

## Two Philosophies, Two Christian Spirituality Paradigms

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Although there is one authoritative written Word, the Bible, and one faith in one Saviour, Jesus Christ, our Christian spirituality may be characterized by one of two perspectives. Some believers emphasize studying God's Word as an objective or external source and in quite a reasoned analytical way, while others almost one-sidedly stress the believer's subjective relationship with the Lord (compare Erickson 1993:251,252). Such a type of dualism is questioned by contemporary scholars who hold to a more holistic approach (Herholdt 1998:223).

It is however interesting to note that this decisive difference in emphasis exists among believers who hold to the same Bible and believe in the same Jesus Christ. Sometimes this difference is so important to believers that they question one another with regard to authenticity of faith or ways of practicing their faith. It appears that philosophy has had a major influence on the historic development of theology and this apparent dualism concerning Christian spirituality.

### The Roll of Idealism in the History of Western Philosophy and Theology

Before the respected Christian father Augustine became a Christian, he made an inquiry into the *idealistic* philosophy of Plato, which came to him via the Neo-Platonism of Plotinus but which was mingled with Christian thought (Walker 1992:121,198). Underlying this *idealistic* thinking, human reason or the mind was considered to be a special aspect of the human soul which modeled ideas as the highest form of existence in the *spiritual* world (De Vleeschauwer [undated] 136, 137). The *Good* (according to Plato) or the

*Ultimate One* (according to Plotinus) was considered to be the *Head* of this spiritual world. The *Ultimate One* could be known through inner experience. On the one hand, association with the *Final One* initially was considered a mere rational or intellectual exercise. On the other hand, it had mystic or intuitive undertones (Brown 1968:16).

### **Jesus My Inner Master**

Although influenced to some extent by Greek philosophy, as a Christian Augustine recognized the biblical truth that “Christ has come to dwell in me and to work through me” (compare Jn. 14:11-23). Augustine further believed that Christ communicated with him by means of what he referred to as “experiences of enlightenment” (Bourke 1976:11; Harvey D Egan 1991:57; compare John 14 to 17).

According to Bouyer (1963:479), Augustine upheld a balance between the two dimensions of spirituality, namely to learn both from God’s Word but also through inner promptings of the Holy Spirit. Apart from important biblically-founded doctrinal interpretation, which he contributed to theology (compare Van’t Spijker 1993:94), he also distinguished himself as someone who openly testified about his personal experience as a believer. He referred to Jesus Christ as his Indwelling Master, from whom he said that he expected and experienced inner guidance (compare Elder [ed.] 1976:477). Augustine emphasized the need to pursue and encounter God through an inner experience (Bouyer 1963:479). As a believer he also emphasized the importance of following Jesus Christ as his example (Reinke 1976:165). We find examples of these experiential aspects of Augustine’s spirituality in Paul (compare 2 Cor 5:20 and Phil 3). However, during the Middle Ages the Augustinian balance was derailed in two ways. Some developed the Augustinian spirituality into a one-sided form of Mysticism while others developed a rational kind of Scholasticism.

### **The Roll of Realism and Idealism in the History of Western Theology**

Like Plato, his disciple Aristotle was also an influential pagan philosopher, although he was less concerned about the abstract. He was more interested in the studied and reasoned interpretation of the things that are accessible through sense-perception and therefore was more of a realist (compare De Vleeschauwer [undated] Band 1:157, 163). Some Medieval theologians practised a form of Realism (e.g. through understanding what Scripture says) but also applied an idealistic form of rationalism through logical reasoning regarding faith. The result was the approach of Scholasticism. It appears that from the outset Protestant theology was largely formulated according to Aristotle’s logical and reasoned techniques and it gradually developed into a Reformed kind of Scholasticism (compare Walker 1992:567; Vandermolen 2010:52). As a result of following Aristotle’s approach, science later became the objective of theology, which, in turn, resulted in the study of the objective essence of things, not as they are experienced through faith but accord-

ing to their “real” existence behind their experiential phenomena and events as they appear through human reasoning (König 1982:167,168). Therefore, it may be said that in some circles the approach changed from “I believe in order to understand” to “I believe because I understand” (compare Tarnas 1993:181,187,188).

### **I Believe on the Grounds of the Promises in God’s Word**

Martin Luther lived several hundred years after Augustine but started off as an Augustinian monk and was therefore educated in the Augustinian spirituality of his time. In the Augustinian tradition, priorities included internalizing the Word, experiencing Christ, union with Christ, and following the example of the (suffering) Christ. However, at an early stage, Luther acknowledged that he did not share in much of those mystical kinds of experiences (compare Reinke 1976:163,165; Rack 1969:29,30).

Luther’s mentors in the monastery however referred him to Scripture for answers, and it was through the reading of Scripture that the truth began to dawn on him. His alleged conclusion was that he did not receive answers to his questions through an inner experience of Christ but that they came to him from the external written Word of God (compare Young 1973:26,42; König 1998:89-92). From then on, his preaching reflected a remarkable move away from the Augustinian perspective of his time. In this sense, Luther moved further away from Augustine’s idealism toward the approach of a *realist*. As already mentioned, a *realist* is directed toward learning from external sources rather than through inner impressions. Such external sources may include one’s physical environment, a human teacher or a book (compare Chu 1971:93-95;116).

