Athanasius as Theologian of Sanctification
Life of Antony / Vita Antonii (c.362 AD)

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Introduction: Views on Sanctification

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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[1] Gerharde O. Forde, 'The Lutheran View' in Donald L. Alexander, *Christian Spirituality: Five Views of Sanctification* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1988), p.15
[2] Ibid p.17
[3] Sinclair B. Ferguson, 'The Reformed View' in Donald L. Alexander, *Christian Spirituality: Five Views of Sanctification* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1988), p.62 – 63

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

Torrance is concerned to relieve people from the burden of 'achieving' not only their salvation, but also their sanctification. Hence, he passionately cautions against any theological framework which ultimately 'throws people back on themselves'[4] – meaning their own energies and efforts. People should not feel the 'burden' of achieving something that Jesus already has achieved in our place and on our behalf. For Torrance, it is not up to human beings to bring about any outcome.

If I understand them correctly, Torrance and Barth are working out of the 'order of salvation' (*ordo salutis*), in which sanctification follows justification in a logical sequence. Torrance insists quite clearly, for instance, 'Justification by grace alone *remains the sole ground of the Christian life*.'[5] Torrance laments that the vicarious humanity of Christ gets lost because, in Protestant churches, justification is announced as conferred by Christ, but sanctification is often something that must be 'worked out for ourselves.'[6] It appears to me that a difference between the patristic theologians in comparison with Torrance is that the latter theologian believed that our participation in God begins (logically and pastorally, at least) with our justification in Christ. In this, he faithfully follows the Lutheran and Reformed traditions. Hence, Torrance is constantly concerned to speak of sanctification also not imposing a 'burden' on the believer.

However, speaking of sanctification as a 'burden' tends to assume that God's commandments are fundamentally *foreign* to human nature, and that human persons can be considered, in theological study, as being fundamentally *individualistic and atomistic* in relation to God and each other. There is no doubt that sanctification can be *challenging*. But the Lutheran and Reformed traditions seem to presume that what is *challenging* is necessarily *burdensome*. It is deeply *challenging* for an alcoholic parent to resist the pull of alcohol for the sake of his or her children, but is it a *burden* in the sense that Torrance speaks of it?[7] While it is not at all clear that the victory of Christ in winning sanctification for us makes participation in that reality effortless – since at times it is still absolutely grueling, akin to a crucifixion and self-denial (Mt.16:24 – 25), which means we must consider carefully Jesus' statement that his yoke is easy and his burden is light (Mt.11:28 – 30) – one wonders whether the pastoral predisposition to make sanctification assuredly not 'burdensome' is itself biblical.

I think at the heart of the matter is the question of whether the human will *is* actually thrown back on itself, ever, at any time. Or, is one's felt experience of that actually a problem of spiritual perception? Ultimately, we are faced with questions about God and creation, not simply justification. That is, we must examine the status of human nature, the human will, and human experience. Torrance was quite convinced that Western Christians must rejoin their Eastern brethren in holding to a relational, rather than individualistic and atomistic, view of human

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

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

[6] In response to this problem, Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics* IV/2, p.516 – 517 says: 'It has not always been taken with sufficient seriousness that He took our place and acted for us, not merely as the Son of God who established God's right and our own by allowing Himself, the Judge, to be judged for us, but also as the Son of Man who was sanctified, who sanctified Himself. Far too often the matter has been conceived and represented as though His humiliation to death for our justification by Him as our Representative were His own act, but our exaltation to fellowship with God as the corresponding counter-movement, and therefore our sanctification, were left to us, to be accomplished by us. "All this I did for thee; what wilt thou do for me?" The New Testament does not speak in this way.'

[7] By contrast, the Greek Byzantine theologian and monk Maximus the Confessor spoke of 'burdens' in a different way: 'There is nothing more burdensome and grievous then when conscience accuses us in anything, and there is nothing dearer than calmness and approval of the conscience.' For Maximus, whom I take as a representative of the patristic tradition on the subject, a burden occurs when one traverses a moral trajectory away from God, causing the conscience to protest because it is against one's true human nature. For Maximus, conscience speaks with the voice of God, and even as the voice of God in the human person. I suspect Torrance assumes the lived experience of sanctification is burdensome because of his tendency to read his doctrine of sanctification against the backdrop of his Reformed (shared with the Lutheran) doctrine of justification – that is, as if the Sinai covenant ('Law') was primarily a burden (a la Luther's exegesis of Galatians) and not a gift and a step in the liberation of human beings to become once again who God created us to be (as in Romans). They therefore seek to motivate human trust in Jesus' self-sanctification through gratitude for being freed from crushing obligations, which is the same transactional motivational structure the Reformed and Lutheran traditions deploy for their concept of justification. I am left to wonder if the biblical data can be considered in a more accurate way, and whether a greater and deeper range of human motivations can be evoked and cultivated, more like those to which Athanasius appeals in his earliest work, the two volume *Against the Heathen – On the Incarnation*. I also wonder whether Torrance was as free from the residue of penal substitutionary atonement as he wished to be.

personhood.[8] He coined the term 'onto-relational,' joining together the words 'ontological' and 'relational.' Yet, does Torrance's approach to sin presuppose a disjuncture introduced by the fall between God and humanity so total that no aspect of the human being desires God any longer? In other words, is it too 'Augustinian,'[9] at least as Luther and Calvin understood Augustine? Does it require us to believe that God's pursuit of the human being – who is supposedly so totally alienated from God – is found only in the circumstance of when that person hears about a 'transaction' of sorts between the Father and the Son, and understands that transaction, such that he or she understands what his or her 'justification' entails?

By comparison, does God pursue us and exert a 'pull' on us constantly, by virtue of His loving creation of every human being universally in His image? Can God's pull be experienced even in a pre-rational or non-cognitive mode? That is, can we find God's pursuit of us, and leading of us, among our emotions and desires? I use the word 'among' with great intentionality here. I am not suggesting that God is to be *identified* with our wants, or that God can be interpreted as the *sum total* of our wants as we feel them. But is He *refracted and dimly perceptible* through the human desires for love, goodness, justice, beauty, meaning, and so forth, in such a way that we are in fact *always* experiencing Him and His loving pursuit of us?

Athanasius' View of Christian Growth in *Life of Antony* (356 – 362 AD)

Can Athanasius help us here? Athanasius, bishop of Alexandria, is known as the courageous theologian who went 'against the world' (*contra mundum*) to defend the deity of Christ and contribute to the defense of the Nicene Creed. Moreover, Athanasius named the twenty-seven books of the New Testament, and gathered support for Christian orthodoxy while being exiled five times from his native city by hostile Roman Emperors. But Athanasius also ought to be known for his dogmatic writings on the Holy Spirit and his pastoral ministry. We have a wealth of information about Athanasius as a pastoral bishop in his *Festal Letters* and especially his *Life of Antony*.

T.F. Torrance did not like Christian monasticism.[10] James B. Ernest reminds us that Torrance does not comment on the *Life of Antony* except for one reference found at the end of a footnote. This is a serious oversight because Athanasius himself seems to have regarded the work as his mature attempt at promoting monastic sanctification and growth in the Holy Spirit. Considering its very positive reception by the wider church – Gregory of Nazianzus praised it as 'a rule for monastic life in the form of a narrative'[11] – as it had an impressive role in spurring on more Christian monasticism, Torrance's neglect of this work is quite unfortunate. Also significant is Torrance's lack of engagement with Athanasius' many *Festal Letters*, where we find Athanasius as bishop in his most pastoral moments. Where else would we develop a better idea for Athanasius' views on sanctification? Positively, Ernest recognizes that Torrance saw the underlying coherence in Athanasius' thought, but at the expense of some of the development of his thinking, and at the expense of appreciating some stylistic variation within Athanasius' different rhetorical purposes. In the end, Ernest strongly commends Torrance for seeing the overall forest of Athanasius' theology and method. But Ernest himself remains uncertain whether Torrance understood all the trees. In Ernest's judgment, 'For these and other reasons his articles are not a reliable guide to the details of Athanasius' biblical interpretation.'[12]

