

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

Mako A. Nagasawa

Last modified: March 11, 2017

Athanasius' First and Second Discourses Against the Arians (342 – 343 AD)

When Athanasius embarked on his second exile from Alexandria, he went to Rome to seek the shelter and support of Julius, bishop of Rome. While there, perhaps encouraged by the anti-Arian Julius and also by the death of their archrival Eusebius, bishop of Nicomedia, in 341 or 342, Athanasius probably composed the first and second *Discourses Against the Arians*. These lengthy refutations of Arian prooftexts shows Athanasius' ability as a biblical expositor of these key texts. It also glitters with insights into Athanasius' mind as a biblical theologian and pastoral bishop.

James B. Ernest summarizes the scholarly views on the composition of these two works.¹ He points out one indication that they were written within a relatively close time frame. In 1.53, Athanasius mentions two contested Scriptures: Hebrews 1:4 and Proverbs 8:22. But in the remainder of the first *Discourse*, he only discusses Hebrews 1:4. Obviously, discussion of Proverbs 8:22 is still to come, and it occupies a quite large section of the second *Discourse*. It makes sense that Athanasius would reserve space and time for Proverbs 8:22 for the second *Discourse* if he was anticipating a lengthy discussion about it. Much like Luke links his Gospel and Acts together with internal indications that the two volumes go together, so Athanasius links his first and second *Discourses*.

The first and second *Discourses* are broken down in the following way and can be understood thus:

Chapter (Paragraphs)	Topic
1 (1.1 – 4)	Introduction of old heresies and the newest: Arianism
2 (1.5 – 7)	Extracts from Arius' <i>Thalia</i> to show what Arians believe
3 (1.8 – 10)	Arianism twists the meaning of biblical language about the Son
4 (1.11 – 13)	Scripture attests to the Son being God and creator; anchor points
5 (1.14 – 16)	The Son is from the Father's essence, and is proper to the Father
6 (1.17 – 22a)	The Son is co-eternal and co-creator with the Father, shares the Father's attributes
7 (1.22b – 26a)	Objection countered: 'Did the Father make the Son from nothing?'
8 (1.26b – 29)	Objection countered: 'Had you a son before you begot him?'
9 (1.30 – 34)	Objection countered: 'Is the Unoriginate one or two?'
10 (1.35 – 36)	Objection countered: 'Is the Son alterable? Does he have free will?'
11 (1.37 – 45)	Disputed text: Philippians 2:9 – 10
12 (1.46 – 52)	Disputed text: Psalm 45:7 – 8
13 (1.53 – 64)	Disputed text: Hebrews 1:4; Proverbs 8:22 hinted
14 (2.1 – 11a)	Reintroduction of disputed texts
15 (2.11b – 18a)	Disputed text: Acts 2:36
16 (2.18b – 24a)	Disputed text: Proverbs 8:22; introduction
17 (2.24b – 30)	Disputed text: Proverbs 8:22; the relation of God and creation
18 (2.31 – 43)	Disputed text: Proverbs 8:22; God operates naturally through His Word
19 (2.44 – 51a)	Disputed text: Proverbs 8:22; 'He created me' refers to the Word's humanity
20 (2.51b – 56)	Disputed text: Proverbs 8:22; 'for the works' refers to salvation
21 (2.57 – 72)	Disputed text: Proverbs 8:22; 'begotten' distinct from 'created'
22 (2.73 – 82)	Disputed text: Proverbs 8:23; 'He founded me before the earth'

As can be readily seen in the outline, Athanasius conceives his task as twofold: (1) To defend the co-eternity and co-divinity of the Son with the Father, especially in the work of creation; and (2) To explain the disputed biblical texts, often distinguishing the Son 'in the economy' (that is, in relation to the creation

¹ James D. Ernest, *The Bible in Athanasius of Alexandria* (Atlanta, Society of Biblical Literature, 2004), p.109

and its history) as distinct from ‘in his essence’ or equivalent. Given that Athanasius’ main focus is the Son, what can be gleaned from him about the Holy Spirit?

The Temple Paradigm, the Economic Trinity, and the Immanent Trinity

Already, scattered throughout the work, we find his basic paradigm in place: the structure of the temple. He deploys the common patristic analogies about a sun with its radiance² and a fountain with its stream³ to set the basic groundwork. I believe it is notable that the temple structure guides the imaginative patristic imagery for the Trinity: something which overflows itself. Athanasius quotes Jeremiah 17:12 – 13 which explicitly invokes, in Israel’s voice, ‘our sanctuary.’ The image of an overflowing fountain connects Jerusalem to Eden, which overflowed with water.

A decade later, his letters to bishop Serapion of Thmuis on the topic of the Spirit finds him using the same analogies, but with the addition of the Spirit into the image. By 360 AD, Athanasius is comfortable including the Spirit in the standard analogies for the unity of substance and essence between the Father and the Son. If surviving written literature is our only guide, he is apparently the first to do so. Why does he not do so in 342 – 343 in the first and second *Discourses*?

<i>Discourse Against the Arians</i> 1.19	<i>Letters to Serapion on the Holy Spirit</i> 1.19
<p>‘If God [the Father] be, and be called, the Fountain of wisdom and life— as He says by Jeremiah, ‘They have forsaken Me the Fountain of living waters [Jeremiah 2:13]’ and again, ‘A glorious high throne from the beginning, is the place of our sanctuary; O Lord, the Hope of Israel, all that forsake You shall be ashamed, and they that depart from Me shall be written in the earth, because they have forsaken the Lord, the Fountain of living waters [Jeremiah 17:12 – 13]’...</p> <p>life and wisdom are not foreign to the Essence of the Fountain, but are proper to It, nor were at any time without existence, but were always...</p> <p>Is it not then irreligious to say, ‘Once the Son was not?’ for it is all one with saying, ‘Once the Fountain was dry, destitute of Life and Wisdom.’ But a fountain it would then cease to be; for what begets not from itself, is not a fountain.’⁴</p>	<p>‘The Father is called fountain and light: ‘They have forsaken me,’ it says,’ the fountain of living water [Jeremiah 2:13]’...</p> <p>But the Son, in contrast with the fountain, is called river: ‘The river of God is full of water [Psalm 65:9]’...</p> <p>[And] we are said to drink of the Spirit. For it is written: ‘We are all made to drink of one Spirit [1 Corinthians 12:13]...</p> <p>Who can separate either the Son from the Father, or the Spirit from the Son or from the Father himself?’⁵</p>

The historical context of our theologian helps explain how the doctrine of the Holy Spirit developed a few decades later than that of the Son. By speaking of the ‘doctrine,’ I mean how the language was formally applied and stabilized in the endeavor to describe who and what the Holy Spirit is. The formulation of the ‘doctrine’ in the late fourth century at the Council of Constantinople in 381 AD does not mean that Christians were somehow without any prior language for the Spirit or for their experience of the Spirit before that. They certainly had many ways of speaking about the Spirit, and did so frequently. And it is, therefore, important to explain how pre-Nicene Christians spoke about the Holy Spirit.

Following New Testament usage, pre-Nicene Christians consistently attributed the authorship of the Scriptures to the Holy Spirit’s inspiration of the human authors. Christian proclamation was also seen as

² Athanasius of Alexandria, *Discourse Against the Arians* 1.13, 14, 20, 22, 25, 27, 28, 46, 47, 49, 58, 60; 2.2, 31, 32, 33, 34, 35, 36, 41, 42, 53 uses the sun and radiance image

³ Athanasius of Alexandria, *Discourse Against the Arians* 1.14, 19, 27; 2.2, 42, uses the fountain and stream image

⁴ Athanasius of Alexandria, *Discourse Against the Arians* 1.19

⁵ Athanasius of Alexandria, *Letters to Serapion on the Holy Spirit* 1.19

inspired by the Spirit. God's work of transforming human beings was understood to happen by or in the Spirit. But the stabilization of redeployed Greek and Latin terminology confirmed the church's hope that the task of theology served missional contextualization into new cultures and languages, and that the reality of God acting within the human mind *compelled* them to adjust human languages, concepts, and cosmology accordingly. Such was the verdict of Gregory of Nazianzus.

It may be worthwhile to suggest an explanation for Athanasius' apparent hesitation to developing his theology of the Holy Spirit. Part of the answer, of course, is that the *Discourses* were his signal anti-Arian polemics about the Word, not the Spirit. But part of the answer also involves Athanasius' conception of Christian theology as a fundamentally conservative exercise. That is, Athanasius thought of his task as a bishop as faithfully receiving revelation from the past, conserving and preserving it, and faithfully transmitting that revelation to future generations (e.g. John called it 'what you heard from the beginning' in 1 Jn.2:24; Luke refers to 'servants of the word' in Lk.1:2; etc.). His hesitation about theologizing about the Holy Spirit, therefore, suggests a measure of restraint as a theologian whose primary interest and sphere of comfort was the biblical data.

The major challenge had to do with how one reasons from the economic trinity to the immanent trinity, from the biblical terminology to a new linguistic context fraught with words that had vastly different meanings and connotations. There is less New Testament material explicitly saying that the Spirit's relation to the Father and Son in the economic trinity (God in creation and history) mirrors the Spirit in the immanent trinity (God considered in himself, prior to creation). The New Testament affords those data points for the Son: the Word was with God before creation (Jn.1:1 – 3); the Son shared in the glory of the Father (Jn.17:1 – 5; Heb.1:1 – 3). These biblical data points allowed Athanasius and other pro-Nicene theologians to reason backwards: Who we experience the Son to be in history with us, is who the Son truly is in God's own being, independently of us. Hence, Athanasius made the revolutionary Christian claim that we have true and accurate personal knowledge of God. The Son's relation to the Father, his character, and his characteristics have not changed – only the fact that he has taken a human nature. But whereas the New Testament says such things about the Son, it does not do so as explicitly for the Holy Spirit. Also, the apostolic writers invited Jesus' followers to pray and give thanks to the Father 'in Jesus' *name*' (Jn.15:16; Eph.5:20); but not in the 'name' of the Holy Spirit. Such things were to be done, rather, 'in the Spirit' (Eph.6:18),⁶ but what that means *about* the Spirit was uncertain.

The Spirit in Pre-Nicene Usage: As Divine Nature

Moreover, prior to the Council of Nicaea in 325, Christian theologians spoke of the Holy Spirit in the life of Jesus as meaning more or less what the phrase 'the divine nature' would mean in Nicene language. This pre-Nicene usage is well attested. Ignatius of Antioch, bishop of Antioch who was martyred under Emperor Trajan at some time between 107 and 117 AD, said:

'There is one Physician who is possessed both of flesh and spirit; both made and not made; God existing in flesh; true life in death; both of Mary and of God; first passible and then impassible – even Jesus Christ our Lord.'⁷

The flesh and Spirit antithesis probably comes from Paul's categories for the Christian life (e.g. Rom.8:5 – 11; Gal.5:16 – 26) and for Jesus himself in terms of dual *origin* or *parentage* (Rom.1:3 – 4). Ignatius gives a rapid sequence of antitheses to get at the human and divine constitution of Jesus. The use of flesh and Spirit also suggests some sense of moral struggle within Jesus himself, but Ignatius says no more, and we can go no further on the matter. These letters have a breathless quality and urgent pace. Tradition holds that the bishop-martyr was sending multiple letters while being under Roman armed escort to Rome to be executed. Thus goes the shorter version of Ignatius' letter.

The longer version is a later expansion and perhaps embellishment of the shorter version for doctrinal instruction, or perhaps trying to claim Ignatius more firmly for the developing Christological orthodoxy – regardless of whether one views that with a cynical or charitable lens. We do not know when these longer

⁶ Anthony Briggman, *Irenaeus of Lyons and the Theology of the Holy Spirit* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), p.16 notes this

⁷ Ignatius of Antioch, *Letter to the Ephesians 7*, shorter version

versions began to circulate with the shorter ones. Whatever the reason for this elongation, the longer version shows how comfortable (most) pre-Nicene Christians were eliding between the Spirit and the Word. In the longer version, the word 'Spirit' is replaced by 'only-begotten Son' along with another mention of that phrase with the addition of 'and Word':

'But our Physician is the only true God, the unbegotten and unapproachable, the Lord of all, the Father and Begetter of the only-begotten Son. We have also as a Physician the Lord our God, Jesus the Christ, the only-begotten Son and Word, before time began, but who afterwards became also man, of Mary the virgin. For 'the Word was made flesh.' Being incorporeal, He was in the body; being impassible, He was in a passible body; being immortal, He was in a mortal body; being life, He became subject to corruption, that He might free our souls from death and corruption, and heal them, and might restore them to health, when they were diseased with ungodliness and wicked lusts.'⁸

Emphasis is given once again to divine parentage, with the apparent assumption that to speak of parentage is to speak of *nature*. From a post-Nicene perspective, the substitution is a bit jarring. Can the Spirit be subsumed into the Word like this? But from a pre-Nicene perspective, the substitution seems to have been considered a matter of no great consequence. Within another decade or so, Justin Martyr of Rome, in a discussion about the conception of Jesus and the biblical texts Isaiah 7:14, Luke 1:32, and Matthew 1:21, says:

'It is wrong, therefore, to understand the Spirit and the power of God as anything else than the Word, who is also the first-born of God, as the foresaid prophet Moses declared; and it was this which, when it came upon the virgin and overshadowed her, caused her to conceive, not by intercourse but by power.'⁹

To post-Nicene ears, this can be surprising. The Spirit *is* the Word? Justin 'affirms the distinction of the Spirit and the Word while failing to distinguish their activity,'¹⁰ concludes Anthony Briggman, in his chapter on Justin Martyr's theology of the Holy Spirit. Leopoldo A. Sanchez M. explores further Justin's treatment of the baptism of Jesus, where Father, Spirit, and Son are distinct entities insofar as the narrative is concerned. That being the case, Justin must work harder to explain what he thinks is happening, and what significance he thinks it has. Athanasius must as well. When Athanasius discusses the same event, I will compare it to Justin's work, as well as Sanchez M.'s discussion of Irenaeus and Basil as they treat the Jordan event.