For Luther the Word became primarily an external word with a clear and precise meaning, independent of the processes by which it was received and internalized (Rack 1969:30, 31). However, according to Reinke (1976:165,166), the emphasis eventually moved from the Augustinian encounter with God to an encounter with the text in the form of meaningful interpretation. The art of the monastic *meditatio* was replaced by the linguistics of the critiques’ *explicatio* and the word of the inner experience was separated from, or replaced by, the external promise (compare Reinke (1976:165,166). This is not taken to mean that Luther or some of his more scholastically oriented successors did not experience an internalizing of the Word or a relationship with Christ. It is also not meant to imply that Augustine or some of his more mystically oriented successors did not use the objective Word of God as their source. However, the difference in emphasis between the spirituality of Augustine and Luther may throw light onto the mutual differences in spirituality that Christians demonstrate or observe today.

### **Contemporary Examples of Realism and Idealism**

The following are examples of how believers seem to bring their *Realism*

or *Idealism* to the Bible. First, a comparison of three diaries based on the Heidelberg Confession and prepared by representatives of each of the three Afrikaans mainstream Reformed churches brought to light that all three of the authors described the expression “true conversion” mainly in objective *realistic* terms. At the end, however, one of the authors more clearly confronted his readers in imperative terms with an *idealistic* directed kind of challenge regarding the necessity for true inner conversion to become real in their lives (Dreyer et al 1952:210-217; Vorster 1957: 275-281; Du Toit 1963:196-200).

An important related second example is the seeming lack of inner (*idealistic*) passion among many believers to take the gospel to the unreached peoples with the expectation that the Holy Spirit will also make His dwelling in the hearts of such pagan peoples. According to Johnstone (1989:33,39, 63,79,80), mission as an imperative has been marginalized by overlooking it in scriptural interpretation and sidelining it in the history of the Church.

*Realism* seems to feature in Evangelical Reformed theology; for example, MacArthur’s interpretation (compare 1984:300, 303, 306) is that the inner work of the Holy Spirit, by means of the gifts, as practiced in New Testament times was of a temporary nature and has ceased or may at most continue in a more diluted form. Jensen (2002) is also skeptical about the genuineness or value of Christian experience or discernment. Church people may be asked to help interpret and verify a testimony about an unusual experience worked by the Holy Spirit or the possibility of a prophetic word.<sup>1</sup> However, should the church concerned hold to strong *realistic* views in a unilateral way? How reliable would such verification be? How drastic would the results be if a preacher preached a prophetic message of admonition as a true communication from God but was ignored? Compare the results of the responses of Israel to the prophet of Jeremiah, or of the Pharisees to Jesus the Messiah . . . or of those who reject the message of the Spurgeons and Grahams, or William Careys and Hudson Taylors of our time?

Examples could also be given of believers who apply *Idealism* one-sidedly. Erickson (1993:252) warns against “over excitability and ill-advised fervor”. These may relate to practices that are not scripturally justifiable but are exaggerating or even corrupting biblical examples or truths, such as expecting and publically promoting life to be an *idealistic* chain of miraculous experiences with hardly any *realistic* components. Unbiblical forms of both *Realism* and *Idealism* are to be avoided. Both may be the result of sin (e.g. lack of faith) and the deceit of the devil (e.g. believing a lie).

Brother Yun, the Chinese evangelist, represents a more balanced spirituality. He uses the Bible as his normative source and tells many biblically justifiable stories of how Chinese Christians experience and practise their rela-

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<sup>1</sup> I believe that a prophetic word may be one of admonition or encouragement and does not have to be predictive concerning the future (compare 1 Cor 14:3) or in terms of Scripture will not involve revelation of new theological truth (refer to 2 Cor 11:3,4; Gal 1:6-12, etc).

tionships with Jesus Christ. His ministry confirms the supernatural work of the Holy Spirit through miracles, prophetic visions and/or dreams and their fulfillment, etc., but he also subjects himself to God's Word and learns from many *realistic* experiences which even include severe persecution (Hattaway 2004).

It is true that we learn from the Word of God as our basic source and from *realistic* situations, but it is also true that, through the Holy Spirit, we live in a relationship with the Lord and experience His (*idealistic*) interventions. These should be accepted as two dimensions of our biblically founded Christian spirituality. When the *idealist* speaks openly about his/her relationship with the Lord and the work of the Holy Spirit, the *realist* that one-sidedly emphasizes the authority of Scripture may suspect him/her of falseness, wishful thinking or of pursuing an experience of the spectacular, etc. On the other hand the *idealist* may suspect the *realist* of lack of faith, skepticism and rationalism, or even that the *realist* may be unsaved. These extremes may also represent real deviations from what God intends in His Word or may be biased emphases thereof. It must be stated frankly that *Idealism* and *Realism* are terms foreign to the Bible. On the other hand, it is true that both of the spiritual inclinations referred to here can be substantiated biblically. There is a biblical foundation and place for both in the sense that both are actually non-negotiable in Christian living. When spirituality is built on one of these two aspects more heavily than the other, it is justifiable to ask whether there are God-given truths or realities that may be being forfeited due to bias.