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[8] Greek Orthodox theologian and philosopher Christos Yannaras, *Person and Eros* (Brookline, MA: Holy Cross Orthodox Press, 2007), p.5 reminds us that the term for *person* is 'a referential reality. The referential character of the term is revealed fundamentally by its primitive use, that is, by its grammatical construction and etymology. The preposition *pros* ("towards") together with the noun *ops* (*opos* in the genitive), which means "eye," "face," "countenance," form the composite word *pros-opon*: I have my face turned towards someone or something; I am opposite someone or something. The word thus functioned initially as a term indicating an immediate reference, a relationship.' It is vital to recall that the Greek term for person (*prosopon*), as well as the Latin term (*persona*), were used in the Greek and Roman theater to indicate the 'masks' or 'faces' that the actors wore. When Christians brought this term into settled formal theological discourse by the time of Constantinople (381 AD), the divine 'persons' were understood to be intrinsically and eternally persons-in-relation, 'facing' one another as it were. And we as human persons are always persons-in-relation as well, although our orientation in relationship, and experience of our relationship with God, is shaped by our created human nature and determined by our choices. See also Metropolitan of Nafpaktos Hierotheos, *The Person in the Orthodox Tradition* (Levadia-Hellas, Greece: Birth of the Theotokos Monastery, 1998)

[9] Seraphim Rose, *The Place of Blessed Augustine in the Orthodox Church* (St. Herman of Alaska Brotherhood; Third Revised edition August 1, 2007) provides a very helpful and readable summary of the immediate reception of Augustine's doctrine of double predestination and differential grace

[10] Father George Dion. Dragas (who did graduate studies under T.F. Torrance in Scotland), conversation Fall 2017

[11] Gregory of Nazianzus, *In laudem Athanasii*, PG 35:1085 – 1088

[12] James D. Ernest, *The Bible in Athanasius of Alexandria* (Atlanta, Society of Biblical Literature, 2004), p.13 critiques Torrance's four part article from 1970 and 1971 on 'The Hermeneutics of St. Athanasius.' Ernest cautions that Torrance 'plucks texts from across the Athanasian corpus without distinguishing authentic, doubtful, and spurious works (fragments on Luke, the Psalms commentary, the *De incarnatione contra Apollinarium*).' Ernest points out that Torrance seldom engages other scholars on Athanasius.

By the time of his death, Antony, monk of the Egyptian desert, had already been a revered figure in Egypt, and probably beyond. Athanasius' *Life of Antony* became a much celebrated work within a few years of its composition. In 376 AD, just three years after Athanasius' death, and at most a decade and a half after the writing of *Life of Antony*, Jerome the famous Latin translator notes that he had seen the work in both Greek and Latin. If imitation is a form of admiration, then Jerome's literary biography from 374 or 375 called *Life of Paul* was Jerome's own attempt to encourage Christian monasticism and asceticism; it is a tribute of sorts to Athanasius' *Life of Antony*. Jerome's work is about the Egyptian solitary monk Paul (died circa 341 AD) who Antony reportedly met and called 'the first monk.' Gregory of Nazianzus, in 380 AD, praised Athanasius for putting a monastic rule into narrative form. At around that time, a certain Ponticianus read it and was deeply moved, and his testimony made a deep impression on Augustine, as Augustine records in his *Confessions*.[13]

At the same time, modern scholars have questioned Athanasius' motives and veracity in conveying the historical Antony. Interestingly, Antony's followers left behind a collection of letters, and those portray Antony as a fairly sophisticated intellectual, of an Origenist persuasion.[14] Samuel Rubenson gives a sense for the popularity of this literature as he assesses these letters in all their linguistic versions: Coptic, Syriac, Georgian, Latin, Arabic, and Greek! Yet Athanasius says that Antony refused to 'learn letters [*grammata*].'[15] Is Athanasius representing Antony as being more simple and humble than he really was? Is Athanasius smoothing over some theological differences he had with Antony and Origen to present a more generic or more orthodox version of Antony for the general Christian public? Was he portraying Antony as disinclined to follow the path of academic theology as did Origen?

At the same time, if Athanasius' account is to be at all believed, and Antony was already somewhat famous, Athanasius was risking something by making claims about someone so noteworthy. The Emperor Constantine, along with his sons, wrote to Antony, and received a delayed response from the Egyptian monk.[16] And at the end of his narrative, Athanasius declares that Antony's fame had already spread to 'Spain and Gaul, and in Rome and Africa'[17] prior to the *Life of Antony* being written. Given the widespread and celebrated interest in *Life of Antony*, this fame of Antony seems plausible. An already notable interest in Antony means, however, that if Athanasius was entirely misconstruing or falsifying information about the Egyptian monk, he was inviting a swift response. Was Athanasius using Antony as a convenient mouthpiece against the Meletians and Arians? Given the proximity in time and place shared by the author and his subject, Antony's support for Athanasius as a defender of orthodoxy against the Arian camp seems likely to have been historically true. It is even historically possible that Athanasius heard Antony's prophecy about the Arian camp troubling the church and from this, derived his own sense of personal mission against the Arian heresy/heresies.[18]

Significantly, the word *grammata* refers not to Antony's total illiteracy as some suppose, but his unwillingness to receive a secondary level education from a *grammatikos* which most upperclass Egyptian young men would undertake.[19] Furthermore, one can of course be quite an intellectual without being formally schooled, and one can even know Origen without even reading Origen per se. So there may not be as much of a difference between Athanasius' Antony and the historical Antony as some might suspect, although Athanasius can still be plausibly interpreted as excluding Origenist elements in Antony's theology. David Brakke argues that Athanasius was portraying Antony as deferential to the episcopate,[20] which reflects an important concern of the fourth century church in general: Should monasteries come under the authority of the local bishops? Perhaps so. Whatever the 'quest for the historical Antony' turns up, I will nevertheless treat *Life of Antony* as a literary creation in its own right. I am fully aware that we are looking at Athanasius' view of the ideal ascetic, and in some ways, the Alexandrian theologian's exemplar of Christian sanctification.

Here is an overview of the structure of *Life of Antony*, which I have modified from James B. Ernest.[21]

Chapter(s)	Topic

[13] Augustine of Hippo, *Confessions* VIII.15
[14] Samuel Rubenson, *The Letters of St. Antony: Monasticism and the Making of a Saint* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1990)
[15] Athanasius of Alexandria, *Life of Antony* 1
[16] Athanasius of Alexandria, *Life of Antony* 81
[17] Ibid 93
[18] My thanks to David Valentine, *Athanasius' Life of Antony* (publicly available paper) for this suggestion
[19] David Brakke, *Athanasius and Asceticism* retitled from *Athanasius and the Politics of Asceticism* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), p.255
[20] Ibid ch.3 – 4
[21] James D. Ernest, *The Bible in Athanasius of Alexandria* (Atlanta, Society of Biblical Literature, 2004), p.297

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

Antony's Spiritual Formation and Discipline: The Making of the Monk (1 – 7)
In 1 – 2, Athanasius introduces us to Antony in creational and Christocentric frameworks. Whatever the 'bare historical facts' lying behind Antony's upbringing, Athanasius portrays Antony as an eager recipient of the Christian teaching provided specifically by his parents, already disposed as a child to stay at home and be a contemplative. Antony was raised from 'infancy' by his Egyptian Christian parents, 'knowing nought else but them and his home.'[22] Athanasius moves quickly to 'boyhood,' where the young Antony refuses outside schooling ('to learn letters'), declines associating 'with other boys' and only desires 'to live [as] a plain man at home,' which makes him like the biblical Jacob, adds Athanasius as a comparison (1).

When Antony does venture outdoors, he only goes with his parents to 'the Lord's house,' and regularly so (1). Curiously, Athanasius focuses not on Antony's experience of the relational context of this local Christian community, with other families and young people, but solely on Antony's interaction with the teaching that he heard in the church context. This sets Athanasius up to describe in biographical form his own idealized interaction with the word of the Lord.

