

**WRITINGS OF AN ANCIENT POET: A THEOLOGICAL COMPOSITION OF
AURELIUS PRUDENTIUS CLEMENS' SOTERIOLOGY AS DEPICTED IN HIS**

LIBER CATHEMERINON

by

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Abstract

By his poetic declarations concerning Jesus Christ, Prudentius appeals to some as a flagship for fourth-century Nicene theology. This thesis investigates the poet's concept of salvation to determine its congruity with Nicaea's underlying soteriology. To that end, Athanasius' *Against the Gentiles-On the Incarnation* and Prudentius' *Liber Cathemerinon* are read in juxtaposition, drawing out and comparing theological themes. Prudentius exhibits an inherent fixation on the problem of sin and its effect on salvation. This diminishes the significance and hope offered by the Incarnation. Yet, Athanasius purports that Nicaea's Christological proclamations are founded on God's saving action in Jesus' life, death, and resurrection. Therefore, while the Christological confessions of Nicaea appear to prefigure the theology of Prudentius in his pastiche, *Liber Cathemerinon*, a closer analysis reveals that his conception of salvation is inconsistent with the underlying soteriological impetus of Nicene theology.

For my dad.

What a likeness you have to Father Mapple, whose message – though spoken from a seaman’s pulpit in Whaleman’s Chapel on a sleet-stormed Sunday morning – rang just as clear during my late-night discussions with you: “But all the things that God would have us do are hard for us to do ... and hence, he oftener commands us than endeavors to persuade.” Thank you for your kindly charge to press on, to love the LORD with all my mind.

Contents

Acknowledgments.....	vi
Introduction.....	1
Research Problem and Background.....	1
Research Question and Thesis Statement.....	4
Contemporary Dialogue.....	5
Methodology.....	8
Procedure.....	11
Chapter 1: Nicene Soteriology as Articulated by Athanasius.....	13
Introduction.....	13
Athanasius' Soteriological Impetus.....	21
The Plot of Athanasius' Dramatic Narrative.....	29
Conclusion.....	47
Chapter 2: Prudentius' Soteriology as Presented in his <i>Liber Cathemerinon</i>	48
Introduction.....	48
The Broader Theological Framework and Overall Motifs.....	49
The Means of Salvation.....	55
The Effects of Salvation.....	70
The Final Results of Salvation.....	76
Conclusion.....	82
Chapter 3: A Comparative Analysis.....	83
Introduction.....	83
The Overarching Biblical Narrative.....	83
The Significant Shift in Narrative Emphasis.....	85
Professing the Person and Work of Christ.....	92
Implications for Understanding Soteriology.....	100
Conclusion.....	109
Conclusion.....	114
Synthesis.....	114
Implications.....	115
Questions for Further Study.....	118
Conclusion.....	120
Appendix 1: The Hermeneutical Basis for Prudentius' <i>Liber Cathemerinon</i>	121
Bibliography.....	148

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Almighty God, the Giver of all good things, without whose help all labour is ineffectual, and without whose grace all wisdom is folly: grant, I beseech Thee, that in this my understanding, thy Holy Spirit may not be withheld from me, but that I may promote Thy glory.

Prayer on the Rambler 1750

Erika M. McAuley
Langley, British Columbia
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Introduction

Research Problem and Background

Patristic Christology, particularly that of the great fourth century, cannot stand apart from soteriology. The ecclesiastical debates of this period are often recounted as if they were primarily about God and Christ when, in actuality, Donald Fairbairn points out, they were “fundamentally ... about salvation.”¹ Succinctly, Fairbairn contends, “At the level of what the church *said* about Christ, the issue was Christological. But at the level of *why* the church said what it said about Christ, the underlying issue was soteriological.”² In consequence, “Differing perceptions of what salvation actually is and how it is accomplished are closely related to different perceptions of who can accomplish that salvation.”³ Working from Fairbairn’s reasoning, a number of questions arise: How conscious were fourth-century Christians of this theological connection as it related to the confessions of Nicaea? Does this interrelation between salvation and the person of Christ show itself in the writings of pro-Nicene thinkers? If so, how important is it that the Christological claims of Nicaea hinge on a complementary salvation theology?

Responding to this broader concern, this study centres around two pro-Nicene writers, Athanasius of Alexandria (296 – 373), the leonine defender of Nicaea, and Aurelius Prudentius Clemens (348 – c. 410),⁴ the provocative genius behind the literary

¹ Donald Fairbairn, “The One Person Who is Jesus Christ: The Patristic Perspective,” in *Jesus In Trinitarian Perspective: An Introductory Christology*, eds. Fred Sanders and Klaus Issler (Nashville: B&H Publishing Group, 2007), 92.

² Fairbairn, “Patristic Perspective,” 92.

³ Fairbairn, “Patristic Perspective,” 92.

⁴ John Anthony McGuckin, *The Westminster Handbook to Patristic Theology*, The Westminster Handbooks to Christian Theology (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2004), 285. For dates see Prudentius, *Preface*, in *Prudentius*, trans. H. J. Thomson, vol. 1 of *Loeb Classical Library* 387 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1969), 1-3; 22-27; Prudentius, *Apotheosis*, in *Prudentius*, trans. H. J. Thomson, vol. 1 of *Loeb Classical Library* 387 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1979), 446-453.

genre of Christian epic poetry.⁵ Prudentius' use, comprehension, and application of Nicaea's Christological proclamations, as they relate to his concept of salvation, are the primary interests of this study.

As a Spanish native, Prudentius "belonged to that provincial Hispano-Roman aristocracy" that committed itself to Theodosius (347 – 395) and his imperial rule.⁶ Beyond his geo-political alignment little is known of him, except that he possessed exceptional poetic talent.⁷ Contained in the preface to his collection of poems is a brief *curriculum vitae*, "an autobiography followed by an exposition of his poetic project," wherein one can "see the student in love with rhetoric, the ambitious lawyer, the provincial governor who ends his career as private advisor to the emperor (*proximus*)"⁸ and who, by a spiritual

⁵ *The New Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 15th ed., s.v. "Prudentius," 751. Prudentius' unique style influenced later medieval poetry such as Milton's *Paradise Lost* and Dante's *Inferno*. A. A. R. Bastiaensen, "Prudentius in Recent Literary Criticism," in *Early Christian Poetry: A Collection of Essays*, eds. J. den Boeft and A. Hilhorst (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1993), 134.

⁶ J. Fontaine, "Prudentius," in *Encyclopedia of the Early Church*, ed. Angelo Di Berardino, vol. 2 (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 721. For an indication of Spanish ethnicity see Prudentius, *Peristephanon Liber*, in *Prudentius*, trans. H. J. Thomson, vol. 2 of *Loeb Classical Library* 398 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1979), VI.141-147.

⁷ It is suspected that Prudentius began to write poetry around 380, but gained public attention much later because his name is not in Jerome's catalogue of Christian writers, arranged in 392. Siegmund Döpp and Wilhelm Geerlings, eds., *Dictionary of Early Christian Literature*, trans. Matthew O'Connell (New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 1998), 505. Fontaine estimates that Prudentius' works were published around 404 or 405. Fontaine, "Prudentius," 721.

⁸ Fontaine, "Prudentius," 721; Cf. *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 751; Döpp, *Early Christian Literature*, 504-505. The poet reveals, "Twice held I in fair cities of renown / The reins of office, and administered / To good men justice and to guilty doom. / At length the Emperor's will beneficent / Exalted me to military power / And to the rank that borders on the throne." Prudentius, *Preface*, in *The Hymns of Prudentius*, trans. R. Martin Pope (London: J. M. Dent and Co., 2005), 16-21, Christian Classics Ethereal Library, <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/prudentius/cathimerinon.p00t.html> (accessed October 7, 2010). From this information Cunningham, suggests that the only factual information taken from Prudentius' words include: "(1) the poet has had a successful career as a civil servant; (2) he is of senatorial rank; and (3) he has retired honourably from the service." Maurice P. Cunningham, "Contexts of Prudentius' Poems," *Classical Philology* 71, no. 1 (January 1976): 56. Other scholars have consulted extra-historical data to expand on Prudentius' life. With specificity, Weston suggests that "He studied rhetoric, became an advocate, twice served as governor of a province, and later held some court position of honor by the appointment of the Emperor Theodosius." Arthur H. Weston, *Latin Satirical Writing Subsequent to Juvenal* (Charleston: BiblioBazaar, 2009), 43.

crisis, retreats “to a private life in order to see to his salvation and devote himself to poetry.”⁹

Seven of Prudentius’ works are extant. All were originally written in Latin, though most possess Greek titles.¹⁰ The poems exhibit a variety of classical forms, leading edge content, and multiple sources.¹¹ Prudentius created an innovative Christian style of poetry by combining and reshaping the existing elements and techniques.¹² His works include: *Hamartigenia*, a theological piece on the origin of sin,¹³ *Apotheosis*, a treatise on the Trinity with particular attention given to Christology,¹⁴ *Psychomachia*, “an allegory of

⁹ Claudio Moreschini and Enrico Norelli, eds., *Early Christian Greek and Latin Literature: A Literary History*, vol. 2 (Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers, 2005), 340. Prudentius writes, “And then the forum’s strife my restless wits / Enthralled, and the keen lust of victory / Drove me to many a bitterness and fall.” Prudentius, *Preface*, in *Hymns*, 13-15; Cf. Angelo Di Berardino, ed., *Patrology: The Golden Age of Latin Patristic Literature from the Council of Nicea to the Council of Chalcedon*, trans. Rev. Placid Solari, vol. 4 (Westminster: Christian Classics, 1986), 281. Some scholars, like Moreschini and Norelli, interpret Prudentius’ change of conscience to be the result of his dissatisfaction with the merits obtained throughout his life, and thus his poetry was “to help him praise God” more adequately. Moreschini, *Literary History*, 340. Similarly, Justo Gonzalez suggests that “all his literary works were written as a way to atone for the sins of his youth.” Justo Luis Gonzalez, *The Westminster Dictionary of Theologians* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2006), 284. Di Berardino suspects that Prudentius’ change of conscience was the result of a trip to Rome wherein he found himself overwhelmed with the impressive Christian monuments of the great city. As a result, he was illuminated to a new inspiration for his writing and henceforth adopted an anti-pagan mandate. Di Berardino, *Patrology*, 281. Di Berardino is accurate to acknowledge Prudentius’ overt anti-pagan convictions, though it is speculative to suggest his motivation was born out of this particular trip. Still another scholar, McGuckin, speculates that Prudentius’ personal crisis was due to “the death of Theodosius, in 395, which ushered in a period of great instability in the imperial administration.” McGuckin, *Patristic Theology*, 285.

¹⁰ Moreschini, *Literary History*, 341.

¹¹ Di Berardino, *Patrology*, 285.

¹² Prior to his works, Christian poetry relied on genres like “iambic hymns, acrostics, Vergilian centos, and Biblical hexameter epics which either drew minimally upon the pagan tradition, or exclusively on Vergil.” Frederic James Edward Raby, *A History of Christian-Latin Poetry from the Beginnings to the Close of the Middle Ages*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1953), 11-43.

¹³ In this work Prudentius ardently “attacks the Gnostic dualism of Marcion and his followers,” while describing the origins of sin “by the fact that a fallen angel, acting in the service of hell, led human beings astray. For the misery that thereby entered the world, man, endowed by God with free will, bears sole responsibility.” *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 751; Cf. Döpp, *Early Christian Literature*, 505.

¹⁴ While stressing the divine nature of Christ, the *Apotheosis* refutes multiple heresies that were prominent in the fourth century, “such as those of the Patripassians, who held that it was actually God the Father who suffered on the Cross, of the Sabellians, who differed from the orthodox Trinitarians, of the Jews, the Ebionites or *Homuncionitae*, itself a satirical appellation, who denied the divinity of Christ, and finally the Manichaeans, who held that Christ was a mere image.” Weston, *Latin Satirical Writing*, 44.

spiritual combat,”¹⁵ *Peristephanon Liber*, a compilation of anecdotes dedicated to the praise of the martyr saints,¹⁶ *Contra Orationem Symmachi*, a patriotic two-volume work that condemns paganism in Rome,¹⁷ *Dittochaeon*, a thematic overview of famous biblical narratives,¹⁸ and *Liber Cathemerinon*, a collection of daily hymns for the Christian life.¹⁹ It is this last collection of hymns that is the primary focus of this study.²⁰

Research Question and Thesis Statement

By placing Prudentius directly in line with the study’s broader concern, the research question becomes clear: Is the poet’s understanding of salvation consistent with Nicaea’s underlying soteriology, given that he utilizes the Nicene proclamations of the person of Christ? Stated differently: Have the Christological tenets of the Nicene Creed affected this poet’s soteriological convictions, so as to align them with the antecedent soteriology driving Nicaea? Or in Fairbairn’s words: In recognition of what the church is *saying* about Christ, has Prudentius been able to understand *why*?

This study demonstrates that while the Christological confessions of the Nicene Creed appear to prefigure the theology of Prudentius in his pastiche, *Liber Cathemerinon*, a

¹⁵ Di Berardino, *Patrology*, 289. It has been proposed by some scholars that the *Psychomachia* is the central work of Prudentius and all other compositions work to drive the themes presented there. Peter Toohey has since challenged this rationale, arguing instead that the *Liber Cathemerinon* VII, IX, and XI are among the first poems written by Prudentius. Peter Toohey, “An Early Group of Poems in Prudentius’ *Liber Cathemerinon*,” *Mnemosyne* 44, no. ¾ (1991): 395; Cf. Moerschini, *Literary History*, 341.

¹⁶ The *Peristephanon Liber*, which can be translated as “Crowns of Martyrdom ... contains 14 lyric poems on Spanish and Roman martyrs.” *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 751.

¹⁷ More specifically, these two pieces were a reply to a pagan senator’s request to have “the altar of Victory be restored to the Senate house.” *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 751.

¹⁸ It has been suggested that this work provides the captions for the murals of a Roman basilica. Catherine Conybeare, “Sanctum, Lector, Percense Volumen: Snakes, Readers, and the Whole Text in Prudentius’ *Hamartigenia*,” in *The Early Christian Book*, eds. William E. Klingshirn and Linda Safran (Washington: The Catholic University of America Press, 2007), 225-240; Cf. *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 751.

¹⁹ Weston, *Latin Satirical Writing*, 44; Cf. Moerschini, *Literary History*, 342. Prudentius is considered by many to be the first carol writer, an early example being *Corde natus*. Louis Herbert Gray, *Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics*, ed. James Hastings and John Alexander Selbie, s.v. “Music: plain-song and the carol,” 21.

²⁰ Attention is brought to Prudentius’ other works as they provide clarification.

closer analysis reveals that his conception of salvation is inconsistent with the underlying soteriological impetus of Nicene theology, as explicated best by Athanasius.

Contemporary Dialogue

In recent scholarship his poetical verse, notably *Liber Cathemerinon*, has been described as a flagship for fourth-century Nicene theology.²¹ For Christopher McKelvie, who is a recent Canadian contributor to the study of Prudentius' work, it becomes a kind of handbook for rudimentary Nicene beliefs, which reflects "a salvation history, running through the chief elements of the Old and New Testaments."²² With regard to its overt reflection of the Nicene maxims, McKelvie is absolutely on par. The *Liber Cathemerinon* employs the phrases of the Nicene Creed, but is Prudentius' theology of salvation, found beneath the poetic phrases, *truly* Nicene?²³ In response, this study investigates Prudentius' doctrine of soteriology as it is presented in his *Liber Cathemerinon* and seeks to determine its congruity with Nicene soteriology.

²¹ The expression "Nicene theology" is intended to reflect the tone of the New Testament canon's teachings, which proclaim that salvation is in Christ alone. Therefore, Nicene theology finds its focus on Christ and purports that salvation is found in Him alone, though it does not describe how that happens. To be clear, I am working from the assumption that there is one salvation that stands behind the Nicene confessions, though it be a *Who*, rather than a *how*.

²² Christopher G. McKelvie, "The Cosmic Christian Vision of Prudentius' *Liber Cathemerinon*, and the Inculturation of Augustan Vatican Poetry" (M.A. thesis, Dalhousie University, 2010), vii. Before McKelvie, others asserted the notion of the *Liber Cathemerinon* functioning "as an allegorical catechism of the Christian faith: a poetic primer of salvation history like the short *breviaria* of local history prepared for new arrivals in Rome." Arnaldo Momigliano, ed., *The Conflict between Paganism and Christianity in the Fourth Century: Essays* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1963), 87-90. R. Martin Pope also anticipates the Nicene reflections in Prudentius' work as he explicitly states, "His theology is that of the Nicene Creed. The Fall of man, the personality of the Tempter, the mystery of the Trinity and of the Incarnation, the Virgin-birth, the Death and Resurrection of Christ, the pains of the lost and the bliss of the saints, the resurrection of the Body and the life everlasting – these are themes of his pen, the themes of the theology of his age." R. Martin Pope, "Translator's Notes," in *The Hymns of Prudentius* (London: J. M. Dent and Co., 2005), Christian Classics Ethereal Library, <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/prudentius/cathemerinon.p00t.html> (accessed October 7, 2010). Similarly, Gerard O'Daly presumes Prudentius' Nicene alignment, but leaves room for further inquiry by stating that the poet "seems to be in line with post-Nicene orthodoxy." Gerard O'Daly, *Days Linked by Song: Prudentius' Cathemerinon* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 337.

²³ Following O'Daly's warning, the reader "must beware of harnessing Prudentius too closely to the interests of the church leaders of his day. His interests are not opposed to theirs, but his themes are refreshingly free of narrowly conceived church teaching." O'Daly, *Linked by Song*, 246.

Because Prudentius' writings have been evaluated primarily on the basis of their literary genius, a debate has arisen as to whether he can be assessed rightly as a theologian, despite the theological content in his works.²⁴ A. A. R. Bastiaensen consolidates the contemporary argument among scholars. He notes that K. Thraede criticizes the legitimacy of Prudentius' theology, stating that he is "a nonentity, theologically speaking ... [and] nothing else was to be expected from him as a poet."²⁵ Countering Thraede, Bastiaensen points out that Prudentius' writings are consistent with the theological concerns of the church during the fourth century.²⁶ C. Gnllka, another skeptical voice, criticizes specifically "the ambivalence of Prudentius' dualistic outlook as showing the poet's *uncertainty* with regard to the relation of man's soul and body."²⁷ Despite the discussion

²⁴ Further to the point, Padovese suggests that typically Prudentius' ideas are drawn from literary study, whereas the theological thought of the author is neglected. Luigi Padovese, "Linee Di Soteriologia Nell'opera Di Aurelio Clemente Prudenzio," *Laurentianum* 19 (1978): 360; Cf. Peter Toon, "Prudentius Clemens, Aurelius," in *Who's Who in Christian History*, eds. J. D. Douglas and Philip W. Comfort (Wheaton: Tyndale House Publishers, 1992), 574.

²⁵ Bastiaensen, "Literary Criticism," 114. This is contested by Bastiaensen as he remarks that Thraede's comments do "less than justice to Prudentius." Bastiaensen, "Literary Criticism," 114. Bastiaensen also points to Smolak in his "*Gedankenfülle*" as another voice advocating a greater interpretation of Prudentius, as he recognizes his "richness of thought." Bastiaensen, "Literary Criticism," 114. Similarly, Lock argues for the theological value in Prudentius' poems simply by their inclusion of "typical adaptations of Bible history" and thus "Their lack of originality of thought makes them even more valuable for this purpose." W. Lock, *A Dictionary of Early Christian Biography*, ed. Henry Wace and William C. Piercy (Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers, 1999), 868. A middle-of-the-road position is presented by the Oxford's *Encyclopedia of the Early Church*, as it suggests that Prudentius "laboriously becomes a verse theologian: but this layman does not have the solid theological ability of a Hilary or an Ambrose. In the structures of his demonstrations and in the forms and vocabulary that express them, he tries to be a Lucretius of Christian doctrine." Fontaine, "Prudentius," 721.

²⁶ Bastiaensen, "Literary Criticism," 114. In support of this claim, both Bucheit and Evenepoel have conducted "a series of studies, systematically pointing out many intertextual agreements with Prudentius' poems and agreements with texts by other early Christian writers." Bastiaensen furthers his argument by referring to "Buchheit's study on the doctrine of the *resurrection carnis*, which he maintains against Thraede as being treated coherently at the end of the third hymn of the *Cathemerinon*." Bastiaensen, "Literary Criticism," 115. Bastiaensen points to Prudentius' treatment of the Trinity in his *Hymnus de trinitate* as a prime example. To buttress his point he references W. Evenepoel who "shows that Prudentius is aware of the importance of the relation between faith and reason, dealing with it in a judicious way in his works." For the detailed study see W. Evenepoel, "Prudentius: Ratio and Fides," *L'Antiquite Classique* 50, no. 1/2 (1981): 318-327.

²⁷ Bastiaensen, "Literary Criticism," 115, emphasis mine. Theologically oriented studies of Prudentius' poetry arose during the 1980s in Europe. For example, J. M. Fontanier contributed to the understanding of Prudentius' Christology and perception of creation. See J. M. Fontanier, "Christus imago Dei: art et christologie dans l'oeuvre de Prudence," *RecAug* 21 (1986): 117-137; "La creation et le Christ

surrounding the poet's degree of theological acumen, in fairness to his own intent and desire, Prudentius published his poems as didactic and catechistic pieces, particularly the *Liber Cathemerinon*. As an expert in Prudentian poetry, Maurice Cunningham, puts forward that by virtue of its title *himni*, the *Liber Cathemerinon* was "intended for use in the poet's own household."²⁸ It would seem that Prudentius anticipates this question of purpose and relinquishes to the reader a satisfactory answer. He writes in dedication

Let each day link itself with grateful hymns / And every night re-echo songs of God: / Yea, be it mine to fight all heresies, / Unfold the meanings of the Catholic faith, / Trample on Gentile rites, thy gods, O Rome, / Dethrone, the Martyrs laud, th' Apostles sing. / O while such themes my pen and tongue employ, / May death strike off these fetters of the flesh / And bear me wither my last breath shall rise!²⁹

The author gives to the reader his goals as they are: (1) to fight heresies, (2) to preach the message of the Catholic faith, (3) to defend Rome against pagan falsities, and (4) to praise the acts of the martyrs. The poet himself, therefore, welcomes readers to recognize its theological message, as he seeks to pass on the truth of the Christian faith.

createur dans l'oeuvre de Prudence," *RecAug* 22 (1987): 109-128. Similarly, L. Padovese, J. P. Torro and C. Micaelli have offered a number of essays including: L. Padovese, *La cristologia di Aurelio Clemente Prudenzio*, vol 219 of *Analecta Gregoriana* (Roma: Universita Gregoriana Editrice, 1980); J. P. Torro, *La antropologia de Aurelio Prudencio*. Monografias 23 (Roma: *Publicationes del Instituto Espanol de Historia Ecclesiastica*, 1976); "Funcion del Espirito Santo en la encarnacion segun Aurelio Prudencio," *Anales Valentinus* 9 (1983): 347-360; "Die genetrix. Testimonio de Prudencio sobre la maternidad divina de Maria," *Anales Vanetios* 10 (1984): 315-322; Cl. Micaelli, "Note di teologia prudenziana," *Vetera Christianorum* 21 (1984): 83-112.

²⁸ Cunningham, "Contexts," 58. If Cunningham's evaluation of Prudentius' purpose for his *Liber Cathemerinon* is correct, it would seem that over the years this work has grown well beyond its original purpose. For instance, excerpts have been included in the hymnology of the church, such as those verses included in the Roman Breviary. Pope, "Translator's Notes," n.p. Other scholars have attempted to argue for a different purpose. For example, Ballengee suggests that Prudentius wished "to escape his mortal body, springing free along with the sound – or meaning – of the Christian word as it reaches toward heaven." Jennifer R. Ballengee, *Witness: The Rhetoric of Torture* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2009), 106. Different still is Moreschini's proposal in which Prudentius created this literary work as a devotional for intellectual Christians. Moreschini, *Literary History*, 342. Witke points to Lavarenne, who opposes this suggestion entirely and instead offers that Prudentius chose to write in a pagan literary style to adorn the Christian message to "men of taste" as opposed to using the language of Christianity, which he crassly recognized as a "good religion for ignorant men." Charles Witke, "Prudentius and the Tradition of Latin Poetry," in *Numen Litterarum: The Old and the New in Latin Poetry from Constantine to Gregory the Great*, vol. 5 of *Mittelateinische Studien Und Texte* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1971), 103.

²⁹ Prudentius, *Preface*, in *Hymns*, 40-48. For the poet's dedication of the poems to God see Prudentius, *Epilogue*, in *Hymns*, 9-12.

This debate continues. More recently, studies of Prudentius' poetry have been "decisively advanced by interpretation and individual commentaries," which have allowed for greater attentiveness to his theological themes.³⁰ In concert with scholars such as Bastiaensen, I too see the theological legitimacy of Prudentius' works for the contemporary context. Thus, I can also say, "Although Prudentius was certainly not the '*profond theologien*' a French critic in the last century made him out to be, his theological views deserve, I think, serious examination."³¹ As will be shown by this study, that examination will develop in particular connection to the Nicene Creed.