## Conclusion

The purpose of this article is not to plead that one must be both an *idealist* and a *realist*. Over the centuries, however, the pagan philosophies referred to have had a profound impact on the historic development of theology, often in a one-sided way. This also applies to what has been conveyed to seminary students by their professors and to church people from pulpits. More often than not, it was the one-sided emphasis of *Realism* that reigned supreme in theology. Instead, the intention of this article is to subject to close scrutiny the possibility that one's spirituality may not be in line with God's intended balance, e.g. that one of these philosophies may have a stronger impact on one's orientation toward living as a Christian than God intends according to Scripture. We trust and are dependent on God's Word as our absolute and objective source and all human experience must be substantiated in terms of God's Word. By virtue of His Word, however, we rely on and are dependent upon a subjective personal relationship with God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, through His Spirit. He usually speaks to us through Scripture. When I study the Bible, I find that I not only learn fixed truths of the faith and historic facts but through my Scripture reading, the Lord inspires and also guides me through His Spirit with respect to decisions I need to make, priorities I need to set, etc. As with the believers of Bible times, a Scripture-

based, two-way communication between God and man is possible and is non-negotiable. Although sovereignly given by God, His supernatural gifts may and should be pursued and be expected to operate (flow) through us as the body of Christ (compare end of 1 Cor 12 and beginning of 1 Cor 14). However, we cannot prescribe or restrict God with respect to the ways in which He chooses to speak to us.

If God spoke to Jacob through a dream, to Moses through a burning bush and cloud and to Gideon through an angel, to David through a prophet, to Josiah through rediscovered Scriptures and a prophetess, to Israel through Isaiah and Jeremiah with words of comfort, to Peter and Paul *inter alia* through visions, and to Daniel and John after having collapsed physically, then in His sovereignty, God may choose to speak into my situation in any of these ways or merely in a still voice which I experience internally. What I believe God says must however be substantiated in terms of the absolutes and values in God's written authoritative Word (compare Wolvaardt 2002: 36,37).

In God's Word, He has fully revealed His message to save mankind through Jesus Christ. His current communication with us does not involve new additions or amendments to the fixed truths. However, it does present us with practical guidance by the Holy Spirit with regard to our lives as believers today. A subjective question in this respect could be phrased as follows: "Where does the reader of this article stand with regard to these two facets of Christian spirituality?"

### Appendices

**Appendix A: from J. I. Packer and Carolyn Nystrom, *God's Will: Finding Guidance for Everyday Decisions* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2008), 229.**

#### **Nudged by the Spirit?**

*"What then, in positive terms should we say to those who believe, partly because of what they have been told and partly on the basis of their own past experience, that guidance by divine nudge is frequently God's way of indicating to us what we should do? Simply this, we think:*

*"First, it is not for us to make rules for God or to deny that he made his will known this way when someone testifies that he did. We recognize that God sovereignly may renew today any of the modes of communication that he used in Bible times – visions, dreams, voices, inner promptings, whatever.*

*"Second, this kind of guidance is most likely to be authentic and healthy when it comes at a time when one is not looking for it but is seeking to discern God's will by the methods described in the foregoing chapters. Then the peace of God in the heart finally confirms the rightness of the thinking.*

*"Third, if we are looking for a kind of spiritual experience that God himself, teaching us in Scripture, has not told us to look for, Satan, who is*

*very good at imitating genuine spiritual experience, may fool us again and again by giving us his version of what we are looking for and will thereby lead us astray.*

*“Fourth, while it is always important to check our conclusions as to what God wants us to do by consulting wise folk in the church, it is supremely important to do this when we believe we have received guidance by unusual means. Sin and Satan operate by deceit and the corrupting of good judgment, which makes lone rangers in this matter of direct guidance more than ordinarily vulnerable. If the wise folk agree in giving us reasons to doubt whether our experience really was God revealing his will to us, we should doubt it too.*

*“Fifth, direct guidance will never breach biblical boundaries or cut across biblical directives. Inner urgings to do either of these most certainly do not come from God.”*

**Appendix B: from Gerald Bray, *God Is Love: A Biblical and Systematic Theology* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012), 64-65.**

*“How can we tell when a voice that we hear is God speaking to us? There is no infallible rule to follow here, but there are certain principles we can rely on for guidance. First, anyone who says things about God that contradict the Scriptures has been misled. God will not tell his people to murder, steal, or commit adultery, nor will he give anyone a new revelation of himself that modifies or adds to what we already know. That kind of revelation ceased at the end of the apostolic period, for the very good reason that we are in fellowship with the saints of every age and so cannot know more about God than the first generation of Christians did. Individuals today who claim to have received a message that the church has never heard before, but must now accept, are certainly wrong, and we must not listen to them. For example, from time to time someone predicts that Christ will return on a certain day, even though the New Testament explicitly says that this cannot be known by anyone (Acts 1:7). Tragedies have occurred when people have listened to such predictions instead of testing what they say by the Word of God, and we must be careful not to fall into such traps.*

