

The Legacy of St. Athanasius Father George Dion. Dragas

Athanasius as Interpreter of the Trinity

First and Second Discourses Against the Arians / Contra Arianos 1 – 2 (342 – 343 AD)

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Introduction: The Father-Son Relation, Atonement, and Salvation

Athanasius' understanding of the Father-Son relationship within the Trinity makes penal substitution impossible. Why is this? Athanasius was a zealous defender against anything he considered to be 'Arian.' The theologies of the various camps Athanasius considered to be 'Arian' had in common an aversion to naming the Son as fully divine and equal to the Father. But is penal substitution, by implication, 'Arian'? If we restrict the significance of the Nicene-Arian debates to the question of whether the Son is as divine as the Father, then I suppose the answer would be, 'No, not in that narrow, technical sense.'

Yet penal substitution rests on critical assumptions about the Father-Son relation that Athanasius, as we will see below, would explicitly reject *as being unbiblical*. In addition, the Alexandrian theologian would argue that the word '*homoousios*' in the Nicene Creed itself foreclosed long ago on the possibility of penal substitution. Given that Athanasius was a leading architect, and the most vigorous defender, of the creed of Nicaea, this is a subject of great import. Any penal substitution advocate must be sobered by the fact that Athanasius stands in a universal consensus of the first four hundred years of orthodox Christian writing on the Father-Son relation.

Athanasius' understanding of the Father-Son relation differs subtly but markedly from Augustine's. This would have the later effect of dividing East from West, and also providing a conception of the Father-Son relation that would make the penal substitutionary atonement model possible. For instance, Peter Leithart notes with considerable sensitivity and skill how Augustine's understanding of the Trinity differs from Athanasius'. And since Augustine is often credited with being the foremost influence in Western, Latin Christianity, from which Roman Catholicism and Protestantism flow, it is worth noting here that Augustine's conception of the Trinity is one of the many building blocks that made penal substitution possible. Augustine did not himself believe in penal substitution,¹ which must be the topic of another exploration. By contrast, Athanasius' view of the Trinity, and that of the Cappadocians and the Eastern Greek church, prevents any variety of the doctrine of penal substitution.

To explain why, I quote from Peter Leithart. Leithart is an ordained teaching elder in the Presbyterian Church of America, and a minister in the Communion of Reformed Evangelical Churches, which holds to Calvinist doctrine such as the Westminster Confession. Discussing Leithart's scholarship has the benefit, for my purpose, of providing my readers with an example of a penal substitution advocate who respects Athanasius enough to be an honest scholar.

Leithart explains that Augustine imagined that the Father had his own wisdom, the Son had his own wisdom, and the Spirit had his own wisdom. The Father had his own power, the Son had his own power, and the Spirit had his own power. And so on. Augustine therefore suggests that the term *ousia* be understood as a divine substance, or collection of divine characteristics, which each person of the Trinity possessed in some measure, exhaustively. Leithart notes of Augustine,

'...But the way Augustine finally interprets 1 Corinthians 1:24 suggests that the Father has attributes that are more proper than the Son, more intrinsic to the being of the Father than his being Father. Perhaps this is where the criticisms leveled against Augustine hit home, particularly the criticism that he privileges the one essence over the persons. Saying that the Father has 'his own'

¹ Stanley P. Rosenberg, 'Interpreting Atonement in Augustine's Preaching', edited by Charles E. Hill and Frank A. James, *The Glory of the Atonement* (Downers' Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2004), p.233 – 238. It is notable that the editors of this book wanted to honor Dr. Roger Nicole, an American evangelical theologian, who upheld the penal substitution view. Rosenberg, however, recognizes that Augustine cannot be pressed into this editorial purpose.

wisdom is not exactly ‘privileging’ unity over plurality, but Augustine leaves open the possibility that the Father has some surplus goodness left over that is not exhaustively poured out in the Son, that is not wholly expressed in his being Father...

Athanasius points, I think, in another direction, a path towards cognitive rest, if not ‘resolution.’ He insists that the Father’s wisdom simply *is* the Son, as is his power. This might be taken in two ways. On one view, the Father truly is nothing without the Son. Of course, since the Son is begotten of the Father, the Son is nothing without the Father either. Of course, too, the Father never has been without the Son, who is his own Word, ‘proper’ to his essence, so the Father has never been without his power, wisdom, goodness, being. Yet the Father’s attributes are utterly dependent on the existence of the Son and are realized in the Son, just as much as the sun is realized and is light because of the radiance that supplements it. On this interpretation, God is radically dependent internally. *I am* before I am a father; I am apart from at least some of my human relations; I am more than my fatherhood. The heavenly Father *is not* before or apart from being Father; the person Paul calls ‘God’ is not God except as he is Father of the Son. On another interpretation, Athanasius is saying that the Father has ‘his own’ wisdom, but that wisdom is paternal wisdom, which means wisdom that exists in the Father (*ad se*) only as it is the wisdom poured out for and manifest in the Son. The Son too has ‘his own’ wisdom, but has that wisdom only as receptive wisdom, received eternally from the Father. Each of the persons shares all the same attributes, and these attributes are their ‘own,’ but these attributes are ‘inflected’ relationally, ‘held’ by each person distinctly as a person. All the Father’s attributes are inflected paternally, the Son’s filially, the Spirit’s spiritually.

Augustine would agree that there is not the slightest sliver of space between the Father and the Son, just as he would not allow the slightest sliver of space between the Father and his attributes. But for Athanasius, those two statements are identical: there is not the slightest sliver of space between the Father and his attributes because he has all that he has *in the Son*, who is proper to his essence. Augustine believes as strongly as Athanasius in an eternal radiance from the light of the Father. Yet Augustine is still capable of conceiving an unsupplemented origin: the Father ‘in himself’ having attributes ‘in himself,’ the light without radiance, the fountain without the stream. Augustine seems to leave a small crack open for thinking that the Father has something that is ‘his own,’ something that appears more intimate and intrinsic to his being than the Son. Athanasius will have none of this, and so he is more radically trinitarian, because he does not envision any glimmer of life for the Father that is not realized in the Son. In slight but significant contrast to Augustine, he sees that the Scriptures entail the conclusion that ‘*the Son is the Father’s All*; and nothing was in the Father before the Word (*Discourses* 3.67, emphasis added). For the Father, too, it is all about the Son, all about the eternal Word that became flesh.’²

The problem for penal substitution advocates is immediate: If the Son *is* the Power of the Father, then what Power is there from which the Father judges or punishes the Son? If the Son is from the proper Essence and inherits all the Father *is* except the Father’s divine personhood, then what leverage point is there from which the Father can exercise power upon the Son?

In addition, the Lutheran-Calvinist definition of ‘justification,’ since it rests on top of a penal substitutionary atonement, seems to maintain the divide between the Father and the other two persons of the Trinity. The Father ‘knows’ or ‘experiences’ us as blameless behind the wrath that he exhausted upon the Son, who was a legal substitute for our judicial penalty. Moreover, the Father ‘knows’ or ‘experiences’ us as having the righteousness of the Son credited to us in a legal and meritorious sense. However, the Spirit ‘knows’ us as weak and weighed down by sin so much that he groans (Romans 8:26 – 27). And Christians, when they commit sins, have to ask questions about whether Jesus took the divine penalty for these sins even before they were committed, and why they believe they are among the elect. Does the

² Peter J. Leithart, *Athanasius* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2011), p.75 – 77 intriguingly also describes the impact of Augustine’s version of the Trinity on Thomas Aquinas and other western theologians: ‘We can see how the pressure of this argument led Thomas and others to conclude that the persons simply are their relations, top-to-bottom: the Father is Father all the way down, the Son is simply and sheerly Son.’

Father 'know' us in the same way that the Spirit and the Son do? And if the Son *is* the Wisdom of the Father, then can the mind of God be divided such that the Father 'knows' us as perfectly innocent behind the legal innocence of Jesus imputed to the believer?

The seven great ecumenical councils attest that dividing the persons of the Trinity in this sort of way is unacceptable. In his comprehensive recounting of the Nicene period, Lewis Ayres concisely points out how pro-Nicene theologians like Athanasius insist that the Father, Son, and Spirit know us and act towards the creation inseparably, in union with one another:

'It is at this point that we must return to the principle of inseparable operation. Inseparable operation sets bounds to how we envisage the persons... It is true that pro-Nicenes do intend to place restrictions on the way that we imagine the unity of God. Most clearly, if we were to imagine God as three potentially separable agents or three 'centres of consciousness' the contents of whose 'minds' were distinct, pro-Nicenes would see us as drawing inappropriate analogies between God and created realities and in serious heresy.'³

Yet separate operations are precisely what penal substitution requires. In atonement, God the Father must have some 'power' of his own, which is then directed at the Son and on the Son, in judgment and wrath. Even in more careful formulations where divine attributes are not identified with divine persons, God as a whole must have some power of God's own which operates separately from the Son in principle, in order to be directed at, and wielded upon, the Son. The same must be true of 'mind,' if not 'wisdom' categorically: God the Father must have a 'mind' of his own, separately from the Son and the Spirit, for Jesus to mentally experience the Father's wrath and/or separation for the punitive atonement to have any meaning, and for the Father to be the person of the Trinity whose perception of us constitutes our 'justification' in an ongoing way. One can see that Athanasius would not support that view.

Leithart makes these further remarks about these 'Western' Augustinian and 'Eastern' Athanasian views of the Trinity by voicing his appreciation of Athanasius:

'But I believe another Athanasian insight is more fruitful. Above, I suggested that Athanasius' trinitarian theology is more radically trinitarian than that of Augustine, since the latter appears to leave space to consider the Father 'in himself,' not sheerly as Father of the Son. To use Athanasius' terminology, Augustine does not grasp as clearly as Athanasius that the Son is 'proper' to the Father, as intimate and intrinsic to the Father's being as any wisdom of power the Father could call his 'own.' Augustine finds it nonsensical to say that the Father can beget his own wisdom, unless he has some prior wisdom of his own to confer. But that, it seems, is to fall into an Arian paradigm, and to run into Athanasius' critique of the 'double wisdom' of Asterius. If the Father has 'his own' wisdom, which is eternally conferred on the Son, which is then also his Wisdom, then we are multiplying Wisdoms. That will not do. God is one, and his Wisdom must be one.'⁴

Whether or not Athanasius' understanding of the Trinity is the most biblically faithful one is a topic for a much lengthier discussion, although I do believe that Athanasius has the more correct interpretation of 1 Corinthians 1:24 and other Pauline and Johannine biblical insights about the Father-Son relation. To be sure, Athanasius gives us a way to understand the 'Father-Son' language around the biblical idea of bestowing an inheritance: the Father gives all of who he is to the Son. Of this, more later. Suffice to say here, therefore, that I believe in Athanasius' *Contra Arianos* we have enough evidence to accomplish a much more specific goal. I believe Athanasius' early two volume work *Contra Gentes* and *De Incarnatione*, and especially his dogmatic works *Contra Arianos*, discredits the claim of any penal substitution supporter who seeks to enlist the bishop of Alexandria to their cause. Scholarship on the fourth century and the Christian development of dogma and creeds also raises the very searching question of whether the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed of 381 and the word *homoousion* negate very critical

³ Lewis Ayres, *Nicaea and its Legacy: An Approach to Fourth-Century Trinitarian Theology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), p.296

⁴ Leithart, p.86

assumptions about the Father-Son relation made by the Lutheran and Calvinist tradition. Anyone asking these questions must pass through the fire of Athanasius' theological thought.