Athanasius' uses of Scripture are both subtle and pointed. On the subtle side, he invokes a biblical character to portray Antony as shielding himself as a boy from any other influences. The reference to Jacob is no coincidence: It serves to contrast Antony with Jacob's brother Esau, who loved hunting and the outdoors. Also, Athanasius is subtly painting Antony in the garb of the wise son of Proverbs, who listens to the teaching of his father and mother (Pr.1:8). This deployment of Jewish wisdom motifs in the case of Antony reflects a biblical creation theology. God's wisdom unites God's commandments and God's creation, where God's commandments provide a framework for growth for God's human creations (Pr.8:22 - 36). Following God's commandments is for our good, and for our development. The fall does not obstruct that basic fact. Antony's context for learning God's commandments aligns with the view of Jewish wisdom theology, wherein children learn God's truth and ordinances from their godly parents, which is what the children of Adam and Eve would and should have experienced, from creation. This creation theology, which operates independently of a doctrine of justification in the Protestant sense, and certainly without any sense of an *ordo salutis*, is evident in Athanasius' earlier writings. Following Scripture, Athanasius stresses a basic agreement and alignment between creation and sanctification that continues uninterrupted despite the contingencies of the fall and sin. This relationship between creation and sanctification, or growth, is possible because of the ongoing activity of the Word and the Spirit in creation in an ongoing, providential sense. I will comment further on that below.

Moreover, Athanasius subtly clothes the young Antony in the garment of the young Jesus. Antony's relationship to his parents and his visitation of 'the Lord's house' reminds us of Jesus' visit with his own parents to the Jerusalem Temple when he was twelve:

[22] Athanasius of Alexandria, *Life of Antony* 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

Although Luke referred to Mary as the one who 'treasured all these things in her heart,' Athanasius shifts that internal decision to Antony. These were Antony's practices as a boy. This early invocation will serve Athanasius when he parallels the adult lives of Antony and Christ in various ways later.

On the pointed side of his explicit invocation of Scripture, Athanasius cites Matthew 4:20, Acts 4:35, Matthew 19:21 (2), and Matthew 6:34 (3). All these passages have to do with following Jesus in the leaving behind of one's wealth. Antony begins to seriously meditate on these passages when he was 'about eighteen or twenty,' and, due to the death of his parents, 'on him the care both of home and sister rested' (2). He happened to be pondering how the apostles left all to follow Jesus in Matthew 4:20 and how the disciples sold their possessions to care for the needy in Acts 4:35, when he entered the church and heard yet another passage related to following Jesus in the giving up of wealth for the poor, from Matthew 19:21. Athanasius' suggestion is that God was operating in his providence to speak to Antony. Antony, like a biblical character, 'went out immediately... and gave the possessions of his forefathers to the villagers - they were three hundred acres, productive and very fair' (2). Athanasius is sure to point out that Antony made provisions for his younger sister (2 – 3), apparently with her blessing, but definitely for her spiritual good. In this way, Antony's sale was the removal of 'a clog upon himself and his sister' (2).

In 3 – 4, another visit to the church resulted in Antony hearing yet another passage related to wealth, Matthew 6:34 (3). He committed his sister to a convent of Christian virgin women (3). Antony then left to study the ascetic practices of godly men living on the outskirts of the villages, imitating all of their best practices (3 – 4). He observed the principle of the apostle Paul in 2 Thessalonians 3:10 to not be a burden on anyone financially. Like Paul instructed, Antony prayed constantly and in secret unceasingly (3). Antony's memory was prodigious: '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). This characterization supports Athanasius' later narration of Antony being very intellectually engaged with Scripture and the ascetic practices he observed. As Antony strives to imitate all the spiritual practices he observed in others, and integrate and unite them, he grows in the esteem of all. As the young Jesus 'increased in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and with men' (Lk.2:52), so does Antony. In fact, others 'call him God-beloved' (4), which is striking because 'beloved' is the term the Father called the Son at the Jordan River baptism (Lk.3:21 – 22).

In 5 – 7, Athanasius continues the Christological parallel. After baptismal blessing comes the devil's temptation, as with Jesus (Lk.4:1 – 13), so now with Antony (5). The devil 'tried to lead him away from the discipline' by 'whispering to him the remembrance of his wealth' and ordinary responsibilities like 'care for his sister, claims of kindred' (5). When these did not succeed with Antony, the devil brought to mind more base, egotistical motivations, like 'love of money, love of glory, the various pleasures of the table and the other relaxations of life' (5). 'He suggested also the infirmity of the body and the length of the time' (5). But Antony was strong against the devil. The devil was 'conquered by the other's firmness, overthrown by his great faith and falling through his constant prayers' (5). The devil then 'took the shape of a woman and imitated all her acts simply to beguile Antony' (5). These defeats shamed the devil. 'For he, 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.'

Athanasius then makes a critical comment: 'For the Lord was working with Antony— the Lord who for our sake took flesh and gave the body victory over the devil, so that all who truly fight can say, 'not I but the grace of God which was with me'' [1 Cor.15:10] (5). Athanasius will give further insights about how the Lord Jesus was working with Antony after narrating another unusual temptation. The devil, who is identified by Athanasius as 'the dragon' [of Rev.12?], 'saw himself thrust out of his heart.' This is a decisive victory for Antony.

The devil then appears 'to Antony like a black boy, taking a visible shape in accordance with the colour of his mind' (6). This appearance as the 'black boy' has two possible explanations. One is that the image corresponds with a

homoerotic pedophilia[23] of exotic variety, since black skin was considered Ethiopian or Nubian, and therefore exotic from the likely olive-skinned or brown-skinned Egyptians who lived closer to the Mediterranean. Although many modern Western readers would raise their eyebrows upon the use of black skin and the suggestion of pedophilia as idiomatic expressions of exoticism, Athanasius shows that spiritual experiences and visions are also culturally embedded, and inevitably so. This explanation is supported by the fact that the devil then says, 'I am the friend of whoredom… I am called the spirit of lust' (6). Later, Antony debates certain 'men who were deemed wise among the Greeks' (74), and Antony criticizes Greek pagan gods for supporting 'adultery and the seduction of boys' (74). Likely, the devil's appearance as a boy has to do strategically with Antony's and Athanasius' cultural milieu. The basic meaning of this appearance is clear: The devil comes to make one last petition to Antony. He verbally admits defeat, but does not flee until Antony gives thanks to the Lord, and 'with good courage said to him' that he is 'black-hearted and weak as a child.' In other words, Antony turns the devil's appearance against him, and with irony. 'Henceforth,' Antony says, 'I shall have no trouble from you, for the Lord is my helper, and I shall look down on mine enemies [Psalm 118:7]' (6). The devil then shudders at Antony's words and flees, 'dreading any longer even to come near the man' (6).

Athanasius then interprets Antony's victory and further monastic discipline with a very important biblical passage: Romans 8:3 – 4.

> '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.'[24]

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.'[25]

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 3:13 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*.

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[23] Basil of Caesarea, *Renunt*.6 and *Sermo Asceticus* 323 are also written to monks struggling against desires of homoerotic pedophilia
[24] Athanasius of Alexandria, *Life of Antony* 7
[25] Ibid 7

Excursus: Athanasius' Pastoral Framework of the Word as Creator and Redeemer

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 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].'[26]

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.'[27] 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.'[28]

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[26] Athanasius of Alexandria, *Contra Arianos* 1.51
[27] Ibid 1.52
[28] Ibid 2.55 – 56

Athanasius maintains in his *Letters to Serapion on the Holy Spirit* that 'the Spirit is the *energeia* of the Son,'[29] and is 'in the Word,'[30] while simultaneously, 'the Son is in the Spirit.'[31] 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].'[32]

> '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].'[33]

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.'[34]

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

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[29] Athanasius of Alexandria, *Letters to Serapion on the Holy Spirit* 1.20, 30
[30] Ibid 3.5
[31] 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
[32] Athanasius of Alexandria, *Contra Arianos* 1.60
[33] Ibid 2.56
[34] 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 Autolycus* 25 with being the first to write that Adam had been *nepios*, 'a child,' and needing to properly mature. Irenaeus repeats that in *Demonstration of the Apostolic Preaching* 11, 14. I suspect that Theophilus and Irenaeus meant that Adam and Eve were mentally, not biologically, children. 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.