Tertullian of Carthage interprets 'the Spirit of God' to have a reciprocal relationship with 'the Word' where the former is the substance of the latter, and the latter is the operation of the former. He offers this while discussing Luke 1:35, the annunciation of the Spirit conceiving Jesus in the womb of the young virgin Mary:

'Now, by saying 'the Spirit of God' (although the Spirit of God is God), and by not naming God, he wished that portion of the whole Godhead to be understood, which was about to retire into the designation of 'the Son.' The Spirit of God in this passage must be the same as the Word... For both the Spirit is the substance of the Word, and the Word is the operation of the Spirit, and the Two are One (and the same).'¹¹

Tertullian's description of the Spirit being 'the substance' of the Word and the Word being 'the operation' of the Spirit might be understood as derived from Genesis 1 when the Spirit hovered over creation and then God spoke. The theophanies of the Old Testament could also be understood in a similar way as preliminary to the incarnation of the Word by the Spirit enfleshed as Jesus. For example, when God

⁸ Ignatius of Antioch, *Letter to the Ephesians 7*, longer version. In the next chapter of the longer version, the Spirit/flesh antithesis reappears in the context of a pastoral admonition: 'But ye, being full of the Holy Spirit, do nothing according to the flesh, but all things according to the Spirit.'

⁹ Justin Martyr of Rome, *First Apology* 33

¹⁰ Anthony Briggman, *Irenaeus of Lyons and the Theology of the Holy Spirit* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), p.25

¹¹ Tertullian of Carthage, *Against Praxeas* 26; *On the Flesh of Christ* 14

delivered Israel from Egypt and led them in the wilderness, He appeared in a pillar of cloud and fire which was identified by Moses with the Spirit hovering once again, this time over Israel (Dt.32:11). And from that cloud, God spoke to Israel. In such cases, the Spirit might be understood to be both divine substance and person.

Elsewhere, Tertullian followed Ignatius in speaking of Jesus as being made of two substances: ‘the two substances, both of flesh and of the Spirit’ because he was ‘generated in the flesh as man’ and ‘born of God.’¹² What seems fair to say is that pre-Nicene Christians assumed some kind of interrelation between the Word and Spirit, so that when one spoke of the former, the latter was understood and assumed to be involved. The Spirit acts by speaking, and that utterance is the Word in some kind of relation.

However, the weakness of this pre-Nicene way of speaking about the Spirit appears when we try to explain more of the biblical data. When the Spirit guided multiple people at the same time into prophetic utterances of God’s word, such as with Moses and the seventy elders (Num.11:25) or the overlapping time frames of the Spirit-anointed prophets Amos, Isaiah, and Micah before the Assyrian invasion, and then the the Spirit-anointed prophets Jeremiah and Ezekiel before and during the Babylonian invasion, and most especially the Spirit-inspired speeches of Mary, Zacharias, Simeon, and Anna while Jesus was already bodily conceived and distinctly present, how are we to understand the relationship between the Spirit and the Word? How can the Word be in Jesus of Nazareth, and also fill the mouths of others praising him? This is arguably part of the weakness of the pre-Nicene manner of discussing the Holy Spirit. When the Spirit acts in a one-to-many way, how are we to grasp the uniqueness of the Word as a distinct person? Is the Word simply a more intense ‘operation’ of the Spirit who might act simultaneously via less intensive ‘operations’ as well through lesser ‘words’? Unless a conceptual and linguistic barrier is erected against that option, the pre-Nicene articulation seems vulnerable to a two-person Sabellianism.

Origen of Alexandria (c.184 – c.254 AD), the influential teacher at the Catechetical School in Alexandria, was the first to say that the Father, Son, and Spirit were three *hypostases* who were one genus of immaterial and indivisible *ousia*¹³ and one in *symphonia*.¹⁴ However, the stabilization of theological terms would have to wait another century. Some bishops hesitated to adopt Origen’s terminology because they held under suspicion other aspects of Origen’s theology, which was admittedly too colored by Platonism. Also, the three Synods of Antioch, convened between 264 and 269, rejected the term *homoousios* as it was used by Paul of Samosata. The heretic Paul asserted that God was a semi-material substance (*ousia*) which existed behind the temporary ‘masks’ (*prosopa*) which we call the Father and the Son, who do not have eternal existence. Arius likely thought that the Samosatene was the main adversary, and overcorrected: Arius thought that he could guarantee the independent existence of the Son as distinct from the Father, but at the expense of subordinating the Son to the status of an exalted creature, but not sharing the divinity of the Father. In such a schema, the Father and the Son could not share in one *ousia*. Nor could the Spirit. Against this backdrop, Athanasius reinvigorated the use of Origen’s terminology, but in his own framework. He made his case for using the word *homoousios* to denote the relationship between the Father and Son as equal in substance, but with the qualification that the *ousia* under consideration was immaterial. But he did not speak of the Spirit this way.

The Spirit in the Nicene Creed: Divine Person?

The article about the Holy Spirit in the Nicene Creed of 325 was not designed to clarify this issue, as can be seen by the expansion at Constantinople in 381 and the profusion of works by theologians about the Holy Spirit at this time.

Nicaea 325 AD	Constantinople 381 AD
We believe in one God, the Father Almighty, <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maker of all things visible and 	We believe in one God, the Father Almighty, <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maker of heaven and earth, and of all things visible and

¹² Tertullian of Carthage, *On the Flesh of Christ* 18

¹³ Origen of Alexandria, *On First Principles* 1.6, ‘The works of Divine Providence and the plan of this whole world are a sort of rays, as it were, of the nature of God, in comparison with His real substance and being.’

¹⁴ Origen of Alexandria, *Contra Celsus* 8.12 ‘We worship, therefore, the Father of truth, and the Son, who is the truth; and these, while they are two, considered as persons or subsistences [*hypostasei*], are one in unity of thought, in harmony [*symphonia*] and in identity of will.’

<p style="text-align: center;">invisible.</p> <p>And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God,</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Begotten of the Father, the only-begotten; that is, of the essence [<i>ousia</i>] of the Father, God of God, Light of Light, very God of very God, begotten, not made, being of one substance [<i>homoousios</i>] with the Father; • By whom all things were made, both in heaven and on earth; • Who for us men, and for our salvation, came down and was incarnate and was made man; • He suffered, and the third day he rose again, ascended into heaven; • From thence he shall come to judge the quick and the dead. <p>And in the Holy Ghost.</p> <p>[But those who say: ‘There was a time when he was not;’ and ‘He was not before he was made;’ and ‘He was made out of nothing,’ or ‘He is of another substance [<i>hypostasis</i>]’ or ‘essence [<i>ousia</i>],’ or ‘The Son of God is created,’ or ‘changeable,’ or ‘alterable’— they are condemned by the holy catholic and apostolic Church.]</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">invisible.</p> <p>And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only-begotten Son of God,</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Begotten of the Father before all worlds (æons), Light of Light, very God of very God, begotten, not made, being of one substance [<i>homoousios</i>] with the Father; • By whom all things were made; • Who for us men, and for our salvation, came down from heaven, and was incarnate by the Holy Ghost of the Virgin Mary, and was made man; • He was crucified for us under Pontius Pilate, and suffered, and was buried, and the third day he rose again, according to the Scriptures, and ascended into heaven, and sits on the right hand of the Father; • From there he shall come again, with glory, to judge the quick and the dead; • Whose kingdom shall have no end. <p>And in the Holy Ghost, the Lord and Giver of life,</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • who proceeds from the Father, who with the Father and the Son together is worshiped and glorified, who spoke by the prophets. • In one holy catholic and apostolic Church; we acknowledge one baptism for the remission of sins; we look for the resurrection of the dead, and the life of the world to come. Amen.
---	---

By using the term *homoousion* for the relationship between the Father and the Son in 325 AD, and also listing the Spirit as the third article in the Creed, a shift began to occur in the stabilization of technical terminology. No longer was the Spirit per se suggested to be the divinity of the Son, linking the Son with the Father. The Son, post-incarnation, was understood to have his own divine nature along with a human nature. Rather, the Spirit was implied to be co-eternal with the Father and Son, although the Nicene Creed, as one can see in the column on the left, also contained anathemas about the use of the word *hypostasis* (‘person’ or ‘existence’). The church would backtrack on that point as the bishops redeployed the word *hypostasis* to mean not something more or less synonymous with *ousia* (‘essence’), and thus ‘substance,’ but rather ‘person.’ Shared between the Father and Son was a divine *ousia*. But the Father and Son were distinct in some way which, in 325, the word *hypostases* was not yet stabilized sufficiently to denote. While not making pre-Nicene terminology for the Spirit *wrong*, Nicaea began to signal a shift in Christian expression and conceptualization of the Spirit. It opened wide the theological field for questions about the relations between the persons, the content of this divine *ousia*, the knowability of such things, and the advisability of attempting to press further into these terms using human language which was inherently limited by our human experience.

Athanasius himself did not treat the Nicene Creed as a rallying standard until about the first *Discourse*, as some scholars hypothesize. This conclusion is based on the Alexandrian bishop’s curious lack of advocacy for the *homoousion* and the Nicene Creed prior to that.¹⁵ In fact, no one refers to it until the 350’s.¹⁶ This makes good sense, as the far-flung Christian community had never treated a ‘council’ as authoritative for all churches, and had no precedent for receiving a ‘creed’ as a rallying standard from one. Accounts of the Council of Nicaea suggest that the proceedings of 325 AD were viewed as mostly administrative even by

¹⁵ Lewis Ayres, *Nicaea and its Legacy: An Approach to Fourth-Century Trinitarian Theology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), p.114 – 115 notes that the word ‘homoousios’ from the Nicene Creed is only used once in the *Discourses*. ‘Nevertheless, we do see here an engagement with Nicaea, a realization that the language used there serves an ongoing purpose. It is also noticeable that his interest in *ousia* language occurs at the same time as his growing use of *idios* in the same contexts.’ He notes that Athanasius, *Eleventh Festal Letter* of 339 AD speaks of the Council of Nicaea being important because of its size, but not necessarily because of the Creed, but I am unable to ascertain what passage he refers to.

¹⁶ Ayres 2004, p.136 – 137 cites Hilary of Poitiers’ account of the Council at Milan in 355 (*Synod.* 91) as the first time he had heard the Nicene Creed recited in a public context as an authoritative statement of faith.

the participants themselves.¹⁷ They adopted the term *homoousion* because it ruled out the teaching of Arius. But the Creed itself was not designed to be a pastoral tool in the further education of Christians, despite the fact that it was structured in the same manner as baptismal formulae and the so-called Apostles' Creed. Indeed, as Matthew Steenberg has shown, this is why Cyril of Jerusalem could maintain an anti-Arian position and yet use his own catechism for instructing the newly baptized; he essentially ignored the Nicene Creed and the word *homoousion*.¹⁸ Some factions in the Eastern Greek-speaking church were against *ousia* terminology because of its usage by Sabellius, and because of its previous association with a material substance, shown for instance by the Council of Sirmium in 357 which pointedly argued against *ousia* language.¹⁹ This would mean that Athanasius had to view his own activity in Rome in the 340's as more foundationally theological, pastoral, and linguistic than administrative, organizational, and political. The latter concern is not completely absent, of course. But the former certainly takes precedence in his writings. For example, in his *Tome to the Antiochenes*, written in 362, Athanasius explains that while he investigated the theology of two other Christian groups, it is the *structure of thought and categories* which he is most concerned about, not whether the Antiochenes used the same terms he did, for he was aware that terminological stability and uniformity had not been achieved, even though he might wish for such a thing.²⁰

Indeed, only in 362 in the *Tome to the Antiochenes* did Athanasius overcome his own hesitation to the use of the word *hypostasis* to denote the distinctive identities of the Father, Son, and Spirit. The idea of there being three *hypostases* in God had been used by Origen in a subordinationist scheme where the Son was somehow lesser than the Father. Athanasius had scrupulously avoided that framework. But it was his encounter with two groups from Antioch who used terminology in a different way that gave him reason to reconsider using the term *hypostasis*. The first group confessed three *hypostases* in God, but not in a subordinationist scheme which he feared. Thus, Athanasius for the first time 'admits that *hypostasis* might primarily indicate a logical distinction: indicating only that the persons are truly and eternally distinct, and doing so in the context of a belief that whatever is God is immaterial and simply God.'²¹ But Athanasius also defends those who speak of God as having one *hypostasis* for doing so if they were indicating that the divine is 'one reality distinct from the created order and not indicating a belief that Son and Spirit are not truly existent realities.'²² In other words, Athanasius is willing to use the word *hypostasis* flexibly according to its confessed context and purpose, and encourages others to do so as well. This seems only fair; Athanasius after all was asking others to use the word *ousia* to mean an immaterial substance while in reference to God, despite its previous usage in Greek contexts, including in the New Testament, to refer to a material substance.²³ Does God have 'substance' in the same way that an argument has 'substance' in the same way that olive oil has 'substance?' Yes, but whether the object in question is immaterial or material, and divine or created, matters. Contexts determined the precise meaning of a word. From this, it should be clear that Athanasius did not simply view the Son and Spirit as active and resting states of one another. They were distinct, eternal realities.

Thus, in his first and second *Discourses*, Athanasius seems to straddle pre-Nicene and Nicene-Constantinopolitan ways of articulating the Spirit. This is not unusual for the fourth century theologians.

¹⁷ Matthew Craig Steenberg, *Of God and Man: Theology as Anthropology from Irenaeus to Athanasius* (New York, NY: T&T Clark, 2009), ch.3

¹⁸ *Ibid* ch.4; cf. Ayres 2004, p.153 – 157

¹⁹ Hilary of Poitiers, *Synod*. 11, records, 'But as for the fact that some, or many, are concerned about substance (*substantia*) which is called *ousia* in Greek, that is, to speak more explicitly, *homoousion* or *homoiousion*, as it is called, there should be no mention of it whatever, nor should anyone preach it.' Cited by Ayres 2004, p.138. The Homoian camp resisted using essence language to discuss the relation between the Son and the Father, preferring to say that the Son was 'like' (*homoios*) the Father.

²⁰ Athanasius of Alexandria, *Tome to the Antiochenes*. His earlier *On the Councils of Ariminum and Seleucia* written 359 – 361 appeals to Basil of Ancyra's use of *ousia* language despite the previous connotations of *ousia* being a semi-material substance. He denies that the word *homoousion* carries the same connotations of necessity. Athanasius' *On the Decrees of Nicaea* is written either 353 or 355 – 356 in the judgment of Ayres 2004, p.140. In it, Athanasius skillfully hones his logic in a detailed defense of the terminology of Nicaea. He especially refutes questions raised by the use of the word *homoousion* and the phrase 'of the *ousia* of the Father.'