Not only does Athanasius *not* speak of atonement in the legal-penal paradigm of retributive justice required by penal substitution, but he instead employs a medical-ontological paradigm to support the Father-Son relation he envisioned. Athanasius would have rejected any suggestion that a *separation* opened up between the Father and the Son *in any sense*; or that at the cross, the Father suddenly acted *upon* the Son rather than continued to act *in and through* the Son by the Spirit; or that the Son had a separate consciousness from the Father such that Jesus lost his awareness of the Father. In fact, Athanasius, in *Contra Arianos* 3.54 – 57 provides an interpretation of Jesus' cry of forsakenness from the cross that directly opposes the interpretations offered by penal substitution advocates. Penal substitution did not exist in the mind of Athanasius, and *could not have existed*. Everything else in his theological system would have rejected it. Athanasius, the Emperor-defying defender of the Nicene Creed and the orthodox doctrine of the Trinity, the Christian leader who is first to give us the list of twenty-seven New Testament books as we inherit it today, the theologian who is called the fountain of all subsequent orthodox Christian theology, would not have supported penal substitutionary atonement.

We can press further. The development of the Nicene doctrine of the Trinity in 325 AD and the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed of 381 AD *rest* on the understanding of atonement and salvation that can be nicknamed 'medical substitutionary atonement.' This nomenclature invites direct comparison with 'penal substitution.' The bishops in the first two Ecumenical Councils were guided by the larger theological thought structure which is described by the phrase deployed by Gregory of Nazianzus, 'That which is not assumed is not healed.' If true divinity did not personally unite with true humanity in the person of Jesus, then there is no salvation. Salvation was defined as God's personal union with human nature, recovering humanity from sin, death, and the demonic. This conviction about salvation drove orthodox reflection and biblical exegesis about christology, and therefore the Trinity. Looking at the theological structure from the standpoint of its 'atonement theology,' we can see that the definition operating in the mind of Athanasius is that the eternal Son of God, who is one substance with the Father, shared our fallen human nature in order that we might share his healed human nature, by the Spirit. This is exactly what I am labelling 'medical substitutionary atonement,' or 'ontological substitutionary atonement,' although it has certainly gone by other names.

Looking towards an examination of the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creeds of 325 and 381 AD, we can begin to ask a related question. Do those earliest and greatest Creeds of the church foreclose the possibility of penal substitution? The word *homoousion*, which means 'same in being,' was applied to the relationship between the Father and the Son in a certain way and for a certain purpose. Famously, even the word *homoiousion*, differing by one iota, literally, and meaning 'similar or like in being,' was not sufficient for Athanasius, even though he was eager to appeal to those bishops in that camp, to win them over. If the arguments and conceptual understanding of Athanasius can be taken as determinative on this matter, and if the logic behind the word choice of *homoousion* over *homoiousion* operated in such a way so as to preclude the possibility of a separation between the Father and the Son, or the idea that the Son shared 'attributes equal to the Father's attributes,' or had 'stuff in common' with the Father, but acted in a way so as to not reveal the Father personally, then penal substitution is excluded on the grounds of the Nicene Creed itself. And that would be quite an obstacle to overcome.

High Level Overview of *Contra Arianos* 1 – 2

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 / Contra Arianos*. These lengthy refutations of Arian prooftexts show 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 *Contra Arianos* 1 – 2.⁵ 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 *Contra Arianos* 1, 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. It makes sense that Athanasius would reserve space and time for Proverbs 8:22 for the second volume 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 volumes. The first and second volumes 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 by distinguishing the Son 'in the economy' (that is, in relation to the creation and its history) as distinct from the Son 'in his essence' or equivalent. The third volume demonstrates more literary independence from the first two, but has been thought to follow not long afterwards. I will reserve study of the third discourse for a separate paper.

Scholars believe that Athanasius himself did not treat the Nicene Creed as a rallying standard until about the first volume of *Contra Arianos*. This conclusion is based on the Alexandrian bishop's curious lack of advocacy for the *homoousion* and the Nicene Creed prior to that.⁶ In fact, *no one* refers to it explicitly until the 350's AD.⁷ Athanasius himself used the word *homoousios* on only one occasion in *Contra Arianos* 1.9

⁵ James D. Ernest, *The Bible in Athanasius of Alexandria* (Atlanta, Society of Biblical Literature, 2004), p.109

⁶ 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 *Contra Arianos*. '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.

⁷ 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 Son is ‘very God, existing *homoousios* with the very Father’) and yet does not refer to the Nicene Creed. This makes good sense, though, as the far-flung Christian community had never treated a council as authoritative for all churches, and had no precedent for receiving a ‘creed’ from one as a rallying standard.⁸ Accounts of the Council of Nicaea suggest that the proceedings of 325 AD were viewed as mostly administrative even by the participants themselves.⁹ 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*.¹⁰ Some factions in the Eastern Greek-speaking church were against *ousia* terminology because of its usage by Sabellius, and because of its previous association in Aristotle and even the Gospel of Luke with a material substance.¹¹ This skepticism and even disdain was shown for instance by the Council of Sirmium in 357 which pointedly argued against *ousia* language.¹² Similar concerns might have occurred with the Latin word *substantia*, which translates for *ousia*.

This brief historical account would mean that Athanasius had to view his own activity in Rome in the 340’s as foundationally biblical, theological, pastoral, and linguistic as much as it was strategic and organizational. Western, Latin-speaking bishops and theologians had wrestled with Gnosticism, Marcionism, and Monarchianism, but had not yet become fully invested in the Arian controversy which had embroiled the Greek-speaking East. Although Athanasius had the support of Julius of Rome and Hosius of Cordoba, the Alexandrian veteran of the Council of Nicaea could not simply appeal to Nicaea 325 as an agreed upon point of authority and departure. Athanasius had to explain to others why Nicaea used the Greek word *ousia* at all. 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. Context determines the precise meaning of a word.

Additional clarity about Athanasius’ use of the term ‘essence’ will be helpful, to understand both Athanasius’ reasoning then about the Father-Son relation, and how he might reason today about the atonement. In 1.6, Athanasius roundly condemns the Arians who say, as their *Thalia* attests,

“The essences of the Father and the Son and the Holy Ghost, are separate in nature, and estranged, and disconnected, and alien, and without participation of each other;’ and, in his [that is, Arius’] own words, ‘utterly unlike from each other in essence and glory, unto infinity.’ Thus as to ‘likeness of glory and essence,’ he says that the Word is entirely diverse from both the Father and the Holy Ghost. With such words has the irreligious spoken; maintaining that the Son is distinct by Himself, and in no respect partaker of the Father. These are portions of Arius’s fables as they occur in that jocose composition.’¹³

Athanasius challenges the Arian position that the ‘essence’ of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are separate and different from each other. Yet interestingly, in *Contra Arianos*, he reserves ‘essence’ language to connect the Son and the Father. Apparently, he is not yet comfortable saying that the essence of the Father includes, in some sense, the Spirit *also*. 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.

⁸ Thomas Weinandy, *Athanasius: A Theological Introduction* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing, 2007), p.73 explores further reasons why Athanasius did not explicitly invoke Nicaea in his *Contra Arianos*.

⁹ Matthew Craig Steenberg, *Of God and Man: Theology as Anthropology from Irenaeus to Athanasius* (New York, NY: T&T Clark, 2009), ch.3

¹⁰ *Ibid* ch.4; cf. Ayres 2004, p.153 – 157

¹¹ 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

¹² 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.

¹³ *Ibid* 1.6

Nowhere does Athanasius suggest that we human beings can declare *what* the essence (*ousia*) of the Father, Son, and Spirit is. We can only declare *that* it is. And for Athanasius, the term *homoousion* in the Nicene Creed was the best safeguard to ensure the equal divinity of the Son with the Father. But he had to argue for the use of *ousia* against bishops who were skeptical of its use as a non-biblical term. Athanasius nevertheless insisted that this term, too, could be stripped of its non-theological connotations, such as materiality, and properly redeployed to describe the Father-Son relation. Through the use of this term, in this particular way, Athanasius is protecting his claim that beholding the Son means beholding the Father:

‘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?’¹⁴

As always, Athanasius interprets Father and Son language in Scripture to be communicating shared 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.

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 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.’¹⁵

¹⁴ Ibid 1.15 – 16 emphasis mine

¹⁵ Ibid 1.16 emphasis mine

It remains for us, in a separate paper while also examining Athanasius' *Letters to Serapion*, as well as his pastoral *Festal Letters*, *Letters to Virgins*, and *Life of Antony*, to see how Athanasius himself will articulate the Spirit as equally divine, with the Father and the Son.

The Alexandrian theologian does not envision the Father-Son relation as if the term 'essence' simply communicates the idea that the Son *is spatially separable* from the Father yet consists 'of the same substance' as the Father. Since the Father-Son relation is not spatial, that is not the proper way to distinguish them. The Son is not simply another container 'of the same stuff' as the Father, whatever that divine 'stuff' is. The problem with this view, and indeed the reason why the Nicene Creed had its detractors, critics, and skeptics among Christian bishops following 325 AD, was that this would seem to lead to the inevitable conclusion that there were two Gods, one who is Father and another who is Son.¹⁶ How was the church to confess on the one hand the divinity of the Son while still upholding one God, and, on the other hand, not collapse the Son into the Father, as in the Sabellian heresy?¹⁷ Whereas we speak of a human father and son sharing the same genetic human substance in spatially separate bodies, the relation between the divine Father and Son must be 'tighter,' and in any event conceived differently.

Athanasius' conception of the Father-Son relation, suggests Thomas Weinandy, means:

'No longer does the Father alone embody or constitute the one nature of God, but rather, since God is the Father, the one nature of God, what the one God is, is the Father begetting the Son. The Father begetting the Son is eternally, and so immutably and unalterably, constitutive of what the one God is.'¹⁸

Georges Florovsky adds that Athanasius' accomplishment can be stated in terms of breaking free of Origen of Alexandria's notion of the relation between God and creation. The scholarly Origen took the terms 'Almighty,' 'Lord,' and 'Creator' to be as indicative of God's fundamental nature as the Father-Son relation.

'For Origen this implied inevitably also an eternal actualization of the world's existence, of all those things over which God's might and Lordship were exercised.'¹⁹

This rendering of the God-creation relation as being as intrinsic to God as the Father-Son relation was influential because of Origen's sheer brilliance and copious literary output. Everyone read Origen. But it unfortunately meant that, in Origen's framework, the status of creation and fallen history had to be inevitably joined with conclusions about theology proper – that is, the articulation of God, His character, and His nature. Athanasius' insight was to perceive the Father-Son relation as constitutive of God intrinsically, and that the Creator-creation relation started *ex nihilo* from a free, unnecessary, and gratuitous choice on God's part to create. God did not need to create. This he had already committed to writing in his early two volume work, *Contra Gentes* and *De Incarnatione*. Hence, for Athanasius,

'Trinitarian names denote the very character of God, His very being. They are, as it were, ontological names. There are, in fact, two different sets of names which may be used of God. One set of names refers to God's deeds or acts – that is, to His will and counsel – the other to God's own essence and being. St. Athanasius insisted that these two sets of names had to be

¹⁶ Thomas Weinandy, *Athanasius: A Theological Introduction* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing, 2007), p.62 – 63 notes, 'This appears to have been the common understanding prior to Nicea, in that Paul of Samosata earlier on, and now most recently Arius, claimed that such a view demanded change and division within the Godhead. Arius would, by this reading, be vindicated in that there would be no way that one could say that God is one and that the Son is God simultaneously.'

¹⁷ Ibid, p.63 notes, 'If one were an Origenist bishop or theologian, which many were, or an Arian sympathizer and so conceived, as was the tradition, the Father embodying or constituting the whole of the Godhead, and then were confronted with Nicea's declaration that the Son is *homoousios* with the Father, it could very easily be alleged that what had been decreed was not simply that the Son is God as the Father is God, but that the Son is the Father since the Father alone defines and constitutes the one nature of God... [And thus] *homoiousion* was offered as a correction to Nicea so as to ensure the proper distinction between the Father and the Son.'