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 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.'[35]
>
> '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.'[36]

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.),

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[35] Athanasius of Alexandria, *First Letter to Virgins* 20, 23 (see Brakke, p.48ff., 280ff.)
[36] Athanasius of Alexandria, *Tenth Festal Letter* 4

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,'[37] 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, 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.

The Development of Synergia: Christ Confirms His Work in Antony (8 – 15)

In 8 – 10, Athanasius makes a deeper parallel between Antony and Christ. Antony moved to the tombs. He brought an acquaintance with him to shut the door and 'bring him bread at intervals of many days' (8). Now 'at a distance from the village,' Antony was alone within the tomb. The enemy came 'one night with a multitude of demons' and 'cut him with stripes.' This left Antony 'on the ground speechless from the excessive pain.' Athanasius quickly inserts an editorial comment for theological interpretation: 'But by the Providence of God – for the Lord never overlooks them that hope in Him – the next day his acquaintance came bringing him the loaves' (8). This friend lifted Antony up and 'carried him to the church in the village, and laid him upon the ground.' Antony laid there as if dead while his friends and family sat around him. During the night, when he woke, he motioned for his friend to 'carry him again to the tombs without waking anybody' (8).

Whereupon Antony prayed, and shouted to the devil a challenge: 'Here am I, Antony; I flee not from your stripes, for even if you inflict more nothing shall separate me from the love of Christ [Romans 8:35]' (9). Then he sang Psalm 27:3, 'though a camp be set against me, my heart shall not be afraid.' The enemy and his demons take the form of animals, complete with the sounds of 'angry ragings,' which 'were dreadful' (9). Meanwhile, Antony 'felt bodily pains severer still.' But his soul was 'unshaken' and 'his mind was clear, and as in mockery,' he challenged them to actually harm him. As with the incident where the enemy took the form of a black boy, Antony turns their physical appearance against them, by twisting it around ironically. He says, 'If there had been any power in you, it

[37] Athanasius of Alexandria, *Letter #48 to Amun*

would have sufficed had one of you come, but since the Lord has made you weak, you attempt to terrify me by numbers: and a proof of your weakness is that you take the shapes of brute beasts… If you are able, and have received power against me, delay not to attack; but if you are unable, why trouble me in vain? For faith in our Lord is a seal and a wall of safety to us.' Antony forced the demons to confront the fact that their own appearance was demeaning to them; 'they were mocking themselves rather than him' (9). I suspect Athanasius had this biblical allusion in mind: The appearance of animals only strengthened Antony's identity as a 'new Adam' surrounded by the beasts (Gen.1:26 – 28; 2:18 – 20), a motif that adorns the presentation of the young David learning to be a shepherd by protecting his flock from wild beasts (1 Sam.17:34 – 37), the Danielic Son of Man enthroned in the midst of the beastly empires (Dan.7:1 – 14), perhaps the infant Jesus in the manger surrounded by shepherds and flocks (Lk.2:15 – 20), and the mature Jesus invoking Daniel's Son of Man enthronement picture in the midst of Jewish leaders he renders as the beasts (Lk.22:66 – 71). This 'new Adam' portrait is both creational and Christological. The devil's schemes only serve to confirm Antony's identity in Christ.

Athanasius affirms the Lord's presence with Antony with another allusion to Jesus' baptism:

> '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.'[38]

This is the first time in *Life of Antony* that Jesus (ostensibly) speaks directly, and it is surely not coincidental that this scene so strongly reflects Jesus' own experience at the Jordan River. For Jesus, the sky opened. For Antony, the roof of the tomb opened. For Jesus, the Spirit as a dove descended. For Antony, a ray of light descended. For Jesus, the Father spoke. For Antony, the Lord [Jesus] spoke. The effect of this experience on Antony was not only the alleviation of pain, and the dispersion of the demons, but 'more power in his body than formerly.'

Jesus' previous silence did not indicate his absence. 'Antony, I was here,' said Jesus to the monk. This mysterious, mystical experience of Antony is the experience Athanasius wants every Christian to have. It reveals the truth of at least three very important Scripture quotations from previously in the narrative:

> 'For the Lord was working with Antony— the Lord who for our sake took flesh and gave the body victory over the devil, so that all who truly fight can say, 'Not I but the grace of God which was with me.' [1 Cor.15:10]'[39]

> '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]'[40]

> 'The Lord lives before whose presence I stand today. [1 Kings 18:15]'[41]

Each of these references – two by Paul and one by Elijah – call attention to the presence of the Lord with his people, empowering them for spiritual warfare, victory over temptation, and a courageous prophetic vocation. This is Athanasius' portrait of *synergia*, where the power and grace of Jesus is prior, but calls for our participation and cooperation. Jesus' victory over sin and the demons can become our victory by ascetic discipline and the exercise of our will. Athanasius does not seem to feel it necessary to explain the question of theodicy of why Jesus was silent previously, but there is no doubt that his intent is for us as his readers to recognize the truth of Jesus' words.

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[38] Athanasius of Alexandria, *Life of Antony* 10
[39] Ibid 5
[40] Ibid 7
[41] Ibid 7

Antony's victories, those behind him in the narrative, were empowered by Jesus. Now those ahead of him will be empowered by Jesus, too.

Athanasius deepens his comparison with Antony and Jesus by paralleling their adventures in the wilderness/desert. In the Gospels, following his baptism and his reception of the Father's 'beloved' declaration, Jesus went into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. Jesus' experience was modeled after that of Mosaic Israel, emerging out of Egypt. Just as Israel passed through water via the Red Sea, Jesus passed through water via the Jordan River. Just as Israel endured forty years in the wilderness, Jesus endured forty days in the wilderness. Just as Israel reflected on the words of Deuteronomy in the wilderness, Jesus reflected on the words of Deuteronomy (from which his three quotations came). But where Israel failed in faithfulness to God, Jesus succeeded. And where Israel would go to the mountain and fail to meet God on it, Jesus would go to the mountain and ascend there, both giving the commandments of God and receiving them (that is, continuing to receive them) into his own humanity. From that point, Jesus ventures into new locales casting out demons. There seems to be some kind of linkage between the demons and geography in the Gospel accounts. So as Jesus travels from Jewish areas to Gentile areas, he always expels demons in like manner. And a victory by Jesus in one area, for example, the region of Gerasa/Gadara, seems to open the way for the disciples to one day return, and the kingdom message to go forward.

Athanasius reproduces this Christological pattern as well, painting Antony as a spiritual warrior who cleared the desert of demons so monasteries could flourish there later. In 11, Antony goes to the desert, then the mountain. The enemy threw temptations across Antony's path: 'a great silver dish' which 'vanished like smoke from the face of fire' when Antony refused it (11), then 'real gold scattered in the way' which Antony simply passed by 'more and more confirmed in his purpose' (12). Antony arrived at the mountain and found a fort, filled with creeping creatures. He spent a total of twenty years there (14), continuing to engage with spiritual battles.

Finally, when word had spread roundabout 'and his acquaintances came and began to cast down and wrench off the door by force, Antony, as from a shrine, came forth initiated in the mysteries and filled with the Spirit of God' (14). His physical body had not suffered or become lean, which caused wonderment. His 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. But he was altogether even as being guided by reason, and abiding in a natural state' (14). This makes Antony the ideal man of God, in view of Athanasius' teaching on soul and body from his very first work, *Contra Gentes*.

Antony was 'filled with the Spirit of God.' Mention of healing and deliverance miracles receive minor mention (14). The highlight Athanasius draws from Antony's ministry, however, is speech. Just as Antony is described this way, he comes forward in speech, exhortation, advice, and persuasion.