Methodology

Prudentius was a "contemporary of the Roman emperors, Julian the Apostate (c. 331 – 363), Gratian (359 – 383), Theodosius I (347 – 395), and Theodosius' son, Honorius (384 – 423)."³² During this time the empire experienced external conflict between Christians and pagans as well as internal conflict between orthodox Christians and heretics; both types of hostility contributed to Prudentius' writings.³³ Therefore, a key component of this study is an examination of the historical, cultural, geographical, and theological milieu from which his poetry emerged.

An indispensable piece to this study is the interpretation of Prudentius' work. For this reason, his hermeneutical method must first be examined. This poet interprets the biblical text for himself and for his reader from within his poetical verse. Thus, a prolegomenon engages Prudentius' use of biblical narrative in his *Liber Cathemerinon* for

³⁰ Döpp, *Early Christian Literature*, 507. For an example of such recent scholarship see Gerard O'Daly, *Days Linked by Song: Prudentius' Cathemerinon* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012); Anthony Dykes, *Reading Sin in the World: The Hamartigenia of Prudentius and the Vocation of the Responsible Reader* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011).

³¹ Bastiaensen, "Literary Criticism," 115.

³² Christoph Flüeler and Martin Rohde, eds., *Laster im Mittelalter* (Vices in the Middle Ages), vol. 23 of *Scrinium Friburgense* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter GmbH & Co., 2009), 11.

³³ Flüeler, *Laster im Mittelalter*, 11.

the purpose of determining congruency with the Alexandrian tradition, of which Origen (c. 186 – c. 254) becomes the synthesis and quintessential expression.³⁴ Three biblical narratives, utilized by both Origen and Prudentius, are compared. The core of the study places Origen’s interpretive comments in direct discussion with Prudentius’ use of each biblical narrative. As a result, it argues that Prudentius echoes the non-literal hermeneutic of Alexandria, as championed by Origen, in his use of biblical narrative. Early church fathers, including Origen, had to determine how the Old Testament Scriptures were going to be understood in light of the Incarnational event and authoritative circular letters, which would later be recognized as the canonical New Testament.³⁵ So then, the works of Prudentius model both an historical and Christological hermeneutic that is rooted in Origen’s multi-dimensional approach to the exegesis of Scripture.³⁶

Prudentius’ poetry unites classical Latin poetic devices (particularly the influences of “Vergil’s and Ovid’s epic, Lucretius’ didactic, Horace’s lyrical, Seneca’s dramatical and Juvenal’s satirical poetry”) with Scripture (Pentateuch narratives and the Psalms), prose of the church fathers (the texts of “Tertullian [160 – 225], Cyprian [c. 200 – 258], Ambrose [c. 340 – 397],³⁷ Juvenius [died c. 300], Proba [c. 322 – c. 370], Hilary [c. 300 – c. 368]”), and social commentary (including “anti-pagan attacks, political ideas, theology, ascetical

³⁴ For this discussion see appendix 1.

³⁵ McKelvie, “Cosmic,” 16-17. The New Testament canon was not recognized as such until Athanasius’ Easter letter of 367 wherein he listed the twenty-seven books and labelled them as canonized.

³⁶ Two forms of interpretation define Origen’s approach to Scripture: literal exegesis and spiritual exegesis. Henri Crouzel, *Origen*, trans. A. S. Worrall (New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1989), 61. To further aid in understanding the patristic world of biblical exegesis see Frances M. Young, *Biblical Exegesis and the Formation of Christian Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997). For a detailed study on Alexandrian exegesis, with a focus on Origen see Karlfried Froehlich, *Biblical Interpretation in the Early Church*, Sources of Early Christian Thought, ed. William G. Rusch (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984).

³⁷ Ambrosian meter is used in the first two and last two hymns of the *Liber Cathemerinon*. Moreschini, *Literary History*, 343, 345. Ambrose, the bishop of Milan, would have introduced the first Latin hymn to the church when Prudentius was around the age of twenty-six. Pope, “Translator’s Notes,” n.p.

ideals, and the cult of the martyrs”).³⁸ As a way of engaging pagan constructs, Prudentius writes from the formula “Christian subject matter, pagan form.”³⁹ In doing so, he follows in the tradition of Philo (c. 20 BC – c. 50), Paul, (c. 5 – c. 67), and Justin Martyr (c. 100 – 165).⁴⁰ A heavy Greek influence marks Prudentius’ poems as exemplified by his tendency toward symbology and his gruesome imagination.⁴¹ McKelvie concludes that Prudentius “transcends practically every convention, mixing various modes together within a single poem.”⁴² Thus, in order to handle his poetry adequately and contribute a significant assessment to the field, the research method involves literary analysis for the purpose of drawing out Prudentius’ theological themes. Engagement with those scholars who have previously translated and analyzed the primary material is included, although priority is given to working as close to the original texts as possible.⁴³ Vocabulary and phrasing have been illuminated with the use of Richard A. Muller’s *Dictionary of Latin and Greek Theological Terms*, the Dumbarton Oaks Medieval Library translation series, and Lewis

³⁸ Bastiaensen, “Literary Criticism,” 120; Moreschini, *Literary History*, 341.

³⁹ Morton W. Bloomfield, “A Source of Prudentius’ *Psychomachia*,” *Speculum* 18, no. 1 (January 1943): 87.

⁴⁰ Prudentius takes on Paul’s charge to engage the philosophers as exemplified in Acts 17:18. Eric Osborn, *The Emergence of Christian Theology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 308, 310.

⁴¹ Moreschini, *Literary History*, 341. For an involved conversation on how Prudentius’ “elaborate interest in gore” detracts the religious purpose of his work see Robert Levine, “Ingeld and Christ: A Medieval Problem,” *Viator* 2 (1972): 107; Lucy Grig, “Torture and Truth in Late Antique Martyrology,” *Early Medieval Europe* 2, no. 4 (2002).

⁴² McKelvie, “Cosmic,” 2. Prudentius’ technique of mixing literary components has been heavily criticized. For a current critique see Anne-Marie Palmer, *Prudentius on Martyrs* (Oxford: Clarendon Press; New York: Oxford University Press, 1989).

⁴³ For reputable scholars who have directly critiqued his Latin poetical verse and translated *Liber Cathemerinon* into English see M. P. Cunningham in 1966 and J. Bergman in 1926. Later classical scholars such as F. Klingner and G. Meyer have offered notable critiques of the two standard translations. Others including K. Thraede and C. Gnllka have given exceptional feedback to both translations and poetic analysis. Furthermore, K. Thraede has drawn significant conclusions regarding the accuracy of Latin idioms used in Prudentius. More recently, others have translated Prudentius’ poems into English, including H. J. Thomson, Sister M. Clement Eagan, R. Martin Pope, Gerard O’Daly, and Anthony Dykes. In addition, a number of helpful studies have clarified the poetry of Prudentius such as Charles Witke’s essay “Prudentius and the Tradition of Latin Poetry,” along with W. Evenepoel’s essay “The Place of Poetry in Latin Christianity,” in *Early Christian Poetry: A Collection of Essays*, eds. J. den Boeft and A. Hilhorst (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1993), 35-60. To aid with limitations in the Latin language, resident scholar Chris Morrissey was consulted to encourage a proper understanding of Latin vocabulary and expression.

and Short's *A Latin Dictionary*. Translation resources, such as Harvard University Press' Loeb Classical Library, further aid literal vocabulary and phrase comparisons. Theological conclusions follow a systematic approach,⁴⁴ outlining and assessing Prudentius' poems for overarching theological themes and expositing doctrinal concepts.

Procedure

In order to demonstrate the validity of this study, it proceeds along the following lines. First, chapter 1 describes the salvific concerns that led to Nicaea's statements about the person of Jesus Christ. Articulated best in his coherent theological treatment *Against the Gentiles-On the Incarnation*, Athanasius expounds the underlying concerns for redemption that gave rise to the clarifications of *Who* brings about that salvation. Also, this chapter briefly explores the development of salvation theology up to the fourth-century Christological controversies, in turn, arguing for Athanasius to be the quintessential expositor of Nicene salvation theology. After establishing a standard for theological comparison, chapter 2 presents Prudentius' soteriology, as drawn from the verses of his twelve daily hymns. Increasing tensions develop between Prudentius' Christological confessions of the Nicene Creed and his soteriological rationale. Fairbairn's warning begins to materialize with regard to the interconnected nature of one's definition of salvation subsequently affecting one's perception of who accomplishes that salvation.⁴⁵ Chapter 3 directly compares and contrasts the underlying salvation theology of Nicaea with Prudentius' concept of salvation. At this point, the implications and applications further distance Prudentius from Nicaea. Notwithstanding his attentiveness to what the fourth-

⁴⁴ The term "systematic" is used to describe inner-logic, meaning that this study will attempt to articulate the various parts of Prudentius' Christian belief and assess how they are related. For further clarification on a systematic approach to patristic thought see Khaled Anatolios, *Athanasius: The Coherence of his Thought*, Routledge Early Church Monographs (Abingdon: Routledge, 2005), 2.

⁴⁵ Fairbairn, "Patristic Perspective," 92.

century church has *said* about Christ, the poet seems less aware of *why* the church said what it did about Christ.⁴⁶ The study culminates with the conclusion, which includes a synthesis of findings, implications, and questions for further study.

⁴⁶ Fairbairn, "Patristic Perspective," 92.

Chapter 1

Nicene Soteriology as Articulated by Athanasius

Introduction

Posing the question, “who do you say that I am?”⁴⁷ Jesus Christ implored His first-century disciples to recognize Him. History reverberates the same question, and Christian theology seeks to answer it by interpreting the person and work of Jesus Christ in context with the being and action of God.⁴⁸ The dialogue of the early church remained directly or indirectly connected to this question.⁴⁹ Writers such as Justin Martyr, Irenaeus (c. 130 – c. 200), Tertullian, and Origen laboured to articulate the God-Man identity of Jesus of Nazareth.⁵⁰ Nevertheless, instigating the debates surrounding the person of Jesus Christ “was the fundamental question of how Jesus’ life and death were efficacious for human salvation.”⁵¹ The early Christians fought to “safeguard the accomplishment of redemption” and thus, opinions about salvation fuelled the conversation.⁵² Daniel Akin attributes the early church’s course toward Nicene theology to the veneration of Jesus and the awareness

⁴⁷ Matthew 16:15, NASB.

⁴⁸ John Behr, *The Way to Nicaea*, vol. 1 of *Formation of Christian Theology* (Crestwood: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 2001), 1.

⁴⁹ Hugh M. Scott, *Origin and Development of the Nicene Theology* (Chicago: Chicago Theological Seminary Press, 1896), 8.

⁵⁰ Weaver states the four most likely errors of the early writers: (1) blurring the distinction between Jesus and God, leading to the conclusion that God the Father suffered and died on the cross, (2) separating Jesus and God so as to propose two deities, (3) elevating Jesus’ divinity, leading to a view of His humanity that suggests some sort of guise or apparition, and (4) elevating the humanity of Jesus so as to see Him as a special creation or an adopted son of God. Natalie Kertes Weaver, *The Theology of Suffering and Death: An Introduction for Caregivers* (New York: Routledge, 2013), 50-51.

⁵¹ Weaver, *Suffering*, 51.

⁵² Donald Fairbairn, *Grace and Christology in the Early Church*, Oxford Early Christians Studies (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 12. Fairbairn suggests that those who believed salvation was primarily a human task saw Jesus Christ as their leading example. By this logic, the person of Christ “must not simply be fully human, but his humanity must also have a measure of autonomy and must receive prominence in one’s conception of his person, in order for his achievement of redemption to be of any saving significance.” By contrast, those who believed salvation was primarily an act of God saw Jesus Christ as God, present on earth. By this logic, the person of Christ “is ‘God with us’” and His presence must be a direct and personal one. Fairbairn, *Grace*, 12. Cf. Weaver, *Suffering*, 50; Kwanbena Donker, “The Nature of Christ: The Soteriological Question,” *Biblical Research Institute Release 4* (May 2005): 2.

that salvation comes only through Him.⁵³ In this trajectory, concerns for redemption lead to the clarification of Christ's person.

Ante-Nicene Salvation Theology

In its most elementary form, early Christians saw salvation as God's triumph over oppressive powers.⁵⁴ As a result, patristic soteriology⁵⁵ embodied a concern for rescue from sin and death. Developing these initial ideas, Irenaeus offered a cohesive answer to what salvation is *from* and also what it is *for*. To this end, his ideas greatly shaped later thinking. Reflecting Paul's interpretation of Jesus Christ as the new Adam,⁵⁶ Irenaeus describes Him as the new head of creation and the One who will sum up all things.⁵⁷ As this figure, "Christ reverses the disobedience of Adam" and "restores to the human race the existence in the image and likeness of God that had been lost."⁵⁸ The Incarnation initiates what Irenaeus calls *recapitulation* (*anakephalaiosis*), for it is Jesus Christ who sums up all

⁵³ Daniel L. Akin, ed., *A Theology for the Church* (Nashville: B&H Publishing Group, 2007), 209. In line with Akin, Daniélou views Irenaeus' proclamations as representative of this movement. Jean Daniélou, *Gospel Message and Hellenistic Culture*, vol. 2 of *A History of Early Christian Doctrine Before the Council of Nicaea* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1973), 153. In his great *Against Heresies*, Irenaeus writes, "They preserve with care the ancient tradition, believing in one God, maker of heaven and earth, and of all things therein, through Christ Jesus, the Son of God; who in his exceeding love toward his creation submitted to be born of a virgin, thus through himself uniting Man to God, and suffered under Pontius Pilate, and rose again and was received in glory, and in glory will come as the Saviour of those who are saved and Judge of those who are judged, and will send into eternal fire those who distort the truth and despise his Father and his own Coming. And those who have believed this faith without the written word are, in our terminology, barbarians; but, as far as their opinions and conduct and way of life are concerned, because of the faith they are exceedingly wise and pleasing to God, walking in all righteousness and chastity and wisdom." Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, in *Five Books of S. Irenaeus*, vol. 42 of *Library of Fathers of the Holy Catholic Church* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1872), III.4.2.

⁵⁴ Colossians 2:15, NASB; John 12:31, NASB; Francis Schüssler Fiorenza and John P. Galvin, eds., *Systematic Theology: Roman Catholic Perspectives*, 2nd ed. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2011), 274.

⁵⁵ "Soteriology" as a contemporary systematic category cannot be applied in the same way to the patristic understanding of salvation. However, much of patristic theology is understood best in the context of salvation and many early writers exemplify an ordered and methodical expression of salvation. For example see the theology of Theophilus of Antioch. Rick Rogers, "Theophilus of Antioch," in *Early Christian Thinkers: The Lives and Legacies of Twelve Key Figures*, ed. Paul Foster (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2010), 61. For these reasons, the term "soteriology," connoting a logical explanation, remains an appropriate description of patristic salvation theology.

⁵⁶ Romans 5:12-21, NASB; I Corinthians 15:20-49, NASB.

⁵⁷ Ephesians 1:10, NASB; Fiorenza, *Systematic Theology*, 274-275.

⁵⁸ Fiorenza, *Systematic Theology*, 274-275; Christopher McMahon, *Jesus Our Salvation: An Introduction to Christology* (Winona: Saint Mary's Press, 2007), 160.

things.⁵⁹ As a result of Christ's work, the relationship between God and humanity is restored, sin is destroyed, and human beings can become divine.⁶⁰

Irenaeus viewed sin as a fall from a perfect condition and salvation as a return to that condition. Fairbairn interprets Irenaeus' view of original humanity as immortal, and because of their decision to disobey God's commandments they became mortal.⁶¹ Satan captured humans in their disobedience, though they were originally God's property. To revert the fall, Irenaeus understood Christ as the One who reclaimed for humanity their immortality and God's rightful ownership.⁶² Therefore, his concept of salvation emphasized sin, death, and captivity alongside the restoration of humanity's original condition.⁶³ It is from this basis that two general theories of salvation began to emerge.⁶⁴ First, that salvation is restorative and second, that salvation elevates humans from their original state to a higher condition.⁶⁵

The Nicene Creed of 325

As much as historical records are able to divulge, Arius (256 – 336) and Alexander (c. 250 – 326) characterize the early stages of what metastasized into an empire-wide

⁵⁹ Fiorenza, *Systematic Theology*, 274-275; Cf. Ephesians 1:7-10, NASB.

⁶⁰ McMahon, *Jesus*, 160.

⁶¹ Fairbairn, *Grace*, 18.

⁶² Fairbairn, *Grace*, 18.

⁶³ Fairbairn, *Grace*, 18. Irenaeus' perception of salvation seems to be progressive, in that humanity moves from a "state of childishness and imperfection to a condition of maturity." Fairbairn, *Grace*, 19. "One could argue," responds Fairbairn, "that Irenaeus' dominant idea is that salvation is a restoration to the original condition, but when his concern is with the preservation of human freedom, he slides (probably unconsciously) into a view that emphasizes the free action of man in elevating himself to a higher condition." See Fairbairn, *Grace*, 19.

⁶⁴ Fairbairn, *Grace*, 18.

⁶⁵ Fairbairn, *Grace*, 18. As these two theories of salvation developed, each took on a more definitive concept. For instance, those who aligned with a restorative understanding of salvation, tended to believe that humans were created as immortal and in perfect communion with God and only by the fall was this interrupted. In contrast, those who aligned with an ascending understanding of salvation, tended to view humanity's original state in terms of opportunity, wherein God gave people the ability to obtain immortality and perfect communion with Him. Fairbairn, *Grace*, 17-18.

controversy.⁶⁶ Due to its viral effects, the Emperor Constantine arranged for Ossius (c. 257 – c. 359), bishop of Córdoba, to go to Alexandria with letters scolding the two instigators, and he advised for them to reconcile.⁶⁷ Thus, the Council of Nicaea in 325 was an attempt to mend ecclesiastical differences.⁶⁸

At this first ecumenical council of the early church,

three significant theological declarations were made regarding the Greek word *ousia*, which means ‘being’ or ‘essence’ and represents ‘that-which-a-thing-is’. The bishops gathered at Nicaea confessed that the Son was ‘from the *ousia*’ of the Father, the Son possessed the same being or essence (*homoousios*) as the Father, and, in the anathemas attached to the creed, condemned anyone who taught that the Son was ‘of a different *hypostasis* or *ousia* from the Father.’⁶⁹

⁶⁶ Anatolios notes that at the beginning of this controversy, “Arius’s position was associated with the provocative slogan ‘there was once when the Son was not,’ while Alexander strongly insisted on the doctrine of the eternal generation of the Son.” Khaled Anatolios, *Athanasius, The Early Church Fathers* (London: Routledge, 2004), 7. For a detailed description of Arius and his involvement with Nicaea see Ronald E. Heine, “‘One God the Father’ and ‘One Lord Jesus Christ,’” in *Classical Christian Doctrine: Introducing the Essentials of the Ancient Faith* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2013). For an engaging and descriptive essay on the development of Arian thought in relation to Nicaea see Frank Thielman, “The Road to Nicaea: The New Testament,” in *Evangelicals and Nicene Faith: Reclaiming the Apostolic Witness*, ed. Timothy George (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2011).

⁶⁷ Charles P. Arand, James A. Nestingen and Robert Kolb, eds., “A History of the Ancient Creedal Texts: Apostles, Nicene, and Athanasian,” in *The Lutheran Confessions: History and Theology of the Book of Concord* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress Press, 2012), 27. For a detailed description of the dialogue between Arius and Alexander see letters of correspondence, including: “Arius’s Letter to Eusebius of Nicomedia”; “Arius’s Letter to Alexander of Alexandria”; “Alexander of Alexandria’s Letter to Alexander of Thessalonica”; “The Synodal Letter of the Council on Antioch, A. D. 325,” in *The Trinitarian Controversy*, trans. William G. Rusch (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1980).

⁶⁸ For a detailed description of the meeting see Theodoret, *The Ecclesiastical History of Theodoret*, in *Theodoret, Jerome, Gennadius, and Rufinus: Historical Writings*, vol. 3 of *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church*, eds. Philip Schaff and Henry Wallace (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1892), 1.6; “The Creed of the Synod of Nicaea: June 19, 325,” in *The Trinitarian Controversy*, trans. William G. Rusch (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1980).

⁶⁹ Carl Beckwith, “Athanasius,” in *Shapers of Christian Orthodoxy: Engaging with Early and Medieval Theologians*, ed. Bradley G. Green (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2010), 160. The Nicene Creed of 325: “We believe in one God, Father Almighty, Maker of all things, seen and unseen; and in one Lord Jesus Christ the Son of God, begotten as only begotten of the father, that is of the essence [*ousia*] of the Father, God of God, Light of Light, true God of true God, begotten not made, of one essence [*homoousios*] with the Father, through whom all things came into existence, both things in heaven and things on earth; who for us men and for our salvation came down and was incarnate and became man, suffered and rose again the third day, ascended into the heavens, and is coming to judge the living and the dead; and in the Holy Spirit. But those who say ‘there was a time when He did not exist’, and ‘before being begotten He did not exist’, and that ‘He came into being from non-existence’, or who allege that the Son of God is from another *hypostasis* or *ousia*, or is alterable or changeable, [or created], these the catholic and apostolic Church condemns.” David M. Gwynn, *Athanasius of Alexandria: Bishop, Theologian, Ascetic, Father*, Christian Theology in Context (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 64.

At the council the forefront tenets dealt with the person of Jesus Christ directly. It was not until later, when Athanasius articulated the soteriological concerns that led to such a defense of the divinity of Christ, that Nicene theology was recognized.

Because patristic theology was both an attempt to illuminate the mysteries of Christ and a defense against critics and non-believers, the doctrines that came out of Nicaea were developed over time.⁷⁰ Therefore, Lewis Ayres argues that the Nicene Creed was not originally intended as a

binding and universal formula of Christian faith with a carefully chosen terminology defining the fundamental Christian account of the relationship between Father and Son. The idea that the creed would serve as a universal and precise marker of Christian faith was unlikely to have occurred to anyone at Nicaea simply because the idea that *any* creed might so serve was as yet unheard of; and thus, it evolved through the fourth century.⁷¹

For this reason, it is valuable to study the driving concerns behind Nicaea in order to better understand its overall development. The claims of the Nicene Creed, though known by many during the fourth century, were not fully understood or even agreed upon, but any impetus should be more established theoretically. Ayres contends that the council “resulted in more confusion than resolution, at least in the short term, and neither Arius nor Athanasius ... was a primary figure in the immediate aftermath of the council.”⁷² However,

⁷⁰ Robert Louis Wilken, *The Spirit of Early Christian Thought: Seeking the Face of God* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), 3; John M. Leavitt, ed., “Early History of Soteriology,” in *The American Quarterly Church Review*, vol. 20 (London: Waterloo Place, 1869), 391.

⁷¹ Lewis Ayres, *Nicaea and Its Legacy: An Approach to Fourth-Century Trinitarian Theology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 85-86.

⁷² Khaled Anatolios, “Discourse on the Trinity,” in *Constantine to c. 600*, vol. 2 of *The Cambridge History of Christianity*, eds. Augustine Casiday and F. Norris (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 434. For a further discussion on Athanasius and Arius in dialogue about the statements of the Nicene Council of 325 see Athanasius, *Orations Against the Arians*, in *The Christological Controversy*, trans. and ed. Richard A. Norris, Jr. Sources of Early Christian Thought, ed. William G. Rusch (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1980); Athanasius, *De Synodis*, in *Athanasius: Select Works and Letters*, vol. 4 of *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church*, eds. Philip Schaff and Henry Wallace (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1892), 451-580; Athanasius, *Four Discourses Against the Arians*, in *Athanasius: Select Works and Letters*, vol. 4 of *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church*, eds. Philip Schaff and Henry Wallace (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1892), 306-447; J. N. D. Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrine*, 2nd ed. (New York: Harper

Athanasius' early writings may be the best place to "enlarge on and offer a convincing version of that original Nicene theology."⁷³

The major statements of the Nicene Creed propelled discussion about the person of Jesus Christ.⁷⁴ Nevertheless, it was the soteriological concerns that prompted thinkers to clarify the identity of Jesus. Subtle though these undertones may be, they are a valuable inclusion within the creed. Fairbairn points out that

The Creed affirms not only that 'we believe in one God, Father all-sovereign, maker of all things seen and unseen; and in one Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God', but also that this Son of God 'for us men, and for our salvation, came down, and was incarnated, and was made man, suffered, and arose on the third day.'⁷⁵

It is Athanasius who later argues that the divinity of Jesus Christ and salvation through Him are inseparable, for it is because "salvation and eternal life are given by Christ He must be the Divine Son of God."⁷⁶

The Rightful Spokesperson for Nicene Salvation Theology

To be clear, it is doubtful that Athanasius played a significant role in the first Council of Nicaea.⁷⁷ Nevertheless, John Behr convincingly argues that more important than his initial involvement is Athanasius' theology in which he expounded "the central

& Row, 1960), 223-251; Frances M. Young, *From Nicaea to Chalcedon*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2010), 40-72.