*“Beyond that, it is often impossible to say for sure whether what we think is a word from the Lord is genuine, and believers must allow each other the freedom to determine what the right response to such impulses should be. For example, if I believe that God is telling me to open a bakery and there is nothing to stop me from doing so, then perhaps the only way to test this is to open one and see what happens. If the bakery prospers, I may be able to claim that God’s word to me has been fulfilled. If it fails, I may have to admit that I was mistaken, or that God wanted me to fail for reasons of his own – perhaps to make me depend more on him and less on my own efforts. Either*

way, such divine-human communication is between him and me and cannot be interpreted as his will for the wider church. God does not want everyone to open a bakery, and if I insist that my experience must become a model for others or a yardstick for measuring their spirituality, then I have certainly taken things too far.

“The key distinction here is the difference between what is private and what is public. A private communication from God to an individual believer must be received and acted upon by the person concerned, according to the wisdom given him by the Holy Spirit. It is when such things move from the private into the public sphere that we must exercise the greatest caution. The Bible has been given to us as our common guide to God’s will, and it remains the permanent, fixed standard by which all other claims to divine guidance must be judged. Anything beyond this is private speculation and cannot be imposed on the church with the authority of God’s revelation. Just as someone in secular life has to consider whether a bright idea he has is legal before he acts on it, so a Christian must ask whether what he thinks is a word from the Lord is biblical before he does anything about it. If he decides that it is, then let him test it and see, as long as we all remember that the written Word is the final arbiter given to us by God and is the only authority to which the church is called to submit without reservation.”

**Appendix C: from Charles Spurgeon, *The Soul Winner* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1963), 289 as quoted in Jim Samra, *God told me – who to marry, where to work, which car to buy . . . and I’m pretty sure I’m not crazy: learning to listen for guidance from God* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2012), 75.**

“There are many monitions [directions] from God’s Spirit which are not noticed by Christians when they are in a callous condition; but when the heart is right with God and living in communion with God, we feel a sacred sensitiveness, so that we do not need the Lord to shout, but His faintest whisper is heard. Nay, he need not even whisper . . . in your soul, as distinctly as the Spirit said to Philip, ‘Go near and join thyself to this chariot,’ you shall hear the Lord’s will. As soon as you see an individual, the thought shall cross your mind, ‘Go and speak to that person.’”



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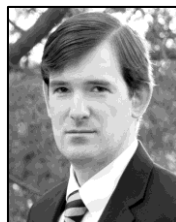
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## Athanasius: A Review Article

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Together with Irenaeus of Lyons, Athanasius was one of the most vital figures of the patristic church. While Irenaeus was responsible for distinguishing Christianity from Gnosticism, Athanasius was responsible for ensuring the permanence of the doctrine of Christ's deity in Christendom. Yet he has not been able to escape fierce criticism. In 2000 the patristic scholar David Brakke, basing himself on the work of Timothy Barnes and a newly discovered letter of a contemporary of Athanasius, wrote a chapter in which he condemned Athanasius for his tyrannical actions as patriarch of Alexandria and compared him to a modern-day ayatollah, although this phrase could have arguably been better applied to Athanasius' proximate successors Cyril and Dioscorus.<sup>1</sup> Eleven years after Brakke's chapter, interest in this "opaque but complicated figure" was by no means diminished and was seen notably in one evangelical study of him and two translations published by St. Vladimir's Seminary Press.

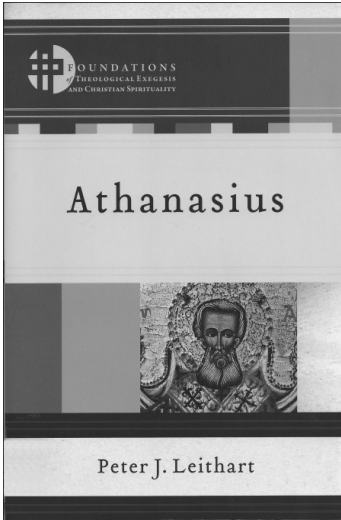
**Athanasius. Peter J. Leithart. Foundations of Theological Exegesis and Christian Spirituality, eds. Hans Boersma and Matthew Levering. Grand Rapids: Baker, 2011, 204 pp., paper. ISBN 978-0-8010-3942-3**

Peter Leithart is a pastor and professor in Moscow, Idaho. He has written only one other book on late antiquity, a study of Constantine the Great, but his work on Athanasius has the earmarks of an expert in the field. It is more of an evaluation of Athanasius than a biography and is additionally the first installment in the series Foundations of Theological Exegesis and Christian Spirituality which, among other objectives, strives to recover patristic exegesis for contemporary theology. Despite this admirable aspiration, the series has a major flaw which will presently be considered.