¹⁸ Ibid, p.63ff.

¹⁹ Georges Florovsky, 'St. Athanasius' Concept of Creation,' p.3

formally and consistently distinguished. And, again, it was more than just a logical or mental distinction. There was a distinction in the reality itself.²⁰

Christian theologians had to consciously overcome the strong Aristotelian tendency to render an object in isolation from all other objects in order to understand and articulate its true nature. To the contrary, says Athanasius, the self-revelation of the Christian God breaks that pattern. For the Father cannot be rendered in isolation from his Son, or, for that matter, the Spirit. Reality itself, at its source, has a fundamentally *relational*, not an individualistic, character. And if God in His goodness patterns all things after Himself, each in its own way, then we would expect all of reality to bear a relational imprint of its Creator.

We can affirm, then, that Christian theology *corrected* Aristotle (among others), going even so far as to fix the philosopher's deepest inconsistencies.²¹ This goes beyond the most obviously troubling aspects of Aristotle's thought, that women were ontologically inferior to men, slaves to masters, and foreigners to natives. Aristotle believed that human beings living in a *polis* – or political community – were doing what is *natural* to us, although we need to grow in virtues to better participate in community life. Yet into this basic communitarian framework, he attempted to forcibly join the ontology of the individual, along with a fractal epistemic approach to the natural world. But if life in community is *natural* to us – and not fundamentally alien – then human personhood must have a fundamentally *relational* ontology. We are persons, to be sure, but we cannot have an individualistic ontology. We were meant for right relationship, and human flourishing can only be defined by the pursuit of, and restoration of, *right relations*. This is affirmed by such basic biblical passages as Jesus' teaching on marriage being a reissuance of the creation order (Mt.19:3 – 12) and Jesus' teaching on the sharing of economic wealth as also flowing from Jesus' 're-gensis' (*palingenesis*; Mt.19:28) of humanity – that is, the new creation order of radical generosity modeled on the original one (Mt.19:13 – 30).

Sadly, Enlightenment political philosophers like Rousseau and Locke, who placed even more weight than Aristotle on an individualistic ontology ('we are noble savages in the state of nature') and paradoxically the rational nation-state as well in another forced but unworkable joining, failed to create a stable, meaningful political culture and field for debate. In Enlightenment discourse, polity can be justified only through some overly rationalized schema like social contract theory and voluntary consent. The glaring problem, of course, is that people do not voluntarily consent to the family and community of their birth, yet we inherit responsibilities to others regardless. Christian theology, by contrast, had already traveled – albeit imperfectly – down a different road. The Christian vision found that political life, the relational meaning(s) of justice, our relationship to the wealth of the natural world and the human-built environment, and the necessity of personal growth in the virtues, can and must be shaped by the relational vision of a relational God. In the West, Christian theology must continue to correct this artificial but unstable forced fit between the one and the many. It must specifically eschew the Protestant-Enlightenment synthesis, for erroneously starting with 'the individual' and defining 'freedom' negatively, as from involuntary constraint, rather than positively, directed towards the true, the good, and the beautiful.²²

God as Fountain of Wisdom, and the Son Who is His Wisdom: 1.17 – 22

Essence language alone is vital, but does not completely answer the question of how Athanasius understood the Father-Son relation. Throughout *Contra Arianos 1 – 2*, Athanasius consistently explores Paul's

²⁰ Ibid, p.8

²¹ See for example, Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1981) and his sequel, *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1989) argues for maintaining our awareness of the pre-Christian Homeric and Classical Greek tradition, the impact of Christianity and synthesis, culminating in Thomas Aquinas. However, Oliver M.T. O'Donovan, *Resurrection and Moral Order: An Outline for Evangelical Ethics* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1986) and *The Desire of Nations: Rediscovering the Roots of Political Theology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999) argues for an explicitly Christian theological, not tradition-based, foundation. See Chrestos Yannaras, *Person and Eros* translated by Norman Russell (Brookline, MA: Holy Cross Orthodox Press, 2008) for an incisive Eastern Christian critique of Western ontological, moral, and political categories.

²² See for example, Timothy Gorringer, *God's Just Vengeance: Crime, Violence, and the Rhetoric of Salvation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996) as an example of how an individualistic ontology in scholastic Calvinism influenced criminal justice practices towards retributive rather than restorative justice practices

statement in 1 Corinthians 1:24 that ‘Christ is the wisdom and power of God,’ explicitly and implicitly.²³ For Athanasius, that is an important point, because if we are given experience of God, and knowledge of God, in a true and proper way, then the Son must reveal the Father truly and properly in the economy of salvation. Hence, Athanasius says repeatedly that the Son *is* the Wisdom and Word and Power of the Father. Athanasius even ventures to say that the Father’s *fullness* is the Son (1.50), by quoting John 1:16. Athanasius spends most of 1.17 – 22 as the main section where he elaborates on how the Son shares the Father’s attributes of Wisdom and Power, and not only shares them but even *is* them, by *personally being them*.

After he introduces the reason for his taking up pen to defend the faith and the Scriptures from those in the Arian camp (1.1 – 4), Athanasius rebukes Arius and his followers by criticizing the *Thalia*, Arius’ literary work (1.5). The *Thalia*, according to Athanasius, claims that ‘Wisdom’ existed in God as ‘the attribute co-existent with God’ (1.5), and then subsequently as the divine person of the Son who was created by God at some primordial point in time before the creation of all else. Hence, in the Arian understanding, there are ‘two wisdoms’:

‘For God,’ he says, ‘was alone, and the Word as yet was not, nor the Wisdom. Then, wishing to form us, thereupon He made a certain one, and named Him Word and Wisdom and Son, that He might form us by means of Him.’ Accordingly, he says that there are two wisdoms, first, the attribute co-existent with God, and next, that in this wisdom the Son was originated, and was only named Wisdom and Word as partaking of it. ‘For Wisdom,’ says he, ‘by the will of the wise God, had its existence in Wisdom.’²⁴

Athanasius responds to this Arian usage of ‘Wisdom’ as a separable divine attribute prior to the divine person with sharp rhetoric throughout the rest of *Contra Arianos*. He continues in 1.9 that if, as the *Thalia* says, the Son-Word-Wisdom is ‘a creature and a work’ made by ‘the will’ of God rather than eternally from the Father’s essence, and thus ‘out of nothing’ like the rest of creation, and not eternally begotten, and if the Son ‘was made God by participation,’ then a whole host of logical consequences follow that are fatal to Christian faith. The *Thalia* itself asserts, ‘the Son has not exact knowledge of the Father, nor does the Word see the Father perfectly; and neither exactly knows nor understands the Father perfectly.’ Arius’ placement of the Son on the creation side of the ontological divide between Creator and creation also runs directly contrary to Athanasius’ evangelistic and pastoral paradigm which he outlined especially in *De Incarnatione* 11 – 18. Athanasius held that Arius’ view damages beyond recovery Jesus’ claim to know the Father, as recorded in Matthew 11:25 – 27 / Luke 10:21 – 22, and to reveal the Father, as in John 14:8 – 9 and Hebrews 1:1 – 3. Those verses punctuate Athanasius’ *Contra Arianos* and serve as biblical anchor points.²⁵

‘For, behold, we take divine Scripture, and thence discourse with freedom of the religious Faith, and set it up as a light upon its candlestick, saying:— Very Son of the Father, natural and genuine, proper to His essence, Wisdom Only-begotten, and Very and Only Word of God is He; not a creature or work, but an offspring proper to the Father’s essence. Wherefore He is very God, existing one in essence with the very Father; while other beings, to whom He said, ‘I said you are Gods,’ [John 10:34; Psalm 82:6] had this grace from the Father, only by participation of the Word, through the Spirit. For He is the expression of the Father’s Person, and Light from Light, and Power, and very Image of the Father’s essence. For this too the Lord has said, ‘He that has seen Me, has seen the Father [John 14:9].’ And He ever was and is and never was not. For the Father being everlasting, His Word and His Wisdom must be everlasting.’²⁶

He elides the biblical presentation of Word and Wisdom by giving the Son the title, ‘Wisdom Only-Begotten’ (1.9). If the Son-Word-Wisdom of God who is truly of the divine essence of the Father did not become incarnate in Jesus of Nazareth, then God did not actually join human nature to Himself in a saving

²³ Athanasius of Alexandria, *Contra Arianos* 1.11, 32; 2.37, 42, 62; 3.30, 48, 63 are explicit quotations. The implicit connections are far more numerous.

²⁴ *Ibid* 1.5

²⁵ Matthew 11:27 is found in 1.12, 39. John 14:8 – 9 is found in 1.9, 12, 21. Hebrews 1:1 – 3 is found in 1.12, 24, 49, 55.

²⁶ Athanasius of Alexandria, *Contra Arianos* 1.9

act. So salvation conceived as union with God and divinization ('you are gods') would be dashed to pieces. Scripture would be inconsistent and untruthful when it tells us that we are 'partakers of the divine nature' (2 Pet.1:4). As it stands, we have 'this grace from the Father... by participation of the Word, through the Spirit.' Divinization and salvation must involve all three divine persons. Thus, he says of Arius and his followers, 'they are not Christians' (1.10).

Athanasius recognizes that human language must be adjusted to appropriately describe the realities to which they point.²⁷ He appropriately negates any connotation of the Word-Wisdom-Son having a temporal beginning, meaning he deploys the term 'begotten' analogically and not univocally. The word 'begotten,' for Athanasius and the Christian tradition, when used to refer to the Father-Son relation prior to creation, must therefore be cleansed of any temporal meanings. The term retains its significance, however, to carry the meaning that the Father and Son share the same 'essence,' based on the analogy to the human experience of a human father sharing the same essence as his human son. A father 'begets' a son in his own essence, whereas a sculptor 'creates' a sculpture of stone, made out of a different essence. Correspondingly, when used in reference to the Father-Son relation, the Son is 'proper to His [that is, the Father's] essence.' He is, Athanasius says, 'one in essence with the very Father,' by nature, whereas everything else, which exists on the ontological side of the creation, might only share in this 'by participation of the Word, through the Spirit.'

In the same early section, Athanasius argues that, if one listens to the Arians and tries to read Scripture about 'divine power' or 'the power of God,' using their theological framework, the matter is even more confusing (1.5):

'And this too is an idea proper to their heresy, as shown in other works of theirs, that there are many powers; one of which is God's own by nature and eternal; but that Christ, on the other hand, is not the true power of God; but, as others, one of the so-called powers, one of which, namely, the locust and the caterpillar, is called in Scripture, not merely the power, but the 'great power.' The others are many and are like the Son, and of them David speaks in the Psalms, when he says, 'The Lord of hosts' or 'powers.'²⁸

In other words, the Arian theological framework for divine power is the same for divine wisdom. According to the Arian position(s), there was a time when God was not yet a Father, when He had not *created* and *begat* (using these terms identically to each other, and univocally with human experience, in the Arian way) the Son. During that time, God could be said to have His own power, as a personal attribute. That is the power 'which is God's own by nature and eternal.' But what of the biblical witness to the Son supposedly being 'the power of God' in 1 Corinthians 1:24 and the like? In an attempt to respect the biblical witness and yet work around it, the *Thalia* asserts that God created and begat the Son as some kind of pre-eminent created being, or super-angel, and so allowed that Son to participate in the power God had from eternity. Hence, 'Christ... is not the true power of God,' but is 'one of the so-called powers.'