> '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.'[42]

Antony crossed the Arsenoitic Canal, which was infested with crocodiles, and passed through it safely 'by simply praying' (15). Parallels to biblical miracles of water-crossings abound, from Noah in some sense, to Abraham and Sarah crossing the Euphrates to get to the promised land, to Israel crossing the Red Sea, to Joshua crossing the Jordan, to Elisha the same, to Jesus the same in his baptism. On the other side lies victory:

> 'And having returned to his cell, he applied himself to the same noble and valiant exercises; and by frequent conversation he increased the eagerness of those already monks, stirred up in most of the rest the love of the discipline, and speedily by the attraction of his words cells multiplied, and he directed them all as a father.'[43]

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[42] Ibid 14
[43] Ibid 15

This is a direct reflection of Athanasius' understanding of Scripture and spiritual growth. In biblical idiom, the phrase 'filled with the Spirit' refers not to an experience of emotion necessarily, as it tends to for us today, but to an experience of speaking (Eph.5:18). Luke's Gospel in particular bears the stamp of the Spirit and speech taking a preeminent thematic role. Early on, every incident where the Spirit comes upon people results in their speech:

- 'Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit. And she cried out with a loud voice…' (Luke 1:41 – 42)
- 'Zacharias was filled with the Holy Spirit, and prophecied…' (Luke 1:67)
- Simeon 'came in the Spirit into the temple…and blessed God and said…' (Luke 2:25 – 26)
- God speaks at Jesus' baptism, giving the Spirit to Jesus (Luke 3:21)
- 'Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit…answered' Satan three times with Scripture (Luke 4:1 – 12).

Luke then shows that he is explicitly organizing his Gospel and Acts around speeches from people 'filled with the Spirit,' first Jesus and then the disciples:

	Beginning	A Major Leader	Quotes the OT	Announcing the Spirit Empowering Proclamation	Proclamation
Luke	Luke 4	Jesus	Isaiah 61	'The **Spirit** of the Lord is upon me…**to preach**…**to proclaim**…' (Luke 4:18 – 19)	Jesus preaches and proclaims. (Luke 4:20ff.)
Acts	Acts 2	Simon Peter	Joel 2	'And it shall be in the last days that I will pour forth of **My Spirit** on all mankind and your sons and daughters shall **prophesy**…I will in those days pour forth of **My Spirit** and they shall **prophesy**.' (Acts 2:17 – 18)	The apostles and other leaders proclaim and prophesy. (Acts 2:19ff.)

These quotations of Isaiah 61 and Joel 2 function paradigmatically for Luke. The Spirit anointed Jesus to speak, and is now poured out 'on all mankind' to inspire prophetic speech. Hence, Jesus preached to train the disciples. In response to the disciples' question about how to pray, Jesus promised the disciples that the heavenly Father gives the Holy Spirit to those who ask (Luke 11:1 – 13). Jesus assured them that the Spirit will teach them what to say under duress (Luke 12:10 – 12). Jesus connected his post-resurrection promise of the Spirit to their minds being opened to understand the Hebrew Scriptures, and proclamation to the world (Luke 24:45 – 49).

In the opening of Acts, Jesus reiterates his commission to the disciples as his witnesses by the power of the Spirit (Acts 1:7 – 8). Thus, every instance of the Spirit filling people results in them speaking: the disciples at Pentecost (Acts 2:1 – 21); Simon Peter in his confrontation with the Jewish leaders (Acts 4:8); King David in his authorship of Psalm 2, retrospectively (Acts 4:24 – 25); the disciples despite persecution (Acts 4:31); Stephen (Acts 6:10; 7:55 – 56); Philip (Acts 8:29 – 35); Saul of Tarsus (Acts 9:17 – 20); Simon Peter (Acts 10:44 – 46); Barnabus (Acts 11:22 – 24); prophets from Jerusalem, led by Agabus (Acts 11:27 – 28); the Antioch community (Acts 13:2); Paul confronting Elymas the magician (Acts 13:9 – 10); the disciples in the Iconium syngagogue (Acts 13:51 – 14:1); Apollos (Acts 18:24 – 28); the Ephesian disciples Paul met (Acts 19:1 – 6); Paul in his warning to the Ephesian elders (Acts 20:16 – 28); the disciples in Caesarea who warned Paul about his future suffering in Jerusalem (Acts 21:4 – 11); the prophet Isaiah, retrospectively (Acts 28:24 – 26).

Jesus explains the principle. 'The good man out of the good treasure of his heart brings forth what is good,' says Jesus, 'and the evil man out of the evil treasure brings forth what is evil, for his mouth speaks from that which fills his heart' (Luke 6:45). This statement functions as another interpretive key to the meaning of the phrase, 'filled with the Holy Spirit.' The contrapositive proves the rule: The lying husband-wife duo Ananias and Sapphira prove that evil words indicate that Satan, not the Holy Spirit, 'filled [their] hearts' (Acts 5:1 – 5).

Athanasius, similarly, presents Antony as a prophetic messenger who is 'filled with the Spirit' as an interpreter of Scripture, of the movements of the Lord in the spiritual realm, of the demons and how to defeat them, and of human growth in ascetic experience. From this point, Athanasius arranges five major speeches of Antony, with clear

demarcations of beginnings and endings.[44] For example, each speech ends with a phrase beginning with the 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)

Perhaps Athanasius is echoing the five-fold structure of the Torah, the Psalms, and Matthew's Gospel and subtly casting Antony as the covenantal head akin to Moses, David, and Jesus, respectively. Athanasius' use of biblical language and structure is masterful and operates at both overt and subtle levels. Regardless, Antony's moral and spiritual authority is beyond doubt.

Antony's *Long Speech*: The Daily Battle for Virtue (16 – 43)

In his first speech, 'The Long Speech,' Antony sets forth basic paradigms for understanding Christian growth. He says that the Scriptures are enough for instruction, but there is value in encouragement, which he then gives (16). Antony encourages 'all the monks [who] had assembled to him and asked to hear words from him' by exhorting to practice their discipline 'daily.'

> '…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.''[45]

The word 'daily,' triggered by Paul's dictum, 'I die daily,' is used four more times in chapter 19. Antony reminds his audience of the surpassing value of the heavenly reward, the spiritual life, focused on the eternal, in contrast to the earthly, the temporal, and the corruptible. He compares worldly riches unfavorably with the cultivation and possession of Christian virtue and character (17). He says that we must work daily for our Master, rather than become idle or lazy on the suggestion that we worked enough yesterday (18). Antony then gives an in-depth treatment of how we grow in virtue in Christ, using soul-body language familiar to readers of Athanasius' *Contra Gentes / De Incarnatione*:

> 'Wherefore, children, let us hold fast our discipline, and let us not be careless. For in it the Lord is our fellow-worker, as it is written, 'to all that choose the good, God worketh with them for good.' But to avoid being heedless, it is good to consider the word of the Apostle, 'I die daily.' For if we too live as though dying daily, we shall not sin. And the meaning of that saying is, that as we rise day by day we should think that we shall not abide till evening; and again, when about to lie down to sleep, we should think that we shall not rise up. 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. Wherefore having already begun and set out in the way of virtue, let us strive the more that we may attain those things that are before. And let no one turn to the things behind, like Lot's wife, all the more so that the Lord hath said, 'No man, having put his hand to the plough, and turning back, is fit for the kingdom of heavens.' And this turning back is nought else but to feel regret, and to be once more worldly-minded. But fear not to hear of virtue, nor be astonished at the name. For it is not far from us, nor is it without ourselves, but it is within us, and is easy if only we are willing. That they may get knowledge, the Greeks live abroad and cross the sea, but we have no need to depart from home for the sake of the kingdom of heaven, nor to cross the sea for the sake of virtue. For the Lord aforetime hath said, 'The kingdom of heaven is within you.' Wherefore virtue hath need at our hands of willingness alone, since it is in us and is formed from us. For when the soul hath its spiritual faculty in a natural state virtue is formed. And it is in a natural state when it remains as it came into existence. And when it came into existence it was fair and exceeding honest. For this cause Joshua, the son of Nun, in his exhortation said to the people,

[44] Ernest 2004, p.297
[45] Athanasius of Alexandria, *Life of Antony* 16

> 'Make straight your heart unto the Lord God of Israel,' and John, 'Make your paths straight.' For rectitude of soul consists in its having its spiritual part in its natural state as created. But on the other hand, when it swerves and turns away from its natural state, that is called vice of the soul. Thus the matter is not difficult. If we abide as we have been made, we are in a state of virtue, but if we think of ignoble things we shall be accounted evil. If, therefore, this thing had to be acquired from without, it would be difficult in reality; but if it is in us, let us keep ourselves from foul thoughts. 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.'[46]

This is the lengthiest explanation given by Antony about growth in virtue. It is fascinating both in its lucidity, details, and breadth. Antony explains that our choices affect our desires. Talk of cultivating virtue links my choices with an intrinsic effect on me. What I choose now influences how and what I choose tomorrow. My choices even influence what I become tomorrow. One major problem is that Protestantism has tended to approach theology via their polemical argument with the legacy of medieval scholastic soteriology which sees good works as either satisfactions or merits, extrinsic to the person, and logged on a theoretical accounting ledger in the mind of God.