⁷³ Ayres, *Nicaea*, 99-100. Ayres points to a group of texts that define original Nicene theology, rather than a unified systematic because many of the contributors would not have coincided well in terms of theology broadly speaking. Ayres, *Nicaea*, 99. While in agreement with Ayres, this chapter focuses on Nicene soteriology; thus, Athanasius' system of thought offers a valid and formative representation of this aspect of Nicene theology.

⁷⁴ For a further discussion about Athanasius, Arius and the Christological controversy of the fourth century see Rowan Williams, "Athanasius and the Arian Crisis," in *The First Christian Theologians: An Introduction to Theology in the Early Church*, ed. G. R. Evans (Malden: Blackwell Publishing, 2004).

⁷⁵ Fairbairn, *Grace*, 1.

⁷⁶ Scott, *Origin and Development*, 11.

⁷⁷ Andrew Louth, "The Fourth-Century Alexandrians: Athanasius and Didymus," in *The Cambridge History of Early Christian Literature*, eds. Frances M. Young, Lewis Ayres and Andrew Louth (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 275. Louth suggests that Athanasius had some involvement in one or two letters sent to Alexander before the council met; however, proof of this remains unclear. Louth, "Alexandrians," 275.

institutions of his predecessor, Alexander, into a full exposition of Nicene theology.”⁷⁸ It was, after all, Athanasius who “on the eve of the Council of Constantinople ... was canonized and ... whose very name was synonymous with orthodoxy.”⁷⁹ The doctrinal controversies prevailed after Athanasius’ death; however, the dominant figures after him were the Cappadocian Fathers, Basil of Caesarea (c. 330 – 379), Gregory of Nazianzus (c. 329 – c. 390), and Gregory of Nyssa (c. 335 – c. 395), “who in orthodox tradition *completed the work that Athanasius had begun*.”⁸⁰ In many ways, Athanasius was the voice for a theology that originated before him and the sustainer of its essence long after his own death. For this reason, he is the best resource for understanding the creed’s original tenets and its inherent motivations.

It is suspected that Athanasius was born at the end of the third century and later succeeded Alexander as bishop of Alexandria in 328.⁸¹ J. F. Johnson records that he was given a Greek education, after being taken in as a young boy by Alexander, and that he exemplified the influences of both his successor and of earlier Alexandrian thinkers, such as Origen.⁸² Notably, the foundation of his work remains soteriological, as is best

⁷⁸ John Behr, introduction to *On the Incarnation*, by Athanasius (New York: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 2011), 20.

⁷⁹ Behr, *Incarnation*, 20. Leithart aptly adds that he “was a bishop until his death in 373, that is, *for nearly a half century after the Nicene council*, and he was fixated on defending the Nicene formula, especially the controversial term *homoousios*, ‘one substance.’” Peter J. Leithart, *Athanasius*, Foundations of Theological Exegesis and Christian Spirituality (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2011), 17, emphasis mine.

⁸⁰ Gwynn, *Athanasius*, 65, emphasis mine; Robert L. Ottley, *Doctrine of the Incarnation* (Whitefish: Kessinger Publishing, 2003), 41.

⁸¹ Due to his young age his succession to bishop was widely contested. Despite concerns he went on to hold the position for “forty-six years, during which he had been exiled five times, for a total of some seventeen years.” Behr, *Incarnation*, 19.

⁸² J. F. Johnson, “Athanasius,” in *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, ed. Walter A. Elwell, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2001), 111. In contrast to previous Alexandrian thinkers, Gwynn notes that “Athanasius was not a theoretical or intellectual theologian. The questions that inspired his teachings were those that concerned his congregations and the wider Christian people.” As a result, even in his early works Athanasius was “engaging with the fundamental doctrines of Christianity: the revelation of God and salvation for man made possible through the Incarnation of the Son.” Gwynn, *Athanasius*, 66.

articulated in his double work *Against the Gentiles-On the Incarnation*.⁸³ *On the Incarnation* is a continuation of *Against the Gentiles*. In agreement with John Behr, “Both need to be considered together, for the first work sets up the problem that the second resolves.”⁸⁴ Scholars such as Denis Edwards have argued that Athanasius’ early work lays out his system of thought.⁸⁵ Thus, in *Against the Gentiles* he explains how humans tainted their ability to know God, turning from Him to idolatry.⁸⁶ Human beings were originally created to contemplate God and by their own decision turned their attention to created things and suffered the fall.⁸⁷ Continuing through the narrative, *On the Incarnation* argues that this intimate contemplation of God can be renewed, but only by the Word “making himself personally present in the created order, and overcoming the metaphysical or ontological consequences of the Fall – corruption and death – by absorbing them through his own encounter with, and embracing of, death.”⁸⁸ In this way, part two portrays redemption for humanity through Christ, victory over death, and the re-establishment of communion with God.⁸⁹ Of *Against the Gentiles-On the Incarnation* Behr writes that it is

⁸³ Thomas G. Weinandy, *Athanasius: A Theological Introduction*, Great Theologians (Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing, 2007), 11. Ayres suggests that “an original ‘Nicene’ theology” can be pointed to in terms of “common themes apparent in texts from those most directly responsible for Nicaea’s language. We can point to Alexander of Alexandria’s letters to Alexander of Byzantium, some fragments of Marcellus of Ancyra, the creed of Antioch 325, some fragments of Eustathius of Antioch, and the few fragments giving Constantine’s own opinion. To these we might add the Athanasius of *Contra gentes* and *De incarnatione*.” Ayres, *Nicaea*, 99. For a detailed discussion on the dating of *Against the Gentiles-On the Incarnation* see Anatolios, *Athanasius*, 26-30; James D. Ernest, *The Bible in Athanasius of Alexandria* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2010), 44-50; Ottley, *Doctrine*, 24; Khaled Anatolios, *Retrieving Nicaea: The Development and Meaning of Trinitarian Doctrine* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2011), 101; Gwynn, *Athanasius*, 65-66. Generally scholars are in agreement that *Against the Gentiles-On the Incarnation* is one of Athanasius’ earliest works.

⁸⁴ Behr, *Incarnation*, 22.

⁸⁵ Denis Edwards, “Athanasius – The Word of God in Creation and Salvation,” in *A Mosaic of Selected Classic Christian Theologies*, vol 1 of *Creation and Salvation*, ed. Ernst M. Conradie (Berlin: LIT Verlag, 2012), 38.

⁸⁶ Edwards, “Athanasius,” 38.

⁸⁷ Louth, “Alexandrians,” 277.

⁸⁸ Louth, “Alexandrians,” 277.

⁸⁹ Edwards, “Athanasius,” 38. Athanasius’ stress on the Incarnation of the Word must not be perceived as an alternative theology of Christ’s death and resurrection; rather, his two-part work is “an

Athanasius's simple and direct language that communicates "the 'real' Nicene theology."⁹⁰ Therefore, it is the purpose of this chapter to argue that forasmuch as the immediate concerns of Nicaea centre around the person of Jesus Christ, it is Athanasius who articulates best the underlying soteriological impetus, wherein the Word Incarnate, by means of His life, death and resurrection, is humanity's intended and only redemptive solution. A clear description of Athanasius' soteriological vision, as depicted in his *Against the Gentiles-On the Incarnation*, is necessary to showcase the essence of Nicene soteriology. Following Athanasius' lead, his reasoning will unfold in terms of identifying the problem, God's dilemma, and finally, His solution for the salvation of the world.

Athanasius' Soteriological Impetus

In a well-formulated argument, Khaled Anatolios opposes a view of Athanasius' work that narrows it to the Arian controversy, but instead purports an appreciation of his coherent theological treatment of the Christian faith.⁹¹ He remarks that the scholarship was missing "a systematic account of the overall inner logic of the Athanasian vision that shows how the various aspects of his doctrine are mutually related."⁹² Agreeing with Anatolios, Athanasius exhibits a strong sense of order. For instance, he encourages his reader to understand cause and effect: "For the account of such things, it is necessary to recall what has previously been said, that you may be able to know the cause."⁹³ His intentionality in

apology for the cross." Edwards, "Athanasius," 38; Behr, *Incarnation*, 23. "In a comprehensive and compelling manner," Behr continues to argue, "Athanasius expounds the central mystery of Christian theology, the incarnation, but in a manner that embraces all aspects of God's work, from creation to recreation." Behr, *Incarnation*, 21.

⁹⁰ Behr, *Incarnation*, 21.

⁹¹ Anatolios, *Coherence*, 1.

⁹² Anatolios, *Coherence*, 1. Athanasius' "theology may be considered as formally systematic insofar as he is consistently concerned to articulate the various 'parts' of Christian faith as intrinsically related." Anatolios, *Coherence*, 2.

⁹³ Athanasius, *On the Incarnation*, trans. John Behr, intro. C. S. Lewis (New York: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2011), 53.

order further suggests this planned schema. For example, he describes “first cause” information, expounds an argument by continuing with phrases such as “for this reason,” and leads his reader by telling them what “the next step is.”⁹⁴ In turn, Athanasius is careful to limit his work to what is known, rather than to what is speculation.⁹⁵ In addition, the dramatic narrative cannot be separated from his theological reasoning. For example, he explains that the origin of humanity

is not distinct from the aim of our exposition. For speaking of the manifestation of the Savior to us, it is necessary also to speak of the origin of human beings, in order that you might know that our own cause was the occasion of his descent and that our own transgression evoked the Word’s love for human beings, so that the Lord both came to us and appeared among human beings. For we were the purpose of his embodiment, and for our salvation he so loved human beings as to come to be and appear in a human body.⁹⁶

Further to the point, Anatolios notes that Athanasius’ writings span over “four decades permeated with intense doctrinal debate” and yet,

he maintains a remarkable consistency in his theological vision and even vocabulary, albeit with some notable developments and variance of emphasis [His] soteriological vision, in turn, is based on a particular conception of the relation between God and creation which is given foundational systematic expression in *Against the Greeks – On the Incarnation* and then seems to be presumed throughout Athanasius’s theological career.⁹⁷

⁹⁴ Athanasius, *Incarnation*, 73, 83, 93.

⁹⁵ He writes, “We have spoken above in part, as far as was possible and as far as we were able to understand.” Athanasius, *Incarnation*, 93.

⁹⁶ Athanasius, *Incarnation*, 59.

⁹⁷ Anatolios, *Athanasius*, 39. Harnack argues that Athanasius’ soteriology did not experience any real changes, but Schaff and Wallace keenly observe a distinct fading of Origen’s influence from his earlier to later writings. Philip Schaff and Henry Wallace, eds., “The Theology of S. Athanasius,” in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, vol. 4 (New York: Cosimo, 2007), xviii. Gwynn argues that amidst his continuity of thought (from *Contra Gentes-De Incarnatione* to the *Orationes contra Arianos*) “The language of the three *Orationes* is far more explicitly polemical, and Athanasius reacted to the threat he perceived in ‘Arianism’ by placing even greater stress on the Son’s full divinity. He also refined his presentation of the doctrine of deification and the relationship between the divine Word and the human body in the Incarnation. These were differences of emphasis not of interpretation. The fundamental principles of Athanasius’ theology remained unchanged, as they would throughout his involvement in the fourth-century controversies.” Gwynn, *Athanasius*, 74.

History as God's Salvation Metanarrative

Genesis Establishes the Creator's Being and Action

Athanasius interprets all of history as God's grand salvation narrative.⁹⁸ It is for this reason that he begins his exposition of redemption with creation. His purpose is to establish the being and action of the Creator. As Creator, God is the ultimate power, sustaining authority and *sole* Creator. "As we give an account of [humanity's salvation]," Athanasius explains, "it is first necessary to speak about the creation of the universe and its maker, God, so that one may thus worthily reflect that its recreation was accomplished by the Word who created it in the beginning."⁹⁹ The logic here suggests that because only the Creator can create, only the Creator can re-create. As Creator, God is the first cause, for nothing pre-exists Him.¹⁰⁰ Leithart is right to point out that in declaring that God creates, Athanasius is suggesting that it is "the Father working through the eternal divine Son and

⁹⁸ By insisting that Jesus Christ stands at the centre of God's salvation narrative, "Athanasius is not merely affirming that the historical Jesus is both God and man, but also a central Gospel tenet. He is confirming both that *God* acts in history and that it is within history that God acts. History is the stage, for Athanasius, upon which God acts, and through the Incarnation, he has actually done so as a man. At the very heart of Jesus' redemptive work is the historic event of the cross, for it embodies the healing power of all creation and so establishes all that the Father originally intended for creation, especially humankind, that is, eternal communion with him." Weinandy, *Athanasius*, 12.

⁹⁹ Athanasius, *Incarnation*, 53.

¹⁰⁰ To affirm this conclusion, Athanasius argues against three parties of thought: (1) the Epicureans, who "say that all things have come into being spontaneously and as by chance," as a result they "fantasize that there is no providence over the universe"; (2) the Platonic Greeks, who "declare that God made the universe from preexistent and uncreated matter, as God is not able to make anything unless matter preexisted"; and (3) "Others, again, from the heretics fabricate for themselves another creator of all things besides the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ." Athanasius, *Incarnation*, 53, 55. To these, Athanasius disputes saying, first "if all things came into being spontaneously without providence, as they claim, all things would necessarily have simply come into being and be identical and without difference. Everything would have been as a single body, sun or moon, and regarding human beings, the whole would have been a hand or eye or foot Such order indicates that they did not come into being spontaneously, but shows that a cause preceded them, from which once can apprehend the God who ordered and created all things." Athanasius, *Incarnation*, 53. Second, "if [God] is not himself the cause of matter, but simply makes things from pre-existent matter, then he is weak, not being able without matter to fashion any of the things that exist." Athanasius, *Incarnation*, 55. And third, "if, according to John, encompassing all things in saying, 'all things were made by him and without him was nothing made' (Jn 1.3), how could there be another creator besides the Father of Christ?" Athanasius, *Incarnation*, 55.

the eternal divine Spirit.”¹⁰¹ So that, correctly understood, God’s being and action are intimately held together.

The Word as Creator

Athanasius expresses that God’s own Word creates, the Word who is Jesus Christ. For “he made all things through his own Word, our Lord Jesus Christ.”¹⁰² Johnson observes that it is before the Arian controversies that Athanasius articulates a concept of the Word of God that was different from the present view.¹⁰³ Prior to his explanation, there was a proclivity to distinguishing God from a subordinate deity,¹⁰⁴ a notion that Athanasius rejects outright.

Concluding that all of creation was created by the Word of God, Athanasius presses the point further, affirming that God also “governs and establishes this world through his

¹⁰¹ Leithart, *Athanasius*, 90.

¹⁰² Athanasius, *Incarnation*, 57.

¹⁰³ Johnson, “Athanasius,” 112. At the heart of the debates between Athanasius and Arius stood the issue of whether the Word was part of the created world or part of God Himself. Edwards explains that Arius’ followers seemed to understand the Word as created, whereas Athanasius located the Word in God, thus defending the divinity of the Word. Furthermore, it is because of the fact that the Word belongs to God that He “can really become incarnate in the world and thus transform the world in God. *God and creation meets in Christ the Word*. The saving act of the incarnation is precisely about the union of God and the created universe in Jesus Christ.” Denis Edwards, “God’s Redeeming Act: Deifying Transformation,” in *How God Acts: Creation, Redemption, and Special Divine Action*, Theology and the Sciences (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2010), 112, emphasis mine.

¹⁰⁴ Johnson, “Athanasius,” 112. Daniélou argues, “Athanasius’s significance in Trinitarian theology lies in his ability to separate wholly the generation of the Word from a theory about the universe and consequently reject all subordinationism, as Marcellus has done, but at the same time asserting the existence as a separate Person of the Word, with the traditional theologians, something that Marcellus had not done. By this achievement he made possible a reconciliation of the movements of thought which were opposing each other while retaining whatever of value each possessed. This new doctrine is evident in the fact that he is the first to apply the word Pantocrator (Almighty) to the Word, a term hitherto reserved for the Father, and to assert as a consequence the entire equality in the Godhead of the Father and the Son, while at the same time subscribing to the eternal existence as a Person of the latter. This formula alone expressed realistically the Christian datum.” Jean Daniélou, “Patristic Literature,” in *Historical Theology*, vol. 2 of *The Pelican Guide to Modern Theology*, ed. R. P. C. Hanson (London: Penguin Books, 1971), 85. *On the Incarnation* “emphasizes this innovation by linking the Incarnation consistently with the Atonement and in placing Christ’s conquest of death at the centre of his theology. The interest is thus firmly shifted from the Word as Creator to the Word as Redeemer, without, however, the doctrine of the original creation of man in the image of God being played down. On the contrary, Athanasius sees in the image of God in man, which he does not distinguish from the likeness, man’s calling to share the life of God.” Daniélou, “Patristic Literature,” 85-86.

Word, so that, guided and ordered by the Word, it is enabled to remain firm.”¹⁰⁵ Behr

discerns that the Word’s creating and governing

should not be thought of as two separate and sequentially distinct actions. Rather, as everything has been created by God through his Word, the order of the Word is, as it were, imprinted upon everything, so that every aspect of his creation manifests the creative work, the power, of the Word. Bearing the imprint of the Word, and so making the Word present, the cosmos is maintained in existence by the Word, and this creation Athanasius identifies, following Colossians, as the Church.¹⁰⁶

The Word, therefore, is identified as being external to creation.

The Created

Athanasius’ perception of God and creation provides the overarching structure wherein all other doctrines find their place.¹⁰⁷ For Anatolios, the strength of this schema comes from Athanasius’ ability to balance consistently the dissimilitude and relation between God and creation.¹⁰⁸ Creation, by its very nature, implies an ontological distinction from its Creator. It is this distinction that Athanasius preserves “no matter how intimately God unites himself with human nature or how elevated human beings are in grace. God remains God and creation remains created.”¹⁰⁹ Similarly, David M. Gwynn articulates that “The Godhead, eternal and immutable, is utterly separate by *ousia* (essence) and *physis* (nature) from the created order, brought into existence in time and mutable.”¹¹⁰ Yet, this does not pre-determine a distant God, for knowledge of Him and salvation “must come from God through His love, expressed above all through the Incarnation [life, death

¹⁰⁵ Behr, *Incarnation*, 34.

¹⁰⁶ Behr, *Incarnation*, 34.

¹⁰⁷ Anatolios, *Athanasius*, 39-40. In saying this, Anatolios provides a caveat, warning that “this central focus on the relation between God and creation is at the same time always a Christological focus.” Anatolios, *Athanasius*, 40. For a comprehensive essay on Athanasius’ concept of creation as it stood in the wake of Origen’s philosophically Greek concept of creation see G. Florovsky, “The Concept of Creation in St Athanasius,” *Studia Patristica* 6 (1962): 36-52.

¹⁰⁸ Anatolios, *Coherence*, 3.

¹⁰⁹ Leithart, *Athanasius*, 89.

¹¹⁰ Gwynn, *Athanasius*, 66-67.

and resurrection] of His Son.”¹¹¹ In this way the Word of God is affirmed as Creator and not created. Therefore, Thomas G. Weinandy is correct to observe that “it is the act of creation that ontologically distinguishes God from all else” and this places Jesus, the Word of God, as divine intermediary between Creator and created.¹¹² To summarize, creation was brought into existence from *nothing* by the *Word*.¹¹³

Humankind Differentiated

Athanasius goes on to demarcate the whole of creation from human beings. In the act of creating, God “had mercy on the human race, in that being good he did not leave them destitute of the knowledge of himself.”¹¹⁴ Without this component, human beings “would not have differed at all from the irrational creatures if they had known nothing more than the terrestrial animals.”¹¹⁵ Athanasius pronounces clearly the uniqueness of human beings, though he views them as part of the greater creation.¹¹⁶ Human beings were created in the image of God, which means that they have been gifted with rationality (free choice and the ability to know God) and a sharing of the power of His own Word.¹¹⁷ Originally, the gift (grace) of being created in the image was, in Athanasius’ mind,

¹¹¹ Gwynn, *Athanasius*, 66-67.

¹¹² Weinandy, *Athanasius*, 14.

¹¹³ For Athanasius, this principle characterizes humanity’s existence in a way that projects them as “inherently tending toward non-being.” Anatolios, *Athanasius*, 41; Athanasius, *Contra Gentes*, in *Athanasius: Select Works and Letters*, vol. 4 of *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church*, eds. Philip Schaff and Henry Wallace (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1892), §41.

¹¹⁴ Athanasius, *Incarnation*, 73.

¹¹⁵ Athanasius, *Incarnation*, 73.

¹¹⁶ God “made *all things* through his own Word.” Athanasius, *Incarnation*, 57, emphasis mine.

¹¹⁷ Athanasius argues, “of all things upon earth he had mercy upon the human race, and seeing that by the principle of its own coming into being it would not be able to endure eternally, he granted them a further gift, creating human beings not simply like all the irrational animals upon the earth but making them according to his own image (cf. Gen. 1.27), giving them a share of the power of his own Word, so that having as it were shadows of the Word and being made rational, they might be able to abide in blessedness, living the true life which is really that of the holy ones in paradise. And knowing against that free choice of human beings could turn either way, he secured beforehand, by a law and a set place, the grace given.” Athanasius, *Incarnation*, 57.

“sufficient to know the God Word, and through him the Father.”¹¹⁸ In this way, Anatolios observes that Athanasius places human existence as constitutive of God’s grace; that is to say, “The aspect of ‘grace’ in the human being is the gift that is granted to humanity.”¹¹⁹ Recall that humanity was created from nothing and as such, Athanasius accepts a “radical ontological instability” in which human beings need the grace of God to exist as they are.¹²⁰ As part of God’s gracious gift, human beings were created with free choice and the capacity to know Him.¹²¹ Weinandy gives summary to Athanasius’ concept in noting “human beings are able, after the likeness of the Word, to know and so be in communion with the Father. Having been ontologically created by the Word and in the Word’s own image, human beings are thus naturally empowered by that same Word to share equally in the epistemological ability to know the Father.”¹²²

It is only through the misuse of free choice that “humanity has lost access to the knowledge of God and descended into a downward spiral of ignorance¹²³ and moral

¹¹⁸ Athanasius, *Incarnation*, 75.

¹¹⁹ Anatolios, *Athanasius*, 41. Developing this idea further, Anatolios explains, “It is vital to distinguish this dramatically dialectical conception from later schematizations of ‘nature’ and ‘grace’ in the later Western tradition, where ‘nature’ refers to the inherent structure of the human being as created by God, while ‘grace’ is associated with the unmerited gifts which are granted by God over and above the original act of creation. For Athanasius, the aspects of ‘nature’ and ‘grace’ are both constitutive of human beings as created by God, ‘nature’ referring to the whence of creation’s being, which is also an intrinsic orientation to nothingness, and ‘grace’ to the reality of its establishment in being through the Word. It might seem that Athanasius lays extreme stress on humanity’s fragility, which indeed he does. But it would be a mistake to construe this as a ‘pessimistic’ account of the human condition. Ultimately, it is a conception of the human being as an entity whose very existence is radically gifted. Precisely because its whole being is gifted, humanity has no hold on being apart from that irreducibly radical gift.” Anatolios, *Athanasius*, 42.

¹²⁰ Anatolios, *Athanasius*, 43. During the theological debates Athanasius insisted “that the Word is the one who sustains humanity and compensates for the ontological poverty of its origination from nothing and is not himself susceptible to the radical weakness of created being.” Anatolios, *Athanasius*, 43. It is for this reason that Athanasius describes humanity as mortal, but made immortal with the gift of the image of God. Athanasius, *Incarnation*, 59.

¹²¹ Athanasius, *Incarnation*, 57, 73, 75.

¹²² Weinandy, *Athanasius*, 14.

¹²³ Even at this state of incessant idolatry, there was the possibility of knowing God. If a human being turned back to God, giving up their idolatrous behavior, so as to keep the image of God, they could contemplate Him again. In the same way, the image of God can be perceived through His creation. Behr, *Incarnation*, 31-32.

depravity.”¹²⁴ Human decision changes their being, “For the transgression of the commandment returned them to the natural state, so that, just as they, not being, came to be, so also they might rightly endure in time the corruption unto non-being.”¹²⁵ In contrast to God’s will, human beings chose themselves and fell into an idolatrous existence.¹²⁶ Athanasius connects evil directly to what humans have done. For “evil is non-being, the good is being, since it has come into being from the existing God – then they were bereft also of eternal being. But this, being decomposed, is to remain in death and corruption. For the human being is by nature mortal, having come into being from nothing.”¹²⁷

Athanasius’ Basis of Thought

Athanasius’ account of God, creation, and humanity secures three foundational assumptions that determine the expression of his interpretation of Nicene soteriology. First, God establishes Himself as love in His act of creation by naming Himself Savior before creating.¹²⁸ “The Word of creation is the Word of salvation.”¹²⁹ In this way Athanasius replicates Irenaeus by declaring that creation and redemption are inseparable.¹³⁰ That is why all of history, for Athanasius, is salvation history. Second, he constitutes the purpose for which humanity was created, and consequentially affirms that humanity is still

¹²⁴ Anatolios, *Retrieving Nicaea*, 102-103. *Contra Gentes* “is an exposition of the extent to which humanity had failed to ‘remain’ within the original structure of the relationship with God and had turned to the non-being of evil.” Anatolios, *Coherence*, 36.