Needless to say, Athanasius regards the *Thalia's* attempt to explain God's wisdom and power to be hopelessly confused. Athanasius argues that the Father's proper Wisdom *is* the eternal person of the Son. He is not a secondary creature named after an attribute of the one who is primary. He is not a created personification of wisdom who participates in an attribute of God who created him. Nor is he, as

²⁷ Thomas F. Torrance, *Divine Meaning: Studies in Patristic Hermeneutics* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1995), p.204 says, 'When our ordinary terms are applied to God they must be *stretched* beyond their natural sense and reference and must be employed in such a way that they indicate more than the actual terms can naturally specify.' (emphasis his) Torrance is quoting Athanasius *Contra Arianos* 1.23; 4.27; *De synodis* 42; *De decretis* 12; *Ad Marcellinum* 11 – 13; *Ad Serapionem* 1.8 – 9, 16 – 20. See also *Contra Arianos* 2.3, 'For terms do not disparage His Nature; rather that Nature draws to Itself those terms and changes them. For terms are not prior to essences, but essences are first, and terms second.' And 2.6, where Athanasius discusses the meaning of the word 'faithful' in such a way that he anticipates the exegetical nuance N.T. Wright sees in the word 'righteousness' – that when we are talking about humans being 'faithful' or 'righteous' the words mean one thing, and when we are talking about God being 'faithful' or 'righteous' it means something related but different: 'But when the saints spoke thus, they were not thinking of God in a human way, but they acknowledged two senses of the word 'faithful' in Scripture, first 'believing,' then 'trustworthy,' of which the former belongs to man, the latter to God.'

²⁸ Athanasius of Alexandria, *Contra Arianos* 1.5

Augustine’s concept of the Trinity would allow, a divine person who shares the same information and processing speed as God the Father.

To explore how the concept of Wisdom functions for Athanasius, I will examine *Contra Arianos* 1.17 – 22 and especially 1.19, which has the densest use of the word ‘wisdom.’ Out of sixty eight total in *Contra Arianos* 1, he uses it a total of fourteen times in 1.19, whereas 1.5 (the next in density) has nine mentions, 1.28 has eight, 1.9 and 1.32 each have six, and the others have only two, one, or none at all. Density of word usage alone may not make any given discussion of that word decisive. Significantly, though, in 1.19, we also find Athanasius using his basic paradigm for explaining God: the conceptual structure of a fountain overflowing itself.

A decade later, Athanasius’ 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. For our purposes here, the comparison below is only meant to highlight the way Athanasius comfortably draws from the metaphorical portrait of God as a fountain.

<i>Contra Arianos</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.’²⁹</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?’³⁰</p>

Athanasius’ point, as he works with this fountain metaphor, is that the Son is intrinsically proper to the Father as water is to a fountain. Just to name a fountain ‘a fountain’ is to indicate its water. Even so, just to name the Father ‘the Father’ is also to indicate his only-begotten Son. The Father is so intrinsically overflowing with life that he eternally begets the Son.

But this is not simply a clever metaphor. It is a reflection on Scripture. Athanasius quotes Jeremiah 17:12 – 13 which explicitly invokes, in Israel’s voice, ‘our sanctuary,’ which was modeled after Eden, a mountain (Ezk.28:13 – 14) and a *fountain* from which four rivers diverged (Gen.2:10 – 14, which informs Ezk.40 – 48). It must also be noted that Athanasius is deploying the common patristic analogies about a sun with its

²⁹ Athanasius of Alexandria, *Contra Arianos* 1.19

³⁰ Athanasius of Alexandria, *Letters to Serapion on the Holy Spirit* 1.19

radiance³¹ and a fountain with its stream³² to set the basic groundwork. I believe it is notable that the conceptual structure of ‘something which overflows itself’ guides the imaginative patristic imagery for the Father-Son relation, and eventually the Father-Son-Spirit relation. The image of an overflowing fountain connects Jerusalem to Eden, which overflowed with water.

Athanasius’ argument in 1.17 – 22 is that if God were initially a monad, and through a decision of will became a triad, then there would be no shared essence between the Father who originated and the Son and Spirit who were derived (1.17). In fact, since there is no logical stopping point to this addition, God could become a tetrad or more, or subtract from the Godhead and become a dyad or monad again (1.17). Athanasius retorts that the triad has always been, and is not originated (1.18). He makes the cheeky accusation, ‘It belongs to Greeks to introduce an originated triad, and to level it with things originate’ – meaning that Greek philosophy with its monadic conception of deity becomes grossly inconsistent when trying to explain the Son and Spirit as produced by the Father at some point in time (1.18). The Son (and Spirit), therefore, must be eternal, and co-eternal with the Father. If the Son communicates the Father, he must be from the very essence of the Father eternally, not a temporal creation and therefore different.

The theologian then defends this point by drawing on the fountain image. The full quotation of 1.19 is as follows:

‘If God 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 ;’ and in the book of Baruch it is written, ‘You have forsaken the Fountain of wisdom [Baruch 3:12],’— this implies that 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. Now the Son is all this, who says, ‘I am the Life [John 14:6],’ and, ‘I Wisdom dwell with prudence [Proverbs 8:12].’ 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. What a load of extravagance! For God promises that those who do His will shall be as a fountain which the water fails not, saying by Isaiah the prophet, ‘And the Lord shall satisfy your soul in drought, and make your bones fat; and you shall be like a watered garden, and like a spring of water, whose waters fail not [Isaiah 58:11].’ And yet these, whereas God is called and is a Fountain of wisdom, dare to insult Him as barren and void of His proper Wisdom. But their doctrine is false; truth witnessing that God is the eternal Fountain of His proper Wisdom; and, if the Fountain be eternal, the Wisdom also must needs be eternal. For in It were all things made, as David says in the Psalm, ‘In Wisdom have You made them all [Psalm 104:24];’ and Solomon says, ‘The Lord by Wisdom has formed the earth, by understanding has He established the heavens [Proverbs 3:19].’ And this Wisdom is the Word, and by Him, as John says, ‘all things were made,’ and ‘without Him was made not one thing [John 1:3].’ And this Word is Christ; for ‘there is One God, the Father, from whom are all things, and we for Him; and One Lord Jesus Christ, through whom are all things, and we through Him [1 Corinthians 8:6].’ And if all things are through Him, He Himself is not to be reckoned with that ‘all.’ For he who dares to call Him, through whom are things, one of that ‘all,’ surely will have like speculations concerning God, from whom are all. But if he shrinks from this as unseemly, and excludes God from that all, it is but consistent that he should also exclude from that all the Only-Begotten Son, as being proper to the Father’s essence. And, if He be not one of the all, it is sin to say concerning Him, ‘He was not,’ and ‘He was not before His generation.’ Such words may be used of the creatures; but as to the Son, He is such as the Father is, of whose essence He is proper Offspring, Word, and Wisdom. For this is proper to the Son, as regards the Father, and this shows that the Father is proper to the Son; that we may neither say that God was

³¹ Athanasius of Alexandria, *Contra Arianos* 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

³² Athanasius of Alexandria, *Contra Arianos* 1.14, 19, 27; 2.2, 42, uses the fountain and stream image

ever without Word, nor that the Son was non-existent. For wherefore a Son, if not from Him? Or wherefore Word and Wisdom, if not ever proper to Him?’³³

He continues to argue that the Son must be the Father’s true essence if the Son is the Image and Radiance of the Father (1.20). Other attributes which belong to the Father must also belong to the Son: ‘eternal, immortal, powerful, light, King, Sovereign, God, Lord, Creator, and Maker’ (1.21). This much must be true if Jesus was truthful in saying that seeing him is seeing the Father (Jn.14:9). According to Arian logic and use of terms, the created Son must also ‘beget’ another in order to be like his Father, which would create a ridiculous ‘multitude of gods’ (1.21), because not only must there be a son of the Son, but a father of the Father, infinitely in both directions (1.22). This brings Athanasius back to his point that, although we use human terms like ‘beget,’ ‘God be not as man’ and thus ‘beget’ has an analogical, not univocal, meaning when applied to God (1.21 – 22), a point Mormons would do well to consider at length.

The word ‘in’ located in the quotation of Psalm 104:24, ‘In Wisdom have You made them all,’ does not refer to the inside of a material container space. Rather, ‘Wisdom’ and ‘Word’ indicate an immaterial rationality in God, in which all creation partakes. In *Contra Arianos* 2, Athanasius produces a very lengthy treatment of Proverbs 8:22 – 23 in his exposition of the eternal Son as God’s very Wisdom. Proverbs 8:22 – 23 contains the statement about God’s wisdom, as divine attribute, bringing forth the creation. The passage was heavily contested material in the struggle between Nicene and Arian theologians. Athanasius is anticipating his longer exposition here, as indicated by his citations of Proverbs 3:19 and 8:12 in *Contra Arianos* 1.19. In 1.20, he quotes Proverbs 8:30, ‘I was His delight’ and attributes that to God the Son speaking of the Father’s delight in him. The early church – Athanasius being an example insofar as this study is concerned – was persuaded that the Word of God, our creator, already providentially sustained us *from creation*. Like the earth partakes of the sun’s light, so we partake of him simply by the fact of our existence.³⁴

Wisdom in Scripture

Is Athanasius playing a clever semantic game with the terms ‘wisdom’ and ‘fountain of wisdom’? Or is he being faithful to Scripture here? The following table shows at a glance how ‘wisdom’ begins in its simplest dimension: a divine command which human beings are intended to reflect on, in order to learn and grow.

Moses (Torah)	Prophets (Nevi'im)	Writings (Ketuvim)
Moses (Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy)	Joshua, Judges, Samuel, Kings, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Treisar (the Twelve Prophets)	Psalms, Proverbs, Job, Megillot (Ruth, Songs, Lamentations, Ecclesiastes, Esther), Daniel, Ezra-Nehemiah, Chronicles
Beginning: Garden & Command ‘The LORD God commanded the man, saying, ‘From any tree of the garden you may eat, but from the tree of knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat...’ (Gen.2:16 – 17)	Beginning: Garden & Command ‘Be strong and courageous, for you shall give this people possession of the land which I swore to their fathers to give them... This book of the law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate on it day and night... ’ (Josh.1:8)	Beginning: Garden & Command ‘But his delight is in the law of the LORD, and in His law he meditates day and night. He will be like a tree firmly planted by streams of water , which yields its fruit in its season, and its leaf does not wither...’ (Ps.1:2 – 3)

We can see a pattern here in the canonical shape of the Old Testament literature. (1) At the start of the Torah, or ‘the Teaching,’³⁵ in the Garden of Eden, God gave a wise command for humanity to remember and honor. (2) Then, in the first book of the Nevi'im, or ‘the Prophets,’ the character Joshua read the Torah and meditated on it constantly (Josh.1:8). As a result of this deep study of the Torah, Joshua is portrayed as the great wise man: He reflects on what God gave before. (3) In the third section of the Old Testament, the

³³ Athanasius of Alexandria, *Contra Arianos* 1.19

³⁴ Athanasius of Alexandria, *De Incarnatione* 17.5 – 7

³⁵ Also unfortunately called ‘the Law’ through the Latin translation ‘lex,’ although this title tends to emphasize the ‘commands’ and not the narrative and poetic portions.

Ketuvim, or ‘the Writings,’ we find Psalm 1, which praises the person who meditates on God’s Torah constantly. That person is wise. We always reflect on what was given before. John Sailhamer calls these ‘compositional seams’ linking and holding together books of the Bible.³⁶ In effect, it is a way to see the inspiration of the Scriptures as relating to the *organization and placement* of the books, not just the *writing* of the books.

The Jewish wisdom tradition understood human nature and God’s commandments to be perfectly fitted to each other *from creation*: Both flow from God’s wisdom, where ‘wisdom’ is considered as an attribute of God which becomes, in a derivative sense, a pattern in creation (e.g. Prov.8:22 – 23). To suggest otherwise means that God commands things that are strangely inappropriate for His creation, or that God made the creation in some arbitrary way that is disconnected from His commandments and moral character. Either hypothetical case would boggle the Jewish mind.