Yet Alister E. McGrath asserts that the Septuagint translators of the Hebrew word *sedeq* deployed the Greek word *dikaiosyne* by *reorienting* its original Greek meaning, *not* maintaining its original meaning as 'meritocratic-retributive justice.'[47] Alasdair MacIntyre, *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?* gives a much fuller account in agreement with McGrath.[48] Also, Adonis Vidu, *Atonement, Law, and Justice: The Cross in Historical and Cultural Contexts* also observes the early Christians rejecting Greek and Latin notions of meritocratic-retributive justice in favor of biblical, Hebrew restorative justice.[49] In other words, the early Christians rejected precisely what the later medieval and Protestant scholastics embraced. In the 11th and 12th centuries in Western Europe, the resurgence of interest in classical Roman law, including Latin concepts of 'satisfaction' and *iustitia distributiva* (what we would call meritocratic-retributive justice), forged this context for Catholic, and later Protestant, scholastic theologians.

The Lutherans of the late 16th century, for example, revealed their self-imposed cultural misplacement in their correspondence with the Greek Ecumenical Patriarch Jeremias II Tranos. Tellingly, the Lutherans could not even find theological terms in the vocabulary of Greek patristic theology for the scholastic concepts of satisfaction and merits.[50] Their struggle shows that the concept of 'satisfaction' and 'merit' did not exist in the early church. The patristic and Orthodox understanding of the human being is built on an explanation of the image and likeness of God. John of Damascus, considered to have written a summary of the patristic writings before him, explains this distinction between image and likeness in *Exposition of the Orthodox Faith*.[51] We remain in the image of God despite the fall, and thus we retain rationality and free will. The likeness of God, however, is about our *becoming*: We are commanded to become like God through partnership with God, perfecting the virtues of character within ourselves. In this understanding, and in light of our sin, good works are understood to be part of the cultivation of the virtues which restore the likeness of God in the human person. The category and stress are ontological, intrinsic and not extrinsic to the person. Our good works impact our own human nature, as neuroscience is telling us about our brain formation. The Western tradition, by contrast, is dominated by the legal, forensic, juridical view, where our 'works' produce an effect, not *in us*, but *in God* and, in effect, *over God*, who is in this account bound to reward good behavior and punish bad.

Antony, by discussing virtue, refers to the equivalent biblical and formal language of cultivating 'the likeness of God' within ourselves. Antony insists, 'It is not far from us, nor is it without ourselves, but it is within us, and is easy if only we are willing.' Virtue is either synonymous with, or the effect of, the kingdom of heaven within us. Virtue is not external to us, although it is certainly true that God is the dispenser of virtue. God is the dispenser and we are the willing receivers and repositories. 'It is in us and is formed from us.'

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[46] Athanasius of Alexandria, *Life of Antony* 19 – 20
[47] Alister E. McGrath, *Iustitia Dei: A History of the Christian Doctrine of Justification* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), ch.1
[48] Alasdair MacIntyre, *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1988), chs.3 – 11
[49] Adonis Vidu, *Atonement, Law, and Justice: The Cross in Historical and Cultural Contexts* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Publishing, 2014), ch.1
[50] Dorothea Wendebourg, *Reformation und Orthodoxie: Der ökumenische Briefwechsel zwischen der Leitung der Würtembergischen Kirche und Patriarch Jeremias II. von Konstantinopel in den Jahren 1573-1581* (Göttingen: 1985). The whole correspondence is in German: Aussenamt der Evangelischen Kirche in Deutschland (Hrsg), *Wort und Mysterium: Der Briefwechsel über Glaube und Kirche 1573 bis 1581 zwischen den Tübinger Theologen und dem Patriarchen von Konstantinopel* (Witten: 1958)
[51] John of Damascus, *An Exposition of the Orthodox Faith* 4.4

One very noteworthy detailed observation made by Ernest is that Athanasius records Antony quoting Romans 8:28, but in an unusual form.[52] Antony uses the formula to denote a biblical reference: 'as it is written.' He follows that formula with what he appears to believe is Romans 8:28:

> 'For everyone who chooses the good, God works together for the good.'

This is curiously different from the manuscripts available today:

> God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God (NASB)
>
> All things work together for good to those who love God (NKJV)
>
> All things work together for good for those who love God (NRSV)

Making this more fascinating, as Ernest notes, is that Didymus the Blind of Alexandria (c.313 – 398 AD), who headed a church school (possibly the Catechetical School of Alexandria) also repeated the same quotation explicitly on one occasion, and paraphrased it in another:

> 'And this must be said, that in saying "let the earth bring forth," God was not satisfied with giving the command but also carried it out. For God not only urges to excellence but joins in achieving it, *for with the one who chooses the good God also works together for good*, so that those who are eager to assent to the command may be able in the end to achieve the goal of their efforts. For even if someone by his own striving works towards excellence, he stands in need of God, whose grace provides the basis of the achievement and the good completion.'[53]
>
> 'The savior is building the church, being himself both stone and builder; for *God works together with the person who is diligent*.'[54]

We cannot be sure whether Antony, Athanasius, and Didymus are conflating biblical texts, drawing from an interpretive tradition on Romans 8:28, or quoting an actual textual variant of Romans that existed in Alexandria. Given the weightiness of saying 'as it is written,' I suspect the first option, and that Philippians 2:13 stands behind this conflation. Regardless, this is the essence of the vision of *synergia*.[55] God creates, and gives power to His creatures simply by virtue of their created nature. God commands. God gives power to human beings to respond to the command positively in and through the command itself. God continues to give power to human beings who respond positively, and this shapes the nature of the human being, since human beings are 'human becomings,' called to grow in the likeness of God by cultivating Christian virtues, or the character of Christ.

The Eastern tradition would not be plagued by an opposition between God's grace and human free will, as the Western tradition would because of the influence of Augustine. Human free will itself is *evidence* of God's grace. For Athanasius, God's grace can be seen in our creation, our ability to rationally communicate with God and one another, any receptivity at all to God's word, and the empowerment that comes from the Son and his Spirit. The Eastern Orthodox would later say that God upholds all existence through His 'divine energies,' and therefore it is a false dichotomy to oppose God's grace and human free will. 'For everyone who chooses the good, God works together for the good.' True enough. Although, it can be said in addition: For everyone who chooses the evil, God works in spite of them for the good.

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[52] Ernest 2004, p.320 – 321

[53] Didymus the Blind of Alexandria, *In Genesim* 54, cited by Ernest 2004, p.320 – 321

[54] Didymus the Blind of Alexandria, *Commentarii in Job* 312.27; cited by Ernest 2004, p.320 – 321

[55] Of course, the dogmatic and biblical basis for *synergia* does not arise from Romans 8:28 alone. More often, supporters of *synergia* appeal to Philippians 2:13 and various other texts, as well as *synergia* being the only possible way to honor biblical texts on God's initiative on the one hand, and human responsibility on the other. Significantly, Didymus explicitly develops his statement from Genesis 1, the nature of creation and God's commandments. A fuller criticism of Augustine's proposal of *monergism*, and Luther's and Calvin's development of this concept, would be necessary for fuller perspective. See Seraphim Rose, *The Place of Blessed Augustine in the Orthodox Church* (St. Herman of Alaska Brotherhood; Third Revised edition August 1, 2007), as mentioned above. See my comments on sanctification and creation, at the last section of this paper.