¹²⁵ Athanasius, *Incarnation*, 59. Athanasius points to the fall as the problem of his dramatic narrative suggesting that “God created the human being and willed that he should abide in incorruptibility; but when humans despised and overturned the comprehension of God, devising and contriving evil for themselves, as was said in the first work [*Contra Gentes*], then they received the previously threatened condemnation of death, and thereafter no longer remained as they had been created, but were corrupted as they had contrived; and, seizing them, death reigned.” Athanasius, *Incarnation*, 59.

¹²⁶ Vividly Athanasius writes, “out of wickedness human beings devised for themselves the worship of idols.” Athanasius, *Incarnation*, 51; Cf. Athanasius, *Incarnation*, 61.

¹²⁷ Athanasius, *Incarnation*, 59.

¹²⁸ Cf. Athanasius, *Incarnation*, 59; Revelation 13:8, NASB; 1 Peter 1:19-20, NASB.

¹²⁹ Edwards, “Athanasius,” 50.

¹³⁰ Anatolios, *Athanasius*, 50.

“destined for knowledge of and fellowship with [his or her] Creator.”¹³¹ By declaring the divine nature of the Word he affirms, “the only means, to this end is Christ the Incarnate Son of God.”¹³² Third, Athanasius’ balance of God’s transcendence and immanence in and through Jesus Christ is explicit and consistent. John Behr aptly summarizes,

God is transcendent to all creation, ‘beyond all being and human thought.’ Yet this transcendence is not such that it makes his presence in creation, nor the creatures knowledge of God, impossible. As God is good, Athanasius affirms, he created all things ‘by his Word our Savior Jesus Christ,’ so that through likeness to him knowledge of their Creator might be granted to human beings.¹³³

Beginning with the doctrine of creation (which really incorporates redemption, the Trinity, Christology, and anthropology) gives Athanasius “a number of his most fundamental metaphysical convictions.”¹³⁴

The Plot of Athanasius’ Dramatic Narrative

The Problem

The first critical juncture in Athanasius’ drama of humankind is the problem. God in His goodness created humanity with free choice, and humans used it to reject their Creator. Even so, God, out of love for humanity, continued to provide avenues by which humans could know Him.¹³⁵ Nevertheless, stubborn and selfish humanity remained

¹³¹ Schaff, “Athanasius,” 1.xxi -1.xxii.

¹³² Schaff, “Athanasius,” 1.xxi -1.xxii.

¹³³ Behr, *Incarnation*, 26-27. Anatolios adds, “Instead of assigning divine transcendence and immanence to Father and Son respectively, he construes them as attributes that belong to divine being as such and are harmonized through the category of *philanthropia*, God’s love for humanity. While God is by nature inaccessible, he makes himself accessible to creation through his love.” Anatolios, *Retrieving Nicaea*, 104. As a result, “No distinct mediating being is needed because the divine nature mediates its own transcendence through God’s loving condescension. Simultaneously conceding that divine transcendence militates against direct contact with creation and integrating his theology of creation with his theology of incarnation, Athanasius characterizes the radical relation between God and creation, even in the very act of creation, as the expression of God’s loving mercy.” Anatolios, *Retrieving Nicaea*, 104.

¹³⁴ Leithart, *Athanasius*, 89-90.

¹³⁵ Gwynn, *Athanasius*, 67.

obstinate and ignorant.¹³⁶ Given human weakness and the ontological instability of their natural being, God foresaw the inevitable reality of human frailty and planned for a positive outcome before even creating.¹³⁷ For this reason, Athanasius does not interpret the Incarnation of the Word as God's reaction, nor as an arbitrary event. Rather, it was intended, foreseen, and therefore, designed for a distinct purpose. Propelling the problem, as Athanasius explains, is evil's dynamic and progressive nature, for

even in their transgressions human beings had not stopped short of any defined limits, but *gradually pressing forward they had passed beyond all measure*: from the beginning they were inventors of evil and called death and corruption down upon themselves; while later, turning to vice and exceeding all lawlessness, not stopping at one evil but contriving in time every new evil, they became insatiable in sinning.¹³⁸

In consequence, the human experience began a "rapid descent into the nothingness which is humanity's only natural possession apart from God."¹³⁹ The determining factor for the human situation in light of this tension "is the exercise of free will," which determines the movement "upwards, toward communion with God, or downwards, toward nothingness."¹⁴⁰ Therefore, the problem was that humanity chose to fail at remaining in the good of God and surrendered to the temptations of idolatry, corruption, and death.¹⁴¹ Sin,

¹³⁶ Athanasius explains, "The grace of being in the image was sufficient to know the God Word, and through him the Father. But knowing the weakness of human beings, God anticipated also their carelessness, so that if they cared not to recognize God through themselves, through the works of creation they might not be ignorant of the Creator. But since the negligence of humans descended gradually to lower things, God again anticipated such weakness of theirs, sending the law and the prophets, known to them, so that if they shrank from looking up to the heavens and knowing the Creator, they might have instruction from those close by." Athanasius, *Incarnation*, 75, 77.

¹³⁷ Athanasius, *Incarnation*, 59.

¹³⁸ Athanasius, *Incarnation*, 61.

¹³⁹ Anatolios, *Athanasius*, 48. For Athanasius, a neutral state is an impossibility, "given humanity's inherent lack of hold on being." Anatolios, *Athanasius*, 48.

¹⁴⁰ Anatolios, *Athanasius*, 48. This same description of movement is also seen in Prudentius, the major difference being that for the poet this tension remains after Christ's death and resurrection, whereas for Athanasius it does not.

¹⁴¹ Idolatry, in terms of the human body, was "a kind of barometer, measuring the perversity into which humans have fallen, the degree to which their knowledge of God has been lost, and the extent to which the image of God in them obscured, the consequence of which is corruption and death." Behr, *Incarnation*,

therefore, is corruption of being, not simply unethical behavior.¹⁴² For Athanasius, it is the “finality and irreversibility of sin” that remains at the heart of the problem.¹⁴³

In this narrative humans are responsible for their own plummet to corruption (de-creation), not God.¹⁴⁴ Participation in evil leads to “insatiable sinning,”¹⁴⁵ while participation in good leads to sharing in the power of the Word, which is re-creation and knowing God.¹⁴⁶ Athanasius begins his explanation of the cross of Christ by first recognizing the origin of idolatry, underscoring that it “is not ‘from the beginning,’ ... [therefore it] is not a proper characteristic of created existence, but is rather a deviation from the right relationship between God and creation.”¹⁴⁷ In contrast to what has happened in history, human beings were intended “for communion with God, through contemplation of God’s Word and image” and evil is in no way a part of this original design, but instead

23-24. Furthermore, “The bulk of *Against the Gentiles* describes the prevalence of idolatry prior to the coming of Christ, a situation which demands the drastic solution presented in *On the Incarnation*.” Behr, *Incarnation*, 24.

¹⁴² Athanasius reasons, “If then there were only offence and not the consequence of corruption, repentance would have been fine.” Athanasius, *Incarnation*, 65.

¹⁴³ Anatolios, *Athanasius*, 63. Anatolios continues, “But if the power of sin lies in its capacity to lead humanity into the condition of ‘remaining’ in its orientation to nothingness and so exploits humanity’s inherent ontological weakness, the final and definitive ‘remaining’ in the ‘grace’ of participation in the Word happens only through the humanization, death, and resurrection of the Word. Only the divine Word, who is not subject to the ‘remaining in death’ that comes through sin’s confirmation of humanity’s inherent nothingness, can definitely liberate humanity and cause it to ‘remain’ with God.” Anatolios, *Athanasius*, 63.

¹⁴⁴ Athanasius portrays this corruption graphically stating, “Now nothing in creation had gone astray in its notion of God, save the human being only. Why, neither sun nor moon nor heaven nor stars nor water nor air altered their course; but knowing their Creator and King, the Word, they remained as they were made. But human beings alone, having rejected the good, henceforth fabricated things that do not exist instead of the truth, and ascribed the honor due to God, and the knowledge of him, to demons and human beings fabricated in stone.” Athanasius, *Incarnation*, 143.

¹⁴⁵ Athanasius, *Incarnation*, 61. Insatiable sinning, for Athanasius, is idolatry, a state in which God is not known. He writes, that humanity “turned away from God and so darkened their own soul, that they not only forgot the concept of God but also fashioned for themselves others instead.” Athanasius, *Incarnation*, 75.

¹⁴⁶ Athanasius begins to explain that the human pattern of deteriorating into non-being is safeguarded once and for all in the person of Jesus Christ, for “being good he bestowed on them of his own image, our Lord Jesus Christ, and made them according to his own image and according to the likeness, so that understanding through such grace the image, I mean the Word of the Father, they might be able to receive through him a notion of the Father, and knowing the Creator they might live the happy and truly blessed life.” Athanasius, *Incarnation*, 73, 75.

¹⁴⁷ Behr, *Incarnation*, 25; Cf. Athanasius, *Contra Gentes*, §2. Athanasius sides with Origen’s understanding of evil by not giving it an existence. Schaff, “Athanasius,” 1.xxiii.

was introduced through human sin, which “defaced His image in [humans]” and solidified death as their final result.¹⁴⁸ Thus, Athanasius considers this problem to be afflictive.

God’s Dilemma

In exploring the dilemma that is before God, the complicated nature of the problem is accentuated as well as the stringent parameters for any solution. And so, Athanasius poses the question: “Therefore, since the rational creatures were being corrupted and such works were perishing, what should God, being good, do?”¹⁴⁹ The author frames God’s dilemma by four considerations. First, God could not go against His own law; death had to ensue as punishment for rejecting His grace. Athanasius reasons,

with death holding greater sway and corruption remaining fast against human beings, the race of humans was perishing, and the human being, made rational and in the image, was disappearing, and the work made by God was being obliterated and it was impossible to escape the law, since this had been established by God on account of the transgression. And what happened was truly both absurd and improper. It was absurd, on the one hand, that, having spoken, God should prove to be lying: that is, having legislated that the human being would die by death if he were to transgress the commandment, yet after the transgression he were not to die but rather his sentence dissolved.¹⁵⁰

As a result of God’s law, the corrupt had to die.

In the second consideration, Athanasius proposes that “it was improper that what had once been made rational and partakers of his Word should perish.”¹⁵¹ God could not destroy His good creation, showing negligence in caring for it and dishonoring Himself. Anatolios posits, “if [God] were to let humanity perish, his own benevolence would be defeated.”¹⁵² Therefore, Athanasius declares God as having mercy upon His creation and

¹⁴⁸ Edwards, “Athanasius,” 39; Ottley, *Doctrine*, 26-27.

¹⁴⁹ Athanasius, *Incarnation*, 63.

¹⁵⁰ Athanasius, *Incarnation*, 63. Typically, this first consideration is emphasized by the later Western tradition.

¹⁵¹ Athanasius, *Incarnation*, 63.

¹⁵² Anatolios, *Retrieving Nicaea*, 102.

lowering Himself to their level and overcoming death, “lest what had been created should perish and the work of the Father himself for human beings should be in vain.”¹⁵³

The third consideration to the problem is that God could not require humans to save themselves, particularly through the act of repentance.¹⁵⁴ Recollect Athanasius’ position on sin, whereby

the ontological gulf between the humanity created from nothing and the uncreated God acquires an ominous dimension; it becomes a radical separation which subverts the very purpose of human creation, which is communion with God. Simple repentance from the human side, or a mere nod from the divine side, is not enough to reverse humanity’s orientation toward corruption, precisely because this orientation constitutes a confirmation of the ontological pull of its own nature.¹⁵⁵

Therefore, the act of repentance still would not have appeased the penalty of death, nor would it restore “human beings from what is natural, but merely halts sin.”¹⁵⁶ Humans could not fix the problem and live.

The final point of contention in God’s dilemma is due to humanity’s so-far-gone condition. They are unable to know God because they are ignorant of all revelation. Considering this, Athanasius testifies, “And everything was completely full of impiety and lawlessness, and neither God, nor his Word, was recognized, even though he had not hidden himself invisibly from human beings, nor given them knowledge of himself in one way only, but had unfolded it to them in manifold ways and through many forms.”¹⁵⁷

¹⁵³ Athanasius, *Incarnation*, 67.

¹⁵⁴ Cf. Athanasius, *Incarnation*, 65.

¹⁵⁵ Anatolios, *Coherence*, 37. For this reason, “Nothing would suffice in such a crisis but the very presence of the creative Logos Himself So He assumed a body akin to ours, a body capable of death, capable also of being an instrument of restoration. This sacred body He constituted His organ, and by His entire appropriation of our nature became our perfect representative before God.” Ottley, *Doctrine*, 26-27.

¹⁵⁶ Athanasius, *Incarnation*, 65.

¹⁵⁷ Athanasius, *Incarnation*, 75. According to Athanasius in *Contra Gentes* every part of creation bore the imprint of its Creator, the divine Word. Edwards, “Athanasius,” 39. Humans could, “lifting up their sight to the greatness of the heaven and discerning the harmony of *creation*, know its ruler, the Word of the Father Or, if they were not ready for this, it would be possible for them to meet the *holy ones*, and through them to learn of God the creator of everything, the Father of Christ They could also by knowing the *law* cease from all lawlessness and live the life of virtue. For the law was not only for the Jews, nor on their

Nevertheless, humanity “did not raise their gaze to the truth, but sated themselves even more with evils and sins, so that they no longer appeared rational, but from their ways of life were reckoned irrational.”¹⁵⁸ Due to humanity’s decision to reject the Creator, God was faced with the task of acting, but the perfect solution could only unfold in a particular way.¹⁵⁹ It is the result of this reality that Athanasius’ emphasis cannot stay on the dilemma or the problem. For God, in His goodness, was not surprised by this dilemma. It was not unforeseen! For Athanasius, God has named Himself Savior before creating and thus has established the perfect solution to the dilemma before it ever existed.¹⁶⁰

The Solution

The Word Incarnate¹⁶¹ is the only means of salvation.¹⁶² It is by His love for humanity and the goodness of His Father that the divine Word became human for

account only were the *prophets* sent: they were sent to the Jews, and persecuted by the Jews, but they were for the whole inhabited world a sacred school of the knowledge of God and the conduct of the soul.”

Athanasius, *Incarnation*, 77, emphasis mine.

¹⁵⁸ Athanasius, *Incarnation*, 77.

¹⁵⁹ Revelation was therefore offered in terms of God Himself, manifested in human form. Athanasius further explains, “Human beings had neglected [God’s revelation through creation] before, and no longer were their eyes held upwards but downwards. So, rightly wishing to help the human beings, he sojourned as a human being, taking to himself a body like theirs and from below – I mean through the works of the body – that those not wishing to know him from his providence and governance of the universe, from the works done through the body might know the Word of God in the body, and through him the Father.” Athanasius, *Incarnation*, 81.

¹⁶⁰ The whole of his theological vision, from creation to redemption to re-creation concerns itself with why God became man. To this Athanasius emphatically responds time and time again: for our salvation!

¹⁶¹ Athanasius’ use of the term *Incarnation* requires clarification. By it, he has not restricted himself to the contemporary connotation, which often means “that God himself, without ceasing to be God, has come amongst us, not just in but *as* a particular man, at a particular time and place,” first-century Bethlehem. Brian Hebblethwaite, *The Incarnation: Collected Essays in Christology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 1. This definition is not misguided, *but* it is a modern formulation. By *Incarnation*, Athanasius means something much broader. Behr, *Incarnation*, 37. In contrast, Athanasius’ scope is not limited to the birth of Christ; but rather, “The body, fashioned from the virgin, in which the Word dwells, as seen in the light of his passion, cannot be separated from the body of Christ, that is, those who by faith in the cross are no longer subject to the corruption of death.” Behr, *Incarnation*, 38. For Athanasius, “it is not a matter of choosing between an emphasis on incarnation and an emphasis on death and resurrection, as it is for some contemporary theologians. In his view, the incarnation of the Word involves taking on and overcoming death. The death and resurrection of Christ are what overcomes the death that holds sway as the result of human sin. In the view of Athanasius, the defeat of death and corruption is at the center of the saving work of Christ. This event of salvation occurs by the Word taking bodily humanity, the body that is damaged by sin and

humanity's salvation.¹⁶³ The solution is that the divine Word Incarnate lives, dies, and resurrects.¹⁶⁴ Bolstering his argument for the divinity of Christ, Athanasius asks the question:

For if after the Cross all idolatry was overthrown, while every manifestation of demons is driven away by this Sign, and Christ alone is worshipped and the Father known through Him, and, while gainsayers are put to shame, He daily invisibly wins over the souls of these gainsayers, - how, one might fairly ask them, is it still open to us to regard the matter as human, instead of confessing that He Who ascended the Cross is Word of God and Saviour of the World?¹⁶⁵

The question, simply put, is: How could this solution point to a mere human? There is absolutely no way! Insightfully, Anatolios sees Athanasius' explanation of the solution as God responding to the fall of humanity with a "sinless 'fall' of God himself, through the Incarnation and human death of the Word."¹⁶⁶ This fall, better termed as "*loving condescension*," represents for Athanasius the supreme act of love, which identifies "Jesus Christ as both fully God, existing in mutual correlation to the Father, and yet made a creature for the sake of human salvation."¹⁶⁷

doomed to death, in order to renew in humanity the image of the Word and bring it to resurrection life." Edwards, "Redeeming Act," 113.

¹⁶² Athanasius clarifies, "that it was not for another to turn what was corruptible to incorruptibility except the Savior himself, who in the beginning created the universe from nothing; and that it was not for another to recreate again the 'in the image' for human beings, except the Image of the Father; and that it was not for another to raise up the mortal to be immortal, except our Lord Jesus Christ, who is Life itself; and that if was not for another to teach about the Father and destroy the worship of idols, except the Word who arranges all things and is alone the true only-begotten Son of the Father." Athanasius, *Incarnation*, 93.

¹⁶³ Athanasius, *Incarnation*, 53.

¹⁶⁴ For "he alone consequently was both able to recreate the universe and was worthy to suffer on behalf of all and to intercede for all before the Father." Athanasius, *Incarnation*, 65.

¹⁶⁵ Athanasius, *Contra Gentes*, §1. In the debates against Arius this principle for Athanasius was non-negotiable, for if the Incarnate Word was not God, this separation would consequently nullify the saving work of the crucified Christ. Gwynn, *Athanasius*, 70.

¹⁶⁶ Anatolios, *Athanasius*, 52.

¹⁶⁷ Anatolios, *Athanasius*, 82. It is for this reason that Athanasius began with an explanation of God as Creator and the relationship between the divine Word of God and creation, for "Jesus Christ is himself what it is to be God. Created beings, brought into being from non-existence, are intrinsically 'from outside', external to God, though they can come to participate in God. The Son, on the other hand, is God's 'own' Word, and so is divine, not by participation, but in himself." Behr, *Incarnation*, 34-35.

Despite Athanasius' well-known defense of Christ's divinity in the Arian debates, the humanity, particularly the body of Christ, also holds a significant place in his system of thought.¹⁶⁸ Because of this, his perception of Christ and of humanity becomes integral for understanding the effectual nature of Christ's body for the salvation of human beings.¹⁶⁹ After all, Christ's body is the place of His descent, the place of human brokenness, and the place of His triumph over human death.¹⁷⁰ The human body of the Word of God is offered as a sacrifice for all, thereby satisfying the death sentence and identifying with the corruptibility of human nature so as to cover all with the Word's incorruptibility.¹⁷¹ Therefore, the threat of death is vanquished "because of the indwelling Word, in [human beings] through the one body."¹⁷² Suitably, the bodily death of Christ holds a central position in Athanasius' soteriology. He understands Christ's death and resurrection to be the historical events that liberate human beings from sin and death. However, for this to be efficacious "the victory of sin and death must take place from 'within' the human being, and not simply be ordained by God as an 'external' command."¹⁷³ Thus, it requires the Word God, who is Himself human.

¹⁶⁸ Describing the body of Christ, Athanasius argues that it was in fact a human body, for "If it was constituted by a new miracle from a virgin only, yet being mortal it died in conformity with those like it. Yet by the coming of the Word into it, it was no longer corruptible by its own nature but because of the indwelling Word of God it became immune from corruption. And thus it happened that both things occurred together in a paradoxical manner: the death of all was completed in the lordly body, and also death and corruption were destroyed by the Word in it." Athanasius, *Incarnation*, 95. For a stimulating take on Athanasius' position on the humanity of Christ see Andrew Louth, "Athanasius' Understanding of the Humanity of Christ," *Studia Patristica* 16 (1985): 309-318.

¹⁶⁹ L. Berkhof, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1939), 305.

¹⁷⁰ Anatolios, *Athanasius*, 56. Unlike his Alexandrian predecessors, Athanasius is less concerned with "how the human body is animated by the *Logos*, but with the soteriological dynamics of what the *Logos* does with the human body in order to save us. Most primarily, for Athanasius, what the *Logos* does with his human body for our salvation is to die on our behalf." Anatolios, *Athanasius*, 57.

¹⁷¹ Athanasius, *Incarnation*, 69.

¹⁷² Athanasius, *Incarnation*, 69.

¹⁷³ Anatolios, *Athanasius*, 57.

The Word became flesh for the purpose of Christ's human death on the cross, for "the immortal Son of God needed to become man to die."¹⁷⁴ In Jesus Christ's death, the one perfect human is substituted for all human beings, thereby fulfilling God's law on their behalf.¹⁷⁵ The cross, as it happened, was sacrificial, which, for Athanasius involves a substitution.¹⁷⁶ Echoing the scriptural accounts, Athanasius expands his understanding of the work done at the cross to include a number of major motifs. However, "The most important" motif, argues John R. Meyer, is "the propitiatory and expiatory sacrifice of Christ on the cross. The pre-existent Logos became a ransom for all, suffering 'for us,' and acting as an advocate 'on our behalf' before the Father."¹⁷⁷ *On the Incarnation* communicates two ways in which Christ's work saves humanity: His sacrifice for the purpose of substituting Himself for humanity and His revelation for the purpose of restoring the knowledge of God.¹⁷⁸ The cross is the clearest revelation of God as it manifests God Himself as opposed to an image of Him. As the ultimate expression of His love for humanity, it portrays the ultimate humiliation, death on a cross.¹⁷⁹ Victory at the cross of Christ means reconciliation with God. For Athanasius it also means

¹⁷⁴ Steve Jeffery, Michael Ovey and Andrew Sach, *Pierced for Our Transgressions: Rediscovering the Glory of Penal Substitution* (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 2007), 172.

¹⁷⁵ Trevor A. Hart, "The Two Soteriological Traditions of Alexandria," *The Evangelical Quarterly* 61, no. 3 (1989): 253-254.

¹⁷⁶ John R. Meyer, "Athanasius' Use of Paul in His Doctrine of Salvation," *Vigiliae Christianae* 52, no. 2 (May 1998): 150. Athanasius writes, "and by his death salvation has come to all, and all creation has been ransomed. He it is who is the Life of all, and who like a sheep delivered his own body to death as a substitute for the salvation of all, even if the Jews do not believe." Athanasius, *Incarnation*, 131.

¹⁷⁷ Meyer, "Salvation," 150; Cf. Athanasius, *Incarnation*, 93-95.

¹⁷⁸ Anatolios, *Athanasius*, 75.

¹⁷⁹ Behr, *Incarnation*, 37. Athanasius writes, "But now he comes, condescending towards us in his love for human beings and his manifestation." Athanasius, *Incarnation*, 67. This theme of God acting out of love directly impacts Athanasius' position against Arius, for "the debate concerns two alternative readings of salvation which respectively identify two very different characterizations of the nature of the Son in relation to the benefits of his work. Either the Son is by nature the true God who humbled himself in order to bring about our exaltation, so that his salvific work is the result of the abasement that he undertakes for our benefit; or he was himself 'promoted' to divinity as a reward for his work in the flesh. The choice then is between the *God of loving condescension* and the *self-promoting, upwardly mobile God!*" Anatolios, *Athanasius*, 53-54, emphasis mine.

our renewal in this life and our transformation from lives of darkness to light, from corruption to incorruption, from sinners to sons and daughters of God. The Word who created and redeemed us is the same Word who becomes our co-worker in the life of sanctification and by his grace through the Holy Spirit renders us holy. Our transformation – our deification, as Athanasius prefers to put it – and our lives of holiness serve as a testimony and witness to the world of Christ's victory.¹⁸⁰

Therefore, the work of Christ at the cross is efficacious immediately.¹⁸¹

Christ's death at the cross is critical for understanding the efficacy of Christ's work, but Athanasius' concept of salvation looks to the entire life of Jesus Christ as the

offering to the Father on our behalf. 'He humbled himself' Athanasius says 'in taking our body of humiliation, and took a servant's form, putting on that flesh which was enslaved to sin'. He became a servant instead of us and on our behalf and in this same flesh 'He sanctifies himself to the Father for our sakes ... that he himself may *in himself* sanctify us that he may become righteousness for us, and that we may be exalted in him, and that we may enter the gates of heaven which he has also opened for us'. In other words Christ's whole life of obedient sonship lived in the power of the Spirit is a life lived *for others*, and not just a preparation for death on the cross. It is only insofar as we are united to the one true Son in his *humanity* that we have access to the Father, who when he looks upon us sees us not as we are in ourselves, but as we are clothed with the righteousness of his Son. Thus, says Athanasius, 'because of our relationship to his body, we too ... are made God's sons.'¹⁸²

Salvation, from the beginning to the end, is God's work; as such, "the Gospel stands or falls, then, on the singularity of Christ's soteriological Sonship, which is, of course, the point made by the *homoousios to patri* of the Nicene Creed ('of one substance with the Father')."¹⁸³ The means of salvation is the Word Incarnate alone.

