insecurities, and vulnerabilities, and feelings that need to be taken seriously.. Nobody is just a means to an orgasm.”
    - Reina Gattuso, “Suck: Towards a Better Politics of Nakedness,” *Harvard Crimson*, October 24, 2014
  - Recent movies exploring the intersection of casual sex, friendship, and community:
    - When Harry Met Sally (1989)
    - Pretty Woman (1990)
    - Chasing Amy (1997)
    - Soul Food (1997)
    - Hitch (2005)
    - Love and Basketball (2000)
    - 500 Days of Summer (2009)
    - No Strings Attached (2011)
    - Friends With Benefits (2011)

# Outline

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