Moreover, the Book of Proverbs says we need to internalize more deeply every day the words of God onto the ‘clay tablets of our hearts’ (Prov.1:23; 2:10; 3:3; 6:21; 7:3), which the prophet Jeremiah later used as a motif, both negatively by saying that the script on our hearts is sinful (Jer.17:1 – 10) and positively by saying that God will write His law on the tablets of our hearts (Jer.31:31 – 34), arguably replacing the stone tablets of Sinai and the stone temple itself. The admonition of Deuteronomy to write the commandments on small pieces of paper and bind them to one’s hands, forehead, doorposts, and gates served to remind the Israelites to more deeply take the commandments into one’s heart (Dt.6:6 – 9). Proverbs reinforces the impression we get from Genesis 1 – 2 that God started the creation in a developmental mode. The created world was meant to be developed into a garden of sorts by humanity. And human beings themselves were meant to develop into wise image-bearers who cultivate their likeness to God. This is a vital point to recall in one’s theological anthropology. There is a sense in which we are co-creators with God – junior partners, to be sure – of our human nature.

The corruption of sin, while devastating, does not alter the basic categories of creation and wisdom, though it adds an additional layer of significance. However much we now face sinful desires in ourselves that resist God, a situation acknowledged in the Psalms (Ps.32, 51, and 119 perhaps most of all) and supremely by Paul in Romans 7:14 – 25, that does not take away from the fact that we are already participating in God’s wisdom – and therefore in God Himself, in some sense – by our very creation. If God’s commandments cause the heart to rejoice (e.g. Ps.19:8), then the heart cannot be marred by sin beyond recognition. We may struggle to follow the commandments of God. Yet our struggles are framed by a prior assurance of God’s love for us as Creator and sustainer, a teleological hope in God’s goodness to heal human nature as part of our destiny (e.g. Dt.30:6; Jer.4:4; 31:31 – 34; Ezk.36:26 – 36; etc.), along with joy in finding in ourselves a desire to follow those commands in the present, despite the resistance we also feel. That is arguably why Paul can speak of a true ‘I myself’ in contrast to the alien ‘sin that indwells me’ (e.g. Rom.7:18) in that convoluted passage and convoluted journey of self-diagnosis.

Furthermore, the endings of each major section of the Old Testament show us a macro-literary theme:

- The Torah (‘Moses’) begins with the garden land (Gen.1 – 2) and ends with the prediction of exile, yet the hope of restoration (Dt.27 – 33) tied to God cutting sin away from people through ‘circumcision of the heart’ (Dt.30:6).
- The Nevi’im (‘the Prophets’) begins with the garden land in Joshua but ends with the reality of exile and the hope for restoration in both Ezekiel and in Malachi. To do this, God will change hearts via the internal work of the Spirit.
- The Ketuvim (‘the Writings’) begins with a motif of the garden land (the ‘well watered tree’ of Psalm 1) but ends with the reality of exile and the hope for restoration at the end of Chronicles. To do this, God must change hearts, and we must participate with God in that work.

Moses (Torah)	Prophets (Nevi'im)	Writings (Ketuvim)
Moses (Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy)	Joshua, Judges, Samuel, Kings, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Treisar (the Twelve Prophets)	Psalms, Proverbs, Job, Megillot (Ruth, Songs, Lamentations, Ecclesiastes, Esther), Daniel, Ezra-Nehemiah, Chronicles

³⁶ John Sailhamer, *Introduction to Old Testament Theology: A Canonical Approach* (Zondervan, 1995)

End: Back from Exile to the Garden, Sin Cut Away, Hearts Changed	End: Back from Exile to the Garden, Sin Cut Away, Hearts Changed	End: Back from Exile to the Garden, Sin Cut Away, Hearts Changed
God will restore Israel from exile (Dt.30 – 34)	God will restore Israel from exile (Isa.40 – 66; Jer.31 – 50, Ezk.34 – 40; Mic.7; Zech.9 – 14; Mal.4)	God is restoring Israel from exile (2 Chr.36)
God will change hearts (Dt.30:6)	God will give His Spirit to change hearts (Isa.59:21; Jer.31:31 – 34, Ezk.11:19; 36:26 – 37:14, Joel 2:28 – 29; Mic.7:19)	God will give His Spirit to change hearts (Ps.51:9 – 10; 119:29 – 32; 143:10; Prov.1:23; 2:10; 3:3; 6:21; 7:3)

This is one way the entire Old Testament arrangement demonstrates an intentional order. Not only does the beginning of each of the three main sections begin with the garden land and wisdom reflecting on God’s word, but the ending points to a restoration of that ideal, and not just the original state, but the matured, developed form that God envisioned. In fact, these themes would appear even if we ordered the books of the Writings in other ways that other segments of the Jewish community did, so in any case, the ordering of each major section (Torah, Prophets, Writings) contains a theological message in itself.

This arrangement suggests why Jesus could so easily refer to ‘Moses, the Prophets, and the Writings’ (Lk.24:27, 44) as a story pointing beyond itself, crying out for resolution, a resolution he accomplished. Jesus himself, in his humanity, stepped into the place of Israel, and cut sin away from his own humanity (Col.2:12; Rom.2:28 – 29) through his long and faithful obedience to the Father (Rom.8:3 – 4). He put to death that ‘old self’ of ours (Rom.6:6; 7:14 – 25), and raised up for us a new humanity, so he could share his Spirit with us (Rom.8:5 – 11), the Spirit of his new humanity which is cleansed of sin and fully united with God. Jesus is the true ‘wise one,’ for he alone received the commandments into his humanity at the most fundamental level.

Because ‘wisdom’ was such a prominent category in the Hebrew Scriptures, Christians could do little else but interpret it christocentrically. Jesus had referred to himself in terms of ‘wisdom’ personified (Mt.11:19; Lk.7:35), and a teacher of ‘wisdom’ greater than Solomon (Mt.12:42; Lk.11:31). He even claimed to know the very mind of God, and speak for God, under the label of ‘the wisdom of God’ (Lk.11:49ff.). He certainly must have referred to himself as the truly ‘wise one,’ who internalized God’s commandments into his own humanity. By saying, ‘Only the Son knows the Father,’ Jesus was placing himself into the role of Wisdom incarnate, since God’s Wisdom alone was thought to know God.³⁷ Thus, the early Christians in their entirety believed themselves to be preserving Jesus’ and the apostles’ true meaning when they said that Christ *is* the wisdom and power of God (1 Cor.1:24). It is exceedingly unlikely that Paul was the originator of this statement.

Theologians of the early church other than Athanasius, in every major region of the Christian community, before and after him, asserted the same: (2nd century) Justin Martyr of Rome,³⁸ Theophilus of Antioch,³⁹

³⁷ Ben Witherington III, *Matthew: Smyth & Helwy’s Bible Commentary* (Macon, GA: Smyth & Helwy’s Publishing, Inc., 2006), p.238.

³⁸ Justin Martyr of Rome (c.100 – 165 AD), *Dialogue with Trypho* 61 writes, ‘I shall give you another testimony, my friends, from the Scriptures, that God begot before all creatures a Beginning, [who was] a certain rational power [proceeding] from Himself, who is called by the Holy Spirit, now the Glory of the Lord, now the Son, again Wisdom, again an Angel, then God, and then Lord and Logos... The Word of Wisdom, who is Himself this God begotten of the Father of all things, and Word, and Wisdom, and Power, and the Glory of the Begetter, will bear evidence to me...’ cf. 100, 126.

³⁹ Theophilus of Antioch (seventh bishop of Antioch, died 183 – 185 AD), *Epistle to Autolycus* 2.10, identifies ‘Wisdom’ with the *Spirit* and not the Son per se, although the point here is that (1) Theophilus still views Wisdom as a person of the Trinity, not as a quality spread out among the members of the Trinity, and (2) arguably he conceives of the Spirit as *in* the Son: ‘God, then, having His own Word internal within His own bowels, begot Him, emitting Him along with His own wisdom before all things. He had this Word as a helper in the things that were created by Him, and by Him He made all things. He is called governing principle [ἄρκη], because He rules, and is Lord of all things fashioned by Him. He, then, being Spirit of God, and governing principle, and wisdom, and power of the highest, came down upon the prophets, and through them spoke of the creation of the world and of all other things. For the prophets were not when the world came into existence, but the wisdom of God which was in Him, and His holy Word which was always present with Him.’ Cf.2.15 (‘In like manner also the three days which were before the luminaries, are types of the Trinity, of God, and His Word, and His wisdom’), 18 (‘But to no one else than to His own Word and wisdom did He say, Let Us make’), 22 (‘The God and Father, indeed, of all cannot be contained, and is not found in a place, for there is no place of His rest; but His Word, through whom He made all things, being His power and His wisdom...’)

Irenaeus of Lyons,⁴⁰ Tertullian of Carthage,⁴¹ Clement of Alexandria,⁴² (3rd century) Origen of Alexandria,⁴³ Alexander of Alexandria,⁴⁴ Methodius of Olympus,⁴⁵ (4th century) the anti-Arian Council of Sardica in 343,⁴⁶ Cyril of Jerusalem,⁴⁷ Hilary of Poitiers,⁴⁸ Ambrose of Milan,⁴⁹ Basil of Caesarea,⁵⁰ Gregory of Nyssa,⁵¹ Gregory of Nazianzus,⁵² (early 5th century) John Chrysostom of Constantinople,⁵³ and,

⁴⁰ Irenaeus of Lyons (c.130 – 202 AD), *Against Heresies*, 4.7.4 follows Theophilus in identifying ‘wisdom’ with the Spirit: ‘For His offspring and His similitude do minister to Him in every respect; that is, the Son and the Holy Spirit, the Word and Wisdom...’; cf. 4.20.1 – 4.

⁴¹ Tertullian of Carthage (c.155 – 240 AD), *Adversus Praxean* 4 writes, ‘I derive the Son from no other source than from the substance of the Father. I describe him as doing nothing without the Father’s will, as receiving all power from the Father. How then can I be abolishing from the faith that monarchy when I safeguard it in the Son, as handed down to the Son by the Father?’

⁴² Clement of Alexandria (c.150 – c.215 AD), *Paedagogus / The Instructor* 1.2 writes, ‘But the good Instructor, the Wisdom, the Word of the Father, who made man, cares for the whole nature of His creature; the all-sufficient Physician of humanity, the Saviour, heals both body and soul.’ Cf. 3.12.

⁴³ Origen of Alexandria (c.184 – c.254 AD), *De Principiis* 1.1 writes, ‘in Your word and wisdom which is Your Son, in Himself we shall see You the Father’; in 2.1 writes, ‘The first-born, however, is not by nature a different person from the Wisdom, but one and the same. Finally, the Apostle Paul says that Christ (is) the power of God and the wisdom of God’; and in 2.2 writes, ‘it is once rightly understood that the only-begotten Son of God is His wisdom hypostatically existing.’

⁴⁴ Alexander of Alexandria (died 328 AD), *Epistle to Alexander, Bishop of Constantinople*, wrote, ‘They overthrow the testimony of the Divine Scriptures, which declare the immutability of the Word and the Divinity of the Wisdom of the Word, which Word and Wisdom is Christ.’ recorded by Theodoret of Cyrus, *Ecclesiastical History* 1.3.

⁴⁵ Methodius of Olympus (died 311 AD), *From the Discourse on the Resurrection* 1.15 writes, ‘The apostle certainly, after assigning the planting and watering to art and earth and water, conceded the growth to God alone, where he says, Neither is he that plants anything, neither he that waters; but God that gives the increase. [1 Corinthians 3:7] For he knew that Wisdom, the first-born of God, the parent and artificer of all things, brings forth everything into the world; whom the ancients called Nature and Providence, because she, with constant provision and care, gives to all things birth and growth. For, says the Wisdom of God, my Father works hitherto, and I work. [John 5:17] Now it is on this account that Solomon called Wisdom the artificer of all things, since God is in no respect poor, but able richly to create, and make, and vary, and increase all things.’