²¹ Ayres 2004, p.174; Athanasius of Alexandria, *Tome to the Antiochenes* 5

²² Ayres 2004, p.174 – 175; Athanasius of Alexandria, *Tome to the Antiochenes* 6

²³ Aristotle, *Categories* 2b5 spoke of a material 'primary substance'; the Gospel of Luke renders the term 'inheritance' with the word *ousia* ('substance') in Luke 15:11 – 24; and the Gnostics used the word *homoousios* in a semi-material sense

Hilary of Poitiers, dubbed the ‘Athanasius of the West,’ also does this.²⁴ Athanasius assigns to the Word a chronological precedence and eminence over the Spirit in the economy of salvation in terms of sequence and function. Two quotations demonstrate that:

‘For how can he speak truth concerning the Father, who denies the Son, that reveals concerning Him? Or how can he be orthodox concerning the Spirit, while he speaks profanely of the Word that supplies the Spirit?’²⁵

‘All other things partake of the Spirit, but He, according to you, of what is He partaker? Of the Spirit? Nay, rather the Spirit Himself takes from the Son, as He Himself says; and it is not reasonable to say that the latter is sanctified by the former. Therefore it is the Father that He partakes; for this only remains to say.’²⁶

This stress on the Son supplying the Spirit, and the Spirit partaking in the Son but not vice versa, is not merely due to Athanasius’ purpose in writing, which is to elevate the Son as far as possible with the Father. As I demonstrated in the previous works of the Alexandrian that I have surveyed, Athanasius believed that the Spirit inhered in the words – as in *the verbal speech* – of the Word. That pastoral perspective is important to keep in mind here because it is otherwise hard to discern why Athanasius would say these things. And the verbal speech he attributed to the Word was not only that of Jesus of Nazareth. Like virtually all patristic Christians, he believed that the pre-incarnate but immanent Word sojourned on the earth with Adam and Eve all the way through the history of Israel.²⁷ God, who once walked in the garden, the angel who wrestled Jacob, the divine appearance in the burning bush – all those theophanies were the Word immanent but not yet incarnate.²⁸ All this follows the remarks of Paul and Jude, who saw Christ not only prefigured in the Old Testament literature, but personally active in that history (1 Cor.10:1 – 14; Jude 1:5 where some manuscripts read ‘the Lord Jesus, after saving a people out of the land of Egypt...’). Since this was the bishop’s understanding, it makes good sense that he would say that the Word supplies the Spirit, or that the Spirit takes from the Son. Whenever God spoke in the Old Testament, it was the Word speaking, and his words were suffused by the Spirit. The Hebrew Scriptures were thus spoken by the Holy Spirit, in the mind of Athanasius. Athanasius is therefore summarizing biblical salvation history – that is, the economy and the economic trinity.

That should be somewhat reassuring to those who expect to find in Athanasius the Constantinopolitan revision of the Nicene Creed, ‘the Holy Spirit, the giver of life, who proceeds from *the Father*.’ Given the controversy about the addition of the phrase ‘and from the Son’ by the Latin West, and the arguments about what is at stake in doing so, we are rightfully interested in how Athanasius might view the matter.

The Father-Son language of filial relations for Athanasius seems to be deeply connected to the notion of inheritance. What is relatively clear in Athanasius’ Trinitarian thought is that the Father gives all of himself to the Son without reserve. So much so that, although the Father and Son share divine ‘essence’ (*ousia*), Athanasius strongly insists that the Son *is* the Father’s wisdom, power, and radiance, drawing on passages like 1 Corinthians 1:24 and Hebrews 1:3 to make that assertion. So these other ‘qualities’ or ‘characteristics’ of God are not part of the *ousia* (‘essence’) of God per se. They exist, rather, in the person of the Son, *as* the Son, or *as qualities of* the Son. In Athanasius’ mind, the Son does not *share* the Father’s

²⁴ Hilary of Poitiers, *On the Trinity* 8.19; 12.55; cf. Ayres 2004, p.185

²⁵ Athanasius of Alexandria, *Discourse Against the Arians* 1.8

²⁶ *Ibid* 1.15; Athanasius’ use of the word ‘partake’ refers to a sharing of one thing by another which is different from it. So, typically, Athanasius uses the word to denote God’s divine life or divine nature interacting with human beings or human nature. He uses the word ‘partake’ in opposition to the word ‘proper’ or the phrase ‘shares by nature.’ Hence, the Son ‘is proper’ to the Father; the Son does not ‘partake’ in the Father. However, Athanasius also uses the word ‘partake’ as signifying human beings sharing in the Word and Spirit by virtue of God’s creation of us, as opposed to the conscious state of sharing in the Word and Spirit by virtue of participating in redemption. In his first Discourse, Athanasius uses the word ‘partake’ or ‘partaking’ times. Paragraphs 15 and 16 are especially dense; the word occurs there 14 times.

²⁷ Justin Martyr, *First Apology* 62 – 63; *Dialogue with Trypho* 61, 126; Irenaeus of Lyons, *Against Heresies* 4.14.2; 4.20.1 – 4.22.2; *Demonstration of the Apostolic Preaching* 45, 46; *Fragment* 53; Tertullian of Carthage, *Against Praxeas* 14 – 16; Melito of Sardis, *On the Passover* 60, 69, 96; Hilary of Poitiers, *On the Trinity* books 4 – 5; Ambrose of Milan, *Exposition of the Christian Faith* 1.28 – 29, 83.

²⁸ Athanasius of Alexandria, *Against the Heathen* 45.3; *First Letter to Virgins* 26, 38; *Discourses Against the Arians* 2.68 comments on these incidents briefly, and in *Discourses* 3.12, 16 sees the pre-incarnate Son as the angel who wrestled Jacob.

wisdom, power, and radiance, as if those were independent substances or qualities of which Father and Son have equal portions, as Augustine would later argue.²⁹ Nor does the Father have a monopoly on those qualities and lends them to the Son without fully bestowing them upon him. Rather, the Son himself *is* those qualities for the Father, and of the Father. The Son inherits all the Father *is*. For Athanasius, this is how the Son is *proper* to the Father, and why they cannot possibly be without each other. For what would a fountain be without its stream, we find Athanasius saying regularly, or the sun without its radiance, or God without His Word and His Wisdom? By speaking of Word and Wisdom this way, Athanasius is firmly anchoring himself in the biblical story, of course, but he also seems happy to allow words like *logos* to resonate in the Greek air – *logos*, *sophia*, and other words had significant meaning in many Greek philosophies. Would God, who we consider to be the highest rational being, even be intrinsically rational if he were without his *logos*?

When the Son bestows and shares the Spirit, then, how then does the Son reflect the Father? For if the Holy Spirit is given by the Son in the economic trinity, and the Son is the exact radiance of the Father, then the Son must be giving the Spirit in such a way that mirrors the Father giving all of himself to the Son in the immanent trinity. It is possible that ‘life’ in the Johannine sense can ostensibly be the Spirit, given the way John links them in semantics, logic, and imagery (Jn.4:1 – 30; 14:1 – 15:17). John says that the Father ‘has life in himself and gives the Son to have life in himself also’ (Jn.5:26). But Athanasius does not make that particular argument. For his own reasons, which remain unstated but are more or less discernable, Athanasius at this point is reluctant to reason about the Holy Spirit in the immanent trinity from the economic trinity.

The Spirit in Creation (1.11 – 13)

How does Athanasius speak of the Spirit in these treatises? Just before broaching the topic of the Son being the essence of the Father, in 1.11 – 13, Athanasius revisits a major theme from *Against the Heathen – On the Incarnation*: creation; the revelation of the Word via the creation; and how one comes to true knowledge of God. Athanasius might have made a different case against the Arians if he had made his Christological case a different way. For instance, he might have simply strung together New Testament texts about the Word’s involvement in creation, and creation’s teleological purpose being ‘for him’: John 1:1 and 1:3; Romans 11:36; 1 Corinthians 8:6; Ephesians 1:9 – 10; Colossians 1:16. A concatenation like that might have been sufficient to establish the divine nature of the Word, grounded in a touchstone text like John 1:1.

Instead, Athanasius appears to be committed to exploring the matter through the defending the Word as the power of God. He cites the touchstone text, John 1:1, along with Revelation 1:4, to argue for the eternity of the Word, and his co-eternity with the Father. He then discusses creation and the Word’s role as creator. He quotes Romans 1:20 where Paul says that ‘His eternal power’ has been clearly seen, and glosses it with 1 Corinthians 1:24 where he says ‘Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.’ Athanasius claims by word association that the apostle Paul meant that the Word himself is evident in creation precisely through the demonstration of his power:

‘For, ‘In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God [John 1:1].’ And in the Apocalypse he thus speaks; ‘Who is and who was and who is to come [Revelation 1:4].’ Now who can rob ‘who is’ and ‘who was’ of eternity? This too in confutation of the Jews has Paul written in his Epistle to the Romans, ‘Of whom as concerning the flesh is Christ, who is over all, God blessed for ever [Romans 9:5];’ while silencing the Greeks, he has said, ‘The visible things of Him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal Power and Godhead [Romans 1:20];’ and what the Power of God is, he teaches us elsewhere himself, ‘Christ the Power of God and the Wisdom of God [1 Corinthians 1:24].’ Surely in these words he does not designate the Father, as you often whisper one to another, affirming that the Father is ‘His eternal power [Romans 1:20].’ This is not so; for he says not, ‘God Himself is the power,’ but ‘His is the power.’ Very plain is it to all that ‘His’ is not ‘He;’ yet not something alien but rather proper to Him. Study too the context and ‘turn to the

²⁹ Peter J. Leithart, *Athanasius* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2011), p.75 – 77, 86

Lord [2 Corinthians 3:16].’ Now ‘the Lord is that Spirit [2 Corinthians 3:17];’ and you will see that it is the Son who is signified.’³⁰

Athanasius is consistent here with the portrait of humanity which he painted in *Against the Heathen* 1 – 5 as he retold the Genesis narrative: human beings were created to gaze at creation – and probably with verbal assistance from the Word as they did so – and be led into contemplation of the creative Word and ‘his eternal power’ as ‘the power of God.’ He seems committed to this form of argument because of his ability to chain-link biblical passages.

Athanasius seems to rely on his ability to chain-link passages – and deploy a theological hermeneutic while interpreting certain divine attributes – at the expense of close exegesis of the biblical texts which serves as his raw material. The apostle Paul is probably not thinking of the Word of God quite so specifically in Romans 1:20 when he refers to the power of God evident *in creation*. Paul associates the power of God *in salvation* with the Spirit, not the Son or Word *per se*. Paul says that God’s power is demonstrated in Jesus’ resurrection as ‘according to the Holy Spirit’ in the very beginning of the letter (1:4). And he returns to speak of ‘the power of the Holy Spirit,’ twice at the end of the letter (15:13, 19). In between, while some of Paul’s uses of the word ‘power’ in Romans are of indeterminate meaning (8:38; 9:17, 22), the apostle does say that the proclamation of the gospel is ‘the power of God for salvation’ (1:16). Like the apostle John, Paul believes that the Spirit suffuses the words spoken in gospel proclamation. Athanasius viewed the words of gospel proclamation in the same way, as I have demonstrated in his chronologically earlier writings.

But one of Athanasius’ favorite anchor texts, 1 Corinthians 1:24, is close at hand. Athanasius seems to not worry about eliding between the Word and the Spirit in the economy of creation and redemption. For example, why does Athanasius deploy 2 Corinthians 3:16 – 17 in this context? Does the passage have bearing on his discussion of creation? Or is it a poetic and intuitive move on his part? My suspicion is that Athanasius reaches for the phrase ‘turn *to* the Lord’ from 2 Corinthians 3:16 as a rejoinder to the verdict of Romans 1:20 where Paul rebukes the pagan idolater for turning *away* from God despite the creation’s witness (Rom.1:21 – 32). This serves Athanasius’ argument against the Arians because if the Son is not from the essence and substance of the Father, then there would be no bridge between the creation, which is the handiwork of the ‘Framing Word,’ and the Father. He also seems to tie in the Spirit, using 2 Corinthians 3:17, into this discussion of creation, not because Romans 1:20 does so, but because *Genesis 1:1 – 2* does. Athanasius is rereading Genesis 1:1 – 2 using 2 Corinthians 3:17. If the Spirit hovered over creation, then invoking 2 Corinthians 3:17, Athanasius reasons, ‘the Lord is that Spirit.’ That association serves as another hurdle for Arian logic. For ‘it is the Son who is signified,’ Athanasius says, by mention of the Spirit in the Genesis creation. Here, Athanasius may be open to a similar underlying logic as Tertullian. Perhaps he is thinking that there is some manner in which, in creation, the Spirit is the substance of the Word, and the Word is the operation of the Spirit, but in such a way that holds the Word and Spirit to be co-eternal and distinct, not simply resting and active states of one another.

Furthermore, as Athanasius probably recognized, 2 Corinthians 3:16 – 17 is part of an extended discussion about God once indwelling Israel’s tabernacle-temple, whereas God now indwells believers in Christ individually and corporately. The apostle Paul’s comparison of Moses to Jesus, the old covenant to the new covenant, the writing on stone tablets to the writing on hearts (per Jeremiah 31:31 – 34), and the veiled face hiding God’s glory to the unveiled face shining God’s glory, are all intertwined in a comparison between the old sanctuary of stone and the new sanctuary of human being. This surely was not being lost upon the Alexandrian bishop. It was part of the extended story and movement of the Word being immanent in creation, now taking flesh as Jesus of Nazareth. This is, in fact, what Athanasius discusses next: Creation by itself does not provide sufficient information to the observer to speak of the Father; we have always needed the Father’s immanent Son,³¹ who is co-eternal with the Father and therefore capable of revealing him.³² In other words, Athanasius moves easily between temple structures in which God becomes present as the inhabitant.