For what do we need God's help? Most of the *Long Speech* then involves Antony's teaching on purifying one's own soul, connected to a lengthy section on battling the demons. These two topics are, as Antony presents them, more or less simultaneous, although not synonymous. Antony reads Joshua 24:23, 'Make straight your heart unto the Lord God of Israel,' as related to John the Baptist's cry from Matthew 3:3, 'Make your paths straight' (20). Antony understands this summons to be 'straight' as a call to godly uprightness and virtue. Demons are somehow related to sinful impulses, like wrath and lust (21). Antony calls all Christians to personally 'ascend' to God. How does one do this? By overcoming the demons who, like their master (Eph.2:2), infest 'the air' (21) and resist the Christian's growth. Jesus was crucified 'in the air' in order to defeat Satan in his own realm, and clear the path for the Christian's ascent to God, following him.

Athanasius, like other patristic theologians, sees demons connected with deception. Correspondingly, he sees human freedom from demonic influence and deception as being progressive. In *On the Incarnation*, every single mention of the word 'deceit,' 'deceive,' or 'deception' – and there are many[56] – occurs in the same breath as 'the demons.' This tells us a great deal about Athanasius' cosmology. He spends a good deal of effort explaining, in *Life of Antony*, exactly how a Christian breaks through the demons and the temptations and deceptions they offer. This is an inseparable part of his view of sanctification. It involves becoming more spiritually powerful, as in able to exorcise the demons. But it is also, and more fundamentally, a matter of becoming more *truthful* and truth-filled. Hence I suspect that it would be fair to understand Antony's exhortation, 'ascend to God,' as 'ascend in our understanding and approximation of God' in a spiritual warfare context; the ascent is not about overcoming some kind of spatial-relational distance. It is, rather, more cognitive and moral. 'The air' in Ephesians 2:2 is likely a reference to 'the air we breathe' as in 'the way we *think*,' as much as it carries the metaphorical meaning of a cosmological layer under the heavenly realm where Jesus is now seated (Eph.1:20 – 23; 2:6).

The European Enlightenment contained within itself two rival anthropologies which make discussion of demons seem irrelevant to a 'modern' audience. On the one hand, there is the Hegelian, liberal view of humanity, in which we are autonomous, rational beings exercising our freedom and liberty. On the other hand, there is the Marxian, deterministic view of humanity, in which we are so deeply shaped by our material and class background, always defending our economic interests. The early Christians believed that we are *permeable and porous*. We certainly have free will and, therefore, moral responsibility. And no doubt we are influenced by our economic and material conditions. But, according to the Christian teaching prior to the Enlightenment, our thoughts do not simply spring from our physical brains or physical environment. There are demons both inside and outside us. So there are thoughts, temptations, and inclinations that percolate from somewhere into our consciousness, and these cannot be reduced to the Freudian subconscious or other psychoses. The Christian tradition, Athanasius included, cultivated the view that we do not always know from where our thoughts and perceptions are coming. So it is important to cultivate the gift of the discernment of spirits, even to produce a taxonomy of demons as Antony did, and Evagrius and others did after him, along with ways of repelling them.

Antony introduces the demons as originally good, because God made all things originally good (22). They have 'fallen, however, from the heavenly wisdom [and] since then they have been grovelling on earth. (22)' They are envious of Christians because Christians ascend with Christ into the heavens, from which they have been cast out (22). Demons are drawn to Christians, and monks especially, to throw temptations and hindrances in the way (23). Prayer, fasting, and faith in the Lord can defeat them (23). Demons appear fiery (24). And this fire is a prelude of the fire waiting for them from the judgment of God in the end (24):

> 'For that which appears in them is no true light, but they are rather the preludes and likenesses of the fire prepared for the demons who attempt to terrify men with those flames in which they themselves will be burned. Doubtless they appear; but in a moment disappear again, hurting none of the faithful, but bringing with them the likeness of that fire which is about to receive themselves. Wherefore it is unfitting that we should fear them on account of these things; for through the grace of Christ all their practices are in vain.'[57]

This comment corroborates the common patristic view that, since God is fire, His purification of others is represented by fire, as is any resistance to that purification.[58]

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[56] Athanasius of Alexandria, *On the Incarnation* 2.5 – 6; 12.6; 13.1; 14.3 – 4; 25.5; 27.3; 45.5 – 6; 46.3; 47.1 – 2; 48.3; 49.6; 55.5
[57] Athanasius of Alexandria, *Life of Antony* 24
[58] Athanasius of Alexandria, *Third Festal Letter* 3 – 4

But demons appear in other forms, as well (25). Even when they say something, we should command them to be silent, as Jesus did (26 – 27). Jesus' coming weakened the demons (28), though they still 'haunt the air' (28). They can threaten, but of themselves can cause no harm. (Athanasius does not seem interested in explaining why Antony felt physical pain at the approach of the demons prior to ch.16). 'But since they can do nothing they inflict the greater wounds on themselves; for they can fulfil none of their threats' (28). While their deceits may be deadly in terms of leading us into vice and temptation, demons have no strength to match the angel who dispatched the Assyrians in 2 Kings 19. The devil's power to harm Job was given by God uniquely (29). And the Savior has given us power to trample on serpents and scorpions, all the power of the enemy (30). Demons might try to foretell the future to win our curiosity and trust, but we must refuse to listen (31). They might seem to foretell the floodings of the Nile, but this is just because they know the rainfall in Ethiopia, something men could have known (32 – 33). We are not to compete in knowledge of the future, but simply desire to be victorious over the devil and 'be pure in mind' (34). The demons are cowards and fear the sign of the cross, for by it they were vanquished (35). Our souls can remain untroubled and undisturbed (35).

> 'But the inroad and the display of the evil spirits is fraught with confusion, with din, with sounds and cryings such as the disturbance of boorish youths or robbers would occasion. From which arise fear in the heart, tumult and confusion of thought, dejection, hatred towards them who live a life of discipline, indifference, grief, remembrance of kinsfolk and fear of death, and finally desire of evil things, disregard of virtue and unsettled habits. Whenever, therefore, you have seen ought and are afraid, if your fear is immediately taken away and in place of it comes joy unspeakable, cheerfulness, courage, renewed strength, calmness of thought and all those I named before, boldness and love toward God — take courage and pray. For joy and a settled state of soul show the holiness of him who is present.'[59]

Antony gives both diagnosis based on the state of the monk's own emotions, and encouragement that 'him who is present' provide 'joy and a settled state of soul.' Fear remains the tool of the demons, unlike angels who remove the fear of their presence (37). Antony says that one's ability to exorcise demons and even heal diseases with the Lord ought not to ruffle one's emotions positively. Citing Luke 10:20 as a command and Matthew 7:22 as a warning, Antony insists that cultivating virtue is far more important than doing miracles (38). 'For the working of signs is not ours but the Saviour's work' (38). But cultivating virtue is our work. Antony tells a few stories of his own experiences encountering and resisting demons in the name of Christ (39 – 40), even Satan himself (41 – 42), who conveniently confessed that his power was gone. Antony reminds his audience, as if we are beginners, to simply ask, 'Who are you? And whence do you come?' (43).

One later experience narrated by Antony has much to show us about Athanasius' theology of sanctification:

> 'And many monks have related with the greatest agreement and unanimity that many other such like things were done by him. But still these do not seem as marvellous as certain other things appear to be. For once, when about to eat, having risen up to pray about the ninth hour, he perceived that he was caught up in the spirit, and, wonderful to tell, he stood and saw himself, as it were, from outside himself, and that he was led in the air by certain ones. Next certain bitter and terrible beings stood in the air and wished to hinder him from passing through. But when his conductors opposed them, they demanded whether he was not accountable to them. And when they wished to sum up the account from his birth, Antony's conductors stopped them, saying, 'The Lord has wiped out the sins from his birth, but from the time he became a monk, and devoted himself to God, it is permitted you to make a reckoning.' Then when they accused him and could not convict him, his way was free and unhindered. And immediately he saw himself, as it were, coming and standing by himself, and again he was Antony as before.'[60]

The vision provides a divine viewpoint on sin and atonement. The statement, 'The Lord has wiped out the sins from his birth,' might have two possible meanings. One possibility is that the sins Antony committed from his birth to the time he became a monk were 'wiped out' by Christ. This tends to reinforce the early Christian view of baptism: Sins committed prior to baptism were certainly washed away; those committed afterwards introduced some uncertainty. Choosing the monastic vocation seems to function in Antony's life as what baptism does for the

[59] Athanasius of Alexandria, *Life of Antony* 36
[60] Athanasius of Alexandria, *Life of Antony* 65

average Christian then. Remarkably, Antony's personal record as a monk is impressive enough that 'they could not convict him.' Another possibility for interpreting this divine viewpoint is that a fundamental, ontological cleansing of Antony's human nature ('sins from his birth') has been provided by Jesus. But there is a specific way that the demons function to authenticate what Athanasius has already told us about Antony's monastic vocation in narrative form: his dedication to Christ was supreme. While intriguing points can be made from this passage if one were to feel more certain about either interpretation, the overall point remains that Antony's career as a monk is honored by this lack of accusation. Antony, in this vision, ascends 'in the air' as Athanasius' ideal Christian does.