⁴⁶ Council of Sardica of 343 AD, attended by between 170 and 250 bishops, confessed, ‘We confess that the Word is Word of God the Father, and that beside Him there is no other. We believe the Word to be the true God, and Wisdom and Power. We affirm that He is truly the Son, yet not in the way in which others are said to be sons...’ recorded by Theodoret of Cyrus, *Ecclesiastical History* 2.6

⁴⁷ Cyril of Jerusalem (c.313 – 386 AD), *Catechetical Lectures*, Lecture 4.7, writes, ‘Believe also in the Son of God, One and Only, our Lord Jesus Christ, Who was begotten God of God, begotten Life of Life, begotten Light of Light, Who is in all things like to Him that begot, Who received not His being in time, but was before all ages eternally and incomprehensibly begotten of the Father: The Wisdom and the Power of God, and His Righteousness personally subsisting: Who sits on the right hand of the Father before all ages.’ Lecture 6.18, ‘For the Wisdom of God is Christ His Only-begotten Son...’

⁴⁸ Hilary of Poitiers (c.310 – c.367 AD), *On the Trinity* 2.10, writes, ‘Listen then to the Unbegotten Father, listen to the Only-begotten Son. Hear His words, The Father is greater than I [John 14:28], and I and the Father are One [John 10:30], and He that has seen Me has seen the Father also [John 14:9], and The Father is in Me and I in the Father [John 14:10], and I went out from the Father [John 16:28], and Who is in the bosom of the Father [John 1:18], and Whatsoever the Father has He has delivered to the Son [John 5:20 – 29], and The Son has life in Himself, even as the Father has in Himself [John 5:26]. Hear in these words the Son, the Image, the Wisdom, the Power, the Glory of God.’

⁴⁹ Ambrose of Milan (c.340 – 397 AD), *Exposition of the Christian Faith* 1.16, writes, ‘Further, that none may fall into error, let a man attend to those signs vouchsafed us by holy Scripture, whereby we may know the Son. He is called the Word, the Son, the Power of God, the Wisdom of God. The Word, because He is without blemish; the Power, because He is perfect; the Son, because He is begotten of the Father; the Wisdom, because He is one with the Father, one in eternity, one in Divinity.’ Cf. 1.62; 2.143; 5.194 – 196; 4.43, writes, ‘Now is there anything impossible to God’s Power and Wisdom? These, observe, are names of the Son of God’

⁵⁰ Basil of Caesarea (c.329 – 379 AD), *On the Holy Spirit* 1.19 writes, ‘For the Father is not regarded from the difference of the operations, by the exhibition of a separate and peculiar energy...’; 1.20, ‘all things that the Father has belong to the Son, not gradually accruing to Him little by little, but with Him all together and at once’; cf. 1.15.

⁵¹ Gregory of Nyssa (c.335 – 395 AD), *Against Eunomius* 1.24, writes, ‘But in the case of the divine nature, because every perfection in the way of goodness is connoted with the very name of God, we cannot discover, at all events as we look at it, any ground for degrees of honour. Where there is no greater and smaller in power, or glory, or wisdom, or love, or of any other imaginable good whatever, but the good which the Son has is the Father’s also, and all that is the Father’s is seen in the Son, what possible state of mind can induce us to show the more reverence in the case of the Father? If we think of royal power and worth the Son is King: if of a judge, ‘all judgment is committed to the Son’: if of the magnificent office of Creation, ‘all things were made by Him’: if of the Author of our life, we know the True Life came down as far as our nature: if of our being taken out of darkness, we know He is the True Light, who weans us from darkness: if wisdom is precious to any, Christ is God’s power and Wisdom.’ Cf. 2.1, 4, 12; 3.2. *On the Holy Spirit*: ‘the fountain of power is the Father, and the power of the Father is the Son...’

⁵² Gregory of Nazianzus (c.340 – 397 AD), *Fourth Theological Oration* 20, writes, ‘In my opinion He is called Son because He is identical with the Father in Essence; and not only for this reason, but also because He is Of Him... And He is called the Word, because He is related to the Father as Word to Mind; not only on account of His passionless Generation, but also because of the Union, and of His declaratory function. Perhaps too this relation might be compared to that between the Definition and the Thing defined... For, it says, he that has mental perception of the Son (for this is the meaning of Hath Seen) has also perceived the Father; and the Son is a concise demonstration and easy setting forth of the Father’s Nature... He is also called Wisdom, as the Knowledge of things divine and human. For how is it possible that He Who made all things should be ignorant of the reasons of what He has made? And Power, as the Sustainer of all created things, and the Furnisher to them of power to keep themselves together. And Truth, as being in nature One and not many (for truth is one and falsehood is manifold), and as the pure Seal of the Father and His most unerring

at least on occasion, Augustine of Hippo,⁵⁴ to name a few. This means that the overwhelming consensus view of the church was that Christ *is*, and not merely *shares in*, the wisdom of God – and by extension, the Power of God as well. Neither ‘wisdom’ nor ‘power’ are abstractions or qualities that the persons of the Trinity share amongst themselves, or have in varying degrees. They believed that the Wisdom of God was *hypostatic*, that is, *personal* – the very person of the Son. The dense patristic consensus on this matter is significant theologically and exegetically.

Therefore, the *homoousion* in the Nicene Creed of 325 AD, and the gradual convergence of Christian opinion around it, reaffirmed at Constantinople 381 AD, reflects the united Church resisting the Arian heresies, and insisting on a certain traditional understanding of the Father-Son relation which prevailed *prior to Arius*. That is, they were not simply saying that there is something akin to intangible ‘divine stuff’ that the Father has, which the Son has also. Rather, they were reasoning out the use of a difficult term with its own fascinating history – *ousia* – re-deploying it for proper Christian use, as referring to unity of the divine essence/substance in the Father, Son, and Spirit. This reasoning was based, in part, on the conviction that the Son is the Father’s very Wisdom, and the Father’s own Power.

As I mentioned before, early church historian and theologian Lewis Ayres warns against making each Person of the Trinity out to have a separate mind. He correctly asserts that, for the early Christians, Father, Son, and Spirit know us and act towards the creation inseparably, in union with one another:

‘It is true that pro-Nicenes do intend to place restrictions on the way that we imagine the unity of God. Most clearly, if we were to imagine God as three potentially separable agents or three ‘centres of consciousness’ the contents of whose ‘minds’ were distinct, pro-Nicenes would see us as drawing inappropriate analogies between God and created realities and in serious heresy.’⁵⁵

My study of Athanasius’ understanding of the Son of God as the Wisdom of God confirms Louis Ayres’ judgment. Athanasius insists that dividing the Father, Son, and Spirit up into separate centers of consciousness smuggles in the inappropriate connotation that each possess his own corporeal body. Athanasius says the word ‘homoousion’ was used in the Nicene Creed to prevent that connotation:

‘For bodies which are like each other may be separated and become at distances from each other, as are human sons relatively to their parents (as it is written concerning Adam and Seth, who was begotten of him that he was like him after his own pattern [Genesis 5:3]); but since the generation of the Son from the Father is not according to the nature of men, and not only like, but also inseparable from the essence [*ousia*] of the Father, and He and the Father are one, as He has said Himself, and the Word is ever in the Father and the Father in the Word, as the radiance stands towards the light (for this the phrase itself indicates), therefore the Council, as understanding this, suitably wrote ‘one in essence,’ that they might both defeat the perverseness of the heretics, and show that the Word was other than originated things.’⁵⁶

Impress. And the Image as of one substance with Him, and because He is of the Father, and not the Father of Him. For this is of the Nature of an Image, to be the reproduction of its Archetype, and of that whose name it bears; only that there is more here. For in ordinary language an image is a motionless representation of that which has motion; but in this case it is the living reproduction of the Living One, and is more exactly like than was Seth to Adam, or any son to his father.’

⁵³ John Chrysostom of Constantinople (349 – 407 AD), *Homilies on 1 Corinthians*, Homily 7:1, writes, ‘Since therefore he had affirmed His power to be so great, and had referred *the whole* unto the Son, saying that He had become wisdom unto us... [And] As if he had said, He gave unto us Himself.’ (emphasis mine); and in 7:5, ‘By the name of wisdom, he calls both Christ, and the Cross and the Gospel.’

⁵⁴ Augustine of Hippo (354 – 430 AD), *On the Trinity* 1.10, writes, ‘For neither has the Son separated the Father from Himself, because He Himself, speaking elsewhere with the voice of wisdom (for He Himself is the Wisdom of God) says...’

⁵⁵ Lewis Ayres, *Nicaea and its Legacy: An Approach to Fourth-Century Trinitarian Theology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), p.296

⁵⁶ Athanasius of Alexandria, *De Decretis* 20; cf. 11, which says, ‘And on this account men in their time become fathers of many children; but God, being without parts, is Father of the Son without partition or passion; for there is neither effluence of the Immaterial, nor influx from without, as among men; and being uncompounded in nature, He is Father of One Only Son. This is why He is Only-begotten, and alone in the Father’s bosom, and alone is acknowledged by the Father to be from Him, saying, ‘This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased [Matthew 3:17].’ And He too is the Father’s Word, from which may be understood the impassible and impartitive nature of the Father, in that not even a human word is begotten with passion or partition, much less the Word of God.’

Athanasius says that an earthly fire (like a campfire) that springs up from the heat of the sun is still not an appropriate analogy for the Son-Father relation. The physical separation between the fire on earth and the fire of the sun disqualifies it:

‘Again, the illustration of the Light and the Radiance has this meaning. For the Saints have not said that the Word was related to God as fire kindled from the heat of the sun, which is commonly put out again, for this is an external work and a creature of its author, but they all preach of Him as Radiance, thereby to signify His being from the essence, proper and indivisible, and His oneness with the Father.’⁵⁷

Therefore, Athanasius says that the Nicene Creed must be interpreted with disciplined attention to the Gospel of John. John’s account speaks of the Father-Son relation in terms of a mutual indwelling at all times. ‘I am in the Father and the Father in Me,’ says Jesus (John 14:9 – 10; etc.). Therefore:

‘Let every corporeal reference be banished on this subject; and transcending every imagination of sense, let us, with pure understanding and with mind alone, apprehend the genuine relation of son to father, and the Word’s proper relation towards God, and the unvarying likeness of the radiance towards the light: for as the words ‘Offspring’ and ‘Son’ bear, and are meant to bear, no human sense, but one suitable to God, in like manner when we hear the phrase ‘one in essence,’ let us not fall upon human senses, and imagine partitions and divisions of the Godhead, but as having our thoughts directed to things immaterial, let us preserve undivided the oneness of nature and the identity of light.’⁵⁸

Here is Athanasius’ younger contemporary, Ambrose of Milan (c.340 – 397 AD):

‘No separation, then, is to be made of the Word from God the Father, no separation in power, no separation in wisdom, by reason of the Unity of the Divine Substance. Again, God the Father is in the Son, as we oft-times find it written, yet [He dwells in the Son] not as sanctifying one who lacks sanctification, nor as filling a void, for the power of God knows no void. Nor, again, is the power of the one increased by the power of the other, for there are not two powers, but one Power; nor does Godhead entertain Godhead, for there are not two Godheads, but one Godhead. We, contrariwise, shall be One in Christ through Power received [from another] and dwelling in us.’⁵⁹

And Gregory of Nyssa (c.335 – 395 AD):

‘the fountain of power is the Father, and the power of the Father is the Son...’⁶⁰

This consensus is significant as history because it was the orthodox view from so early, and for so long. The fact that the earliest Christian centers at Jerusalem, Antioch, Asia Minor, Alexandria, and Rome produced leaders who said this is a very weighty historical datum. The apostles invested very heavily in these areas. Adding Carthage in Roman North Africa, and Lyons in Roman Gaul to the list becomes quite impressive since tradition tells us that Christian faith was firmly established in these areas by the second century – Carthage may have been reached by a team led by Crescens, ordained by Peter; Lyons and Southern Gaul were missionized by Greek-speakers from Asia Minor known and supported by Polycarp of Smyrna. How did these Christian communities come to speak this way? Of course, it is possible that Christians copied and circulated Paul’s first letter to the Corinthians, in which we find the relevant statements in 1:24 and 1:30, extremely quickly. But I am not suggesting a narrow biblicism, or suggesting that Christianity be regarded as a movement of literature primarily. This was a standard, common, apostolic way of speaking about the Father-Son relation, not just the apostle Paul’s figure of speech in a single letter. Athanasius is no exception to this complete and total patristic consensus.