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<sup>1</sup> Philip F. Esler, ed., *The Early Christian World* (London: Routledge, 2000), 2:1102-1127.

The description in chapter 1 of the shady aspects of Athanasius' personality cannot be improved on, especially since it is applicable not only to him but to his successors in the patriarchal chair of Alexandria. For all his piety, Leithart states, Athanasius was "a tough, skillful infighter, a community organizer and rabble-rouser, willing to use intimidation or other tools in pursuit of his aims."<sup>2</sup> Edward Gibbon, despite his favorable reception of Athanasius, described him as "tainted with the contagion of fanaticism." Leithart, with



more circumspection, claims to have sometimes been put off by his violent intensity while still recognizing in him a zeal akin to that of Moses and the prophets. Athanasius had a remarkable capacity for portraying himself as the victim, but Leithart stresses the conciliatory nature of his later career. His epitaph was perhaps best spoken by Christ: "The kingdom of heaven suffers violence, and the violent take it by force" (Matthew 11:12, with a favorable view of the subjects of the second half of the verse). Christianity was a religion of compassion, but in order for it to succeed it arguably needed well-meaning but belligerent scoundrels at the helm in its early days.

Athanasius had a thorough understanding of philosophy though not literature. He quoted Plato three times, was familiar with Middle Platonism, and resembled Plotinus in his claim that for the eye to see the sun it must become sunlike. But Leithart is correct to say that his basic convictions were shaped by Scripture rather than by Hellenism and that his image of the world as a body was not indebted to Stoic metaphysics. He gives as an example of Athanasius' dependence on Scripture his first encyclical letter, written during the second of his five exiles, in which he compared his deposition to the violation of the Levite's concubine in Judges 20. This comparison is typical of Athanasius' mind, steeped as it was in biblical imagery. Athanasius attended the First Council of Nicaea as a theological adviser to the Alexandrian bishop Alexander but did not, in Leithart's words, dominate the council. He appositely draws a connection between Bishop Alexander's Melitian opponents and the "puritanical" Donatists.

Alexander and Athanasius clearly had their hands full with the Melitians and the Arians, who impelled them, particularly Athanasius, to extreme measures. Before his first banishment, Athanasius was charged with bribery, sacrilege, imprisonments, depositions, the forced requisition of linen tunics, and conniving physical assault. He was exiled twice by Constantine's son Constantius, whom he compared to King Saul, the murderer of the priests of

<sup>2</sup> Peter J. Leithart, *Athanasius*, 8.

Nob, further allowing Leithart to illustrate Athanasius' dependence on biblical imagery.

Leithart commendably continues to use the descriptor "Arian" in a day when Arians are Homoeans, Monophysites are Miaphysites, and Gnostics are not Gnostics. His discussion of Arius' theology is fair to Arius: he took Origen's subordinationism to its logical conclusion and denied the eternal generation of the Son from the Father. He quotes James Joyce's humorous and juvenile description of Arius' death. Athanasius' words, less graphic than Joyce's, merely state that he was burst asunder like Judas. Although Arius had perhaps been poisoned (an unnecessary supposition), his end was such an embarrassment that none of his followers were henceforth comfortable with the Arian label, a fact which reveals much about late antiquity.

Leithart includes the compromise the Homoiousians reached with the normative Arian Homoeans but not the later compromise they reached with the Nicene Homoiousians. He cites the Arian desire to protect God from the mire of life by sending His less divine Son to save mankind, but he does not thoroughly investigate the Platonic agenda behind this desire. Athanasius himself disliked the idea of God suffering on the cross, a qualm his later successor Cyril, who seems to have modeled himself after him, would not share.

In chapter 3, though without explicitly mentioning Origen, Leithart shows that Athanasius followed the Ante-Nicene in distinguishing between *agennētos* (unbegotten) and *agenētos* (uncreated). The Son was for Athanasius both *gennētos* and *agenētos*, begotten but not created. Leithart translates *agenētos* "unoriginate" rather than "uncreated." He astutely compares the trinitarian views of Augustine and Athanasius. When the apostle Paul wrote that Christ was the power and wisdom of God (1 Corinthians 1:24), Athanasius took this literally so that the Father has nothing that is not realized in the Son. For Augustine, by contrast, the Father has something that is His own and that is more intrinsic to His being than the Son is. In Augustine's mind the Father did not have to be made complete by the Son; for Athanasius He did. Athanasius still accepted the eternal derivation of the Son from the Father; in other words, there never was a moment when the Father did not have the Son.

Leithart's exegesis of Athanasius' theology is sound and reveals Athanasius' philosophical acumen. Often, however, Leithart is too garrulous. Although his book is not long, it outstays its welcome by many pages. He manages to lull his reader to sleep even in his discussion of the patristic doctrine of *theōsis* (deification). However, this is not true of Leithart's exposition of Athanasius' doctrine of the Holy Spirit, whose deity Athanasius fully embraced even though it would not be formalized until the Cappadocians.