¹⁸⁰ Beckwith, "Athanasius," 154.

¹⁸¹ It is through Jesus Christ, the God-Man, who identifies with humanity and dies for them, that humanity's encounter with the Logos is immediately restored. Meyer, "Salvation," 167-168. Declaring the immediacy of Christ's work, Athanasius also projects His continuing work in the lives of believers. He rhetorically asks: "Or how, if he is not acting – for this is a property of one dead – does he stop those active and alive so that the adulterer no longer commits adultery, the murderer no longer murders, the unjust is no longer grasps greedily, and the impious is henceforth pious?" Athanasius, *Incarnation*, 115.

¹⁸² Hart, "Soteriological Traditions," 253-254.

¹⁸³ Andrew Purves, "The Ministry of the Priesthood of Jesus Christ: A Reformed View of the Atonement of Christ," *Theology Matters* 3, no. 4 (July/August 1997): 1.

Recall briefly Athanasius' analysis of God's dilemma in relation to the problem of humanity's corruption. The effects of salvation correlate to the way in which he constructs the dilemma. First, God's salvific action, through the Word Incarnate, appeased His own law, "having legislated that the human being would die by death if he were to transgress the commandment."¹⁸⁴ Therefore, death on behalf of all was a requirement of salvation.¹⁸⁵ God, in the person of Jesus Christ, appeased this sentence by dying as a human.¹⁸⁶ Critical to this reasoning is the full humanity and full divinity of Christ. And so Athanasius argues for both.¹⁸⁷ The effect of God's decision to bring about humanity's salvation in this way is that the faithful in Christ "no longer die by death as before according to the threat of the law, for such condemnation has ceased."¹⁸⁸ The effect on the commanded punishment for humanity's rejection is that it is fully satisfied and thus, "if formerly death was strong, and therefore fearsome, but is now despised, after the sojourn of the Savior and after the death and resurrection of his body, clearly it is by him, the Christ who was raised upon the cross, that death has been destroyed and conquered."¹⁸⁹

¹⁸⁴ Athanasius, *Incarnation*, 63.

¹⁸⁵ Athanasius, *Incarnation*, 95.

¹⁸⁶ Athanasius explains, "For the Word, realizing that in no other way would the corruption of human beings be undone except, simply, by dying, yet being immortal and the Son of the Father the Word was not able to die, for this reason he takes to himself a body capable of death, in order that it, participating in the Word who is above all, might be sufficient for death on behalf of all, and through the indwelling Word would remain incorruptible, and so corruption might henceforth cease from all by the grace of the resurrection. Whence, by offering holy and free of all spot, he immediately abolished death from all like him, by the offering of a like." Athanasius, *Incarnation*, 69. In effect, "Coming himself into our realm, and dwelling in a body like the others, every design of the enemy against human beings has henceforth ceased, and the corruption of death, which had prevailed formerly against them, perished. For the race of human beings would have been utterly dissolved had not the Master and Savior of all, the Son of God, come for the completion of death." Athanasius, *Incarnation*, 69.

¹⁸⁷ Cf. Athanasius, *Incarnation*, 89, 95; Athanasius, *Incarnation*, 103.

¹⁸⁸ Athanasius, *Incarnation*, 95.

¹⁸⁹ Athanasius, *Incarnation*, 111. It is the appeasement of God's death sentence over humanity that the Western tradition has typically elevated, as exemplified by writers such as Augustine, Anselm, and later Reformers like Martin Luther.

Second, God's salvific action, through the Word Incarnate, rescues His own creation from complete corruption, for it was incorrect that God's good creation would return to non-being and it was not suitable that the devil claim victory over that which was created good.¹⁹⁰ Athanasius determines that the work of Christ "befitted the goodness of God."¹⁹¹ As a result of God's action, His human creations "no longer die as those condemned, but as those who will arise do we await the common resurrection of all."¹⁹² Life, for the believer, turns instantaneously from certain mortal death to promised immortality with God.

Third, God's salvific action, through the Word Incarnate, honors God Himself by maintaining His Sovereignty over creation.¹⁹³ Humanity, in no way, had the capacity to reverse the downward spiral to non-being. No attempt could settle the score. Thus, it was necessary for God to act by continuing to sustain the world. Athanasius describes the unique position of the Word of God,

as being in all creation, he is in essence outside everything but inside everything by his own power, arranging everything, and unfolding his own providence in everything to all things, and giving life to each thing and to all things together, containing the universe and not being contained, but being wholly in every respect,

¹⁹⁰ Athanasius, *Incarnation*, 63.

¹⁹¹ Athanasius, *Incarnation*, 69. Athanasius explains with an analogy, "For if a king constructed a house or a city, and it is attacked by bandits because of the carelessness of its inhabitants, he in no way abandons it, but avenges and saves it as his own work, having regard not for the carelessness of the inhabitants but for his own honor." Athanasius, *Incarnation*, 69, 71. "All the more so," he continues, "the God Word of the all-good Father did not neglect the race of human beings, created by himself, which was going to corruption, but he blotted out the death which had occurred through the offering of his own body, and correcting their carelessness by his own teaching, restoring every aspect of human beings by his own power." Athanasius, *Incarnation*, 71.

¹⁹² Athanasius, *Incarnation*, 73; Cf. 1 Timothy 6:15; Titus 1:3. In demonstration of God's rescue of His creation being finished, Athanasius writes, "when death is played with and despised by those believing in Christ [such as in the act of martyrdom], *let no one any longer doubt, nor be unbelieving, that death has been destroyed by Christ and its corruption dissolved and brought to an end.*" Athanasius, *Incarnation*, 113, emphasis mine. In Athanasius' mind, this work is done and finished. The Word of God, Jesus Christ, has conquered death, past tense.

¹⁹³ Cf. Athanasius, *Incarnation*, 71

in his own Father alone Nor, being in all things, does he partake of all, but rather everything bore life and was nourished by him.¹⁹⁴

Thus, salvation is God's own act.

Fourth, God's salvific action, through the Word Incarnate, restores the image of God in human beings, which means the recovery of His gifts of rationality, the knowledge of Himself, and participation in the power of the Word.¹⁹⁵ By means of revelation God renews His image in humanity, "so that through it human beings would be able to once again know him."¹⁹⁶ Athanasius clearly articulates that the only way this could have occurred was through "the coming of the very image of God, our Savior Jesus Christ."¹⁹⁷ Pointing to John 3:5 he views the effect of salvation in terms of re-creation, for the person is being "born again and recreated in that which is after the image."¹⁹⁸ Valerie A. Karras observes that it is here that the argument for humanity's being and Christ's humanity come to a head. For "the christological definitions of the ecumenical councils are grounded in a relational-ontological [transcendent-immanent] soteriology based on humanity's being *homoousios* (one in essence, substance, or nature) in our humanity with Jesus Christ, who

¹⁹⁴ Athanasius, *Incarnation*, 85, 87.

¹⁹⁵ In contrast to the Western emphasis of Athanasius' first point, this aspect remains the typical emphasis of the Eastern tradition. Unlike the Western concept where "human beings have no natural orientation toward God" the Eastern tradition sees the condition of the fall as broken communication with God and thus confusion hides their natural orientation and so humans fail to move toward God and restore that communication. Valerie A. Karras, "Beyond Justification: An Orthodox Perspective," in *Justification and the Future the Ecumenical Movement: The Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification*, ed. William G. Rusch (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2003), 110. True to his Eastern roots, Athanasius spends the bulk of his time expositing how the Word Incarnate restores the image in humanity and as a result procures knowledge of Him and participation in the Word.

¹⁹⁶ Athanasius, *Incarnation*, 79.

¹⁹⁷ Athanasius, *Incarnation*, 79. He continues, "For neither by human beings was it possible, since they were created 'in the image'; but neither by angels, for they were not even images. So the Word of God came himself, in order that he being the image of the Father (cf. Col. 1.15), the human being 'in the image' might be recreated." Athanasius, *Incarnation*, 79. "For this purpose, then, there was need of none other than the Image of the Father." Athanasius, *Incarnation*, 79.

¹⁹⁸ Athanasius, *Incarnation*, 81.

is in turn *homoousios* with God the Father.”¹⁹⁹ In agreement, Anatolios reiterates that it is for this reason that Athanasius is so persistent in understanding Christ’s work as taking place within the human being.²⁰⁰ Meyer notes that this internal transformation of the Christian is bound together with Paul’s concept of a new Adam.²⁰¹ In this sense, what humanity was created *for* is what they are saved *for*, which begins presently. According to Athanasius, “human beings were created for communion with God through contemplation of his Word and Image, the Savior Jesus Christ.”²⁰²

Through the act of God becoming man “the Word not only renewed humanity but restored its ability to know God ... as humanity had originally been made in the likeness of God, so ‘the Word of God came in His own person, in order that, as He is the Image of His Father, He might be able to restore humanity who is in the image.’”²⁰³ Athanasius sees Christ revealing His Father through miraculous works, though His greatest display is in His death and resurrection, because it is at this point that the Word fully displays God’s love and care for humanity.²⁰⁴ The revelation of God the Father, as manifested in the Incarnate Word, restores for humanity the knowledge of God.

¹⁹⁹ Karras, “Beyond Justification,” 113. Karras maintains then, that, “the soteriology of the ecumenical councils (and hence of Eastern Christianity) is based not on putting us juridically ‘right’ with God, but on the existential healing of human nature through the person of Jesus Christ.” Karras, “Beyond Justification,” 113. One of the ways that Athanasius underscores the “transformed relation between God and creation through Christ is to assert that it is only through Christ’s saving work that humanity attains an ultimate security ... in its communion with God.” Anatolios, *Athanasius*, 62.

²⁰⁰ Anatolios, *Athanasius*, 64.

²⁰¹ Meyer, “Salvation,” 169; Cf. Galatians 3:26, NASB.

²⁰² Behr, *Incarnation*, 27. This is evidence, admits Behr, of the fact that Athanasius “is more concerned to determine, in the light of Christ, what is the proper characteristic or state of human existence, in contrast to what we have actually seen throughout history, rather than to speculate about primordial beginnings.” Behr, *Incarnation*, 27.

²⁰³ Gwynn, *Athanasius*, 68; Cf. Athanasius, *Incarnation*, 77, 79. Restoration requires more than creation, Athanasius explains. For “when nothing at all existed, only a nod and an act of will was needed for the creation of the universe. But when the human being had once been made, and necessity required the healing, not for things that were not, but for things that had come to be, it followed that the healer and Savior had to come among those who had already been created, to heal what existed. He became a human being for this, and used his body as a human instrument.” Athanasius, *Incarnation*, 145, 147.

²⁰⁴ Cf. Athanasius, *Incarnation*, 93; Gwynn, *Athanasius*, 68; Athanasius, *Incarnation*, 85.

The Word Incarnate also procures for humanity participation in the power of the Word. For Athanasius, the unique place that Christ has in mediating the relation between God the Father and humanity enables “direct and immediate access to the Father.”²⁰⁵ Participation in the Word hinges on the gift of God’s image. For human beings to be “created according to the Image is to be granted a participation in the one who is the true and full Image of the Father ... the incarnate Word repaired the image of God in humanity by reuniting it with his own divine imaging of the Father.”²⁰⁶ The reason that this can happen at all is because Jesus Christ stands as “both eternal divine Image and restored human image.”²⁰⁷ In light of this reality, Athanasius’ concept of participation in the Word is transformed in the event of the Incarnation.²⁰⁸ Where previously human ascent, by contemplation of God, was the primary mode of participating in the Word, after the Incarnation it was placed within the humanity of the Word; thus, a monumental shift occurred. With clarity, Anatolios summarizes this alternative reality, stating that

While Athanasius’s doctrine of creation emphasizes that humanity’s ontological vulnerability is due to its origination from nothing, his articulation of Christian salvation indicates that the definitive ‘remaining’ in divine grace and humanity’s new access to this grace ‘from within’ constitutes nothing less than a ‘new origin’ for humanity. *Humanity’s origin from nothing is now ‘transferred’ into the humanity of the Word himself, whose sacrificial death has destroyed the intrinsic bond, confirmed by sin, between humanity and nothingness:* ‘For by the sacrifice of his own body he both put an end to the law which lay over us, and renewed for us the origin of life by giving hope of the resurrection.’ Thus, whereas apart from the Incarnation, human existence is a movement of receptivity from nothingness to

²⁰⁵ Anatolios, *Retrieving Nicaea*, 107.

²⁰⁶ Anatolios, *Retrieving Nicaea*, 107.

²⁰⁷ Anatolios, *Retrieving Nicaea*, 107. As a result, Athanasius emphasizes “the continuity of immediate connections between God and humanity” by showing an “abhorrence of obstacles and opaque mediation.” Anatolios, *Retrieving Nicaea*, 107.

²⁰⁸ It is significant to note that participation in the Word prior to the Incarnation as well as after is both explicitly *from God* in Athanasius’ treatment. For example, originally humanity was gifted participation in the power of the Word. That gift was lost with the descent of humankind into corruption, but with the Incarnation, through the identifiableness of Christ’s humanity with human being’s humanity, participation in the Word was restored by God.

God, a movement that always threatens to relapse into nothingness, *those who are united in Christ 'now have the origin of their receiving in him and through him.'*²⁰⁹

This shift has tremendous implications for how one is to understand the Christian life, good works, and particularly participation by way of deification.

Gwynn observes that scholars typically describe Athanasius' concept of "participation in God" as *deification* or *divinization*. But, siding with Gwynn's analysis, Athanasius did not seem to mean what those two words often connote. Gwynn argues that Athanasius did not hold to the belief that humans become gods in the same way that God is God, "but through participation with the divine Word, made possible by the Incarnation, humanity could be made perfect and free from sin and preserve the knowledge and unity with God that was lost when men and women turned away into error."²¹⁰ His concept of participation in God depicts the process of humanity becoming more like Christ. Thus, categorizing Athanasius in terms of following the doctrine of *theosis* or *deification* remains ineffective without a closer look at his system of thought, which illuminates his theory by logical argument rather than weighted terminology.²¹¹

Ben C. Blackwell clarifies the discussion by defining the general meaning of deification as present in the works of both Cyril (c. 376 – c. 444) and Irenaeus. He explains that it is

²⁰⁹ Anatolios, *Athanasius*, 66, emphasis mine. A significant difference between Athanasius and Prudentius develops. By this principle, the implications for the Christian life are starkly contrasted. For Athanasius the subsequent action is gratitude; for Prudentius the subsequent action is acts of righteousness.

²¹⁰ Gwynn, *Athanasius*, 69-70. Fairbairn argues that among early fathers there is a view of deification or participation in God that explains it as adoption and therefore sharing in the communion that the "Son of God has with his Father". Donald Fairbairn, "Patristic Soteriology: Three Trajectories," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 50, no. 2 (June 2007): 294. In this view, "God bestows the fullness of divine life in the person of Jesus Christ, and that through the person of Christ and the action of the Holy Spirit [men and women] are made intimate partakers of the living God (*theosis*, divinization)." Catherine M. Lacugna, *God for Us: The Trinity and Christian Life* (New York: HarperCollins, 1993), 3.

²¹¹ For a well-articulated essay on the misinterpretation of Athanasius' perception of divinization see C. R. Strange, "Athanasius on Divinization," *Studia Patristica* 16 (1985): 342-346.

the process of restoring the image and likeness of God, primarily experienced as incorruption and sanctification, through a participatory relationship with God mediated by Christ and the Spirit. Through the Son and the Spirit believers become adopted sons of God, even gods, by grace and not by nature, because they participate in divine attributes.²¹²

By protecting the Creator-created dynamic, believers do not participate in the divine essence, rather they are “transformed by the personal presence of the Spirit and therefore experience the divine attributes.”²¹³ Athanasius ardently maintains the ontological distinction between Creator and created.²¹⁴ Yet, due to the Word’s mediation and identification with humanity,²¹⁵ there is a place for a vibrant and active Christian life. Determined by the grace of Christ and through the power of the Spirit, human beings can participate in God through the process of sanctification.

Through the work of the Word, humanity is given what God intended. Therefore, according to Athanasius, practices like ascetic acts are not the

work of human beings upon themselves, who, by their own efforts, attempt to transcend their human nature to what they consider divine. Rather ... it reflects the possibility, opened by Christ in his Passion, to have communion with God, and embody the Word. This is a possibility which is only actualised by the free and unconstrained grace of God, but also, as we have seen, only through the free application and struggle of human beings; it is, on the one hand, the work of human beings, but, on the other, that which makes it fruitful is solely the work of God.²¹⁶

Much in the same way, baptized believers witness to the indwelling of the Word by practicing “virtues as chastity, sobriety, civil harmony, fortitude, charity, and most

²¹² Ben C. Blackwell, *Christosis, Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament 2, Reihe 314* (Tubingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2011), 253.

²¹³ Blackwell, *Christosis*, 253.

²¹⁴ Anatolios asserts that “Athanasius can rely precisely on his ontology to make the point that whereas our whole being is a participation in God, our nature is still absolutely distinct and ‘external’ to God, not because we have any ‘structure’ which is ‘of itself’ independent of God, but because we participate in God ‘from nothing.’” Anatolios, *Coherence*, 208-209.

²¹⁵ For Athanasius, participation in God is determined by the sacrificial transaction that takes place at the cross and by His humanness so that He can legitimately represent all of humanity before God. Meyer, “Salvation,” 151-152.

²¹⁶ Behr, *Incarnation*, 46.

important of all, martyrdom.”²¹⁷ Therefore, all that encompasses the Christian life is the believer’s witness to the work of the Word and his or her active participation in the salvation that was accomplished at the cross and in the resurrection of Christ.

In telling of the redemption of humanity, Athanasius’ focus remains on the immediacy of Christ’s work, as the cross symbolizes the climax of God’s salvation narrative. Even so, he projects an understanding of the salvation experience that continues for believers. His emphasis is not eschatological, for salvation in its fullness begins in time and in history. But, there is a clear optimism and anticipation of the resurrection to come, which is hoped for only by the resurrection of Christ’s body. He reasons, “But since the Savior’s raising the body, no longer is death fearsome, but all believers in Christ tread on it as nothing, and would rather choose to die than deny their faith in Christ. For they really know that when they die they are not destroyed, but both live and become incorruptible through the resurrection.”²¹⁸ For his purposes, expressing the future hope of the resurrection allows Athanasius to reiterate the victory over death that has already been won by Christ, the Incarnate Word.

Renewal for Athanasius, though it is an outcome of salvation, is not simply reverting to an original condition. The Incarnation has transformed even the concept of renewal. As a created being, humanity originally possessed an ontological instability; by nature they were susceptible to returning to non-being. As a result of the Incarnation, Athanasius underscores “the definitive stability and security worked by Christ.”²¹⁹ Also, through Jesus Christ’s similitude with humanity and His divine essence, He was able to

²¹⁷ Athanasius, *Incarnation*, 51, 52.

²¹⁸ Athanasius, *Incarnation*, 109.

²¹⁹ Anatolios, *Athanasius*, 61.

accomplish salvation for humanity by way of the “‘internality’ of divine grace.”²²⁰ As a result of this phenomenon, the nature of the human person is found in Jesus, and therefore the divine Christ transforms it.²²¹

Conclusion

Driven to sharpen the understanding of Jesus Christ, Athanasius does so from a basic concern for God’s plan of salvation. He contemplates the Incarnation of the Word and declares it to be foreordained and singularly unrivaled. Athanasius argues that the salvation of humanity, the solution to the problem of sin, cannot be understood simply in terms of a man dying for the world; the man had to be “the eternal and true Son and Word of the Father.”²²² It is from his redemptive first-principle that the early church father is able to give full expression to the person of Christ as He is confessed in the Nicene theology of the fourth century.

²²⁰ Anatolios, *Athanasius*, 61.

²²¹ Anatolios, *Athanasius*, 61.

²²² Gwynn, *Athanasius*, 70.

Chapter 2

Prudentius' Soteriology as Presented in his *Liber Cathemerinon*

Introduction

In order to speak intelligently to the alignment of Prudentius' soteriology with Nicaea, this study required a clear expression of Nicene soteriology. The previous chapter engaged fourth-century salvation theologies and their relation to the Nicene conversations. For clarity and definition, Athanasius, in his double work *Against the Gentiles-On the Incarnation*, has articulated best the salvific thrust to the Christological confessions of Nicaea. It is from a cohesive expression of God's redemptive plan for creation through the divine Word that he is able to argue for the confessions of Nicaea. Therefore, looking to Athanasius' soteriological vision, as it represents the spirit of Nicene soteriology, a comparative is established.

It is from within his poetical verse that Prudentius explores, wrestles, and discerns the biblical text for himself and for his reader. Therefore, these poetic texts are used to trace his interpretive decisions, which indicate his hermeneutical strategies. A preliminary excursus engages directly with Prudentius' use of biblical narrative in his *Liber Cathemerinon* in order to establish his predominant hermeneutical influence and method.²²³ The results demonstrate that the poet's intellectual heritage and hermeneutical approach can be placed within the Alexandrian tradition of the early church. Moving forward, this influence necessarily dictates his worldview and consequently his theological convictions. It is from this juncture that the new chapter begins. In order to establish Prudentius' understanding of salvation narrowly, first his perception of God and His interaction with the world must be understood broadly.

²²³ For this discussion see appendix 1.

The Broader Theological Framework and Overall Motifs

Steeped in the traditions of the early church, Prudentius holds to a biblical and creedal overarching Gospel narrative. As if in familiar liturgical rhythm, his poetry retells God's creation act, Adam and Eve's disobedience, the fall of all creation, redemption through the person of Christ, and the world's movement toward its final consummation at Christ's second coming.²²⁴ More specifically, God is upheld as the initiator of all creation, and He has placed it under human responsibility as an illustration of humankind's subservient relation to God.²²⁵ In contrast to this intended order, the fall marks a disastrous interruption in the God-human relationship.²²⁶ By Adam and Eve's act of disobedience sin is born and consequently stains the entire human race, henceforth, rendering humans as the enemies of God.²²⁷ Prudentius believes that nothing but death can remedy the guilt of sin, and thus he tells of Christ as the Second Man.²²⁸ He sees Satan at the centre of evil that, in turn, affects the entire cosmos.²²⁹ As such, the devil "exercises dominion over humankind."²³⁰ Sin breeds a tension that manifests itself by way of humanity's allegiance.

²²⁴ McKelvie, "Cosmic," 6. Particularly expressive of this broad narrative is *A Hymn Before Meat*.

²²⁵ Prudentius reasons, "For He has given all things to man, and we take them with a hand that bears dominion; all that sky or earth or sea produces in air or flood or field, all this has He put under me, and me under Himself." Prudentius, *Liber Cathemerinon*, Loeb, III.36-40.

²²⁶ Prudentius retells that the "treacherous serpent beguiled the simple heart of the maid to seduce her male partner and make him eat of the forbidden fruit," as a result both parties were sentenced to death. Prudentius, *Liber Cathemerinon*, Loeb, III.111-114.

²²⁷ As a result of Adam and Eve's disobedience, "succeeding generations are corrupted and rush into sin, and through copying their primitive ancestors, lumping right and wrong together, pay with death for their rebellious deeds." Prudentius, *Liber Cathemerinon*, Loeb, III.131-135. In light of this initial incident, the early church fathers tended to view sin as any "freely committed disobedience against God." Roch A. Kereszty, *Jesus Christ: Fundamentals of Christology* (New York: Alba House, 2002), 197.

²²⁸ Prudentius, *Liber Cathemerinon*, Loeb, III.131-145. In this way, he reiterates Paul's claim in Romans 8:19-22 that all of creation is longing for salvation and for the re-uniting of its intended relationship with God. For "All things rough and rude were conscious of Thy birth, O Child; even the hardness of stone was overcome and clothed the rocks with grass." Prudentius, *Liber Cathemerinon*, Loeb, XI.69-72.

²²⁹ Despite "a colorful invocation of the devil's power to lead humans astray, Prudentius ultimately lays the blame for sin upon human kind and its flawed will – 'our sins are generated from our own minds' – that is, the free will given to humans by God the creator." Conybeare, "Sanctum," 226-227; Cf. McKelvie, "Cosmic," 14.