⁵⁷ Ibid 23

⁵⁸ Ibid 24

⁵⁹ Ambrose of Milan, *Exposition of the Christian Faith* 2.36

⁶⁰ Gregory of Nyssa, *On the Holy Spirit*

Athanasius on the Wisdom Figure of Proverbs 8

We might wonder whether Athanasius is being 'fair' to the Old Testament use of the term 'wisdom' in Proverbs 8 in particular. I can understand why Athanasius wanted to wrestle Proverbs 8 away from the Arian camp. Their use of Proverbs 8:22 – 23 to argue that the Son was a temporally created being separated in essence from the eternal Father was sophisticated. However, I wish that Athanasius had proceeded down a different path here, which would have been equally, if not more, successful.

I think that speaking of God creating 'by His wisdom' or 'in His wisdom' refers, in its original Old Testament context, to a conceptual pattern whereby God's creation and God's commands are interlocked and agreeable to each other. With the exception of the personification of wisdom in Proverbs 8:22 – 36, it is not obvious that any Old Testament author viewed wisdom as an actual 'divine person,' or *hypostatically*, to use the much later terms of post-Nicene theological discourse. And even in the Book of Proverbs as a whole, the personification of wisdom seems much more like a literary device which becomes manifested, in the fashion of good Jewish creation theology rooted in Genesis 1 – 2, in the 'wise wife' of Proverbs 31. The book is written as a letter from father to son (Prov.1:8). God's commandments are portrayed as 'lady wisdom' (Prov.1:20 – 33; 3:13 – 20; 4:1 – 9) and the suggestive whispers of sin are portrayed as 'lady temptation' (Prov.5:3 – 14; 7:1 – 27). Of course, temptation is also embodied by an actual seductive temptress (Prov.2:16 – 19; 5:1 – 6; 6:23 – 26), but sexual temptation is not the only concern in the proverbs. This motif, however, serves as the foil for the delightful wife of one's own (Prov.5:15 – 20) which becomes the wife who embodies godly wisdom in her life (Prov.31). The quest to find such a wife is one of the wisest pieces of advice a father and mother could give their son. This is why God's wisdom, meaning His commandments, is portrayed in the Book of Proverbs as female.

More to the point: 'Wisdom,' as a term in its original Old Testament context, contains a lexical range of meaning, encompassing: (1) the fact that God gave commandments to humanity to more deeply internalize into ourselves, (2) the content of those commandments, and their character, (3) a section of the biblical canon (i.e. 'wisdom literature'), and (4) the attribute of God from which our design as human beings and God's commandments for us find their origination point. Athanasius shared this understanding, and his emphasis in *Contra Arianos* 1.19 falls on the last of these biblical accents, but he adds another. Athanasius links Psalm 104:24 and Proverbs 3:19 with John 1:3 and 1 Corinthians 8:6, and thereby interprets 'wisdom' in its Old Testament usage by the cosmic christology of the apostles John and Paul:

O LORD, how many are Your works!
In wisdom You have made them all (Psalm 104:24)

The LORD *by wisdom* founded the earth,
By understanding He established the heavens (Proverbs 3:19)

All things came into being *through Him* [the Word],
and apart from Him nothing came into being that has come into being (John 1:3)

there is One God, the Father, from whom are all things, and we for Him;
and One Lord Jesus Christ, *through whom are all things*, and we through Him (1 Corinthians 8:6)

He draws together a synthetic and thematic interpretation of various verses related to God creating the world, that is, giving life, 'in/by Wisdom' and 'in him,' that is, the Word-Son of God.

With fear and trembling at disagreeing with Athanasius on a point that he labored on so extensively, I am persuaded that the apostles John and Paul, in their cosmic christology, were not reading the Old Testament in the same way that Athanasius is. They did not view the divine 'Word' and 'Wisdom' as complete synonyms. I suggest that they viewed the former as belonging to the order of eternity, and the latter to the order of creation. For instance, the apostle Paul was perfectly content to speak of Christ as the personification of various things 'for us,' but these things belong to the order of creation: Christ is 'for us wisdom from God and righteousness and sanctification and redemption' (1 Cor.1:30). These titles that rightly belong to Christ pertain to the order of creation and our subsequent fall and re-creation. Which is to

say, Paul does not mean that such things as ‘redemption’ and ‘sanctification’ existed before in God as part of the order of eternity, in God’s eternity, for how could they? ‘Redemption’ is God’s response to humanity’s fall and would not exist as a category prior to creation. So ‘Christ is our redemption’ refers us to an *activity* of God, not an *eternal attribute* of God. Similarly, ‘sanctification’ refers at a minimum to human beings being ‘set apart’ from other things modeled after God being ‘set apart’ from His creation, yet ‘set apart’ cannot be said to properly describe God prior to creation, since in eternity, there was nothing created from which God could be ‘set apart.’ So ‘Christ is our sanctification’ refers us to an *activity* of God, not an *eternal attribute* of God.

Likewise, when Paul speaks of Christ being God’s wisdom for us (1 Cor.1:24, 30), he indicates the creation order (1 Cor.1:18 – 2:5), not the eternal order. The term ‘wisdom’ itself, in biblical usage, indicates the conceptual agreement between God, God’s creation, and God’s commandments. So wisdom, too, refers us to an *activity* of God, even if it is first conceptual and not material. Indeed, as Proverbs 8:22 says, God’s creation of ‘wisdom’ was the first of His activities in creation. But it is not an eternal *attribute* of God per se. It may very well flow out of God’s relationality as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, or God’s love for us such that His commandments are for our good, or God’s rationality personified in God the Son-Word. But divine ‘wisdom’ per se is a derivation, perhaps derived particularly from God the Word. Hence, the apostles could comfortably draw from the ‘wisdom’ typology of the Old Testament and gather it around the person of the Son, yet without claiming that ‘wisdom’ per se in the Old Testament, especially in Proverbs 8:22 – 36, denotes the eternal divine being, or that ‘wisdom’ was actually another title for the Son of God per se. A similar point can be made for John’s echo of Proverbs 8:22 – 36 in John 1:1 – 18.

Hence, I find it at least *likely* that Paul and John read Proverbs 8:22 – 23 as referring to the conceptual pattern for the *original* creation, and *not*, as Athanasius does in *Contra Arianos* 1.19 – 20 and 2.18 – 82, simultaneously to an eternal divine attribute-person on the one hand, and yet on the other, to the humanity of Christ in his incarnation as the beginning of the *new* creation. In essence, I believe that Athanasius could have responded to the Arian camp by retorting that ‘wisdom’ in biblical parlance was a creation category, not an eternal one, and not an eternal person. Florovsky praised Athanasius for overcoming Origen’s decision to make the terms ‘almighty’ and ‘lordship’ and ‘power’ intrinsic to God, which then created the dangerous corollary that the cosmos is co-eternal with God so that God could express his might and lordship and power towards it. Athanasius might have rendered ‘wisdom’ the same way against the Arians.

Notably, several bishop-theologians who came after Athanasius approached Proverbs 8 in the way I suggest. Hilary of Poitiers, dubbed ‘the Athanasius of the West’ for his efforts in helping the Western, Latin-speaking churches understand the significance of the controversies roiling the Greek East, knew Athanasius personally and yet handled Proverbs 8 differently than him:

‘Ignorance of prophetic diction and unskillfulness in interpreting Scripture has led them into a perversion of the point and meaning of the passage, ‘The Lord created Me for a beginning of His ways for His works’ [Proverbs 8:22]. They [the Arians] labour to establish from it that Christ is created, rather than born, as God, and hence partakes the nature of created beings, though He excel them in the manner of His creation, and has no glory of Divine birth but only the powers of a transcendent creature. We in reply, without importing any new considerations or preconceived opinions, will make this very passage of Wisdom display its own true meaning and object. We will show that the fact that He was created for the beginning of the ways of God and for His works, cannot be twisted into evidence concerning the Divine and eternal birth, because creation for these purposes and birth from everlasting are two entirely different things. Where birth is meant, there birth, and nothing but birth, is spoken of; where creation is mentioned, the cause of that creation is first named. There is a Wisdom born before all things, and again there is a wisdom *created for particular purposes*; the Wisdom which is from everlasting is one, the wisdom which has come into existence during the lapse of time is another.’⁶¹

⁶¹ Hilary of Poitiers, *On the Trinity* 1.35

Even though Hilary does not accept the Arian usage of Proverbs 8 categorically, he also does not try to press the Scripture into a defense of the Nicene cause, or the incarnation of the Word. ‘There is a wisdom created for particular purposes,’ he says, referring to the creation, and then moves on.

The great expositor John Chrysostom, archbishop of Constantinople, also appears to explain the term ‘wisdom’ as I do, not least in 1 Corinthians, as referring to Christ in the economy of salvation: ‘Wisdom is the name he gives to the Gospel, to the method of salvation, the being saved by the Cross... By the name of ‘wisdom’ he calls both Christ, and the Cross and the Gospel.’⁶²

Regardless, my desire to bring Athanasius into dialogue with penal substitutionary atonement can proceed along two parallel lines, momentarily. First, despite my disagreement with Athanasius, I can still allow him to speak for himself, as best I can. It is clear that Athanasius, following biblical prompting, views at least certain key divine attributes *hypostatically*. This means that divine attributes like ‘power’ or ‘wisdom’ are not ‘spread out’ over the Father, Son, and Spirit. Rather, for Athanasius, God’s power and wisdom *are* the Son. They are invested by the Father *in the person of the Son*. This seems to be at least one major reason for using Father-Son language to begin with: biblically, a father gives an inheritance to his son. Athanasius is, in fact, mindful of the principle of inheritance (1.21). In the case of the divine Father-Son relation, the Father is so entirely generous that he gives all of his power and wisdom as an inheritance to his Son, so much so that it can be said that the Son *is* the Father’s power and wisdom. Arguably, *any* variation on the doctrine of penal substitution – as defenders always claim that critics are caricaturing the doctrine – requires that the *person of Son* be the object of God’s retributive activity. But if the Son both is, and possesses, all divine power and wisdom, as per Athanasius’ understanding, from where does the Father, or the Spirit, or God as a whole, have the ability to do anything to the Son?

Second, even if my disagreement with Athanasius has merit, this does not actually change the underlying obstacle for the penal substitutionary atonement theory. Locating God’s ‘power’ and ‘wisdom’ in the Son within the order of creation rather than the order of eternity does nothing to ‘rebalance’ these divine attributes among the divine persons. They remain the Son’s – or rather, they remain the Son himself. For from creation, and towards creation, the Father has willed that the Son always personally express all the divine power and wisdom. And now in the incarnation of the Son as Jesus of Nazareth, the Son personally *embodies* those attributes in our redemption and re-creation, as the apostle Paul said, ‘Christ *is* the power and wisdom of God’ (1 Cor.1:24). He is the powerful one, who defeated the corruption of sin, and the devil and his minions. He is the wise one, who internalized the wise commands of God into his human nature. There is no other divine power or wisdom of which to speak. If the Son both is, and possesses, all divine power and wisdom from the moment God decided to create, then from where does the Father, or the Spirit, or God as a whole, have the ability to do anything to the Son?