Going against the Platonism in the air during his age, Athanasius maintained that bodily secretions are not evil, a fact which Leithart seems to over-emphasize. He helpfully rescues Athanasius from R. P. C. Hanson's charge that his Christ was God in a space suit. The patriarch has also been charged

with proto-Nestorianism; for instance, in his assertion that when Jesus healed Peter's mother He stretched forth His hand humanly but healed divinely. To accuse an Alexandrian such as Athanasius of a Nestorian tendency is somewhat ludicrous and merely discloses the essential orthodoxy behind Nestorius' confused terminology. Regardless, serious questions about Christology did not get under way until after Athanasius' time.

Leithart's introduction and epilogue are done "in the Augustinian mode," an unsettling juxtaposition of Eastern and Western Christianity. But Leithart is not afraid of unsettling juxtapositions and idiosyncrasies. In discussing Athanasius' doctrine of creation in chapter 4, he evaluates the nature versus grace debate as it stands at the present day. This leads him into a dialogue with such writers as Scheeben, de Lubac and Rahner, exponents of the ponderous philosophy of extrinsicism. His eleven-page excursus is unnecessary and amounts to a full-scale incongruity, like inserting information about technology stocks in a book of Renaissance history.

Regarding the patristic question of God's impassibility in the following chapter, the author spends five pages discussing recent philosophers like Hegel and Jürgen Moltmann. Typical of his love for the incongruous, he refers to Hegel as Alexandrian. (In a footnote he compares Hegel to Plotinus, here mentioning a thinker who might have been of service in his study of Athanasius: when the irradiations from the One in Plotinus are reabsorbed back into the One, they lose their identity, which is not the case with Hegel's God and "others.")

Leithart shares the "beginning, middle, and end" preoccupation of contemporary thought, illustrated by the line "In my end is my beginning," and duly applies this to the theology of Athanasius. All of this, it turns out, is partly the fault of the series to which he is contributing, *Foundations of Theological Exegesis and Christian Spirituality*. As has been noted it strives to recover patristic exegesis for contemporary theology. What this unfortunately translates into is an attempt to make the patristic church relevant for contemporary readers. The insinuation is that the patristic church is not significant enough to speak to us on its own terms; it must be dressed up in modern garb in order for it to do so. Leithart gives one the impression of chronological snobbery, of turning his back on a supposedly deceptive past and embracing a worthless present. He should have taken to heart his criticism of Slusser, who ransacks the writings of Athanasius for insight on modern methodology, as anachronistic. I would aver that Hegel, Moltmann, and Rahner have no place in a book about the patristic church. Leithart fills his pages with such characters, from Bosch to Descartes, and gives one the impression that his book is not an investigation of the early church in the strictest sense. The reader who opens it wanting to learn something about Athanasius will come away with a measure of disappointment.

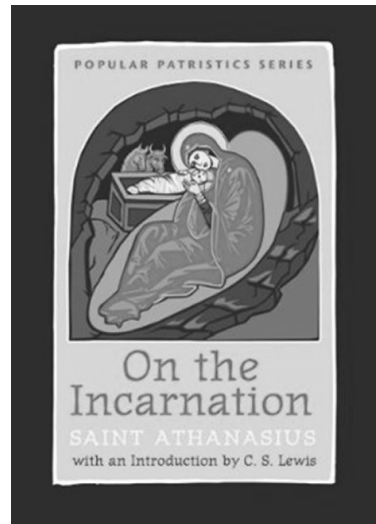
***On the Incarnation.* Athanasius, trans. John Behr. Yonkers, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2011, 173 pp., paper. ISBN 978-088141-409-7**

In Athanasius' day religious figures were also political figures, and it is noteworthy that they wrote their own speeches and treatises. Athanasius was responsible for shaping Nicene Christianity, a religion shared by Protestants, Catholics, Orthodox, Nestorians, and Monophysites, and nowhere more so than with his treatise *On the Incarnation*. This was the second of a two-part compilation, the former of which was entitled *Against the Gentiles*. The double work was probably written in his early patriarchate, in other words in his thirties. It may have been undertaken, as Khaled Anatolios suggests, in response to Eusebius of Caesarea's effusive accolades to the emperor Constantine, an attempt to give back to God what had wrongly been given to Caesar. The treatises were written for a certain Macarius, who is literally translated here by the phrase "blessed one."

The translator of this edition is John Behr, the dean of St. Vladimir's Orthodox Theological Seminary. Behr teaches patristics at both St. Vladimir's and Fordham University and is the editor of Popular Patristics, which together with Ancient Christian Texts is one of the best recent series devoted to the Church Fathers. The preface is C. S. Lewis's introduction to an older translation of the treatise. Behr's translation is a supple one and easily sustains rereading, but "God the Word" would have been a better rendering of *ho Theos Logos* than "the God Word". The treatise begins by opposing the views of the Epicureans that

all things came into being spontaneously without a creator, of Plato that God created out of preexistent matter, and of the Gnostics who introduced a god beneath God as the creator. As against all these, God Himself created the universe out of nothing. He created man and woman in His own image and gave them, in paradise, the life of the holy ones. As is appropriate for an Eastern Christian theologian, even at this early stage of church history, Athanasius emphasizes the freedom of the will in his discussion of the Edenic economy.