³⁰ Athanasius of Alexandria, *Discourse Against the Arians* 1.11

³¹ *Ibid* 1.12

³² *Ibid* 1.13

The Spirit of the Father and His Son Who is from the Father's Essence (1.14 – 16)

In 1.14 – 16, Athanasius argues that the Son is from the 'essence' of the Father, in the section where he specially focuses on the topic. It does not occur to him to say that the essence of the Father is, in some sense, the Spirit *also*, for he reserves 'essence' language wholly for the Son. Through the use of this term, he is protecting his claim that beholding the Son means beholding the Father. For Athanasius, the Son must *completely* be the 'essence' of the Father, without remainder:

'All other things partake of the Spirit, but He, according to you, of what is He partaker? Of the Spirit? Nay, rather the Spirit Himself takes from the Son, as He Himself says; and it is not reasonable to say that the latter is sanctified by the former. Therefore it is the Father that He partakes; for this only remains to say. But this, which is participated, what is it or whence? If it be something external provided by the Father, He will not now be partaker of the Father, but of what is external to Him; and no longer will He be even second after the Father, since He has before Him this other; nor can He be called Son of the Father, but of that, as partaking which He has been called Son and God. And if this be unseemly and irreligious, when the Father says, 'This is My Beloved Son [Matthew 3:17],' and when the Son says that God is His own Father, it follows that what is partaken is not external, but from the essence of the Father. And as to this again, if it be other than the essence of the Son, an equal extravagance will meet us; there being in that case something between this that is from the Father and the essence of the Son, *whatever that be*. Such thoughts then being evidently unseemly and untrue, we are driven to say that what is from the essence of the Father, and proper to Him, is entirely the Son; for it is all one to say that God is wholly participated, and that He begets; and what does begetting signify but a Son?'³³

As always, Athanasius interprets Father and Son language in Scripture to be communicating identity of essence. He rules out any suggestion of temporality: Human fathers are men who become fathers when they beget a child, but not so with God. He also rules out any suggestion of sinfulness or lust. And he rules out an act of will. The Son is not begotten by the Father through an act of the Father's will, which would also require temporality, but by essence and by nature.

Once again, based on Athanasius' earlier writings where he indicates that the Spirit inheres in the words of the Word, I think we are relatively safe in interpreting the Alexandrian in the following way: God spoke the creation into existence, and brought things into being in and through the Word; the ongoing existence of all things is evidence that the resonance of the word of the Word continues to reverberate; and the power by which the Word upholds all creation, in fulfillment of his spoken word, is the Spirit. Hence, 'All other things partake of the Spirit.' And in the next paragraph, 'Of the Son himself, all things partake of the grace of the Spirit coming from him.'

It seems to follow, in Athanasius' use of terms, that the relation between the Son and the Spirit still requires some definition. Or, the term 'essence' would need some rearrangement in order to accommodate a fully Nicene-Constantinopolitan articulation of the Spirit who is *homoousios* with the Father and the Son. Somewhat amusingly, Athanasius points to 'the essence of the Son,' seems to consider defining that more, and then shrugs his shoulders and admits that he has reached the limit of his own mind and biblical data as to what that is: 'whatever that be,' he says. Instead of taking that course, Athanasius cautiously incorporates the Spirit using biblical terminology, linking 'partaking' of the Son by 'the grace of the Spirit coming from him' and temple imagery.

'And thus of the Son Himself, all things partake according to *the grace of the Spirit coming from Him*; and this shows that the Son Himself partakes of nothing, but what is partaken from the Father, is the Son; for, as partaking of the Son Himself, we are said to partake of God; and this is what Peter said 'that you may be partakers in a divine nature [2 Peter 1:4];' as says too the Apostle, 'Do you not know, that you are a temple of God [1 Corinthians 3:16a],' and, 'We are the temple of a living God [2 Corinthians 6:16].' And beholding the Son, we see the Father; for the thought and comprehension of the Son, is knowledge concerning the Father, because He is His

³³ Ibid 1.15 – 16 emphasis mine

proper offspring from His essence. And since to be partaken no one of us would ever call affection or division of God's essence (for it has been shown and acknowledged that God is participated, and to be participated is the same thing as to beget); therefore that which is begotten is neither affection nor division of that blessed essence. Hence it is not incredible that God should have a Son, the Offspring of His own essence; nor do we imply affection or division of God's essence, when we speak of 'Son' and 'Offspring;' but rather, as acknowledging the genuine, and true, and Only-begotten of God, so we believe.³⁴

Athanasius is surely aware, as a biblical theologian, that invoking the baptism of Jesus at the Jordan and the two passages from 1 and 2 Corinthians about being the temple of God triggers awareness of the Holy Spirit's role in those passages. Close to Athanasius' citation are the full quotations from 3:16 – 17 and 6:19:

'Do you not know that you are a temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in you? If any man destroys the temple of God, God will destroy him, for the temple of God is holy, and that is what you are.' (1 Cor.3:16 – 17)

'Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and that you are not your own?' (1 Cor.6:19)

At this point, since Athanasius does not explicitly construct an analogy between a temple within God and the temple structures in creation through which God reveals Himself, I will only say that these thoughts are very close at hand. This coincides with the temple theme related to 2 Corinthians 3:17 which Paul surfaces explicitly in 2 Corinthians 6:16. It is notable that despite the availability of other passages about the Holy Spirit – in Romans 8, say, or Luke-Acts – Athanasius' mind is drawn to these passages where the temple motif figures very prominently, to complement or mutually interpret the baptism of Jesus. That is, he is already thinking about the Spirit in a *perichoretic* way. And the baptism of Jesus is a temple-patterned event. I will explore this below in my treatment of *Discourses* 1.46 – 52.

Still more significant is the fact that Athanasius makes 2 Peter 1:4 a link in a sequence of interlocking temple structures in which one partakes in another. (1) By the grace of the Spirit, we partake in the Son. (2) The Son by nature partakes in the Father. Therefore, (3) all who partake of the Son partake of God. Athanasius thinks of temple passages immediately after discussing 2 Peter 1:4. To be 'partakers of the divine nature' triggers for him a temple image in which the Spirit appears to occupy the place of 'the divine nature' dwelling in the believer. The 'divine nature' is an intangible, non-physical substance, but it has a conceptual structure and rationality. Hence the effect (or, at least one effect) of the Spirit in the believer is to bring us rational knowledge of the Father via knowledge of the Son. Once again, Athanasius appears to stress a relationship between the Spirit's work and conceptual, linguistically expressed convictions starting with the basic statement that the Son is truly Son of the Father in the sense of sharing – or being – the Father's essence. For us to partake in the divine nature may include 'mystical' or 'experiential' components, but it is at minimum a *rational* experience of *knowing* God as God knows Himself as Father and Son in one Spirit. For Athanasius, that is the fundamental experience the Holy Spirit shares with us: an experience of personal *knowing*. The Spirit *brings*, and maybe even *is*, God's own self-awareness as Father and Son. We can see how this fits quite well with Athanasius' early work in his opening chapters of *Against the Heathen*. He conceives of the Spirit dwelling in the rational human soul in a temple structure: the human soul was created by God capable of perceiving and participating in conceptual order, and the Spirit brings or is the rational information about the Father and Son that is appropriate to human rationality. In turn, the human soul dwells in the human body in a temple structure: the human body was created by God capable of participating in an ontological ordering according to the soul in such a way that is appropriate to human personhood. The elements in which the temple structure is expressed may change, but the overall arrangement stays consistent.

This appears to be how Athanasius interprets the Petrine statement about our partaking in the divine nature. The Spirit *is*, in some sense, the divine nature in which we partake, because the Spirit is God's self-

³⁴ Ibid 1.16 emphasis mine

awareness as Father and Son. I am not saying that the Spirit is reducible to mere *information* about the divine, or that the divine *ousia* can be explicated further; in both Scripture and Athanasius, we find reference to the Spirit having *power*, etc. That goes far beyond mere information or perspective. However, if I have read Athanasius fairly, then I think this we have found a sufficient explanation for why Athanasius' *Discourses Against the Arians* serve as a bridge between pre-Nicene and Nicene articulations of who the Spirit is.

The Son Shares the Spirit with Us (1.37 – 45)

In a section dedicated to Philippians 2:9 – 10, Athanasius turns his attention to what the Son is by nature, and what human beings become by grace and by the Spirit. In the following passage, Athanasius first engages Christological passages about God exalting Christ, which were contested between his Nicene party and the Arian camp: Philippians 2:9 – 10; Psalm 45:7; and Hebrews 1:9. If God exalted Christ, then Christ changed; if Christ changed; then his nature is alterable. So reasoned Eusebius and Arius, along with their followers.

'But since they allege the divine oracles and force on them a misinterpretation, according to their private sense, it becomes necessary to meet them just so far as to vindicate these passages, and to show that they bear an orthodox sense, and that our opponents are in error. They say then, that the Apostle writes, 'Wherefore God also has highly exalted Him, and given Him a Name which is above every name; that in the Name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven and things in earth and things under the earth [Philippians 2:9 – 10];' and David, 'Wherefore God even Your God, has anointed You with the oil of gladness above Your fellows [Psalm 45:7; Hebrews 1:9].' Then they urge, as something acute: 'If He was exalted and received grace, on a 'wherefore,' and on a 'wherefore' He was anointed, He received a reward of His purpose; but having acted from purpose, He is altogether of an alterable nature.' This is what Eusebius and Arius have dared to say, nay to write; while their partisans do not shrink from conversing about it in full market-place, not seeing how mad an argument they use.'³⁵

Arians seized upon Philippians 2:9 – 10 because they read into the exaltation of Jesus a movement from human to divinization. As part of his refutation, Athanasius picks up two different senses in which we speak of sons. There are sons of their fathers (or radiance of the sun) by nature. Then there are those who become sons of their fathers by virtue and grace. Jesus is 'very Son' of the Father *by nature*. We are sons of God *by grace, having receiving the Spirit by participation*.

'For if He received what He had as a reward of His purpose, and would not have had it, unless He had needed it, and had His work to show for it, then having gained it from virtue and promotion, with reason had He 'therefore' been called Son and God, without being very Son. For what is from another by nature, is a real offspring, as Isaac was to Abraham, and Joseph to Jacob, and the radiance to the sun; but the so called sons from virtue and grace, have but in place of nature a grace by acquisition, and are something else besides the gift itself; as the men *who have received the Spirit by participation*, concerning whom Scripture says, 'I begot and exalted children, and they rebelled against Me [Isaiah 1:2].' And of course, since they were *not sons by nature*, therefore, when they altered, the Spirit was taken away and they were disinherited; and again on their repentance that God who thus at the beginning gave them grace, will receive them, and give light, and call them sons again.'³⁶

Athanasius carefully distinguishes his terms. Nature and grace here do not refer to the Augustinian distinction between creation and Creator, humanity over against God, or human activity over against God's activity. 'By nature' refers to ontological relations which inhere intrinsically in the realities under consideration: the Son is *by nature* divine, for he is *by nature* from the Father. Nor does 'grace' here mean 'mercy' on the one hand, or 'God's unilateral activity mutually exclusive with human activity' on the other. Rather, 'grace' in Athanasius means *theosis*, or divinization by participation in the divine nature (2 Pet.1:4). This is why Athanasius speaks of 'grace' in ways that are surprising to the average Protestant: grace is

³⁵ Athanasius of Alexandria, *Discourse Against the Arians* 1.37

³⁶ *Ibid* 1.37

virtually synonymous with a type of ‘virtue’ and results in more ‘virtue’; grace is ‘by acquisition’; inasmuch as grace is also ‘received’ because it comes not from ourselves, but from God. Specifically, it comes by receiving God’s Spirit.

The Spirit is *by nature* the Son’s. The Spirit is not by nature, intrinsically, humanity’s. There is a human choice involved to receive the Spirit. Not that God begrudges the Spirit to us. God graciously lets us participate in the Spirit by partaking of it. This Athanasius effectively calls by the biblical term ‘sonship by adoption.’ Later Athanasius says, ‘For adoption there could not be apart from the real Son, who says, ‘No one knows the Father, save the Son, and he to whomsoever the Son will reveal Him [Matthew 11:27].’³⁷

Athanasius cites the experience of Mosaic Israel as described by the prophet Isaiah, and ties it to an experience of the Holy Spirit. Perhaps Athanasius is thinking of the experience of various individuals’ experiences, or the experience of Israel as a collective. Athanasius knows that a measure of the Spirit came upon individuals who were anointed for special speaking roles: the seventy elders who helped Moses (Num.11:16 – 30); Joshua (Dt.34:9); the judges and prophets, King Saul; and King David, who was afraid that the Holy Spirit might be taken away from him (Ps.51:11) because he had inferred it departed from Saul (1 Sam.16:14 – 23). Athanasius may be supposing that the Spirit was actually present when individual Israelites – and not just those in leadership roles – were obedient to God. This may come from the curious (and probably not coincidental) mention of ‘a divine spirit’ in the obedient Joseph at the height of his ascent (Gen.41:38). However, seeing the Holy Spirit’s activity in such an individualized way under the Sinai covenant would mean that Athanasius was using Isaiah 1:2 in a way that Isaiah himself probably did not intend. In my opinion, it is more likely that Athanasius was reading Isaiah 1:2 as referring to Israel’s experience as a historic community. Israel collectively was drawn out from Egypt and exalted as an adopted ‘son’ collectively (Ex.4:22; Rom.9:4). The Hebrew Scriptures tie the concept of inheritance to the designation of sonship. In Israel’s case, God gave them the land of Canaan as a new garden land, reminiscent of Adam and Eve in the original Garden of Eden. Thus, when God exiled them, ‘the Spirit was taken away,’ Athanasius says, ‘and they were disinherited.’ Possibly, Athanasius is thinking about the departure of the shekinah glory from the Temple, and the exile to Babylon. If so, then he is tracing out Isaiah’s own hope for the promised return of the Spirit (e.g. Isa.59:21).

Grounding sanctification in Christ occupies Athanasius’ mind in 1.46 – 52 but the bishop introduces the topic in 1.41. He ties Jesus’ sanctification of us to his exaltation into heaven, arguing that the exaltation of the human Jesus was for us. He quotes Jesus’ prayer when Jesus ‘sanctifies himself’ in John 17:19.