²³⁰ Kereszty, *Jesus*, 198.

However, Christ's death and resurrection overturns this unnatural allegiance and reverts creation's order back to its original design.

The Problem: Sin and the Human Person

The world's colossal problem is fundamentally Prudentius' chief concern.²³¹ Sin has disjointed humanity's relationship with God and altered the order of creation.²³²

Although attuned to the cosmic effects of sin, the poet's attention in the *Liber Cathemerinon* is narrowed.²³³ Prudentius' lyrics are consumed with the effects of sin on the individual human being.²³⁴ However, the poet's angst cannot be fully sensed unless understood alongside his own perception of the individual.

The human is made up of two distinct parts, body and soul. It is the union of these two parts that defines humanity and the dissolution of its parts that defines its earthly end.²³⁵ The soul is a created entity, "made by the mouth of God ... adorned with qualities divine, filled with God, and like its creator, yet not itself God, since it is not a begetting but

²³¹ Prudentius' "doctrinal focus of the *Hamartigenia* is concerned with a true understanding of the problem of evil and the consequences of sin in the world." Dykes, *Reading*, 4-5. Moreover, in his brief exposition of Prudentius lines of soteriology, Padovese exemplifies the poet's fixation on the issues of sin as he walks through Prudentius' obvious themes: the sin of the first parents, the effect of original sin, and the Lordship of the demon of man. Padovese, "Soteriologia," 360-390.

²³² In contrast to creation's intended order (as reiterated in III.31-80), Prudentius lays out humanity's predicament due to sin. Adam and Eve are "Trembling before God for the guilt they felt, they were driven out from the abode of innocence, and the woman, till then unwedded, came under a husband's rule and was commanded to submit to stern laws. The wicked serpent, too, that devised the guile, was condemned to have its three-tongued head bruised by the woman's heel; so the serpent was under the woman's foot, as the woman under the man." Prudentius, *Liber Cathemerinon*, Loeb, III.121-130.

²³³ In the *Hamartigenia* Prudentius echoes Romans 8:20-22 and views sin in the context of a colossal battle between creation and the powers of darkness, which threaten to capture and enslave the individual. Prudentius, *Hamartigenia*, Loeb, 506-649. This notion is further emphasized in his *Psychomachia*, wherein a battle is described "between personified Vices and Virtues, each fighting and struggling to have dominion over the soul." Dykes, *Reading*, 6.

²³⁴ He petitions before God, "May this light give us a clear day and make us pure to meet it; let us speak no guile and think no dark thought. So may the whole day pass that neither lying tongue, nor hands, nor straying eyes commit sin, nor any guilt stain our body." Prudentius, *Liber Cathemerinon*, Loeb, II.97-104.

²³⁵ God, "by uniting two elements, one living and one dying, together, didst in Thy Fatherhood create man But their sundering apart is the dissolution and the end of man: the dry earth receives his body, the breath of air carries off the pure spirit." Prudentius, *Liber Cathemerinon*, Loeb, X.1-12.

a creation of God.”²³⁶ Similar to Athanasius, Prudentius intentionally maintains a distinction between God and His creation. By its nature, the soul is not divine, although “it is wise and capable of righteousness, and sits like a queen on the throne of the world; it sees before, thinks, takes heed, speaks, contrives words and laws, is furnished with a thousand forms of skill and can traverse the heavens in thought. In these respects the creator fashioned the soul like himself, but otherwise unlike.”²³⁷ Limited and bound is the soul to the body, for “at its birth the foul corruption of the flesh, which is subject to decay, receives it, and when it has passed into the wasting body, makes it partaker of its own impurity. Then sin comes about, because it arises from the mingling of the clay and the pure spirit.”²³⁸ The person of Christ is for humanity the perfect example of how a person can pursue and know things of the spirit (righteousness) while in a mortal frame. The imbibed Greek dichotomy of Plato’s perception of the body and soul seems consistent throughout the *Liber Cathemerinon*.²³⁹ In this sense, sin penetrates a person’s soul by way of the body, marring what was once a pure entity.²⁴⁰ Nevertheless, the soul can be cleansed of its filth through the physical act of baptism, *but* as it continues to exist in communion

²³⁶ Prudentius, *Apotheosis*, Loeb, 788-792.

²³⁷ Prudentius, *Apotheosis*, Loeb, 802-808.

²³⁸ Prudentius, *Apotheosis*, Loeb, 814-819.

²³⁹ For instance, Prudentius writes of divided provisions, for “our bodies and our souls with two several kinds of sustenance Thou dost strengthen and invigorate.” Prudentius, *Liber Cathemerinon*, Loeb, IV.34-36. And separate functions during rest, “while kindly repose spreads through all our body, and as sleep floods it, lulls the heart to rest from labour, the spirit roams free through the air, quick and lively, and in diverse figures sees things that are hidden; for the mind, whose source is heaven and whose pure fount is from the skies, cannot lie idle when it is freed from care.” Prudentius, *Liber Cathemerinon*, Loeb, VI.25-36.

²⁴⁰ In *A Hymn For Cock-Crow* he refers to the “natural light” of a person, which hints at an existence that was once untainted. Prudentius, *Liber Cathemerinon*, Loeb, I.33-36. Bolstering this inference, Prudentius clarifies this notion in his *Apotheosis* as he writes, the soul “was indeed clean at its creation, when it gave life to the raw clay with which it was united, in as much as it received its first disposition from the uncontaminated source of nature and was formed by the divine purity; but then, being bidden to attach itself to the heavy earth, it was too much charmed by agreeable temptations and grew cold, polluting its precious flame with the more, and wickedly transgressing and trampling on God’s ordinance. Such is the soul’s first character. Thus pure at its creation, it fell into sin through unclean alliance with the flesh; then, tainted by the wicked deed of the first man Adam, it infected the whole race of men which springs from him; infant souls at birth have inborn in them the first man’s stains, and none is born sinless.” Prudentius, *Apotheosis*, Loeb, 901-914.

with a body “it draws occasion to sin from the incitements of the flesh, and itself also at the same time provokes sin in its comrade, avenging punishment lays hold of both wrongdoers together since they sin with one mind, and burns the partners in sin with like torments.”²⁴¹ Thus the soul exists in constant struggle, and Prudentius believes it must will to overcome the corrupt temptations of the flesh and try to remember its original state.²⁴² From within this civil war existence, it is reasonable to suggest that the soul experiences varying degrees of sinfulness, as it fluctuates between maintaining its righteousness and succumbing to the corruption of sin. In his *Psychomachia*, Prudentius argues that a perfect human soul is one that is ready for Christian salvation,²⁴³ thus it is the mandate of all individuals to avoid sin and pursue righteousness for the sake of his or her soul and for the sake of his or her salvation.

The Solution: The Incarnate Christ?

The world’s quintessential solution is professed in the language of the creeds, claiming Christ as “a Second Man sent forth from heaven, not of clay as was that one before, but God Himself putting on man without the body’s faults. The Word of the Father becomes living flesh; pregnant by the shining Godhead, not by wedlock nor espousal nor allurement of marriage, a maid inviolate bears it.”²⁴⁴ The Incarnation stands as a pivotal act of God because God Himself enters time. It commissions the reversal of sin’s most calamitous effects by offering the ultimate example. Therefore, it is right for Christ to be

²⁴¹ Prudentius, *Apotheosis*, Loeb, 927-931. Due to the unique existence of body and soul united, sin remains a constant threat, hence Prudentius’ considerable unease.

²⁴² Prudentius, *Liber Cathemerinon*, Loeb, X.25-32.

²⁴³ Marc Mastrangelo, *The Roman Self in Late Antiquity: Prudentius and the Poetics of the Soul* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2008), 82.

²⁴⁴ Prudentius, *Liber Cathemerinon*, Loeb, III.136-145.

the central figure in Prudentius' work.²⁴⁵ The foremost example is *A Hymn For Every Hour*, which reads like an ode to Christ, who grounds the Gospel narrative. Christ is proclaimed as the very Word of God,²⁴⁶ the Son of the Father, and eternal Wisdom.²⁴⁷ With all confidence, Prudentius heralds the Incarnate Christ as the "leader of salvation."²⁴⁸

In the knowledge of Prudentius' overarching theological structure, his conclusions about salvation can be properly placed. Affirming God's cosmic plan of redemption, the *Liber Cathemerinon* rests its attention on individual deliverance.²⁴⁹ Salvation is complete *rescue from* the devil's domination, death, and the second death.²⁵⁰ God, through His Son, initiates the possibility of future salvation for all humans by dying and conquering the

²⁴⁵ He writes, "He alone shall be my Muse's theme, Him alone my lyre shall praise." Prudentius, *Liber Cathemerinon*, Loeb, IX.3.

²⁴⁶ He declares, "O NAZARENE, Light of Bethlehem, Word of the Father, offspring of a virgin's womb." Prudentius, *Liber Cathemerinon*, Loeb, VII.1-2.

²⁴⁷ Prudentius affirms, "Thou didst come from the mouth of the Father and wert born of the Word, yet in the Father's heart as Wisdom Thou hadst understanding aforetime. Wisdom coming forth established the heavens, the heavens and the day and all things else; by the power of the Word were all these made, for the Word was God. But when the ages were appointed and the world set in order, the Creator and Artificer himself remained in the bosom of the Father, until the thousands of years should roll past and He himself deign to visit a world long given to sin." Prudentius, *Liber Cathemerinon*, Loeb, XI.17-32. Moreover, praising Christ's eternal nature he writes, "Recognise, O Child, the clear emblems of Thy power and sovereignty, Thou for whom the Father fore-ordained a threefold nature." Prudentius, *Liber Cathemerinon*, Loeb, XII.65-68.

²⁴⁸ Prudentius, *Liber Cathemerinon*, Loeb, XII.80. Adopting Nicaea's overt Christological theology, Prudentius also claims the creedal statements regarding the Trinitarian relationship of the Godhead. W. Evenepoel, "Explanatory and Literary Notes on Prudentius' *Hymnus Ante Somnum*," *Revue Belge de Philologie et d'Histoire* 56 (1978): 63. In a few examples he proclaims, "Be present, most high Father, whom no man hath seen at any time, and Christ the Word of the Father, and Thou, kindly Spirit; O Thou who in this Trinity art one essence and one light, God of God everlasting, and God sent forth of both"; "The Spirit reigns eternal, He whom both Christ and His Father have sent"; "Christ our Lord and Thy only-begotten, who from His Father's heart breathes the Comforter; through whom Thy glory and honour and praise and wisdom, Thy majesty and goodness and love extend Thy kingdom with its three-fold Godhead, uniting age to age for ever and ever." Prudentius, *Liber Cathemerinon*, Loeb, VI.1-8; IV.14-15; and V.159-164.

²⁴⁹ This individualistic focus is the context by which his *Psychomachia* is also written. John Petruccione, "Prudentius' Portrait of St. Cyprian: An Idealized Biography," *Revue des Etudes Augustiniennes* 36 (1990): 231.

²⁵⁰ He writes overtly, "'Away,' [Christ] cries, 'with beds that belong to sickness, sleep, and sloth.'" Prudentius, *Liber Cathemerinon*, Loeb, I.5-6. He also describes deliverance from the second death as he writes, "He puts on the shape of mortal body, members doomed to die, so that the race that sprang from the first man's stock should not perish though the law of sin had plunged him deep in hell." Prudentius, *Liber Cathemerinon*, Loeb, IX.16-18.

powers of darkness. Therefore, Christ's death is an act of deliverance.²⁵¹ Recall that the individual soul is trapped by sin because it yields to the domination of Satan over humanity. Thus, Christ delivers humanity from sin and overthrows the domination of Satan, but the actualization of salvation and its effects are given to the future. As such, the hope of a future salvation instilled by His triumphant rescue (in historical time) subdues the immediate expiatory work of Christ done at the cross (for all time). As a result, Christ's muted work requires significant human agency for the atonement of sin before the time of the *parousia* and ultimately for the assurance of individual salvation. Christ's death provides hope to a sinful race. Hope, for Prudentius, expresses the potential of salvation, not the guarantee.²⁵² The coming of Christ, then, conquers the dominion of the devil over humanity and opens the way for humans to step back into a right relationship with God.

This chapter argues that despite Prudentius' bold Nicene-confessions of the Incarnate Christ as humanity's salvific solution, his *Liber Cathemerinon* exhibits a fixation on the problem of human sin and its effect on individual salvation. In consequence, three major hallmarks of Prudentius' thought arise: an underwhelming notion of Christ's atoning work done at the cross, a movement toward a synergistic model of salvation, and an anticipation of a future salvation that is actualized only at the eschaton. To demonstrate these conclusions, observations and analysis will follow through a discussion of his perceived means, effects, and final results of salvation.

²⁵¹ Deliverance is described in terms of rescue, for humans "had fallen into the power of the false robber, made over their soul to him, and plunged it in the smoking pit." Prudentius, *Liber Cathemerinon*, Loeb, XI.37-40.

²⁵² He affirms, "Wood it is whereby bitter things taste sweeter; for it is when fixed on the cross that men's hope is strong." Prudentius, *Liber Cathemerinon*, Loeb, V.95-96.

The Means of Salvation

For Prudentius, God is affirmed as the ultimate authority. Therefore, He is rightly depicted as the author of, and invitation to, salvation.²⁵³ The hymns declare this in terms of His ability to control. For example, reflecting on his aged life, Prudentius states, “by now what God is adding to my days is on the border of old age.”²⁵⁴ In *A Hymn for the Lighting of the Lamp*, he asserts God’s sovereign reign by professing, “CREATOR of the glowing light, our kindly guide, who dost divide the times in a fixed order of seasons.”²⁵⁵ Furthermore, God is exalted as Governor,²⁵⁶ Creator,²⁵⁷ Provider²⁵⁸ and Sustainer.²⁵⁹ All titles warrant Prudentius’ belief that God is the source of all good and light.²⁶⁰ It is the person of Christ who is identified as the proclaimer of humanity’s salvation. For “Our sins, like foul night, make us lie snoring; *but the voice of Christ from the height of heaven teaches and forewarns us that daylight is near.*”²⁶¹

Authorship, for Prudentius, sets the stage for a particular perspective of salvation. For example, God is understood as a transcendent initiator, who has put everything in order for the plan of salvation to work. The potential for humanity to be saved is available, but

²⁵³ For instance, “now Christ, the awakener of our souls, *calls us* to life.” Prudentius, *Liber Cathemerinon*, Loeb, I.3-4, emphasis mine.

²⁵⁴ Prudentius, *Preface*, Loeb, 4-5.

²⁵⁵ Prudentius, *Liber Cathemerinon*, Loeb, V.1-2.

²⁵⁶ For example, “may all things grave or light, our talk, our merriment, all that we are or do, be governed by the threefold love from on high.” Prudentius, *Liber Cathemerinon*, Loeb, III.18-20.

²⁵⁷ For instance, “Thy hand, then, it was, O Holy One, that made us from the moist earth. After His own image He made us, and that our substance might be perfected, breathed with His mouth into us the breath of life.” Prudentius, *Liber Cathemerinon*, Loeb, III.96-100.

²⁵⁸ To illustrate, “What trumpet or lyre of old, with famous music of wind or strings, could fitly praise the work of Him who is rich and almighty, and all that is provided for man’s enjoyment?” Prudentius, *Liber Cathemerinon*, Loeb, III.81-85.

²⁵⁹ As an example, “For the breath that is warm within me, for the blood that pulses unseen in my heart, for the tongue enscathed within my mouth and beating nimbly on its sounding chamber, let me praise the Father on high.” Prudentius, *Liber Cathemerinon*, Loeb, III.91-95.

²⁶⁰ He writes, “So our halls shine, Father, with Thy gifts of noble flame; their emulous light plays the part of day when it has gone, and night with torn mantle flees before it in defeat. But who would not discern that the swift light has its source on high and flows from God?” Prudentius, *Liber Cathemerinon*, Loeb, V.25-30.

²⁶¹ Prudentius, *Liber Cathemerinon*, Loeb, I.27-31, emphasis mine.

God, in this case, tends to remain aloof and therefore human agency takes on a large role in carrying out salvation. Though its effects are tempered by his fear of sin, Prudentius does profess the Incarnational event as the solution to humanity's problem. As a result, God offers salvation as a possibility for all. It is the Incarnation that proclaims Christ as both God and man. For, "He himself wears the work He made, and the creator thinks no shame to bear what He brought to being, I mean the body and the living soul. The body He had shaped with his fingers, soul He breathed upon it with his mouth."²⁶² As a result of God putting on flesh, Christ becomes the Savior of all humanity.²⁶³ Prudentius claims total dependence on the person of Christ for the hope of salvation because without the act of God it would not be an option.²⁶⁴ McKelvie's conclusion that "Prudentius' Incarnational approach to poetry is the hallmark of his poetic achievement"²⁶⁵ is thus only partially true. Clearly, Prudentius returns to the Incarnational event as that which made possible the salvation of humanity, but that single premise does not specify whether or not he sees Christ *alone* as the means of salvation.

As it has been established, God is the initiator of humanity's justification (right standing before God), but its attainment rests significantly on human action as it collaborates with God's invitation to salvation. Ultimately, Prudentius' hope of individual salvation (deliverance from sin, death, and the torments of hell) is gauged by his own capacity to ward off sin and pursue righteousness. In the prologue he describes a "profound crisis of conscience" that prompts him to leave his civil responsibilities and "consecrate the

²⁶² Prudentius, *Apotheosis*, Loeb, 776-778.

²⁶³ It is to Christ that Prudentius pleads, "with bright look turn Thy saving face, and with gladsome countenance shine upon us." Prudentius, *Liber Cathemerinon*, Loeb, III.6-8.

²⁶⁴ He writes, "Without Thee, Lord, nought is sweet, and appetite finds no relish unless Thy grace, O Christ, first flavour cups and food, while faith sanctifies all." Prudentius, *Liber Cathemerinon*, Loeb, III.11-15.

²⁶⁵ McKelvie, "Cosmic," 130.

rest of his days to praising God in poetry.”²⁶⁶ The individual Christian life becomes a necessary part of the atoning work, functioning to secure a person’s right standing before God and an eternal future.

Prudentius identifies profitable actions with their motivation. In other words, actions can be self-promoting or for God’s sake. As an example, his *Preface* begins with a focus on actions that are self-promoting, and his initial question infers that self-propelling or sinful actions are not profitable: “What profitable thing have I done in all this length of time?”²⁶⁷ The rhetorical answer is intended to suggest – nothing. Going on to list all of his life’s work he rests again on a new question: “Will such things, good or bad, be of any profit after my flesh is dead, when death shall have wiped out all that I was?”²⁶⁸ In response to himself, he argues “It must be said to me: ‘Whosoever thou art, thy soul hath lost the world it cherished [in other words, count it all as loss, for your efforts belonged to the world]; not to God, who will claim thee as His, belong the things for which it was zealous.’”²⁶⁹ Therefore, Prudentius reasons that he ought to make up for that which he did not do, if good deeds are profitable in life and death. In the former statement, Prudentius realizes that his youth and worldly efforts are meaningless. In the latter statement, a person’s actions have no bearing on their favorable status before God. A clue to the direction of Prudentius’ thought exists in his final charge: “Yet as my last end draws near *let my sinning soul put off her folly. With voice at least let her honour God, if with good deeds she cannot.*”²⁷⁰ The course of action that this poet has decided to participate in is to spend the rest of his life committed to making up for the time he wasted on worldly

²⁶⁶ Di Berardino, *Patrology*, 281.

²⁶⁷ Prudentius, *Preface*, Loeb, 6.

²⁶⁸ Prudentius, *Preface*, Loeb, 29-30.

²⁶⁹ Prudentius, *Preface*, Loeb, 31-33.

²⁷⁰ Prudentius, *Preface*, Loeb, 34-36.

endeavors. His actions are now turned to praise, worship, and toward the advancement of the faith, which, in his view, are profitable because they are for God's sake.²⁷¹ But, does Prudentius believe they are necessary for salvation?

Baptism

Water baptism is a necessary response to God's invitation to salvation. McKelvie considers that *A Hymn of the Fasting* presents an order to salvation, rather than a chronological order, whereby baptism is a valuable part.²⁷² "Elijah's asceticism," Prudentius writes, "brings him to personal perfection and Moses, a prophet of his people, prays and fasts, but finally John announces the coming kingdom, forgiving sins through baptism."²⁷³ Striking similarities arise between Prudentius and Tertullian as they seek to understand the role of baptism in the Christian life. For Tertullian a deep moralism

appears in the view that the sinner by repentance earns for [him/herself] salvation in baptism ... [he/she] regards God as Lawgiver and Judge, who looks upon sin as a transgression and guilt, and therefore demands satisfaction, and in lieu of satisfaction inflicts punishment. Sin committed after baptism require satisfaction by penance. If this is rendered, the punishment is warded off.²⁷⁴

²⁷¹ Dykes argues that Prudentius' "own conception of his verse and its function is that he is a humble servant, lacking in moral worth, who nonetheless makes a sacrifice of what he has. It will be an offering to God. Prudentius believes that poetry can be an appropriate means of personal sanctification: it can make him, as a writer, holy. Poetry is also a useful and pleasing tool for the instruction and salvation of literate humanity. As he senses the end of his life approaching, he also see his verse as the one way left to him to offer something to God: even if his soul is sinful, his writing will serve to fight against heresy, to open up the catholic faith, to praise the martyrs and honour the Apostles." Dykes, *Reading*, 10. The question remains as to whether Prudentius views himself as justified and subsequently acting as a witness to that event, or if by his writing poetry he adds to his own salvation apart from God's justification.

²⁷² McKelvie, "Cosmic," 42.

²⁷³ McKelvie, "Cosmic," 42.

²⁷⁴ L. Berkhof, *The History of Christian Doctrines* (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1975), 67-68. Evidence of similar thinking appears also in Augustine. For him "The historical life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ are the foundation of the economy of salvation. Moreover, the human mediation which brings a person into contact with these events in faith and the sacraments is also a constitutive element of the economy. To attain the forgiveness of sins, one must believe and be baptized in the death and resurrection of Christ (*Confessions* 5, 9, 16). To receive and retain the Holy Spirit, one must adhere to the Catholic communion." J. Patout Burns, "The Economy of Salvation: Two Patristic Traditions," in *Studies in Early Christianity: A Collection of Scholarly Essays*, eds. Everett Ferguson, David M. Scholer and Paul Corby Finney, vol. 10 (New York: Garland Publishing, 1993), 235.

Prudentius echoes Tertullian strongly as he concludes that baptism is the means by which a person is forgiven of past sin and receives the Holy Spirit.²⁷⁵ The act of baptism, therefore, establishes the new allegiance to Christ (exemplified by works) and sheds the allegiance to the devil (exemplified by sin). McKelvie points to the crux of *A Hymn for Every Hour*, which is the famous crossing of the Red Sea and argues that it “prefigures the great victory on the cross and the harrowing of Hell.”²⁷⁶ In Prudentius’ thinking, the Red Sea is also a type of baptism. *A Hymn for Epiphany* confirms this idea stating, “Moses cleanses the people in the waves in the crossing of the sea and purifies them with sweet waters, and carries before them a pillar of light.”²⁷⁷ Here the poet is underscoring the absolution of past sin through the act of baptism. Water baptism, for Prudentius, functions synergistically with Christ’s work to abolish the sin of the individual person in order that he/she may receive the hope of eternal salvation. Therefore, baptism stands as the rudimentary act of atonement in the Christian life.

Baptism is the moment by which the Holy Spirit enters a person, marking it a pivotal and necessary means of salvation. Prudentius explains,

for in the consecrated stream [John the Baptist] washed clean the marks of old sins, but after he cleansed the tainted bodies the Spirit flowed shining into them from heaven. From this baptism, the stain of sin removed, men came reborn, shining as fair as does rough gold when it is refined, bright as the glistening sheen of silver ore when it is purified and polished.²⁷⁸

²⁷⁵ He recollects, “when we were dipped in Jordan’s stream and our uncleanness was done away.” Prudentius, *Liber Cathemerinon*, Loeb, II.63-64. The poet’s belief in the salvific nature of baptism is present throughout his writings as he explains from his *Apotheosis*, “For without the divine breath of the supreme Lord the earth was dry and not yet fit for healing; but since the pure Spirit issuing from the heavenly lips besprinkled a virgin’s soil, it has the power to heal; from thence it draws sap, and with its clinging moisture spreads salvation, and pours in the light of day when it is washed in baptism.” Prudentius, *Apotheosis*, Loeb, 692-697.

²⁷⁶ McKelvie, “Cosmic,” 45.

²⁷⁷ Prudentius, *Liber Cathemerinon*, Loeb, XII.166-168. Concurring, Daniélou views the Exodus as representing both “Christ’s victory over Hell, and the Sacramental Baptism.” J. Daniélou, *From Shadows to Reality: Studies in the Biblical Typology of the Fathers* (London: Burns & Oates, 1960), 153-217.

²⁷⁸ Prudentius, *Liber Cathemerinon*, Loeb, VII.72-80.