Throughout the treatise, Athanasius never wavers in his subscription to Christ's deity. During His earthly existence, He was able to do what no other mortal could do: sit inside a house while moving the sun and rotating the heavens. Athanasius also exhibits the allegorical and typological tendency of the patristic church. Christ's physical body was not divided at His death, as were the bodies of Isaiah and John the Baptist, in order to foreshadow the



undivided spiritual body of the church.

The eyewitnesses to Christ's resurrection testify that it happened: "this thing was not done in a corner" (Acts 26:26). The fact that the Christian martyrs of Athanasius' childhood, men and women alike, rushed toward death without fear is another proof that Christ vanquished death. The martyrs play with death because it has been weakened, in the same way that children are able to play with a lion that has lost its power. But the fullest proof that Christ defeated death is His continuing work in the Christian. He makes the adulterer cease from his adultery, the murderer from his murders, the unjust from his greed, and the impious from his impiety.

Athanasius would amplify this thought, as Behr demonstrates, with his biography of St. Anthony, in whose good deeds, accomplished three hundred years after the Incarnation, Christ was seen as working. Even when Anthony felt he had been abandoned by Christ, Christ revealed that this was not the case: "I was here, Anthony. . . . I will be your helper forever."<sup>3</sup> Christ's presence in Anthony was vividly glimpsed when he reemerged into civilization after twenty years of complete isolation. Far from being a pitiful wreck, he evidenced stability of character and a total control over his emotions, displaying neither grief, laughter, dejection, annoyance, nor elation. Athanasius is careful not to use the pagan word *apatheia* (dispassion) in his description of Anthony. After Anthony's reemergence into society, he became an instrument of Christ, healing the sick, consoling the disconsolate, and reconciling enemies. Even his vigorous old age reflects the benefits accorded by the Resurrection. "He generally seemed brighter and of more energetic strength," Athanasius writes, "than those who make use of baths and a variety of foods and clothing."<sup>4</sup>

Another proof of the Resurrection is the decline of paganism and idolatry since Christ's day and, together with this, the wearing away of the magic of the Egyptians, Chaldeans, and Indians. Idolatry, the worship of the demons, was for Athanasius symbolic of the depths to which humanity sank after the Fall. He was particularly opposed to his countrymen's worship of the Nile River. Like other Christians of his day he followed the theory of the Greek historian Euhemerus that the pagan gods were idealized recreations of the earliest mortals. Asclepius, the Greek god of medicine, was actually a man who practised healing and treated bodies with herbs; as such, he was less capable than Christ the Creator and Restorer of the universe. In addition to overcoming the gods, Christ outpaces the philosophers who tried in vain to do what He does now; namely, point humanity to immortality and the virtuous life.

Though his treatise is directed more to the Greeks than the Jews, Athanasius includes an expostulation against Jewish unbelief. He answers the Jews with their own Scriptures, focusing on Old Testament prophecies about

<sup>3</sup> Athanasius, *On the Incarnation*, 42.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 45.

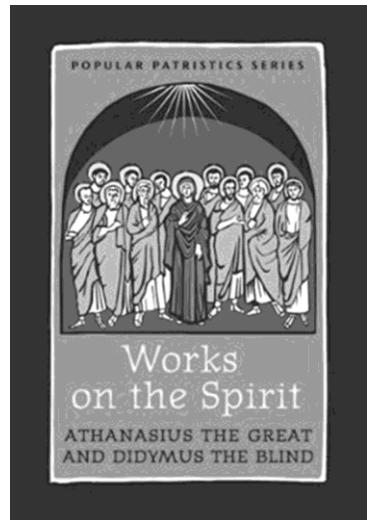


Christ, especially from the book of Isaiah. This had of course been done before him, most notably by Irenaeus in his *Apostolic Preaching*, previously translated by Behr. It strikes Athanasius as preposterous that the Jews believe Jesus did not fulfill the prophecies of the Old Testament and that the Messiah has not yet come. Since the advent of Christ, the Gentiles have been called, visions have ceased, idolatry has been refuted, swords have been beaten into plowshares, and death has been destroyed. To enumerate all the changes Christ has worked in the world would be like standing on the shore and trying to count all the waves one sees.

***Works on the Spirit. Athanasius and Didymus*, trans. Mark DelCogliano, Andrew Radde-Gallwitz and Lewis Ayres. Yonkers, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2011, 243 pp., paper. ISBN 978-088141-379-3**

*On the Incarnation* was a product of the young Athanasius. The *Letters to Serapion on the Holy Spirit* were written by a man who had been exiled three times and was currently hiding in the desert. The present volume pairs the letters to Serapion with Didymus the Blind's treatise on the Holy Spirit. The translators are professors at American and English universities. Mark DelCogliano should be particularly singled out as a specialist on Basil the Great and the author of an exemplary article on the influence of the Homoiousians on his theology.<sup>5</sup> In the introduction, he is more critical of Athanasius the man than are Leithart or Behr. He makes it clear that Tertullian's and Origen's anti-Monarchian writings, while necessary, led to a reluctance on the part of certain Christians to fully embrace the Holy Spirit's deity. But the fact that the Arian Homoeans and Anomoeans radically subordinated the Spirit to the Father, or denied His deity altogether, impelled the Homoiousians to emphasize His deity.