‘But if now for us the Christ is entered into heaven itself, though He was even before and always Lord and Framer of the heavens, for us therefore is that present exaltation written. *And as He Himself, who sanctifies all, says also that He sanctifies Himself to the Father for our sakes, not that the Word may become holy, but that He Himself may in Himself sanctify all of us,* in like manner we must take the present phrase, ‘He highly exalted Him,’ not that He Himself should be exalted, for He is the highest, but that He may become righteousness for us, and we may be exalted in Him, and that we may enter the gates of heaven...’³⁸

Then, in 1.43, Athanasius returns to the motif of ‘adoption.’ He deploys key quotations from the apostle John about the importance of our human responsiveness:

‘For the fact that the Lord, even when come in human body and called Jesus, was worshipped and believed to be God’s Son, and that through Him the Father was known, shows, as has been said, that not the Word, considered as the Word, received this so great grace, but we. For because of our relationship to His Body we too have become God’s temple, and in consequence are made God’s sons, so that even in us the Lord is now worshipped, and beholders report, as the Apostle says, that God is in them of a truth. As also John says in the Gospel, ‘As many *as received Him*, to them

³⁷ Ibid 1.39

³⁸ Ibid 1.41

gave He power to become children of God [John 1:12];' and in his Epistle he writes, 'By this we know that *He abides in us by His Spirit which He has given us* [1 John 3:24].'³⁹

He draws on the temple image to ground the revelation of God in and through His people, and perhaps also to invoke once again the structure of that divine self-disclosure. But this relation is not automatic. It requires a response of faith, inasmuch as participation in the humanity of Jesus, which was intended for us and for our benefit, requires our conscious participation. Athanasius' two quotations from the apostle John stress our necessary response and reception. Those who 'are made God's sons' are 'as many as received him... to become children of God.' This sonship by adoption comes about because God's Son, who is by nature Son, is able to join himself to us and share his sonship with us: 'He abides in us by His Spirit which He has given us.' This ties up the loose end in 1.37 when Athanasius quoted Isaiah 1:2 about God reversing His previous disinheritance of Israel. 'Again on their repentance... God who thus at the beginning gave them grace, will receive them, and give light, and call them sons again.' What was prophesied by Isaiah about the re-extension of sonship by adoption has now come to pass, in union with Christ by the Spirit. Later, Athanasius will call our reception of the Spirit, 'the sequel of the Spirit grace,' because that which the Spirit did in Jesus' humanity now occurs in us as a 'sequel':

'And therefore have we securely received it, He being said to be anointed in the flesh; for the flesh being first sanctified in Him, and He being said, as man, to have received for its sake, we have the sequel of the Spirit grace, receiving 'out of His fullness' [John 1:16].'⁴⁰

T.F. Torrance's 'actualism' suggests that Jesus' human response to the Father already *encompasses*, or even *is*, our actual human response in such a way that his 'flesh,' as Athanasius says above, encompasses our own 'flesh,' and his personhood our personhood. Some practitioners of this brand of 'actualism' would prefer to say that we are *already* children of God by virtue of who Jesus is and what he has done for us, and therefore this Johannine language of receiving him and becoming children of God really ought to be reworked into the past tense. In essence, in this type of 'actualism,' perhaps people can choose 'out' through their resistance and unbelief, but Jesus has already located them as 'in.' However, in passages like these, Athanasius shows that becoming God's children, or being made God's sons, is tied to the church community by virtue of repentance and reception of his Spirit. 'We too have become God's temple,' Athanasius says, 'so that even in us the Lord is now worshipped.' The whole point of using 'temple' language in this context is to designate the place God is worshiped. Conversely, where God is *not* worshiped, there the temple is *not*. And where the temple is not, there, people are not 'made God's sons.' Not yet at least.

Athanasius indicates that the work of Christ not only demands a human response, but also that our positive human response moves us from 'outside' to 'inside.' This movement of the believer corresponds with the revelation that Christ Jesus is really the eternal Son of the Father, come to share his sonship with us by his Spirit. Our 'adoption as sons' in light of the revelation of Jesus Christ as the Son of God is more extensive than what 'adoption as sons' meant for Israel in Exodus 4:22 and Romans 9:4. The semantic phraseology is the same, but the underlying meaning has deepened.

The Spirit Anointed Jesus in the Jordan River (1.46 – 52)

Discourses 1.46 – 52 is a long section where Athanasius highlights the Holy Spirit very densely and extensively. He endeavors to explain the Jordan event where Jesus was baptized, and received the Spirit from the Father. This event now requires Athanasius to explain the difference between the Son and the Spirit. Leopoldo A. Sanchez M. points out that Athanasius modifies Irenaeus here.⁴¹ I will argue that Athanasius, despite his close similarity with his predecessor Irenaeus, makes a subtle shift in his teaching about the Spirit, the anointing of Jesus, and baptism. This subtle shift will have an impact on his understanding of the *human*, which will in turn leave a discernible impression upon the Christians who follow after him, and take them down a trajectory that will not be completely satisfactory.

³⁹ Ibid 1.43

⁴⁰ Ibid 1.50

⁴¹ Leopoldo A. Sanchez M., *Receiver, Bearer, and Giver of God's Spirit: Jesus' Life in the Spirit as a Lens for Theology and Life* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2015), p.12 – 20

Some background will be helpful. Irenaeus, bishop of Lyons in the late second century, wrote five extensive books against various Gnostic heresies. Some of those heresies held that 'Jesus' and 'Christ' were two different beings. In their view, the Jordan event was when the divine 'Christ' descended on the man 'Jesus.'⁴² They said this to maintain the typical Greek dualist separation between spirit and matter. The Gnostic proposal was that the divine 'Christ' only rested upon the human 'Jesus' until just before the crucifixion, when he departed again. His purpose had only been to teach, not to unite matter to God, because in the Gnostic schema, matter is incapable of salvation.

Given such opponents, Irenaeus might have understandably insisted that Jesus was the Jewish anointed messiah, 'Christ,' from birth, to create as sharp a difference as he could with the Gnostic view. However, he maintains that there was something special about the Jordan event where Jesus was anointed 'Christ' by the Holy Spirit. That is, Irenaeus faithfully maintains the use of the term Christ as a Jewish messianic title meaning 'anointed one.'

For Irenaeus, the anointing of Jesus was part of the process by which Father, by the Spirit, overflowed the humanity of Jesus *in stages*. At conception, the Holy Spirit was involved intrinsically as the Word assumed human nature to himself. But as Jesus came out of the waters of his baptism, the Spirit came upon him in a fresh way, as pertains to his humanity in the economy of salvation, to preach and proclaim the kingdom of God on earth. Irenaeus held that this is when Jesus of Nazareth was anointed 'Jesus Christ.'⁴³ Not, as the Gnostics believed, as if some supernatural being named 'Christ' descended upon the otherwise ordinary human being 'Jesus.' But rather, the Jordan is when Jesus of Nazareth was anointed in the Hebraic sense to be Israel's Messiah, the Christ, the true heir of David. For Irenaeus to maintain that Jesus was anointed 'Jesus Christ' in the Jordan and risk being misunderstood in his argument with the Gnostics attests to his desire to stay anchored in the biblical, Hebraic story and not immediately launch into a Christian, neo-Platonic synthesis about 'the human' abstracted from the Hebrew Scriptures, which is the subtle shift I was referring to, above. And just as the first King David was anointed by the Spirit and uttered great words of praise and worship to direct people to God, the last and greatest heir of David would utter greater words of praise to direct people to God in a much more profound way. In other words, the Spirit anointed and overflowed Jesus in new, powerful, and precise *speech*. And this has a normative correspondence to human beings today, precisely because Jesus of Nazareth, Israel's Messiah, is not just the revelation of the one true God, but also the revelation of normative human being, and *human development within the context of the biblical narrative*.

Anthony Briggman demonstrates Irenaeus' strategic use of Luke – Acts, especially Pentecost and the Spirit as the power constituting the church and its activity of preaching and teaching.

'In the early chapters of AH 3, Irenaeus establishes that the starting point for his argument in this Book is the role of the Spirit in the dissemination and preservation of the gospel message in the apostolic church... Among the defenders of the church catholic in the second century, Irenaeus alone incorporated Pentecost in a significant manner. It is a distinguishing feature of his thought.'⁴⁴

Briggman notes three strategic quotations of Luke in Irenaeus' *Against Heresies*. First is Luke 10:16, 'He who hears you, hears me; and he who despises you, despises me, and him that sent me.' Irenaeus quotes this in his preface to book 3. He uses this quote to tie the message of the apostles to the message of Christ. Second, before the quotation of Luke 10:16 comes the phrase, 'the Lord of all gave to his apostles the power of the Gospel.' This phraseology sounds Lukan. Luke called the Holy Spirit 'power from on high' in Luke 24:49, as Jesus instructed his apostles to wait in Jerusalem to be 'clothed' with that power. Then, the interlocking hinge verse in Acts 1:8 also ties the Holy Spirit to 'power': 'you shall receive power when

⁴² Irenaeus describes the Gnostic views of Valentinus, Cerinthus, and the Ophites in *Against Heresies* 1.6, 26, and 30, respectively

⁴³ Irenaeus of Lyons, *Against Heresies* 3.9.3, writes, 'For Christ did not at that time descend upon Jesus, neither was Christ one and Jesus another: but the Word of God--who is the Saviour of all, and the ruler of heaven and earth, who is Jesus, as I have already pointed out, who did also take upon Him flesh, and was anointed by the Spirit from the Father – was made *Jesus Christ*, as Esaias also says, 'There shall come forth a rod from the root of Jesse...' (emphasis mine). See also 3.16.1 to 3.16.9.

⁴⁴ Briggman, p.47

the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be my witnesses.’ Once again the tie to proclamation and preaching is explicit in the verses. Third, to establish the reliability of the apostles as representatives of Jesus, Irenaeus appeals to Pentecost as the moment when the apostles were invested with the power to carry on the truth of what they had heard. This he does in *Against Heresies* 3.1.1. He refers to Pentecost again in 3.12.1, appealing to Joel 2:28 – 29 and its vision of the Spirit empowering prophetic proclamation. And in 3.12.5, Irenaeus says that the apostles shared by the Spirit the perfection of the Lord Jesus: ‘These are voices of the disciples of the Lord, the truly perfect, who, after the assumption of the Lord, were perfected by the Spirit... For this was the knowledge of salvation, which renders those who acknowledge His Son’s advent perfect towards God.’

This emphasis in Irenaeus on Jesus as preacher, and the apostles as preachers after him, corresponds to Luke’s emphasis. Luke as author of both the Gospel and Acts structured his volumes around the Spirit empowering proclamation. My chart below shows this in simple form. In both works, (1) at the story’s start, (2) a lead character (3) quotes from the Old Testament (4) to summarize how the Spirit will empower proclamation. Then, (5) in the remainder of the narrative, the Spirit does empower preaching and proclamation through the various speeches of the main characters: Jesus (in the Gospel), followed by Simon Peter, Stephen, and Paul (in Acts).

	At the Story’s Start	A Lead Character	Quotes from the Old Testament	To Summarize How the Spirit Will Empower Proclamation	And the Spirit Empowers the Proclamation
Luke	Luke 4:14 – 30	Jesus	Isaiah 61:1 – 2	‘The Spirit of the Lord is upon me... to preach ... to proclaim ...’ (Luke 4:18 – 19)	Jesus preaches and proclaims (Luke 6:20 – 49; 8:5 – 21; 9:21 – 27; 10:1 – 11:13; 11:14 – 52; 12:1 – 13:35; 14:7 – 17:10; 17:20 – 18:17; 19:11 – 48; 21:5 – 36; 22:14 – 37; 24:36 – 50)
Acts	Acts 2:1 – 36	Simon Peter	Joel 2:28 – 29	‘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 2:14 – 36; 3:11 – 26; 4:8 – 12; 5:29 – 32; 7:2 – 53; 8:32 – 35; 13:13 – 42; 14:14 – 17; 17:22 – 31; 20:17 – 35; 22:1 – 21; 23:1 – 12; 24:10 – 21; 26:1 – 23; 28:17 – 28)

Later in *Against Heresies* 3.17.1, Irenaeus links the descent of the Spirit upon Jesus to the church as a whole, not just the apostles. He does this by linking to Isaiah 11:2 and 61:1 several more passages: Matthew 10:20 and 28:19, along with the prophecy of Joel 2:28 – 29 cited by Simon Peter in his Pentecost speech in Acts 2:17 – 18. Irenaeus first dismisses the gnostic teachers’ claims, then argues for the Spirit’s empowerment in the preaching of the church as a whole:

‘It certainly was in the power of the apostles to declare that Christ descended upon Jesus, or that the so-called superior Saviour [came down] upon the dispensational one, or he who is from the invisible places upon him from the Demiurge; but they neither knew nor said anything of the kind: for, had they known it, they would have also certainly stated it. But what really was the case, that did they record, [namely,] that the Spirit of God as a dove descended upon Him; this Spirit, of whom it was declared by Isaiah, ‘And the Spirit of God shall rest upon Him,’ [Isaiah 11:2] as I have already said. And again: ‘The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me, because He hath anointed Me.’ [Isaiah 61:1; Luke 4:18] That is the Spirit of whom the Lord declares, ‘For it is not ye that speak, but the Spirit of your Father which speaketh in you.’ [Matthew 10:20] And again, giving to the disciples the power of regeneration into God, He said to them, ‘Go and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost.’ [Matthew 28:19] For [God] promised, that in the last times He would pour Him [the Spirit] upon [His] servants and handmaids, that they might prophesy [Joel 2:28 – 29; Acts 2:17 – 18]; wherefore He did also descend upon the Son of God, made the Son of man, becoming accustomed in fellowship with Him to dwell in the human race, to rest with human beings, and to dwell in the workmanship of

God, working the will of the Father in them, and renewing them from their old habits into the newness of Christ.⁴⁵

The cumulative impact of these quotations about the Holy Spirit in Irenaeus' teaching is powerful. The joint purpose of the Son and Spirit is to empower faithful and effective proclamation by all the followers of Jesus, not just the apostles. Hence, the Spirit speaks 'in you,' to 'teach all nations,' and so 'they might prophesy.' Irenaeus widens his scope of interest at the end of this paragraph when he also says that the Holy Spirit needed to become 'accustomed' to dwelling in humanity, first in Jesus, and then in all believers: 'becoming accustomed in fellowship with Him to dwell in the human race, to rest with human beings, and to dwell in the workmanship of God, working the will of the Father in them, and renewing them from their old habits into the newness of Christ.' Irenaeus also says in the very next chapter that the eternal Son of God became genuine 'man, who had sin in himself... to destroy sin... so that sin should be destroyed by man, and man should go forth from death. God recapitulated in Himself the ancient formation of man, that He might kill sin, deprive death of its power, and vivify man' (3.18.7). It seems that the effect of the Son and the Spirit acting upon the humanity of Jesus is reciprocal: on the one hand, the Son cleansed his humanity of the corruption of sin, by the power of the Spirit, and thus accustomed his humanity to the presence of the Spirit; on the other hand, the Son accustomed the Spirit to indwelling humanity.⁴⁶ All this, Irenaeus ties not to the incarnation of the Son into human flesh, but to the descent of the Spirit upon Jesus at the Jordan.