What Trinity Undergirds Penal Substitution and Forensic Justification?

To the extent that penal substitution requires that the Father have a ‘power’ of his own with which to mete out punishment upon the Son, the early church’s understanding of 1 Corinthians 1:24 and the Father-Son relation renders that impossible. Moreover, to the extent that penal substitution also requires that Jesus on the cross have a different ‘mind’ or ‘center of consciousness’ than the Father – in which to experience separation and/or retributive wrath from the Father, the early church’s understanding of the Father-Son relation renders that impossible as well. Unfortunately, the Lutheran-Calvinist notion of ‘justification by faith alone’ – which flows out of penal substitutionary atonement theory as the legal construct of being

⁶² John Chrysostom, *Homilies on 1 Corinthians*, Homily 7:1, 5; see also Ambrose of Milan (c.340 – 397), *Exposition of the Christian Faith* 1.16, 79; 2.2, 143; etc. calls ‘Wisdom’ an attribute of God constituted by the Son personally, yet in 3.35 says that ‘wisdom’ in 1 Corinthians 1:30 refers to the economy of salvation: ‘At the same time, becoming does not always imply creation; for we read: Lord, You have become our refuge, and You have become my salvation. Plainly, here is no statement of the fact or purpose of a creation, but God is said to have become my refuge and have turned to my salvation, even as the Apostle has said: Who became for us Wisdom from God, and Righteousness, and Sanctification, and Redemption [1 Corinthians 1:30], that is, that Christ was made for us, of the Father, not created. Again, the writer has explained in the sequel in what sense he says that Christ was made Wisdom for us: But we preach the Wisdom of God in doctrine of mystery, which Wisdom is hidden, foreordained by God before the existence of the world for our glory, and which none of the princes of this world knew, for had they known they would never have crucified the Lord of glory. When the mystery of the Passion is set forth, surely there is no speaking of an eternal process of generation. The Lord’s Cross, then, is my wisdom; the Lord’s Death my redemption; for we are redeemed with His precious blood, as the Apostle Peter has said. [1 Peter 1:19] With His blood, then, as man, the Lord redeemed us, Who also, as God, has forgiven sins.’

‘covered’ by Christ’s innocence – precisely requires that the Father have a separate ‘mind’ from the Son and the Spirit. But the early church’s exposition of 1 Corinthians 1:24 and the Father-Son relation renders that belief impossible as well.

A brief note on the Lutheran-Reformed doctrine of ‘justification’ is in order. ‘Justification’ cannot mean that the Father considers me to be innocent through the exhaustion of his wrath onto Christ, and the imputation of Christ’s righteousness to me. For the early Christians, the meaning of the word ‘justification’ (Greek *dikaiosyne*) was derived from the Hebrew word *sedāqa*, ‘righteousness,’ which occurs most frequently in the Psalms. This made the Psalms a chief locus of study for the early church *prior* to their study of Paul’s letters. The Psalms themselves, moreover, repose upon the Torah’s framework (Ps.1:2; 119:1 – 8) of restorative justice which made an offender under obligation to enact restoration, whether in terms of the healing of the victim (Ex.21:18 – 19) or compensation for damage, even lost life (Ex.22:1 – 14). The significance of this is explored by Alister E. McGrath in *Iustitia Dei: A History of the Christian Doctrine of Justification*, who aptly points out:

‘Although there are many instances where *sedāqa* can be regarded as corresponding to the concept of *iustitia distributiva*, which has come to dominate western thinking on the nature of justice (despite the rival claims of *iustitia commutativa*), there remains a significant number which cannot. A particularly significant illustration of this may be found in the Old Testament attitude to the poor, needy and destitute. As we have noted, *sedāqa* refers to the ‘right order of affairs’ which is violated, at least in part, by the very existence of such unfortunates. God’s *sedāqa* is such that God must deliver them from their plight – and it is this aspect of the Hebrew concept of *sedāqa* which has proved so intractable to those who attempted to interpret it solely as *iustitia distributiva*.’⁶³

‘Righteousness’ in Old Testament usage therefore refers, first and foremost, to the relational vision and order God intended. That vision and order, as the Torah makes clear, includes the relational work that must be done by someone who has been in the wrong, with the full awareness of all parties. By analogy, when I accept my child’s apology, I work with that child to undo the damage done, repair relationships, and build the character needed; I most certainly do not pretend that the offense never happened, a sensibility further undergirded by the Psalms, as in the Proverbs, that the Israelites personally develop and grow in the covenant: ‘Teach me Your ways’ (e.g. Ps.25:4 – 5; 27:11; 86:11; etc.). From the Torah and the Psalms (e.g. Ps.51:10 – 14), I find it much more plausible to define ‘justification’ as: ‘Your apology is accepted, so you are once again a member of the covenant family in good standing, with the obligations thereof.’

The New Testament deploys the term ‘justified’ or ‘justification’ with specific concern about whether the Sinai covenant was ultimately a sufficient basis for that apology. The verdict is: No. In Matthew 12:37, Jesus discusses speech for or against the Holy Spirit. He is concerned in Matthew 11:25 – 12:45 to explain the Father-Son relation. ‘Something greater than the temple is here,’ says Jesus with regards to himself revealing the Father (Mt.12:6). Jesus is the Spirit-anointed Servant of Isaiah, as shown by his deeds and proclaimed by his words (Mt.12:17 – 21). Mention of the Spirit gives Jesus reason to discuss the casting out of demons and also internal transformation from a bad to a good tree and fruit (Mt.12:22 – 35). The unusually dense mention of ‘justice’ from Isaiah’s prophecy (Mt.12:18, 20) and ‘justified’ in Jesus’ discussion about speech reflecting the heart (Mt.12:37) is noteworthy. Jesus’ bringing of ‘justice’ to the Gentiles is one and the same as the transformation fervently hoped for by Old Testament prophets of the Holy Spirit bringing about Israel’s ‘circumcision of heart’ and return from exile on the other side of the Sinai covenant (e.g. Dt.30:6; Ezk.36 – 37; etc.).

Jesus’ parable of the Pharisee and the tax collector in Luke 18:9 – 14 is the only other example of Jesus using the word ‘justified.’ The parable in Luke is ostensibly simple: Jesus requires humility before God

⁶³ Alister E. McGrath, *Iustitia Dei: A History of the Christian Doctrine of Justification* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), p.11; see especially chapter 1, especially his discussion of how the Septuagint translators of the Hebrew word *sedeq* deployed the Greek word *dikaiosyne* by reorienting its original Greek meaning. See Adonis Vidu, *Atonement, Law, and Justice: The Cross in Historical and Cultural Contexts* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Publishing, 2014), ch.1 on the early Christians rejecting Greek notions of meritocratic-retributive justice in favor of biblical restorative justice; for a much fuller account see Alasdair MacIntyre, *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1988), chs.3 – 11

and *apology to God*. Moreover, Jesus seems to be anticipating an encounter that happens very shortly, and Luke seems to invite us to place the parable in a literary and narrative context. Right after this parable, we have the motif of new birth ('infants' in Luke 18:15 – 17), and then a contrast between the rich man who does not repent and therefore does not experience new birth (Luke 18: 18 – 30) and Zaccheus the wealthiest and most powerful tax collector who does repent in the format of restorative justice, and experiences new birth like a child, since Zaccheus climbed a tree like children climb trees (Luke 19:1 – 10). Zaccheus gives half his wealth to the poor and promises to return four times what he defrauded others. Zaccheus' commitment is at the higher end of what the Jewish Law required thieves to restore; in Exodus 22:1 – 14, thieves had to restore between two to five times what they stole; that was the cost of rebuilding trust. So in the narrative of Luke, the parable of the Pharisee and the tax collector (Luke 18:9 – 14) prepares us to understand the story of Zaccheus the actual tax collector (Luke 19:1 – 10). Zaccheus represents and brings to life the tax collector of Jesus parable, who repents and works towards restoration. Luke as a writer views the Sinai covenant ('the Law' or 'the Law of Moses') negatively in the sense that it could not produce the transformation God brought about in and through Jesus (Acts 7:53; 13:39; 15:10).

Likely Paul and James use the term 'justification' with this lexical meaning in mind. Paul declares that the Gentiles are 'justified' – accepted by God and part of the covenant family – because their faith in Christ is a sufficient act of apology-repentance. Circumcision, Sabbath-keeping, and eating kosher are neither the evidence of, nor the grounds for, being 'justified.' James declares that the wealthy are 'justified' – accepted by God and part of the covenant family – if they demonstrate works of love towards the poorer members of the Christian congregation ('no partiality') in accordance with Jesus' teaching ('the royal law' of James 2:8). Although my assertion needs more elaboration elsewhere, Paul and James can both be understood to mean, not that God views us as 'innocent,' but rather that God accepts our apology through our faith in Christ, considered as repentance and pledge of allegiance, and therefore works together with us, by His Spirit, towards restoring the damage I have done to my own human nature and to the fabric of human relationships. This definition of 'justification' has nothing to do with legal fictions, since its foundation is the medical-ontological atonement theology of Athanasius and the early church. For 'justification' cannot possibly mean that the Father exercises a form of self-deception by using Christ as a 'lens' of satisfactory suffering (on the one hand) and/or moral perfection (on the other) through which to 'acquit' us (on the one hand) and/or 'legally accept' us (on the other). Two factors – the Hebraic concept of 'righteousness,' as well as the Father-Son convictions of early Christianity – preclude that possibility.

Acceptance by God is not predicated upon God exhausting His retributive wrath somewhere else, nor on God reckoning that we are 'innocent.' Acceptance by God is predicated on our adequate repentance. The apology God is looking for is an apology for shielding the corruption of sin from His transforming power, and for any further self-harm our sins have caused. Because only the resurrection of Jesus – isolated as an event albeit somewhat unnaturally off from his person – offers us the new humanity we need, only our reception of the resurrected Jesus is an adequate apology which addresses the depth of our self-harm. That is why the apostle Paul says in Romans 4:25, 'he was raised for our justification.'

The notion implied in the Lutheran-Reformed version of justification that God the Father deceives himself about our moral reality would be puzzling to the early Christians. Does 'justification' mean an imputed innocence? Does the Father filter his knowledge of us through the Son as a lens of sorts? And where is the unity of the divine substance? If, by comparison, Christ is the power and wisdom of God, then what Jesus knows about us is what the Father and the Spirit know. And how Jesus acts towards us is how the Father and the Spirit act towards us. There can be no separation of mental states in God, or 'broken Trinity' view, here. After all, if the Father shows the Son all that he is doing (Jn.5:19 – 20), and the Son represents the Father perfectly (Jn.14:9 – 10; Heb.1:1 – 3; etc.), then does the Son reply to the Father by managing information within the Godhead, knowing something about our imperfections that he does not communicate back to the Father? No: Rather, Jesus provides us the Spirit of his new humanity precisely because he knows 'what is in us' (Jn.2:25) and what – or rather who – needs to be within us to displace it: his Spirit (Jn.3:1 – 21). If this is the mind of Christ, then for Christ to be the very Wisdom of the Father means his is the mind of the Father as well. For if the Father, Son, and Spirit share one *essence (ousia)* and are a mutual indwelling of persons acting in concerted unity, then they share one *mind (nous)*. And God's mind is, by His wisdom, directed towards helping us as His creation internalize His commandments in a pattern of growth that has always been proper to us.