Serapion, the addressee of Athanasius' letters on the Spirit, was an Egyptian bishop and, together with Athanasius, the beneficiary of St. Anthony's two sheepskin cloaks, no small honor. He had written Athanasius about a group whom Athanasius termed the Tropikoi or Misinterpreters, predecessors of the Pneumatomachians who walked out at the First Council of Constantinople. The Tropikoi de-



<sup>5</sup> "The Influence of Athanasius and the Homoiousians on Basil of Caesarea's Decentralization of 'Unbegotten,'" *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 19 (Summer 2011): 197-223.

nied the deity of the Spirit and should be distinguished from the Arians, although Athanasius desires to show their kinship with them.

Athanasius was more pedantic in his letters to Serapion than he was in his treatise on the Incarnation. One also detects a sharper polemical intensity. In the treatise he had spoken only of the slander of the Jews and the mockery of the Greeks. In the letters he compared Serapion's opponents to the Sadducees, called the Arians Ariomaniacs, equated their religion with the Judaism of Caiaphas, and consigned them to bursting ten thousand times, a reference to Arius' death. A little confusingly he sometimes addressed his remarks to Serapion and sometimes to his opponents. He hinted that the Tropikoi's refusal to acknowledge the Spirit's deity was influenced by the Greeks who caricatured the Holy Spirit as the Father's grandson. His use of Scripture was occasionally careless. To illustrate the self-sufficiency of the Trinity, he quoted Isaiah 1:11: "I am full," cutting off the rest of the sentence, "of the burnt offerings of rams."

Although Athanasius' stance is irascible, he sometimes allows humor to penetrate his discussion. When the disciples heard Christ's command to "baptize in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit", they did not wonder why the Holy Spirit was placed last, why there were three persons in the Trinity, whether the Son had a son, or whether the Father was actually a grandfather.

Turning from Athanasius' letters to Didymus the Blind's treatise is like experiencing a still night after a thunderstorm. Didymus was condemned for his Origenism by the irrepressible Second Council of Constantinople. As a result, much of what he wrote has been lost, but he should be regarded as only a moderate Origenist. He fully accepted the Spirit's deity, and his treatise was relied on by Ambrose. The intractable Jerome translated the treatise into Latin in order to show up Ambrose' dependence on it, but it is fortunate that he did so since the Latin version is the only one which has survived. In the prologue, Jerome refers to Ambrose as an ugly crow dressed in his better's plumes. His infrequent comments on Didymus' Greek text are included in indented paragraphs in this translation.

According to Didymus, the Holy Spirit is holy by nature while the angels are holy only by participating in Him; this would be reiterated by Basil the Great. The angels are messengers of salvation and are more honorable than humans because they participate in the Trinity with a greater affinity and completeness than humans, a point that would be hard to deny. Like the Apollinarians, Didymus calls Christ the Lordly Man, but unlike the Apollinarians, he does not envision Him as a mixture of God and man. Somewhat unusually, he states that the human soul can be filled or indwelt only by the Trinity, which allows Him to argue for the deity of the Spirit, who is said to fill Christians. He denies that Satan can fill a human, as when Peter asked Ananias, "Why has Satan filled your heart?" (Acts 5:3). This, for Didymus, is not to be taken literally. Satan can fill the heart only by suggesting sinful thoughts to it. The same is true in the case of Judas whom Satan entered by

acting on him from without rather than by joining with him substantially. The devil, and one assumes all demons, can indwell humans only through fraud, deception and malice.

There are five main similarities between Athanasius' and Didymus' writings on the Spirit: they distinguish Him from the angels, they emphasize the definite article in scriptural discussions of the Spirit, they agonize over the correct interpretation of Amos 4:13, they distinguish between the scriptural uses of the word "spirit," and they deny that the Holy Spirit can be thought of as the Father's grandson. Didymus probably wrote shortly after Athanasius. He uses the word *homoousios* (of the same substance) to describe the relationship between the members of the Trinity, while Athanasius generally reserves this for the relationship between the Father and the Son. Didymus can therefore be shown to stress the deity of the Spirit even more forcefully than Athanasius. In addition, Athanasius mentions, and Didymus highlights, the doctrine of the sanctifying role of the Spirit, which would have such a long and honorable history in the Eastern and Western churches.

The translation of DeIcogliano and his compeers is sometimes too colloquial, but it represents a great gift to patristic scholars. In their translation and introduction, they render service not only to Athanasius but to such lesser known figures as Serapion of Thmuis, Didymus the Blind, and Cyril of Jerusalem.