Upon entrance of the Holy Spirit, a person is purified, cleansed from past sin and marked for salvation.²⁷⁹ Prudentius explains that as the Holy Spirit dwells in a human being, sin cannot enter there, but if it does, the Spirit will depart.²⁸⁰

Repentance and Penance

The author's depiction of the Holy Spirit coming and going from a human soul is intriguing. On one hand, it underscores the negative effect that sin has on God's own being. On the other hand, it conveys that sin has not yet been fully conquered by God and thus, He is driven from sin's presence. Consequently, it is critical for one to avoid sin as to avoid losing the Spirit of God, which is the assurance of salvation in Prudentius' soteriology. Concern on the part of the individual to remain free of sin in order to retain the Spirit of God necessitates the acts of repentance and penance.²⁸¹ It is reasonable to suggest that Prudentius believes that only a person who houses the Spirit of God can pass from this life into eternal salvation. Therefore, repentance and penance are necessary to take care of post-baptismal sin. If one follows Prudentius' logic, any act that cleanses the soul from sin in order to retain the indwelling of the Spirit of God is necessary for salvation. For this

²⁷⁹ As a picture of this reality Prudentius prays, "But thou, O Christ, put sleep to flight / And break the iron bands of night / Free us from burden of past sin / And shed Thy morning rays within." Prudentius, *Hymns*, I.104-107.

²⁸⁰ He explains that "In His purity He enters chaste hearts, which are consecrated as His temple, smiling brightly when they have drunk deep of God. But if He perceives sin or guile arising in the flesh now dedicated to Him, swiftly He departs as from an unclean shrine. For the disordered conscience burns foully with thick smoke as the fire of sin rages, and its blackness offends and drives away the good. Yet not alone do purity and innocent desire make an everlasting temple for Christ in the depths of the heart within us, but we must beware of the fever of excess that would stuff in food till the mass of it constricted the seat of faith in us. Hearts that spare living leaves unencumbered receive better the inpouring of God; He is the soul's true food and savour." Prudentius, *Liber Cathemerinon*, Loeb, IV.16-33. O'Daly notes that Prudentius begins this poem by presenting the Spirit in Nicene terms, as proceeding from Father and Son, "but then [the Spirit] becomes an undifferentiated divine force entering into the lives of the morally pure." O'Daly, *Linked by Song*, 127. Prudentius' reflections echo the Old Testament perception of the Spirit of the Lord being given and departing. Cf. 1 Sam. 16:14; Psalm 51:11.

²⁸¹ Here is an explicit example of Prudentius' synergistic concept of salvation, for he attempts to assure a future salvation by avoiding sin and pursuing righteousness.

reason, righteous acts, like ascetic disciplines, become the way by which individuals show repentance and gain pardon for their sin. Prudentius aligns with a way of thinking that guarantees the forgiveness of post-baptismal sin and re-establishes the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, so as to reaffirm one's confidence in salvation.²⁸² God remains the power behind forgiveness for the purpose of abolishing the individual's post-baptismal sin, but the focus for Prudentius is reassurance that the soul is cleansed once again and the Spirit remains. The poet maintains an understanding of salvation that is accessed primarily through the continual abolition of sin. In this case he is concerned primarily with individual human sin. Therefore, right standing before God (epitomized by the presence of the Spirit of God), is brought about by the act of baptism and the resultant forgiveness of sin. Without an understanding of Christ's atoning work on the cross that is effectual beyond the limits of time, Prudentius' angst with regard to personal sin is warranted. In addition, his theological construct questions the permanency of God's decision and action toward humanity. Acts of post-baptismal sin repel the Spirit, and affect the soul's status before God. Consequently, salvation is undetermined, ever changing and easily lost. In determining this theological development in Prudentius, it clarifies for his reader his personal interest in writing poetry. He writes with "the hopes of gaining salvation through guiding his soul away from sinful tendencies and by voicing songs in honor to God."²⁸³ One can begin to sense Prudentius' own urgency and anxiety in wanting to secure his own salvation, particularly in light of his focus on the perpetual problem of sin and its effect on the individual soul.

²⁸² Prudentius was not the only one to promote this kind of necessary moralism. Some of the earlier church fathers (i.e., Tertullian, Clement) also found comfort in a works-based system of salvation; however, and more importantly, at its core it deviates from a Pauline doctrine of salvation (Romans 5:1-2, NASB; Ephesians 2:8-9, NASB). Cf. Berkhof, *Christian Doctrines*, 204.

²⁸³ Ballengee, *Wound*, 100-101.

Righteous Acts

The perpetual plea for grace, through righteous acts, which atone for post-baptismal sin, is also a necessary element to gaining and assuring one's salvation. Based upon the Holy Spirit's movement in and out of an individual's life, once again, the continual forgiveness of sin becomes the best guarantee of personal salvation.²⁸⁴ The grace of God, to forgive sin, is obtained through repentance, and is effectual for atoning post-baptismal sin.²⁸⁵ The *Liber Cathemerinon* accentuates a variety of acceptable penitent works, such as ascetic practices,²⁸⁶ penitent prayer, the Lord's Supper, charity, and the sign of the cross.²⁸⁷

²⁸⁴ In Prudentius' *Psychomachia*, he challenges the soul to maintain its separation from sin in order to prepare itself for the second coming of Christ. He writes, "For what does it profit to have driven back with the sword the earth-born regiments of the Sins, if the Son of Man coming down from high heaven and entering the city of the cleansed body finds it unadorned and lacks a shining temple? Hitherto have we labored hard in close battle one after another; now let the white plain dress of quiet peace be active in its tasks, and our soldiers unharnessed hasten to build an abode for holy worship." Prudentius, *Psychomachia*, Loeb, 816-822.

²⁸⁵ Berkhof suggests that the emphasis on repentance as a necessary condition for salvation can be traced to Origen, though he saw it in a less judicial sense than Tertullian. Origen makes it clear that a congregation of believers is the church as there is not salvation found outside of the church. Berkhof, *Christian Doctrines*, 74. This concept does not explicitly come out in Prudentius' *Liber Cathemerinon*, although some ways of obtaining grace reside within the church. Prudentius advocates for penitence as a necessary appeal for God's grace and in the event that He finds it pleasing, He will grant forbearance. He explains, "Moved by such penitence, full soon / God's grace repealed the stern decree / And curbed His righteous wrath; for aye, / When man repents, His clemency / Is swift to pardon and to hear / His children weeping bitterly"; "Yet in His clemency He grants / To penitence a brief delay, / That they might burst the bonds of lust / And put their vanities away; / His sentence given, He waits awhile / And stays the hand upraised to slay." Prudentius, *Hymns*, VII.193-198; VII.115-120.

²⁸⁶ Historically, asceticism was a common form of devotion to Christ, though the more radical ascetical church fathers acted out of an overwhelming sense of Christ's imminent second coming. Therefore, the only true concern for life was to prepare the soul for Christ's return and to do that best one would "withdraw from worldly affairs ... to focus on the otherworldliness." Flüeler, *Laster im Mittelalter*, 31. In like manner, Prudentius praises separation from worldly things, "dreading defilement and corruption from the impure ways of towns." Prudentius, *Liber Cathemerinon*, Loeb, VII.64-65. Again, he emphasizes the significant concern for avoiding sin and the reward of seclusion. He states, "and they say that thus remote and separate from all the noise of the world he put from him a multitude of sins while he enjoyed the pure silence of the desert." Prudentius, *Liber Cathemerinon*, Loeb, VII.28-30.

²⁸⁷ A deviation from the New Testament understanding of salvation is taking place here. Berkhof denotes that "Faith was generally regarded as the outstanding instrument for the reception of the merits of Christ, and was often called the sole means of salvation. It was understood to consist in true knowledge of God, confidence in Him, and self-committal to Him, and to have as its special object Jesus Christ and His atoning blood. This faith, rather than works of the law, was regarded as the means of justification." Berkhof, *Christian Doctrines*, 203-204. There is evidence however, that Prudentius was following a common idea in the early church that repentance, manifested in the form of deeds, was a condition of salvation. As a result,

“Softened by these and the like acts,” Prudentius postulates, “God restrains His short-lived anger and turns propitious, mitigating His awful sentence; for His ready mercy willingly cancels the guilt of men when they humble themselves, and show favour to their tears.”²⁸⁸

These practices cooperate with the death of the Incarnate Christ to wield about salvation for the individual.²⁸⁹ And thus, Ann-Marie Palmer is right to suggest that Prudentius “sees his role as a Christian poet as part of his claim to salvation.”²⁹⁰

Fasting

Fasting is particularly glorified in Prudentius’ *Liber Cathemerinon*. He explains, “Nothing surely is purer than this rite, whereby the heart is enlivened through the cleansing of its tissues, and the intemperate flesh subdued so that fat, exuding the stinking sweat of excess, shall not constrict and choke the mind.”²⁹¹ Fasting is seen as another way to dispel sin, combat the devil’s schemes, and petition for God’s forgiveness.²⁹² Thus, it is another

these deeds are understood to hold “expiatory value in atoning for sins committed after baptism.” Berkhof, *Christian Doctrines*, 204-205.

²⁸⁸ Prudentius, *Liber Cathemerinon*, Loeb, VII.171-175.

²⁸⁹ He explains, “Not so surely does water put out fire, or the snows melt in the heat of the sun, as the unclean crop of rebellious sins vanishes under the cleansing of a restoring fast, if kindly liberality be ever joined with it. For it is a noble form of virtue too, to clothe the naked, feed the needy, give kindly aid to them that beg for it, hold that rich and poor share one and the same humanity.” Prudentius, *Liber Cathemerinon*, Loeb, VII. 206-215. In another example he prays, “Accept our fast, our sacrifice, / And smile upon us, / gracious Lord. / For by this holiest mystery / The inward parts are cleansed from stain, / And, taming all the unbridled lusts, / Our sinful flesh we thus restrain, / Lest gluttony and drunkenness / Should choke the soul and cloud the brain.” Prudentius, *Hymns*, VII.5-12. Furthermore, in *Psychomachia* he suggests that Virtues fight off sin for the same purpose. He writes, “For O kind leader, Thou hast not exposed the followers of Christ to the ravages of the Sins without the help of great Virtues or devoid of strength. Thou thyself dost command relieving squadrons to fight the battle in the body close beset, Thou thyself dost arm the spirit with pre-eminent kinds of skill whereby it can be strong to attack the wantonness in the heart and fight for Thee, conquer for Thee. The way of victory is before our eyes if we may mark at close quarters the very features of the Virtues, and the monsters that close with them in deadly struggle.” Prudentius, *Psychomachia*, Loeb, 11-20.

²⁹⁰ Palmer, *Martyrs*, 121.

²⁹¹ Prudentius, *Liber Cathemerinon*, Loeb, VII.6-10.

²⁹² Prudentius explains, “Hereby are conquered indulgence and shameful appetite, the debased sloth that comes of wine and slumber, filthy passion, immodest pleasantries, and all the plagues that dull our senses are put down and feel the discipline of restraint. For if uncurbed a man abandons himself to drinking and eating and does not duly control his body by fasting, then in the consequence the spark of the noble soul wastes and cools off by reason and constant indulgence, and the mind falls heavily asleep in the sluggish breast.” Prudentius, *Liber Cathemerinon*, Loeb, VII.11-20. Moreover, fasting is an appropriate appeal for the

way that a person can enter into God's offered salvation and experience deliverance from sin. Taken to its logical conclusion, any act that promotes purity and dispels sin plays a cooperative part in acquiring God's salvation for the individual.

The Lord's Supper

The forgiveness of sin, which is necessary for salvation, might also be acquired through the elements of the Lord's Supper if Prudentius views this sacrament in a similar way to baptism. However, the *Liber Cathemerinon* is considerably reserved in terms of expressing the form and significance of this practice. In *A Hymn for Every Hour*, Prudentius tells of Jesus feeding thousands with bread and fish as an analogous connection to the Lord's Supper, professing that "Thou art our meat and our bread, Thou our sweet savour that never fails; he can never hunger any more who partakes of Thy banquet, not filling a void in his belly but refreshing that by which he truly lives."²⁹³ Echoing the Gospel of John, Prudentius proclaims that Christ is the bread of life,²⁹⁴ but remains silent in terms of developing a theology of the Lord's Supper. Further study in Prudentius' understanding of the Lord's Supper may launch a valuable conversation in terms of his views on salvation being available from within the church.²⁹⁵ For instance, if partaking in the communion meal is a necessary part to maintaining one's salvation, it is plausible to suggest that

grace of God: "A public fast they now decree, / If they may thus Christ's anger stay ... The royal head, discrowned and bent, / As low he kneels God's grace to sue." Prudentius, *Hymns*, VII.163-164; VII.179-180.

²⁹³ Prudentius, *Liber Cathemerinon*, Loeb, IX.61-63. Prudentius alludes to a type of mystical feast as he recounts the narrative of Exodus 26:14ff. Though any explicit connection to the Lord's Supper remains unseen.

²⁹⁴ John 6:35, NASB.

²⁹⁵ In many ways, Prudentius' theology has followed that of his predecessors, particularly Origen, Tertullian and Cyprian. Burns, "Salvation," 225. In this case, these thinkers had much to say regarding the place of the church as the only entity by which salvation (through Christ) can be found. According to these church fathers "A person passes from sin to salvation by fulfilling the conditions which God imposes for participation in Christ's redemption Thus one must believe the teaching of Christ, receive baptism, and belong to the communion of the proper Church in order to be freed from sin and raised to the glory of Christ." Burns, "Salvation," 225. This theology fueled Tertullian's push for asceticism as an act of obedience and Cyprian's defense of re-baptism. Burns, "Salvation," 225.

Prudentius has a similar stance on this issue as Origen, Tertullian, and Cyprian, though unequivocal evidence for this theological nuance is lacking in the *Liber Cathemerinon* and dialogue therefore remains speculative.

Martyrdom

So far, Prudentius has affirmed multiple means of salvation, as they participate alongside Christ's work. But one act supersedes all others in his soteriological system – the act of martyrdom. It represents the only direct and assured means of acquiring eternal salvation. Prudentius boldly affirms his position stating, "Therefore is death itself more blessed, in that through the pains of death a way on high is opened for the righteous and by their sufferings they pass to the skies."²⁹⁶ Through sacrificial suffering, martyrs are able to gain their salvation immediately. Like other aspects of his theology, Prudentius aligns his thinking with Origen, Tertullian, and Cyprian. Each holds in veneration the absolute sacredness of martyrdom, though their reasons are different. For instance, Tertullian is adamant that a test of faith is required for salvation,²⁹⁷ and Origen conveys that withstanding persecution from the state is a way of proving one's devotion to God.²⁹⁸ In his *Exhortation to Martyrdom* Origen speaks of this act as a second baptism for the remission of sin, as if it were a baptism by blood.²⁹⁹ This line of thinking cannot be explicitly detected in Prudentius' *Liber Cathemerinon*, though there are inferences. For instance, the

²⁹⁶ Prudentius, *Liber Cathemerinon*, Loeb, X.89-92. As another example Prudentius writes, "The faith fought in arms, not sparing her own blood, for by death she destroyed death and spent herself to save herself." Prudentius, *Peristephanon Liber*, Loeb, II.17-20.

²⁹⁷ David A. Lopez, "Martyrdom and Salvation," in *Separatist Christianity: Spirit and Matter in the Early Church Fathers* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2004), 60-61.

²⁹⁸ Lopez, "Martyrdom," 61-62.

²⁹⁹ Origen, *Exhortation to Martyrdom*, in *Origen*, ed. Rowan A. Greer. Classics of Western Spirituality Series (Mahwah: Paulist Press, 1979), XXX.61-62. In the third century the majority of Christians thought that martyrdom was the only way to treat major post-baptismal sins – though Cyprian took a less fatal stance toward post-baptismal remission after the Decianic persecution. Lopez, "Martyrdom," 65. As seen, Prudentius promotes both views, advocating for grace to cleanse post-baptismal sin as well as promoting the purging of sin through martyrdom.

poet indirectly affirms the notion of salvific martyrdom when speaking of the children that King Herod sentenced to die in his search for the baby Jesus. He writes, “Hail, martyr-flowers, whom on the very threshold of life the persecutor of Christ destroyed, as the stormy wind kills roses at their birth. You are Christ’s first offerings, a tender flock slain in sacrifice, and before the very altar you play in innocence with palm and crowns.”³⁰⁰

Certainly Prudentius’ historical influences held similar ideas. For instance,

among more rigorist Christians such as Tertullian, death was preferable even to the *appearance* of accommodation with the illegitimate, idolatrous authority of the Roman state; this most profound act of rejecting accommodation was believed to be a necessary step for one’s salvation. Among less rigorist Christians, such as Clement of Alexandria [c. 150 – c. 215], martyrdom was promoted somewhat less strongly, and was believed to be necessary for salvation only in situations in which it became the sole defense against idolatry.³⁰¹

Generally Origen, Tertullian, and Cyprian argue that “Affliction provides an opportunity to endure suffering, which is intimately connected to one’s hope of salvation. Suffering is the test of faith that must necessarily be passed to attain the *gloria*, the reward of salvation, which is the goal of Christians.”³⁰² Before Prudentius’ lifetime, the act of martyrdom was thought to fulfill the commands of God and win the presence of God, “reenacting [Christ’s] own death through the martyr and thus conquering death again for the martyr. Thus the

³⁰⁰ Prudentius, *Liber Cathemerinon*, Loeb, XII.125-132. Cunningham articulates a similar interpretation, as the innocent babies are “clustered before God’s altar and playing with the symbols of their martyrdom, the palms and crowns.” Cunningham, “Contexts,” 65.

³⁰¹ Lopez, “Martyrdom,” 57-58.

³⁰² Lopez, “Martyrdom,” 61-62. Furthermore, “It is important to note that separatist Christianity had not yet developed a sacramental means of dealing with postbaptismal sin, comparable to later penitential traditions. While institutional means were developed for dealing with minor transgressions by individuals, no such means were available to help the community cope with the major transgressions (and in large numbers) of apostasy and idolatry. The only recognized means of purging these sins was baptism; yet baptism could only be had once. Martyrdom, however, the ‘second baptism,’ could serve as well: ‘Let us also remember that we have sinned; and that there is no remission of sins other accepting Baptism; and that it is impossible according to the Evangelical laws to be baptized again with water and the Spirit for the remission of sins; and that we have been given the baptism of martyrdom’. Origen in this passage draws a clear parallel between baptism and martyrdom During the remainder of the third century, the question of the efficacy of these alternative means of remitting sin [that Cyprian suggests] still remained undecided, but as a reaction to Diocletian’s persecutions from 303 to 311 showed, the effectiveness of martyrdom for salvation was never in doubt.” Lopez, “Martyrdom,” 63.

martyr was immediately and fully saved, entering Heaven to enjoy the eternal vision of God.”³⁰³ Historically, this rationale was pushed forward by some of Prudentius’ largest influences; therefore, it is no surprise that he too follows this line of thinking.

Even though salvific martyrdom is implicitly present in his *Liber Cathemerinon*, Prudentius exposes his position in *Peristephanon Liber*.³⁰⁴ J. Petruccione observes the soteriological significance martyrdom has for Prudentius as he “attributes the conversion of the city [Caesaraugusta] and its ultimate salvation at the Last Judgment to the efficacy of the martyrs’ self-sacrifice.”³⁰⁵ He sees this act as an aid to those children of God who have renounced the devil in baptism, but continue to struggle thereafter.³⁰⁶ Prudentius writes explicitly, “A noble thing it is to suffer the stroke of the persecutor’s sword; through the wide wound a glorious gateway opens to the righteous, and the soul, cleansed in the scarlet baptism, leaps from its seat in the breast.”³⁰⁷ With the emphasis continually on the

³⁰³ Lopez, “Martyrdom,” 72.

³⁰⁴ Cunningham observes, “all of these poems [*Peristephanon Liber*] bear a relation to the celebration of the annual feasts of martyrs.” Cunningham, “Contexts,” 58.

³⁰⁵ J. Petruccione, “The Martyr Death as Sacrifice: Prudentius, *Peristephanon* 4.9-72,” *Vigiliae Christianae* 49, no. 3 (August 1995): 245. Furthermore, “In his portrayal of the martyr death as a sacrifice that redeems and purifies a given community constituted by ties of shared blood, soil, and historical experience, the poet voices views that were seldom expressed in the west and, in the east, most explicitly formulated by Origen.” Petruccione, “Martyr Death,” 245; Joyce E. Salisbury, “The Bond of a Common Mind: A Study of Collective Salvation from Cyprian to Augustine,” in *Studies in Early Christianity: A Collection of Scholarly Essays*, eds. Everett Ferguson, David M. Scholer and Paul Corby Finney, vol. 10 (New York: Garland Publishing, 1993), 255-256. Clarifying further, “Prudentius, then, conceives of the martyr death as a sacrifice at once redemptive and purificatory. Patristic authors rarely accord to human self-sacrifice such as decisive significance in the drama of salvation. Origen provides the closest parallels in his commentary on John.” Petruccione, “Martyr Death,” 248. Origen carries this thought further by articulating that “while Christ’s offering effected a global atonement, the martyrs’ deaths benefit only their fellow countrymen.” Petruccione, “Martyr Death,” 248.

³⁰⁶ J. Petruccione, “The Persecutor’s Envy and Rise of the Martyr Cult: ‘*Peristephanon*’ Hymn 1 and 4,” *Vigiliae Christianae* 45, no. 4 (December 1991): 334.

³⁰⁷ Prudentius, *Peristephanon Liber*, Loeb, I.29-30. Throughout the *Peristephanon Liber* Prudentius continues to emphasize the martyrs’ immediate transition from this life to the presence of God and the view of martyrdom as a baptism by blood. Cf. Prudentius, *Peristephanon Liber*, Loeb, V.361-372; V.281-300; and V.5-12. Speaking specifically of a baptistery he writes, “This is a spot chosen of Christ for raising tried souls to heaven through blood, and for cleansing them with water. Here two heroes that were slain for the Lord’s name won scarlet martyrdom by their noble death, and here too mercy flows in the limpid fount and washes away old stains in its new stream. Whoso desires to ascend to the everlasting kingdom of the heavens, let him

abolishment of sin and the devil's power, he argues, "Believe ye that the victims' spirits were taken back to God? See how clearly here wild devils are subdued which like wolves capture and devour men's hearts, choking their very minds and mingling with their senses."³⁰⁸

For Prudentius, the martyrs also take on a mediatory role. As an example, St. Vincent, having died under the Spanish governor Datianus, is "able to act as an effective advocate for his devotees, approaching the Father's throne."³⁰⁹ Prudentius writes of the patron martyrs in terms of their intercessory abilities,

With such concern for our perils do they work for us that they suffer no whisper any man has uttered to go for naughts; they listen to our prayer and straightway carry it to the ear of the everlasting King. Hence gifts flow generously on to earth from the very fountain-head, pouring on the petitioners' maladies the healing remedies they sought for. For Christ in his goodness has never refused aught to his witnesses, - witnesses whom neither chains nor cruel death deterred from confessing the one God at the cost of their blood, yes, their blood, but such loss is repayed by life prolonged.³¹⁰

Confident of this reality, he implores the martyrs as he prays for himself, petitioning "through the advocacy of the martyrs [that] he may attain to healing."³¹¹

Beyond participating in their own salvation and offering mediatory aid to those who pray, Prudentius also affirms that martyrs offer expiation to the community.³¹² He explains,

come here in his thirst, and he will find the way is made ready." Prudentius, *Peristephanon Liber*, Loeb, VIII.1-8.

³⁰⁸ Prudentius, *Peristephanon Liber*, Loeb, I.96-99.

³⁰⁹ Grig, "Torture," 329.

³¹⁰ Prudentius, *Peristephanon Liber*, Loeb, I.16-24. Again he articulates, "whose favour [the martyrs] they may seek by prayer." Prudentius, *Peristephanon Liber*, Loeb, I.12.

³¹¹ Prudentius, *Peristephanon Liber*, Loeb, II.579-580. Again he calls out, "and perchance under Christ's favour he [Fructuosus the martyr] will deign to give relief to my torments too, as he recalls my sweet hendecasyllables." Prudentius, *Peristephanon Liber*, Loeb, VI.160-162. In another story he writes, "My glad return, my chance to embrace you, reverend priest, my writing these very words, I know that I owe to Hippolytus [the martyr], to whom Christ our God has given power to grant one's request." Prudentius, *Peristephanon Liber*, Loeb, XI.179-182.

³¹² "The *Peristephanon Liber* enjoys a number of fertility metaphors, where martyrs are seen as extensions of Christ's bloody sacrifice, as participants in the redemptive fertility of Christ's blood." Grig,

“The sacrifice of holy blood has shut out the race of malign devils from all thy gates and driven black darkness from thy cleansed city.”³¹³ The impact of a martyr’s sacrifice on the world of darkness is so effectual that it passes over to the people of the community. Is this a similar expression of what Christ does for humanity according to Prudentius? Both martyr and Christ expel the devil, sin, and death with a sacrificial act that extends to the greater community.³¹⁴ Due to the martyrs’ ability to renounce Satan and expedite their eternal rewards, “their townsmen, indeed all Christians who [appeal] to their intercession ... exorcise the powers of sin, throw off the devil’s yoke, and regain their identity as soldiers of Christ.”³¹⁵ Out of all the participatory actions that Prudentius affirms as means of salvation for the individual, martyrdom is the most direct. Appealing entirely to Prudentius’ personal concerns for the problem of sin, martyrdom offers, in essence, the perfect atonement offering.