Too, in Irenaeus as in the Gospel accounts, the Spirit accompanied verbal proclamation with power to heal: signs and wonders attesting to the healing of humanity. These miraculous signs were temporal and not necessarily permanent moments of liberation from disease and the demonic. All those miracles attested to the deeper healing of humanity which would be available once Jesus himself completed his struggle against temptation, crucified and defeated the corruption of sin within him, raised his human nature new and cleansed in the resurrection, and then shared with us his Spirit from out of the overflow of his new humanity. When Jesus healed the bodies of others, it was not synonymous with his healing of human nature in his own body. Rather, the former served as the anticipation of the latter. Hence the Jordan event and its triggering the kingdom ministry of Jesus was essential, not just to fulfill Scriptures which envisioned the kingdom of God on earth as accompanied by healings (like Isaiah), but because it was a preliminary *stage* by which the Spirit overflowed Jesus' humanity. Put another way, it would appear that Jesus could not give the fullness of the Spirit, which joined others to resurrection life, until he perfected that resurrection life in himself first. But the Jordan event nevertheless enabled Jesus to overflow his humanity in preaching and miracle-work, so that other human beings could enter into his preaching mission. It was a stage in the development of the atoning mission of the Son and Spirit.

The significance of this point is driven home when we consider the role of baptism in the view of these bishop-theologians. For Irenaeus, baptism was an anointing for Christian proclamation and service. It followed some kind of Christian instruction (*catechesis*) which explained at minimum the evangelistic message of the church (*kerygma*), and usually some of the teachings of Jesus for the discipleship of the believer. Baptism signified an identification with Jesus' death and resurrection, yes, but in a future-oriented, proleptic sense. Jesus' own baptism anticipated his death, burial, and resurrection as his final conquest of the corruption of sin by wielding the instrument of death. In the same way, believers look ahead to our own death as the final conquest of the corruption of sin in our own bodies (1 Cor.15:50 – 57). Baptism prefigures that, and signals our commitment to our own mortal death, interpreted now not as a terror but as a victory (Heb.2:14 – 15) – a victory over sin, in and through Jesus. Leopoldo A. Sanchez M. writes:

'Irenaeus understands that the church's Spirit-led participation by the Father's pleasure in the divine life happens through the church's present-day reenactment of the incarnate Word's

⁴⁵ Irenaeus of Lyons, *Against Heresies* 3.17.1

⁴⁶ Thus Briggman, p.72 goes a bit too far, however, in leaving us with the impression from this text alone that Irenaeus 'does not say here that the Spirit created an environment within the humanity of Jesus suitable to his presence and work.' Following shortly after 3.17.1 is 3.18.7. Irenaeus supplies us with ample data to confirm that the Son impacted his own human nature to create an environment within his humanity suitable for the Spirit. Hence, the effect of the Son and the Spirit acting upon the humanity of Jesus is reciprocal.

anointing by the Father with the Spirit. Thus the church does not participate in the divine life through a reenactment of the divine Word's *incarnation* as such, for that event constitutes an unrepeatable and non-transferable dimension of his identity. For Irenaeus, human reception of God and God's indwelling in humans can only take place by the church's sharing in the Spirit (unction) of God who first anointed Christ at the Jordan. For only the descent of the Spirit on the Word made flesh touches his true humanity in a way that allows for people of all times to participate or share in his anointing or unction through Christian baptism, a partaking that allows for human regeneration into the image and likeness of God and thus into a sharing in Christ's incorruptibility at the resurrection of the flesh.⁴⁷

Anthony Briggman, in discussing Irenaeus' understanding of baptism, further notes that second century teachers Origen of Alexandria, Hippolytus of Rome, and Tertullian of Carthage employed Christian baptismal rites with the same basic meaning.⁴⁸ There was a two-stage rite. First came baptism into water, which signified a cleansing of the body in preparation for the anointing of the Holy Spirit. Second came the laying on of hands which conferred or represented the Holy Spirit's anointing on the newly baptized believer. Here are Origen, Hippolytus, and Tertullian, respectively:

'In the Acts of the Apostles, the Holy Spirit was given by the imposition of the apostles' hands in baptism... And therefore the expression is competently applied to the Holy Spirit, because He will take up His dwelling, not in all men, nor in those who are flesh, but in those whose land has been renewed. Lastly, for this reason was the grace and revelation of the Holy Spirit bestowed by the imposition of the apostles' hands after baptism.'⁴⁹

'Lord God, you have made them (the neophytes) worthy to deserve the remission of sins through the laver of regeneration: make them worthy to be filled with the Holy Spirit'... after this, pouring the sanctified oil from his hand and putting it on his head he shall say: 'I anoint you with holy oil in God the Father Almighty and Christ Jesus and the Holy Spirit.'⁵⁰

'Not that in the waters we obtain the Holy Spirit; but in the water, under (the witness of) the angel, we are cleansed, and prepared for the Holy Spirit;' and 'In the next place the hand is laid on us, invoking and inviting the Holy Spirit through benediction... Then, over our cleansed and blessed bodies willingly descends from the Father that Holiest Spirit.'⁵¹

Although Origen and Tertullian were teachers, Hippolytus and Irenaeus were bishops, which gives them significant weight as representatives of Christian pastoral practice. It is also likely that Theophilus, bishop of Antioch around 170 AD, in his three-part letters to Autolytus, speaks of baptism when he speaks of Christians being 'anointed.'⁵² The fact that this understanding of baptism appears in written form in all the major centers of Mediterranean Christianity (Alexandria in Egypt, Rome, Carthage in Roman North Africa, Lyons in Roman Gaul, and probably Antioch in Syria) is impressive. Baptism was connected to an anointing from the Holy Spirit, which itself was connected to Jesus' anointing in the Jordan. Baptism certainly points ahead to death and resurrection (as per Rom.6:1 – 11), just as Jesus' own baptism pointed ahead to his own death and resurrection. And the Holy Spirit makes the spiritual and moral power of the resurrected Jesus available to the believer (as per e.g. Rom.8:5 – 17 and Eph.1:15 – 2:10). But the immediate connection of the believer's baptism is to Jesus' own baptism.

I believe that the anointing of believers in baptism to preach and serve corresponds to the original creation story, irrespective of the fall. If Adam and Eve had remained unfallen, their children would have gone through stages of human development. God's original blessing upon Adam and Eve in Genesis 1:26 – 28, to 'rule and subdue,' was exercised in large part by *speaking*. Serving also was important, not least by spreading the garden down the four riverways flowing out from Eden (Gen.2:7), and then cultivating the

⁴⁷ Sanchez M., p.20

⁴⁸ Briggman, p.81 – 82

⁴⁹ Origen of Alexandria, *On First Principles* 1.3.2, 7; cf. *Commentary on Romans* 5.8.3; *Homily on Ezekiel* 7.4

⁵⁰ Hippolytus of Rome, *Apostolic Tradition* 21.20 – 22

⁵¹ Tertullian of Carthage, *On Baptism* 6.1 and 8.1

⁵² Theophilus of Antioch, *Letters to Autolytus* 1.12

land to bring forth more life; serving other human beings and even animals by creating appropriate habitats seems to be implied in the creation account. But *speaking* seems to have a special place in the Genesis account because of the way God is introduced as the One who speaks life into being. Speaking is initiated by God when He invited Adam to *name* animals (Gen.2:19 – 20). Speaking is required by God when He commanded Adam to eat from any tree of the garden except the tree of the knowledge of good and evil; Adam had to pass on the divine command to Eve and all their descendants. All the wisdom that human beings would have gained through dialogue with God and through experience would have found its way into some kind of codified *spoken* form like the clever proverbs and verdant poetry of the Jewish wisdom literature.

In the rest of the biblical canon, despite the reality of humanity's fall, the motif of human speech is still tied to the creational vocation of exercising dominion in creation as God's stewards and image-bearers. Naming children, places, events, and even God Himself becomes one of the foremost activities of human beings in the Hebrew Scriptures, especially Genesis. Another theme in Israel's history after the Exodus: Authority is given to those who are mature in knowing God's character and commandments. When God delivered the people from Egypt, He shared his judicial responsibility with Moses, who quickly became overwhelmed and then shared it with other elders in Israel (Ex.18; Dt.1:9 – 17; 16:18 – 22; Num.11:16 – 30) and, in some regards, the whole community (Dt.13:5; 17:7; 19:19; 21:9, 21; 22:21; 24:7; cf. Judg.20:13). Sharing in God's judicial responsibility goes back to God's original commission to human beings to have 'dominion' (Gen.1:26 – 28).

The restoration of creational dominion became a messianic motif. The prophet Daniel envisioned that the messianic age would come with 'the Son of Man' ascending on the clouds to be enthroned, and 'the Ancient of Days came and judgment was passed in favor of the saints of the Highest One, and the time arrived when the saints took possession of the kingdom' (Dan.7:22) to share in the role of judging. 'Then the sovereignty, the dominion and the greatness of all the kingdoms under the whole heaven will be given to the people of the saints of the Highest One' (Dan.7:27). Jesus said he shares his authority to judge with his people (Mt.19:28; Jn.5:22, 26; 2 Pet.2:4; Jude 6; Rev.20:4). To the Corinthians, the apostle Paul says, 'The saints will judge the world... and angels' (1 Cor.6:2 – 3) as part of his argument for why he had just instructed the congregation to excommunicate the man who was unrepentant about having sexual relations with his stepmother (1 Cor.5:1 – 13). The role of God's people to judge comes with the restoration of creation to how it was meant to be.

I believe we can infer that Adam and Eve, even if they had not fallen into sin, would have developed the rite of baptism anyway. That may surprise some of my readers. Of course, without sin in the world, human beings would not have needed baptism to signify a *redemptive* act of God. Yet humanity could have practiced baptism in a *creational, developmental* framework. God originally developed creation and humanity through the vehicle of water, over which the Spirit hovered and brooded (Gen.1:1 – 13). So baptism practiced in an unfallen, creational framework would have signified that a mature person was anointed to participate in God's creational blessing of Genesis 1. People coming to maturity would have recapitulated the original creation. This should not be controversial. We can also draw a parallel to what marriage could have been like in the unfallen creation: Every new, unfallen marriage would have recapitulated the original creational marriage of Genesis 1. A man would leave the authority of his father and mother (Gen.2:24), which was revolutionary in the communitarian and elder-centric cultures of the traditional world. Together, every new married couple would stand before God on equal footing with their families of origin, to inherit from God their portion of the garden land. Each new married couple would be a new Adam and Eve, and would recapitulate the creation story and blessing. If this is so – if every marriage was intended to be a recapitulation of the original creation design – then why would it be so surprising if every mature person (or perhaps, every married couple) who had been entrusted with God's spoken commandments and the collective wisdom of godly humanity, who had come into the mature reception of God's creational commandment to have dominion, would go through a rite of baptism by water as well? The water would have reminded people *of creation* because it would have come from either one of the four great rivers which actually came *from Eden*, or a river or fountain or pool which would have reminded people of creation and Eden. Even in an unfallen creation, as I can best discern from the biblical text itself, human beings would have developed a baptism signifying the Spirit's anointing, to mark the maturation of a child into an adult who could serve and *speak* faithfully in the world God made.

Therefore, when we consider the baptismal anointing of Jesus in the Jordan River, we should see in this event a moment in a larger pattern of normative human development, not in some abstract sense, or even in a modern sense given the many fields dedicated to researching the human, but *according to what the biblical story indicates about human development*. One need not accept my argument that baptism is actually anchored in a hypothetical unfallen creational development, although I think it makes a good deal of sense. We need only agree that baptism refers to a redemptive framework, wherein a Christian believer is taught to speak and serve, and then entrusted to do so in the community of the church. And that much should not be in doubt. In that redemptive framework, baptismal anointing signifies a commitment of the believing, mature person sharing in the messianic life of Jesus Christ in a subordinate sense. We do not share Jesus' messianic vocation per se. But we do share in the overflow of his life in the power of his speech and service by the Spirit. We also share in his Spirit-empowered commitment to be faithful unto the Father all the way to his death, to claim his victory over the corruption of sin, but now within ourselves. Baptism is certainly a union with Christ. But baptism does not immediately catapult us into Jesus' exalted and resurrected humanity as if his personal narrative – and ours! – were of no account, or as if Jesus' new human nature could be abstracted into a static 'thing' which exists timelessly, independent of his earthly biography and backstory. Rather, baptism aligns and coordinates our personal story with his personal story, from baptism onward. Union with Christ is a union with his *story*.

If Jesus did everything first in his human nature, then there must be a correspondence between his human experience and ours, including his reception of the Spirit, in a narrative mode. There must be a point of maturation in us where the Spirit anoints us for proclamation and service, which corresponds with Jesus' maturation and the Jordan event. For the Gospels leave us with the strong impression that Jesus of Nazareth, as a human being and specifically as an Israelite, received the Spirit-infused words of the prophet Isaiah (and others) as a prelude to his own reception of the Holy Spirit at the Jordan. Isaiah is unusual out of the prophetic books because it is the only book of Scripture which gives us clues as to what Jesus' early years might have been like, spiritually and intellectually (Isa.49:1 – 4; 50:4 – 5). I will briefly place Isaiah 49:1 – 4 and 50:4 – 5 in the overall thematic and theological context of Isaiah 40 – 66.

The birth narratives of Matthew 1 – 2 and Luke 1 – 2 are saturated with Isaiah because the generation of those expecting the birth of the Messiah were paying special attention to Isaiah. It is very likely, however, that the stories told of Jesus' birth and childhood show Jesus' own engagement with Isaiah's prophecy. (1) The motif of the barren woman bearing children from Isaiah 54:1 has a clear relationship to Elizabeth, who is identified as 'barren' in Luke 1:7. The experience of Elizabeth is probably seen as an inauguration of the fulfillment of that vision. (2) Although Malachi 4:5 – 6 is the first Scripture explicitly quoted by Luke, in 1:16 – 17, the 'forerunner' passage has clear parallels with Isaiah 40:3 – 8 which was quoted by Zechariah in Luke 1:76 and John the Baptist in Luke 3:4 – 6. (3) The conception of Jesus by the Holy Spirit in the womb of the virgin Mary is identified as the 'sign of Emmanuel' from Isaiah 7:14, cited by Matthew 1:22 – 23. (4) Zechariah quoted from the messianic prophecy of Isaiah 9:1 – 2 in his song in Luke 1:79. (5) The elderly Simeon, when he met the infant Jesus in the temple, quoted from Isaiah 49:6, in Luke 2:32. (6) The centrality of Jerusalem, or Zion, is central to Luke as it was to Isaiah. (7) John the Baptist paves the way for Jesus by preaching (at least, but especially) Isaiah 40:3 – 8 to his followers and thereby introducing Jesus in Luke 3:4 – 6. (8) After his anointing, Jesus seems to preach from Isaiah 9:1 – 2 when he opens his itinerant ministry in the Galilee area in Matthew 4:12 – 25 and Luke 4:14 – 15. (9) Jesus himself quotes a combination of Isaiah 42:7 and 61:1 – 2 at his inaugural address in the Nazareth synagogue in Luke 4:18 – 19.