Sanctification in Creation

One could spend more fruitful study with what seems to be 'new Eden' imagery in 49 – 50, how Antony seems to acquire spiritual gifts like prophetic sight in 59 – 60, his evangelistic wit and strategy in 73 – 80, even his 'political theology' as Antony writes to the emperor and appears before judges in 81and 84, calling them to do justice. I am left slightly troubled by the questions of theodicy raised by the Arian controversy which Antony discusses in 82: 'as the Lord has been angry, so again will He heal us, and the Church shall soon again receive her own order.' I am intrigued that Antony, like Elijah, blesses his successors Athanasius and Serapion, two of the leaders of the orthodox community in Egypt. I am fascinated by David M. Gwynn's and David Brakke's observations of how Athanasius united much of the Egyptian monastic Christians under his leadership, securing his episcopacy, and oversaw the shift from a six day Lenten fast to a forty day one.[61] All this deserves much fuller consideration elsewhere.

For the purpose of my general inquiry into Athanasius' view of sanctification and pastoral rhetoric, I will draw this essay to a close with some concluding remarks. The more sanctification is understood to be somehow *foreign* to us, the more the Christian minister must present to others 'news' about some kind of 'transaction' between the Son and the Father which has benefits accruing to the listener. I assume you do not want Jesus, and do not want to grow; so I tell you about how Jesus suffered something, in order to trigger your feelings of relief, indebtedness, and gratitude to Jesus to guide your response. T.F. Torrance, as I mentioned at the start of this essay, asserts, 'Justification by grace alone *remains the sole ground of the Christian life*.'[62] He seemed to be working, like many Lutherans and Calvinists do, from the 'order of salvation' (*ordo salutis*), in which sanctification follows justification in a pastoral sequence. The book *Christian Spirituality: Five Views on Sanctification*, published in 1989, and, humorously, yet another book titled *Five Views on Sanctification*, published in 1996, demonstrate the Protestant Christian debate whether and how 'justification' (often, read: the emotions desired by preaching 'penal substitutionary atonement') plays a psychological role in our 'sanctification.'

That depends, I think, on one's theology of atonement and how one positions God towards human sin. A key question is whether 'total depravity' is true. Has human nature been so ruined by the corruption of sin that every fiber of our being actually resists God? Do we totally resist resuming the path God intended for us from creation? I believe the biblical data, especially the Jewish wisdom tradition, answers in the negative. So does the simple empirical observation that no one breaks all of God's commandments all of the time. However much we resist God, we retain a desire for God, and – however inarticulate – an awareness of who He created us to be, and to become, in relationship with Him. I briefly give four examples here.

First, the Sabbath day was made 'holy' prior to the fall and independently of it (Gen.2:3). Whatever else might be said of the Sabbath day, God's sanctifying of it and setting it apart shows that 'sanctification' does not inherently and intrinsically have to do with sin. It has to do with creation and God's development of creation with His image-bearers. Had humanity not sinned, God would have invited people into the Sabbath rest of every seventh day of the week, simply with the passage of time. They would have participated in the 'holiness' of the Sabbath day, and grown in 'holiness' themselves – not only in their distinctiveness from the rest of creation as they matured, but probably in distinction from each other because of the diversity of experiences throughout the world.

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

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[61] David M. Gwynn, *Athanasius of Alexandria: Bishop, Theologian, Ascetic, Father* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012) and David Brakke, *Athanasius and the Politics of Asceticism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995)

[62] T.F. Torrance, *Reconstruction*, p.161 – 162

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

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

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

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

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

about the validity of their mixed-faith marriage. And the children of a mixed-faith marriage grow up in an intact home in that sense, and are presumably still exposed to Christian teaching from their Christian parent. In that sense, they too are 'sanctified.'

Fourth, the Jewish wisdom tradition understood human nature and God's commandments to be perfectly fitted to each other *from creation*: Both flow from God's wisdom (e.g. Prov.8:22 – 23). To suggest otherwise means that God commands things that are strangely inappropriate for His creation, or that God made the creation in some way that is disconnected from His commandments and moral character. Either hypothetical case would boggle the Jewish mind. The corruption of sin does not alter the basic categories of creation. However much we now face sinful desires in ourselves that resist God, a situation acknowledged in the Psalms and supremely by Paul in Romans 7:14 – 25, that does not take away from the fact that we are already participating in God's wisdom – and therefore in God Himself, in some sense – by our very creation. If God's commandments cause the heart to rejoice (e.g. Ps.19:8), then the heart cannot be marred by sin beyond recognition. We may struggle to follow the commandments of God. Yet our struggles are framed by a prior assurance of God's love for us as Creator, a teleological hope in God's goodness to heal human nature as part of our destiny (e.g. Dt.30:6; Jer.4:4; 31:31 – 34; Ezk.36:26 – 36; etc.), along with joy in finding in ourselves a desire to follow those commands in the present, despite the resistance we also feel. That is arguably why Paul can speak of a true 'I myself' in contrast to the alien 'sin that indwells me' (e.g. Rom.7:18) in that convoluted passage and convoluted journey of self-diagnosis.

Athanasius shared this understanding. His repeated refrain, a quotation from 1 Corinthians 1:24 and 30, 'Christ is the wisdom and power of God,' is placed in narrative form in *Life of Antony*. Christ's wisdom is seen in Antony's wit, insight, and knowledge. Christ's power is seen in Antony's growth in virtue, power over the demons, and ability to minister to others. And because all this happens in the frameworks of creation and christology, Athanasius can narrate the monastic discipline of this man who learned how Jesus was present with him, conforming Antony to his image and likeness. Athanasius' doctrine of atonement does not trigger feelings of anxiety over one's standing before God, fear of retribution, and relief and indebtedness to Jesus for being a penal substitute. Instead, the atonement functions to awaken our deepest hopes as image-bearers of God, to convict us about God's determination to vanquish sin in every human being, and free us from the enemy. In Christ, he did so personally, as a human being, by condemning sin in the flesh through his long and faithful obedience and raising it into new life. As Jesus did in himself, so he did also in Antony, by the Spirit:

> '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]'[63]
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> 'For the Lord was working with Antony— the Lord who for our sake took flesh and gave the body victory over the devil, so that all who truly fight can say, 'Not I but the grace of God which was with me.' [1 Cor.15:10]'[64]

In *Life of Antony*, his pastoral masterpiece, Athanasius gives no evidence that he believed that justification was the sole ground of the Christian life. This results in a more 'balanced' approach in Athanasius' pastoral ministry and vision between his christology and pneumatology, where his pneumatology is not swallowed up by his views of Christ and atonement. Athanasius rooted sanctification in Christ much more richly as creator, not merely justifier, connecting us and God from creation, and not justification. I believe his approach explains more of the biblical data, and provides a much more straightforward parallel between Christ and the believer. What Jesus did with his own human nature by the Spirit, he does in us by the Spirit. So might we also say, with Antony and Athanasius, that Christ is a living presence with us: 'The Lord lives before whose presence I stand today. [1 Kings 18:15]'[65]

T.F. Torrance tells the account(s) of challenging his mentor Karl Barth in places where, in Torrance's opinion, he was 'not Athanasian enough.' I think there is an occasion to challenge Torrance on the same point. On matters of the Holy Spirit, sanctification, and pastoral rhetoric, perhaps Torrance was 'not Athanasian enough.'

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[63] Athanasius of Alexandria, *Life of Antony* 7
[64] Ibid 5
[65] Ibid 7