When we look at Isaiah's 'Servant Songs,' and Isaiah 40 – 66 broadly, for its themes of covenant renewal as 'return from exile' and 'new exodus deliverance,' it is possible to chart out how Jesus as a young boy might have listened to, or read, Isaiah, and allowed these words to shape his sense of messianic vocation. We have an indication from the story of Jesus as a twelve-year old boy learning in the temple, that he paid much attention to the Hebrew Scriptures on which he was nurtured (Lk.2:41 – 52). When God restores

Israel from exile, it will be like a 'new exodus' through 'the wilderness' (Isa.40:3), which sets off a stirring series of promises cast in the motif of the 'exodus deliverance' of old.⁵³

But it is specifically Israel as 'My Servant' in the Servant Song of Isaiah 42:1 – 9 who, God says, will be 'My chosen one' and bear 'My Spirit,' who 'will faithfully bring forth justice.' It will be a fresh act of new creation (Isa.42:5ff.). This 'Israel,' or representative of Israel as it were, will go through water and fire (Red Sea, wilderness temptation, and Sinai?) (Isa.43:1 – 2) in order to heal and restore people's sight and hearing (Isa.41:7; 43:8 – 13). He will indeed be led by God in a new 'way through the sea' where the enemies of God's people are drowned in a new 'Red Sea' deliverance (Isa.43:17 – 18), and this renewed Israel experiences God's supernatural springs of water and the Spirit as he journeys to the promised land again (Isa.43:19 – 44:8).

But in one of the Servant Songs (Isa.49:1 – 7), God calls 'My Servant,' who is both 'Israel' and yet also not Israel, for this Servant will 'bring Jacob back to Him, in order that Israel might be gathered to Him' (Isa.49:5). That may have caught Jesus' attention. Also, the preparation of this 'Servant' is to be formed by God from the womb of his mother, as he certainly had been. Isaiah also spoke of the Servant allowing his mouth to be formed by God to be a sharp sword, to be God's special arrow (Isa.49:2). Yet the Servant will not only challenge. His preparation is first to listen to God 'morning by morning... as a disciple' so that he would 'know how to sustain the weary one by a word' (Isa.50:4 – 5), even though this will bring hardship and backlash (Isa.50:6 – 11). Once again, Isaiah 49:1 – 4 and Isaiah 50:4 – 5 are unusual because these passages seem to discuss the preparation of the messianic king, prior to his public ministry. The significance of the Servant's suffering will be enormous: purification from sin extended to others (Isa.52:13 – 53:12), and the redemption of Jerusalem back into the purposes of God, from which good news will once again spread (Isa.52:1 – 12) all the way 'to the islands' (Isa.49:1).

The Servant's work will cause a great renewal of creational blessing of fertility and fruitfulness (Isa.54:1 – 17), a new feast in a new garden of Eden because of the kingly heir of David (Isa.55:1 – 5), where the 'thorn bush' and 'nettle' of the Adamic curse will be replaced by the verdant 'cypress' and 'myrtle' (Isa.55:13) and other remarkable acts of renewal and restoration, like one-time outsiders being included (Isa.56:1 – 8). Isaiah 55:1 – 13, with its mention of seed, word, rain, soil, and thorns, centered on the heir of David, almost certainly served as backdrop to Jesus' parable of the soils in Luke 8:4 – 18. Isaiah 56:1 – 8, with its remarkable position on the inclusion of eunuchs and foreigners over and against the Sinai covenant's exclusion (Dt.23:1 – 6) has a non-coincidental similarity with Jesus' practice of including foreigners and those who were imperfect, physically and otherwise. God's observation of the hypocrisy (Isa.56:9 – 57:21) and lack of 'justice' (Isa.58:1 – 14) among those ostensibly called His people leads to His commitment to personally come and establish it, and share His Spirit with others (Isa.59:1 – 21). This leads, once again, to a renewal of Zion and Jerusalem as the epicenter of God's goodness and brightness being manifested throughout the world (Isa.60:1 – 62:12), shepherded by the Spirit-anointed king, who is discussed in the middle of that section (Isa.61:1 – 3).

Hence, I believe we have strong evidence that Jesus reflected deeply, not just on the Hebrew Scriptures as a whole, which he of course did, but on Isaiah in particular. By treasuring the Spirit-inspired words of Isaiah, Jesus, as the Word enfleshed, was filling his human heart and mind with Isaiah's *words*. He was filling himself – that is, his humanity – full with this word and the Spirit of God who breathed it out. And his self-consecration and self-preparation in the Spirit led to the anointing of the Spirit. That anointing in the Jordan marked him out as the final king of Israel who was the promised 'Servant' of God that Israel was supposed to be. For Jesus was the Word of God made man, who was anointed by the Holy Spirit, as the Temple of God he already was, to 'fill to the full' this word of God, and 'overflow' his humanity with the power of the Spirit's words and signs. Indeed, there are hints in Athanasius' written corpus that he saw the

⁵³ Even the coastlands will hear of the redemption of Jerusalem and Israel (Isa.41:1, 5). God will bring Israel's exiles home by leading them through a wilderness, providing water for them like He did the first and second generation of Israelites delivered from Egypt (Isa.41:17 – 20). God mocks Israel's idolatry (Isa.44:9 – 20) as a betrayal of its identity as God's people (Isa.44:21 – 23). God promises to use Gentile kings to accomplish his purposes (Isa.44:24 – 45:2), to bring wealth streaming to Jerusalem and to 'Israel' (Isa.45:3 – 17). God reassures those Israelites in Babylon that He will deliver them and bring them home (Isa.46:1 – 48:22).

significance of Isaiah on the literary composition of the Gospel accounts of Jesus, and probably on Jesus himself.⁵⁴

Interestingly, however, Athanasius subtly shifts the meaning of the Jordan event, and therefore shifts the meaning of baptism, union with Christ, and human development. Irenaeus stays strictly within the life of Jesus as narrated by key markers involving the Holy Spirit: his incarnation, anointing, ministry, death, resurrection, and bestowal of the Spirit at Pentecost. Athanasius, on the other hand, feels the need to make the Jordan event completely collapsible to the incarnation. Whereas Irenaeus maintains the role of the Father in giving the Spirit to Jesus, Athanasius removes the Father from view and says that this was the Word giving the Spirit to the humanity he had taken to himself. Whereas Irenaeus recognizes that Jesus was anointed ‘king’ and empowered by the Spirit for ministry, Athanasius insists that the Word was always ‘king.’ I reproduce the passages in full because I wish to compare Irenaeus’ and Athanasius’ respective teachings on this passage. The sub-headings are my own additions, which I have provided to make summarizing the passages easier.

Irenaeus’ <i>Against Heresies</i> 3.9.1	Athanasius’ <i>Discourses Against the Arians</i> 1.46 – 47
<p><i>Father Anointed Jesus for Kingship and Ministry</i> ‘And then, [speaking of His] baptism, Matthew says, ‘The heavens were opened, and He saw the Spirit of God, as a dove, coming upon Him: and lo a voice from heaven, saying, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.’ [Matthew 3:16] For Christ did not at that time descend upon Jesus, neither was Christ one and Jesus another: but the Word of God – who is the Saviour of all, and the ruler of heaven and earth, who is Jesus, as I have already pointed out, who did also take upon Him flesh, and was anointed by the Spirit from the Father – was made Jesus Christ, as Esaias also says, ‘There shall come forth a rod from the root of Jesse, and a flower shall rise from his root; and the Spirit of God shall rest upon Him: the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and piety, and the spirit of the fear of God, shall fill Him. He shall not judge according to glory, [alt. ‘the sight of his eyes’] nor reprove after the manner of speech; but He shall dispense judgment to the humble man, and reprove the haughty ones of the earth.’ [Isaiah 11:1]</p>	<p><i>The Word Anointed His Humanity to Sanctify It and Us in Him</i> ‘And therefore He is here ‘anointed,’ not that He may become God, for He was so even before; nor that He may become King, for He had the Kingdom eternally, existing as God’s Image, as the sacred Oracle shows; but in our behalf is this written, as before. For the Israelitish kings, upon their being anointed, then became kings, not being so before, as David, as Hezekiah, as Josiah, and the rest; but the Saviour on the contrary, being God, and ever ruling in the Father’s Kingdom, and being Himself He that supplies the Holy Ghost, nevertheless is here said to be anointed, that, as before, being said as man to be anointed with the Spirit, He might provide for us men, not only exaltation and resurrection, but the indwelling and intimacy of the Spirit. And signifying this the Lord Himself has said by His own mouth in the Gospel according to John, ‘I have sent them into the world, and for their sakes do I sanctify Myself, that they may be sanctified in the truth [John 17:19].’ In saying this He has shown that He is not the sanctified, but the Sanctifier; for He is not sanctified by other, but Himself sanctifies Himself, that we may be sanctified in the truth. He who sanctifies Himself is Lord of sanctification. How then does this take place? What does He mean but this? ‘I, being the Father’s Word, I give to Myself, when becoming man, the Spirit; and Myself, become man, do I sanctify in Him, that henceforth in Me, who am Truth (for Your Word is Truth), all may be sanctified.’ ‘If then for our sake He sanctifies Himself [John 17:17, 19], and does this when He has become man, it is very plain that the Spirit’s descent on Him in Jordan was a descent upon us, because of His bearing our body. And it did not take place for promotion to the Word, but again for our sanctification, that we might share His anointing, and of us it might be said, ‘Do you not know that you are God’s Temple, and the Spirit of God dwells in you [1 Corinthians 3:16]?’ For when the Lord, as man, was washed in Jordan, it was we who were washed in Him and by Him.’</p>

Whereas Irenaeus quotes the full passage of Isaiah 61:1 about the Spirit anointing Jesus for proclamation and service, Athanasius truncates the quote. He only maintains the link between Jesus and the Spirit per se. For Irenaeus, the incarnation of the Word as man in the lineage of Abraham and then of David (‘root of Jesse’) served as the logical and chronological basis for the anointing of the Spirit, which resulted in ‘preach[ing] the gospel to the lowly.’ For Athanasius, by comparison, the role of preaching is bypassed. Instead, the humanity of Jesus appears to immediately confer the Spirit from Jesus to us by virtue of an implicit connection between Jesus’ humanity and ours. ‘And when He received the Spirit,’ Athanasius says, ‘we it was who by Him were made recipients of It.’ Athanasius’ omission of the *preaching* is remarkable, and in many ways, damaging. I will explore the significance of this move by Athanasius, below. Here is the comparison between Irenaeus and Athanasius on their perception of Isaiah 61:1:

⁵⁴ E.g. Athanasius of Alexandria, *Letters to Serapion on the Holy Spirit* 1.5 quotes Isaiah 61:1 and 59:21 together, in combination with Isaiah 30:1, 48:16, and 63:9 – 10, showing he was aware of the link in Isaiah between the ministry of the messianic Servant in 61:1 and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit in 59:21. I discuss this below.

Irenaeus' <i>Against Heresies</i> 3.9.1	Athanasius' <i>Discourses Against the Arians</i> 1.46 – 47
<p><i>Isaiah 61 Designates Preaching and Service</i> And again Esaias, pointing out beforehand His unction, and the reason why he was anointed, does himself say, 'The Spirit of God is upon Me, because He hath anointed Me: He hath sent Me to preach the Gospel to the lowly, to heal the broken up in heart, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and sight to the blind; to announce the acceptable year of the Lord, and the day of vengeance; to comfort all that mourn.' [Isaiah 61:1] For inasmuch as the Word of God was man from the root of Jesse, and son of Abraham, in this respect did the Spirit of God rest upon Him, and anoint Him to preach the Gospel to the lowly.</p>	<p><i>Isaiah 61 Designates Vicarious Humanity</i> And when He received the Spirit, we it was who by Him were made recipients of It. And moreover for this reason, not as Aaron or David or the rest, was He anointed with oil, but in another way above all His fellows, 'with the oil of gladness,' which He Himself interprets to be the Spirit, saying by the Prophet, 'The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me, because the Lord has anointed Me [Isaiah 61:1];' as also the Apostle has said, 'How God anointed Him with the Holy Ghost [Acts 10:38].' When then were these things spoken of Him but when He came in the flesh and was baptized in Jordan, and the Spirit descended on Him? And indeed the Lord Himself said, 'The Spirit shall take of Mine [John 16:14];' and 'I will send Him [John 16:17];' and to His disciples, 'Receive the Holy Ghost [John 20:22].' And notwithstanding, He who, as the Word and Radiance of the Father, gives to others, now is said to be sanctified, because now He has become man, and the Body that is sanctified is His.</p>

Whereas Irenaeus maintains that the Jordan event was a unique event in the life of Jesus, Athanasius collapses it into both the incarnation and the bestowal of the Holy Spirit, deploying other Scriptures to make that point, so that the Jordan event itself seems to have no inherent meaning in itself.

Irenaeus' <i>Against Heresies</i> 3.9.1	Athanasius' <i>Discourses Against the Arians</i> 1.46 – 47
<p><i>Ministry by Proclamation, Spirit by Overflow</i> But inasmuch as He was God, He did not judge according to glory, nor reprove after the manner of speech. For 'He needed not that any should testify to Him of man, for He Himself knew what was in man.' [John 2:25] For He called all men that mourn; and granting forgiveness to those who had been led into captivity by their sins, He loosed them from their chains, of whom Solomon says, 'Every one shall be holden with the cords of his own sins.' [Proverbs 5:22] Therefore did the Spirit of God descend upon Him, [the Spirit] of Him who had promised by the prophets that He would anoint Him, so that we, receiving from the abundance of His unction, might be saved. Such, then, [is the witness] of Matthew.'</p>	<p><i>Ministry by Partaking, Spirit by Participation in Incarnation</i> From Him then we have begun to receive the unction and the seal, John saying, 'And you have an unction from the Holy One [1 John 2:20];' and the Apostle, 'And you were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise [Ephesians 1:13].' Therefore because of us and for us are these words. What advance then of promotion, and reward of virtue or generally of conduct, is proved from this in our Lord's instance? For if He was not God, and then had become God, if not being King He was preferred to the Kingdom, your reasoning would have had some faint plausibility. But if He is God and the throne of His kingdom is everlasting, in what way could God advance? Or what was there wanting to Him who was sitting on His Father's throne? And if, as the Lord Himself has said, the Spirit is His, and takes of His, and He sends It, it is not the Word, considered as the Word and Wisdom, who is anointed with the Spirit which He Himself gives, but the flesh assumed by Him which is anointed in Him and by Him; that the sanctification coming to the Lord as man, may come to all men from Him. For not of Itself, says He, does the Spirit speak, but the Word is He who gives It to the worthy. For this is like the passage considered above; for as the Apostle has written, 'Who existing in form of God thought it not a prize to be equal with God, but emptied Himself, and took a servant's form [Philippians 2:6 – 7],' so David celebrates the Lord, as the everlasting God and King, but sent to us and assuming our body which is mortal.'</p>

The problem here is that Athanasius is almost certainly truncating proper attention to the Holy Spirit in the *Discourses* because of his desire to magnify the significance of the Word. A broader survey of Athanasius' written corpus demonstrates that in pastoral and non-polemical contexts, Athanasius would affirm the same position as Irenaeus. So while it might be tempting to read Athanasius' *Discourses* in a truncated way, it is actually necessary for readers to recognize that Athanasius meant to include preaching as part of the believer's growth ('we have begun to receive the unction,' he says), and as the basis for the hearer's response to receive the Spirit in turn.

The evidence I submit to substantiate that is *Discourses* 1.50. Here, as he continues to reflect on the nature of the Jordan event as he defends his doctrine of the Word against the Arians, Athanasius gives a biblically-rooted proposal about the power differential between humans and demons. He says 'necessity' required that Jesus 'be anointed with the Spirit' in order to cast out demons. Citing the incident when some Jews accused Jesus of casting out demons by the name or power of Beelzebub, Athanasius says pointedly,

‘What is there to wonder at, what to disbelieve, if the Lord who gives the Spirit, is here said Himself to be anointed with the Spirit, at a time when, *necessity* requiring it, He did not refuse in respect of His manhood to call Himself inferior to the Spirit? [...] Behold, the Giver of the Spirit here says that He cast out demons in the Spirit; but this is not said, except because of His flesh. For since *man’s nature is not equal of itself to casting out demons, but only in power of the Spirit*, therefore as man He said, ‘But if I through the Spirit of God cast out demons [Matthew 12:28].’⁵⁵

In Athanasius’ mind, the power to exorcise demons does not inhere to ‘man’s nature,’ *even in the case of Jesus of Nazareth*. He does not cite other passages of Scripture to defend his argument; he merely accepts it as a given. But undoubtedly this comes from a Hebraic, biblical worldview. Both the nature of the demons and, therefore, the relation between humans and demons are part of the cosmology of the Bible, where an ancient enemy (Gen.3:1 – 15; Rev.12:1 – 9) leads a rebellion of angelic powers which are somehow involved with political structures (Dan.9:20 – 21; 10:5 – 14; 12:1; Mt.4:8 – 9; 1 Cor.2:6 – 8; 15:24; Gal.4:1 – 9; Eph.1:20 – 21; 3:10; 6:11 – 12; Col.1:16; 2:15) and capable of influencing or terrorizing individual people (Mt.8:26 – 34; 12:43 – 45; Mk.5:1 – 20; Lk.8:26 – 39; Eph.4:26 – 27). Athanasius then notes how the followers of Jesus are empowered to cast out demons, too, but ‘only in power of the Spirit.’ Again, this is not because our humanity in itself has the power to do so. Only because Jesus has shared his Spirit with us are we able to participate in his power. Notably, Athanasius calls the development of this spiritual ministry part of our ‘sanctification.’

‘This is what the Lord spoke to the Jews, as man; but to the disciples showing His Godhead and His majesty, and intimating that He was not inferior but equal to the Spirit, He gave the Spirit and said, ‘Receive the Holy Ghost [John 20:22],’ and ‘I send Him [John 16:7],’ and ‘He shall glorify Me [John 16:14],’ and ‘Whatsoever He hears, that He shall speak [John 16:13].’ As then in this place the Lord Himself, the Giver of the Spirit, does not refuse to say that through the Spirit He casts out demons, as man; in like manner He the same, the Giver of the Spirit, refused not to say, ‘The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me, because He has anointed Me [Isaiah 61:1],’ in respect of His having become flesh, as John has said; that it might be shown in both these particulars, that we are they who need the Spirit’s grace in our *sanctification*, and again *who are unable to cast out demons without the Spirit’s power*.’⁵⁶

Athanasius is working from a definition of ‘sanctification’ that is both *participatory* and *progressive*. That is evident in the fact that he is talking about believers growing in the power of *exorcism*. And it is even more evident in his *Life of Antony*. In that work, which I examine below, the monk Antony grows in his ability to discern the demons, rebuke them, and exorcise them. Athanasius certainly did not portray this ability as something which comes instantly at conversion. In his experience, which is by all appearances considerable – and which should carry at least as much weight, if not more, as any deliverance ministry today – the gift of discernment of spirits, the gift of knowledge of Scripture, and some gift of prophetic speech needs to be learned and cultivated over time and hard-fought experience. Thus, it cannot be debated that the Alexandrian believes in an experience of sanctification that holds together ‘participation in Christ’ objectively and ‘progress in growth’ subjectively. To be specific, our ‘participation in Christ’ is a participation *in the Holy Spirit* which is mediated to us progressively because the Spirit has already been united to the humanity of the incarnate Son. That is, because the Spirit has participated to the full in the humanity of Jesus, the Spirit can now overflow Jesus, and participate progressively in us as we receive the words of Jesus by faith.

Interestingly, Athanasius notes that Jesus’ reception of the Spirit *at his baptism* was to empower him as a human to exercise authority over the demons. By extension, and by participation by faith in Jesus, we also are empowered by his Spirit to exercise that same authority. Normally, we as humans would be ‘unable to cast out demons’ (emphasis mine). But the Spirit’s ‘grace’ and ‘power’ renders us able to do so. This subject matter is not something the Alexandrian bishop could or would derive from the Hellenistic philosophies available to him – Stoic, Neo-Platonic, or otherwise. This is an important point to which I

⁵⁵ Athanasius of Alexandria, *Discourses Against the Arians* 1.50 emphasis mine

⁵⁶ *Ibid*, emphasis mine

will return. Strangely, however, Athanasius then locates God's enabling us to receive the Holy Spirit to the incarnation, not the Jordan event. Here is the quotation in context:

'Through whom then and from whom behooved it that the Spirit should be given but through the Son, whose also the Spirit is? And when were we enabled to receive It, *except when the Word became man*? And, as the passage of the Apostle shows, that we had not been redeemed and highly exalted, had not He who exists in form of God taken a servant's form [Philippians 2:6 – 7], so David also shows [referring to the 'anointing' of Psalm 45:7 – 8], that no otherwise should we have partaken the Spirit and been sanctified, but that the Giver of the Spirit, the Word Himself, had spoken of Himself as anointed with the Spirit for us. And therefore have we securely received it, He being said to be anointed in the flesh; for the flesh being first sanctified in Him, and He being said, as man, to have received for its sake, we have the sequel of the Spirit grace, receiving 'out of His fullness [John 1:16].'⁵⁷

By saying that we were enabled to receive the Spirit 'when the Word became man,' Athanasius flattens the contours of Jesus' human journey. Strangely, Athanasius is not consistent in maintaining the Jordan event as a unique event in the life of Jesus. That he does not is attested by the way he quotes Scriptures about the incarnation, like Philippians 2:6 – 7, and also Scriptures about the bestowal of the Holy Spirit to us, like John 16:14, 17; 20:22; 1 John 2:20; and Ephesians 1:13. Save for explicit mention of Jesus gaining the power of exorcism, Athanasius collapses the Spirit's anointing at the Jordan back onto the incarnation, and then simultaneously elongates its significance into the Pentecost event, making Jesus' human life a blur. The Jordan event may very well have never happened. It did, of course, from a historical standpoint – that much Athanasius believes. But what is the theological meaning of the anointing in the Jordan, for Athanasius, as distinct from the incarnation? It is genuinely unclear. That, combined with the fact that Athanasius so emphasizes an eternal kingship of the Word at the expense of the earthly kingship of Jesus so as to eclipse it entirely, means that Athanasius, in the *Discourses*, can also suggest that the Jordan event has no essential place in his theology. It may as well be an event like Jesus healing someone of disease: worth a mention perhaps, but insignificant in the overall scheme of things.

At this point, we might tentatively hold that Athanasius was using a shorthand, seeing the incarnation as the beginning point of a life story that includes Jesus' anointing at the Jordan and then continues onward and back upward as he carried humanity back up to the right hand of the Father. Of course, the anointing of the Son by the Spirit takes, as its logical foundation, his conception into the womb of Mary by the Spirit. But Athanasius does not follow Irenaeus in the specificity with which the earlier bishop of Lyons saw symmetry: Symmetry between the baptism of Jesus and the baptism of the believer. Jesus was anointed by the Spirit to overflow his humanity with power in preaching and signs. So also with us. For Irenaeus, we were enabled to receive the Spirit at his baptism and ours, at least while considering baptism to be a finale to a season of instruction (*catechesis*), to mark off a process of some maturation. For Athanasius, however, we were enabled to receive the Spirit 'when the Word became man,' that is, when 'He who exists in the form of God [took] a servant's form.'

The Alexandrian bishop blurs the biblical portrait of normative human development vis-à-vis the Spirit, which we could only look to Jesus to determine for us. By doing this, Athanasius succumbs in his rhetoric to a type of theologian's impatience. This is the kind of impatience which asks: Of what real use is it to discuss the Jordan event, when one would much rather talk about 'the immanent Trinity' manifested in the Jordan event because of the simultaneous presence of Father, Spirit, and Son? Or, why not reflect on the miracle of the incarnation of the Son as God extending Himself into the humanity of Jesus? And after all that is said and done, why not go straight from there to our 'union with Christ' because the humanity Jesus assumed and baptized and cleansed is our humanity, so we too, because we are joined to Jesus by faith, can hear the blessing of love from the Father? What real use is it to talk about the progressive stages by which the Holy Spirit was developmentally involved in the humanity of Jesus, especially in the 'disenchanted West' where demon-possession is less known, and exorcism is not a common ministry, and when one can simply rely on the Chalcedonian Creed to basically tell us 'everything we need to know' about Jesus' humanity and the work of atonement? Admittedly, this last point about Chalcedon is an anachronism as far

⁵⁷ Athanasius of Alexandria, *Discourses Against the Arians* 1.50

as Athanasius is concerned, but I think the point is fair for us today, given the live debates about the significance of Chalcedon, and the contested relationship between the creeds and the canon. Most sensitive Christian theologians would protest if we were to relocate the terms ‘divinity’ and ‘divine nature’ out of the deep soil of the Hebrew Scriptures and transplant them into the realm of Greek philosophy, to draw up from there arbitrary meanings of ‘divinity.’ But is not the same thing true in defining the meaning of ‘humanity?’ When dealing with the ‘human nature’ of Jesus and the nature of ‘humanity,’ can we take ‘human nature’ as a self-evident thing and then reshape that object in a (more or less) neo-Platonic exercise, and plug it into the Chalcedonian Creed? Or, as I believe, must we explore the biblical Hebraic story for its definition of the human, and anchor the creeds in the canon?

My uneasiness with Athanasius on this point is with his abbreviated portrayal of sanctification in the realm of what we would today call his ‘systematics.’ But my quarrel has a specific focus which I propose is a root cause: It is with his handling of the Jordan event as an exegete and biblical theologian. Although he clearly recognized the power of *exorcism* as a result of Jesus’ anointing, Athanasius nevertheless loses some of the clarity that Irenaeus had about the role of *preaching*, and one’s participation in Christ as the logical result, not the precursor, of one’s human positive response to that preaching.⁵⁸ This is especially disappointing since Athanasius gives the appearance of actually knowing Irenaeus’ *Against Heresies* as he writes the *Discourses*. If, while in Rome in 342 AD, Athanasius did not possess his own copy of Irenaeus’ five books, it is likely that he had access to the Roman Christians’ probable copies of Irenaeus’ writings. After all, Irenaeus had interactions with the Roman church in 177 AD when he came from Lyons to Rome to confront the Montanist and Valentinian heresies, and again in 190 or 191 AD, when he visited Rome to entreat Victor, then bishop of Rome, to be flexible about the calendar dating of Easter.

Moreover, Athanasius neglects to elaborate about the ministry of the word within the ministry of the Word, something that he retained in his earlier works *Against the Heathen – On the Incarnation*, his *Festal Letters*, and *First Letter to Virgins*, as I have shown above. In the *Discourses*, he writes in such a way as to treat the mediation of the incarnate Word between God and human beings as if Jesus’ words had nothing intrinsically to do with God or human beings. It is as if the humanity assumed by the Word had an immediate, direct, and complete effect on the humanity of every other human being, making participation in Christ automatic for all, prior to their actual belief in Christ. This leads to a potential misappropriation of Athanasius’ *Discourses* by (1) some in the universalist camp who wish to make Athanasius sound like a promoter of universal reconciliation, like an Origen of Alexandria or a Gregory of Nyssa;⁵⁹ and (2) some in the Barthian-Torrancian ‘actualist’ camp who wish to define ‘participation in the *Logos*’ as wholly identical with ‘participation in *Christ*,’ who wish to make ‘participation in Christ’ precede actual belief in Christ, and who wish to make unbelievers’ participation in the rationality of salvation precede their rational response to rational words.⁶⁰ This move is commensurate with the Barthian tendency to have a weak doctrine of the Holy Spirit as the flip side of having a strong doctrine of the Son/Word, unlike Irenaeus who maintained very balanced prose about the Son and the Spirit as the Father’s ‘two hands.’ It leads to an unbalanced stress on the objective pole of the doctrine of sanctification, without a commensurate exploration of the subjective pole. Athanasius, because of his ambiguous handling of the Jordan event in the *Discourses*, contributes to this shift away from Irenaeus. It does not help matters that contemporary theologians, trying to recover Athanasius’ doctrines of the Son and the Spirit, tend to treat the *Discourses*, because of their prominence in the debate of the pro-Nicene camp against the varieties of Arians, in isolation from his other writings. However much we sympathize with the Alexandrian theologian and appreciate him for his valiant efforts against Christological heresies, we must find some fault with Athanasius here.

MORE TO COME

⁵⁸ Athanasius clearly believes that the Word participates in us by virtue of creation. And the Word does draw each person towards his incarnate self, Jesus Christ. But the phrase ‘union with Christ’ or ‘participation in Christ’ denotes that mode of life by which faith in Jesus is the entry point.

⁵⁹ citations

⁶⁰ citations