Christ’s death and resurrection is the doorway through which humanity can enter into the planned redemption of the world. In this sense, Christ’s crucifixion is a significant event, but not the central theme. When Prudentius reflects on the work done at the cross, his emphatic praise turns toward Christ’s victorious harrowing of hell and the defeat of the devil.³¹⁶ It is reasonable to suggest that Prudentius’ fixation on the problem of sin perpetuates his view of Christ’s work as limited to conquering death, the devil, and sin. As

“Torture,” 330. For a fuller discussion see J. Ross, “Dynamic Writing and Martyrs’ Bodies in Prudentius’ *Peristephanon*,” *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 3 (1995): 325-355; Cf. Petruccione, “Martyr Death,” 251.

³¹³ Prudentius, *Peristephanon Liber*, Loeb, IV.65-68. Cf. *Peristephanon Liber*, Loeb, IV.71-72.

³¹⁴ Cunningham argues that “the matter of the sufferings has another dimension as well, although it is one which is quite hard for us to estimate. At the time of Prudentius it seems clear that the passion of Christ was not given elaborate or detailed treatment. Its reality is accepted but not stressed. On the other hand, the martyrs were said to participate in Christ’s passion, and to a limited extent to suffer as Christ suffered. Consequently, when Prudentius emphasizes and elaborates upon the sufferings of a martyr, he is also treating of Christ’s passion in a vicarious way. He says as much himself.” Cunningham, “Contexts,” 65-66.

³¹⁵ Petruccione, “Envy,” 336.

³¹⁶ Prudentius, *Liber Cathemerinon*, Loeb, IX.70-105.

such, his focus remains on the accounts of Christ's victorious triumph over hell and the grave. In consequence, Prudentius is more likely to fill the need for atonement with human action. As it has been demonstrated, he does place a high priority on the cooperative action of humanity in the atoning work of salvation, which creates a working sense of sanctification that seems precursory to justification. As such, it leads only to a view of salvation that is actualized in the future.³¹⁷ As it is, Prudentius' theological reasoning must adopt another element (outside of Christ's work) in order to fully appease humanity's sin. In turn, Christ's exclusive salvific work is insufficient and Prudentius' theology demands a propitious solution.

The Effects of Salvation

To evaluate Prudentius' understanding of the effects of salvation, his definition of God's saving act as complete deliverance from sin must be held in the foreground.³¹⁸ In order to persuade his readers of their need for God's salvation, he consistently focuses on the threat of the devil. Prudentius prays, "Imprisoned as we are by the world's cruel violence, as it were by a grim despot, Thou dost direct us and drive away the wild beast that goes roaring round about and seeks to devour us, sharpening its teeth to frenzy with rage, for that, O God supreme, we pray to Thee alone."³¹⁹ Thus, the most immediate effect of salvation is that God hears the cries of His people and acts by offering a way for humans

³¹⁷ What seems to be an over-emphasis on the role of human agency in the economy of salvation is found in the earlier works of Theodore of Mopsuestia, who epitomized the Nestorian expression of soteriology. Fairbairn, "Patristic Perspective," 94. Prudentius seems dangerously close to some of Theodore's premises. In particular, Theodore did not regard salvation as being possessed by the believer in the present; rather, he saw "salvation almost entirely as a future condition, a possession that will be [humanity's] only in a future world, but toward which the believer must strive in this world." Fairbairn, "Patristic Perspective," 93.

³¹⁸ Cf. Prudentius, *Liber Cathemerinon*, Loeb, I.45-48; II.9-18; IX.1-114; XII.74-76. Salvation is primarily expressed as a rescue mission. Reiterating this focus in the narrative of Peter, Prudentius writes, "For sin is committed before the herald of coming day sheds light on the race of men and brings an end of sinning." Prudentius, *Liber Cathemerinon*, Loeb, I.53-56.

³¹⁹ Prudentius, *Liber Cathemerinon*, Loeb, IV.76-81.

to experience deliverance from the devil's allegiance and the corruption of sin.

Furthermore, through the Incarnate Christ, God has prepared a way in which the benefits of salvation are made available to all of humanity. As it has been established, individuals are called into action in order to actualize God's offer of salvation. The Incarnation does not complete salvation; rather, it initiates the opportunity.³²⁰

Hades, Death, and the Devil

Prudentius articulates that it is Christ's descent into hell and subsequent victory over it that marks the salvation of those residing in hell.³²¹ As a result, the effect of salvation is the conquering of Hades, death, and the devil.³²² In one sense, Christ's death, descent, and resurrection has already overcome the powers of darkness and in so doing has demolished the bondage humanity had to the devil. He explains, "but us, who are in continual subjection to the grievous power of sin, our Leader, disabling our enemy, sets free from the darkness of death."³²³ Salvation, through Christ, releases humanity from the slavery of the devil, giving them the *opportunity* for a new allegiance to Christ.³²⁴

³²⁰ McKelvie, "Cosmic," 35-36. Similarly, Tertullian "conceives of the incarnation as affecting mankind chiefly through precept and example." Berkhof, *Christian Doctrines*, 168. Prudentius' failure to see Christ's work in its fullness goes against Athanasius' vision of the salvific work of Christ, which he sees completed in Jesus Christ. There is a kind of substitution in which Christ is put in the place of humanity "offering his life on the cross as a holy sacrifice to the Father." Thomas Gerard Weinandy, *Jesus the Christ* (Huntington: Our Sunday Visitor Publishing, 2003), 151. This kind of substitutionary action on the part of Christ for humanity's salvation seems foreign to Prudentius' *Liber Cathemerinon*.

³²¹ He explains, "Yea, lest those below should have no part in salvation, in His goodness He enters Tartarus. The door is forced and yields before Him; the bolts are torn away, down falls the pivot broken; that gate so ready to receive the inrush, so unyielding in face of those that would return, is unbarred and gives back the dead; the law is reversed, and the black doorway stands open to be retrodden." Prudentius, *Liber Cathemerinon*, Loeb, IX.70-75.

³²² He asserts, "Then was the strength of death crushed, then was the law of hell subdued, then did the stronger potency of day force night to flee." Prudentius, *Liber Cathemerinon*, Loeb, I.69-72.

³²³ Prudentius, *Liber Cathemerinon*, Loeb, XII.161-164.

³²⁴ Cf. Prudentius, *Liber Cathemerinon*, Loeb, II.93-96. This understanding of humanity being under the dominion of the devil is prominent in Justin Martyr, who suggests in his *Apology* that the "Son became man to teach us the truth of God, freeing us from ignorance and so from the lies of Satan." Weinandy, *Jesus*, 141. Origen continues this line of thinking and echoes Irenaeus' use of the term "ransom" to denote Christ paying for humanity's sin. Weinandy, *Jesus*, 148. Shedd stresses this matter by suggesting that "characteristic of the Early Patristic Soteriology" is that "the death of Christ is often represented as ransoming man from the

Prudentius maintains a strong belief in human free will and thus, Christ's work does not guarantee that each individual person will choose to accept what has been offered.

However, in another sense the poet acknowledges that Satan is not fully subdued, even though the event by which Christ overthrows hell has happened in time, the effects will not be accomplished until Christ's return. It is for this reason that he urges Christians to guard themselves against the corruption of sin.³²⁵

Sin

Salvation absolves sin and charges the Christian to a life of righteousness and obedience.³²⁶ God saves humanity *from sin for* a life of obedience, rather than Prudentius' model whereby God *responds to* a life of obedience *by* saving humanity from sin. In the *Liber Cathemerinon*, a clear distinction is made between those who are experiencing the effects of salvation and those who are not. For instance, *A Hymn Before Sleep* portrays the different visions while the body is at rest; those who are holy see visions of spiritual revelation and those who are wicked and suffused in sin experience the terrors of deceptive phantoms.³²⁷ As an example of Prudentius' hermeneutic, which calls for multiple meanings, this passage suggests that similar to the temporary rest of night, the human soul will experience a temporary state after death until it is re-united with the body. Furthering this concept, McKelvie argues that the two visions represent the punishments and rewards

power and slavery of the devil." William Greenough Thayer Shedd, *A History of Christian Doctrine*, vol. 2 (New York: John F. Trow, 1863), 213.

³²⁵ McKelvie, "Cosmic," 38-39. Salvation does proclaim Christ's Lordship over Satan fully, but that will be accomplished after Christ's second coming. McKelvie, "Cosmic," 38-39.

³²⁶ Cf. Romans 6:1-23, NASB; Colossians 3:1-17, NASB; Hebrews 10:19-25, NASB; 2 Corinthians 5:17-21, NASB.

³²⁷ Prudentius, *Liber Cathemerinon*, Loeb, VI.25-55. This type of explanation suggests that there are benefits for the righteous in terms of safety and rest from temptation. The motivation here is the fight for the soul to choose righteousness over the lures of the fleshly temptation for the ultimate good of the soul. "Such is the sleep with which the righteous hero rests his mind, that with prophetic spirit it traverses the whole heaven." Prudentius, *Liber Cathemerinon*, Loeb, VI.113-116.

awaiting a soul in the interim.³²⁸ In pursuit of a holy life, Prudentius urges believers to imitate Christ, the best example.³²⁹ This concept is heavily endorsed throughout the *Liber Cathemerinon* almost to the point where imitation achieves a pure soul.³³⁰

Obedience begins as a transformative response to God's offer of salvation. In his poetry, Prudentius exemplifies this response to his readers by sharing his own sense of conviction. Reflecting Paul's biographical confession in Philippians 3:4-11, he chronologically sorts out his own *curriculum vitae* confessing,

My first years wept under the crack of the rod; after that the toga corrupted me and taught me to utter sinful falsehoods; then lewd sauciness and wanton indulgence, to my shame and sorrow now, marred my youth with the filthy dirt of wickedness. Next disputings armed my vehement spirit, and a perversely stubborn passion for victory laid itself open to cruel falls. Twice with the law's controlling curb I governed famed cities, rendering civil justice to good men and striking terror into evil-doers. Finally His Grace the Emperor advanced me in his service and raised me up, attaching me closer to him and bidding me stand in the nearest rank.³³¹

The author's awareness of his own sinful existence and resulting realignment of priorities in order to pursue God, reflects his understanding of the need for a response somewhere in the process of salvation. In an expression of this desire, Prudentius petitions along with the reader to "Let us awake! Reality is here. Gold, pleasure, joy, riches, honour, success, all the evil things that puff us up, - comes morning, all are naught."³³² By God calling humanity to life, Prudentius immediately outlines what life is not and, in turn, what it is. Life is not for

³²⁸ McKelvie, "Cosmic," 48. The concept of the interim, particularly in purgatory-type descriptions, is a digression from the creedal statements of the Nicene faith.

³²⁹ Slusser suggests that this action "began already during Jesus' ministry and was sufficiently central to the life of the primitive community that they were known as followers of a 'Way' of salvation." Michael Slusser "Primitive Christian Soteriological Themes," in *Studies in Early Christianity: A Collection of Scholarly Essays*, eds. Everett Ferguson, David M. Scholer and Paul Corby Finney, vol. 10 (New York: Garland Publishing, 1993), 220.

³³⁰ Gregory of Nyssa argues fully for the purification of the soul," which may be achieved "either by our efforts in this life or by the purification hereafter." Gregory of Nyssa, *On the Soul and the Resurrection*, trans. Catharine P. Roth, vol. 12 of *Popular Patristics Series* (Crestwood: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1993), 77.

³³¹ Prudentius, *Preface*, Loeb, 7-21.

³³² Prudentius, *Liber Cathemerinon*, Loeb, I.92-96.

selfish sin, for “beds that belong to sickness, sleep, and sloth,” but rather, it is for being “pure and upright and sober and awake.”³³³ An active life, in response to God’s gift of salvation, is carried out with gratitude and worship. For instance, while reflecting on the biblical narrative of Daniel in the lion’s den, Prudentius suggests that in response, the believer ought to offer thanks and praise. Just as Daniel “said ‘Amen, Alleluia’ in response ... we, being refreshed by Thy gifts, O God, the generous giver of all good things, return thanks and dedicate our hymns to Thee.”³³⁴ Prudentius is also discouraging passive or lukewarm responses to God. Certainly in his later years, his own life is marked by full engagement. And yet, his attitude toward the Christian life, in many ways, is motivated by the threat of sin and the devil’s schemes. In his *Apotheosis* he clearly warns that the

torch of faith alone is to be carried before our feet, that our steps may be straight. But when we go astray in this darkness the enemy buffets us, carries us away captive, tramples upon us, a cruel enemy who devours the provision laid out along the way for the very passage of travellers, a thief who spoils Christ’s rich fields, sowing wild oats in them to compete with the corn.³³⁵

It seems, for Prudentius, that the dangers of sin and the devil remain a constant motivator for the actions of the Christian life.

Interim

Salvation also affects the interim destination of the soul in Prudentius’ writings.³³⁶ Evidence denotes his understanding of a holding place, a paradise for the saved after they have experienced bodily death. Prudentius’ descriptions mimic imagery given in Luke’s biblical account of paradise in Abraham’s bosom.³³⁷ Logic suggests that if he maintains a

³³³ Prudentius, *Liber Cathemerinon*, Loeb, I.5-8.

³³⁴ Prudentius, *Liber Cathemerinon*, Loeb, IV.72-75.

³³⁵ Prudentius, *Apotheosis*, Loeb, 39-46.

³³⁶ “For whereas we see the body lying at rest bereft of the spirit, there remains but a short time ere it seek again its union with the soul on high.” Prudentius, *Liber Cathemerinon*, Loeb, X.33-36.

³³⁷ He writes, “But till Thou dost recall the mortal body, O God, and make it new, in what region wilt Thou bid the pure soul rest? In the bosom of the holy patriarch shall it lie, like Eleazar with flowers all

holding place for those who are saved (paradise), there must also be a holding place for those who are not saved. The term *purgatory* is absent from the *Liber Cathemerinon*, though its concept is alluded to particularly in *A Hymn on the Burial of the Dead* when he says “The lifeless body we restore / To earth, must slumber free from pain / A little while, that it may gain / The spirit’s fellowship once more.”³³⁸ Once again, he seems to align his concept of the interim with Origen’s teaching that paradise is for the good, wherein they receive further education, and the wicked pass through a period of judgment for the purpose of purification.³³⁹ Similarly, Gregory of Nyssa speaks directly about this interim space as a place to purify the soul in his *Sermon on the Dead*.³⁴⁰ Origen too asserts that only a few people will enter “upon the full blessedness of the vision of God at once; the great majority of them must pass through a process of purification after death.”³⁴¹ This theological nuance is also present in Prudentius’ thinking. Recall that salvation rests upon an individual possessing the Holy Spirit, which is determined after baptism by the sinless state of the soul. Therefore, if total absence of sin determines the true mark of salvation, upon Christ’s second coming there will be very few people who directly go to paradise

about him, while the rich man, as he burns, looks upon him from afar. We follow Thy words, O Redeemer, with which, in Thy triumph over the blackness of death, Thou dost bid the robber, Thy companion on the cross, to walk in Thy steps. See now, for the faithful a shining way lies open to the spacious garden of paradise, and they may enter that grove which the serpent took from man. There, I pray, good Leader, give command that the spirit, Thy servant, be consecrated to Thee in the home of its birth, which it left to wander in exile.” Prudentius, *Liber Cathemerinon*, Loeb, X.149-168.

³³⁸ Prudentius, *Hymns*, X.33-36.

³³⁹ Berkhof, *Christian Doctrines*, 75. Clement carries this further to suggest that the reprobate have an opportunity to repent in Hades. Berkhof, *Christian Doctrines*, 75.

³⁴⁰ Gregory clarifies, “If a man distinguish in himself what is peculiarly human from that which is irrational, and if he be on the watch for a life of greater urbanity for himself, in this present life he will purify himself of any evil contracted, overcoming the irrational by reason. If he has inclined to the irrational pressure of the passions, using for the passions the cooperating hide of things irrational, he may afterward in a quite different manner be very much interested in what is better, when, after his departure out of the body, he gains knowledge of the difference between virtue and vice and finds that he is not able to partake of divinity until he has been purged of the filthy contagion in his soul by the purifying fire.” Gregory of Nyssa, *Sermon on the Dead*, in *The Faith of the Early Fathers: Post-Nicene and Constantinopolitan Eras through St. Jerome*, ed. William A. Jurgens, vol. 2 (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1970), 58.

³⁴¹ Berkhof, *Christian Doctrines*, 75.

(excluding the martyr who gains direct access). Prudentius' system of thought seems to exemplify Origen's concept of the interim, despite its lack of direct reference.

The Final Results of Salvation

Restoration and Redemption

The final result of salvation, for Prudentius, will be the restoration of all creation, including humanity. Like Irenaeus, he understands God's plan as working toward uniting all things in Christ.³⁴² Prudentius projects that when the "Earth's blackness is split asunder by the stroke of the sun's dart," then the "world resumes its colour under the glance of his shining orb."³⁴³ His confidence comes from his dominant trust in the sovereignty of God's will over all. In *A Morning Hymn* Prudentius draws a parallel between creation righting itself and Christ's second coming. "The dawn comes in," he writes, "the sky is lightening, Christ is coming."³⁴⁴ Despite the recalibration of creation, Prudentius is most concerned that the final result of salvation be a restoration of the intended dynamic between God and humanity. He often uses the metaphorical language of light and dark.³⁴⁵ In this sense, salvation is represented as "the restoration to light of the dark."³⁴⁶ This concept of returning to the original order can be detected in the works of Origen as well. Weinandy suggests, "The deification of the soul of Christ becomes the paradigm ... for every human soul's ascent back to God. The goal of salvation is to reunite all souls to the Logos in their

³⁴² Weinandy, *Jesus*, 143. Irenaeus sees reconciliation coming about primarily in three ways: (1) through the incarnation of Christ, as God recapitulates man in Himself, (2) by being a descendent of Adam, the man of Jesus recapitulates the entirety of human history to Himself and because He lived through all stages of the human life he "sanctified the whole of human life" and (3) Jesus being the second Adam "reverses the whole process of sin" through obedience. Weinandy, *Jesus*, 143; Cf. Kereszty, *Jesus*, 199.

³⁴³ Prudentius, *Liber Cathemerinon*, Loeb, II.5-8.

³⁴⁴ Prudentius, *Liber Cathemerinon*, Loeb, II.3-4.

³⁴⁵ Marion M. van Assendelft, *Sol Ecc Surgit Igneus: A Commentary on the Morning and Evening Hymns of Prudentius (Cathemerinon 1, 2, 5 and 6)* (Groningen: Bouma's Boekhuis, 1976), 33.

³⁴⁶ van Assendelft, *Commentary*, 33.

original created status.”³⁴⁷ This movement of salvation from “birth to beatitude” is not exclusive to Origen; it seems to begin with Justin Martyr and is later expounded fully by Gregory of Nyssa.³⁴⁸

Where Prudentius is compatible with these thinkers, Athanasius included, is in their understanding of Christ’s universal intention.³⁴⁹ Taken to its logical conclusion, Origen and Gregory profess that all created beings are to gain final salvation by God.³⁵⁰ In Prudentius’ interpretation of the biblical narrative of Jacob wrestling, one could argue for a similar conclusion, for he explains that Jacob “lost the strength to sin” as a result of the light shining on his leg and laming him.³⁵¹ In effect, this questions the final consequences of human sin and jeopardizes personal responsibility. It could be argued that whatever the human decision is, God’s decision trumps them all for humanity’s own good. Prudentius explains that “These figures [Jacob and the other] teach us that man, sunk in darkness, if he yield not to God, loses the strength to resume the fight; *yet* he will be more blessed in whom the day, when it appears, finds the unruly body lamed and wasted with the struggle.”³⁵² Does the “yet” in this statement point toward a belief in universal salvation?

More convincing however is the evidence indicating that Prudentius does not take the concept of universal intention to its ultimate conclusion. For instance he confesses that hell does exist, but qualifies that only a few will end up there. He exposes this approach when he writes,

³⁴⁷ Weinandy, *Jesus*, 147.

³⁴⁸ Burns, “Salvation,” 225.

³⁴⁹ Burns, “Salvation,” 225. Finishing *A Hymn On The Burial Of The Dead* with a prayer for the person who has past, he expresses the desire for everyone to experience final salvation. Indeed he writes, “There, I pray, good Leader, give command that the spirit, Thy servant, be consecrated to Thee in the home of its birth, which it left to wander in exile.” Prudentius, *Liber Cathemerinon*, Loeb, X.165-168.

³⁵⁰ Burns, “Salvation,” 225.

³⁵¹ Prudentius, *Liber Cathemerinon*, Loeb, II.80.

³⁵² Prudentius, *Liber Cathemerinon*, Loeb, II.85-92.

The very Lamb of the Thunderer, red from the slaughter, who alone unseals the book that has knowledge of things to be. His mighty hand is armed with a two-edged sword, and flashing this way and that it threatens two strokes at once. He alone is inquisitor of soul and body both, and blade twice to be feared is the first and second death. Yet in kindness too the Avenger blunts the edge of His wrath, and suffers but few of the ungodly to perish for ever.³⁵³

Moreover, Prudentius clarifies his position on the final *destinies* of humanity explaining that Christ “promises eternal salvation to those who believe, the salvation of the soul, which alone does not perish but endures for ever and undergoes fortunes that differ; it either shines with light or is sunk in darkness; if it has followed Christ, it enters into the Father’s glory, but if it has separated itself from Christ it is delivered up to hell.”³⁵⁴ As such, he does not claim universal salvation as God’s finale for all.

Resurrection

In understanding Prudentius’ soteriological premise, it is critical to define the structure of his eschatological vision. There are four main categories that deserve exposition: the resurrection of the body, judgment, the afterlife, and Christ’s eternal rule. Prudentius captures the idea of Christ’s resurrection as prefiguring humanity’s bodily resurrection.³⁵⁵ The poet seems to reflect a similar focus to that of Tertullian. For instance, “it can be understood that [Tertullian] looked to the *parousia*, and perhaps only to it, as the source of his hope for the future.”³⁵⁶ In the same way, Prudentius eagerly anticipates the

³⁵³ Prudentius, *Liber Cathemerinon*, Loeb, VI.81-96.

³⁵⁴ Prudentius, *Peristephanon Liber*, Loeb, X.470-475.

³⁵⁵ McKelvie furthers Prudentius’ own words and suggests that the resurrection “literally provides the *crux* of Christian soteriology.” McKelvie, “Cosmic,” 106. Buttressed by his own words in his *Apotheosis* Prudentius confesses, “I know that my body rises in Christ; why dost thou bid me abandon my hope? I shall come by the same paths by which He came against from trampling upon death; it is this we believe. And I shall come whole; for I shall be restored not less nor other than now I am; my features, natural force, complexion, will be the same as they are now in life; when the tomb is opened, the grave will send me forth again without the loss of even a tooth or a nail. He who bids me return will not give back aught infirm; for if it is infirmity that returns, then is there no restoration. What calamity has robbed me of, what illness or pain has drained away, what consuming age with wasting decline has cut off, all will return, at my coming again, to a body renewed.” Prudentius, *Apotheosis*, Loeb, 1062-1073.

³⁵⁶ Jaroslav Pelikan, “The Eschatology of Tertullian,” *Church History* 21, no. 2 (June 1952): 112.

resurrection. He writes, “Soon will come the time when the warmth that bore them company shall return to the bones, and wear again its old dwelling quickened with living blood. Bodies that long lay dead and still and mouldering in their tombs will be carried into the flying breezes in company with their former souls.”³⁵⁷ For him, it is Christ’s second coming that brings forth this resurrection of the dead. Graphically portrayed in *A Hymn Before Meat* he writes,

Yeah, it is even granted to restore the dead flesh after its decease, and once again from its tomb the old form is reborn, when the mouldering dust comes together. I indeed believe (and my faith is not vain) that bodies live as does the soul; for now I bethink me it was in bodily form that God returned from Phlegethon with easy step to heaven. The same hope awaits my members, which, though they are bidden to rest scented with spices in the tomb of death, Christ my leader, who rose from the like earth, calls to the glowing stars.³⁵⁸

Judgement

The principle of eschatological judgment is unclear in Prudentius’ *Liber Cathemerinon*. His understanding of who must bear the judgment of Christ at the end times is ambiguous. Various passages suggest that he understands God’s judgment to be only for those who reject Him.³⁵⁹ McKelvie furthers this concept suggesting that Prudentius’ idea of sleep “takes on an eschatological character as the daily experience of death and judgment.”³⁶⁰ If this is an accurate assessment, the poet would affirm that judgment awaits

³⁵⁷ Prudentius, *Liber Cathemerinon*, Loeb, X.37-44. It is for this reason that Prudentius advocates for Christians to take great care of dead bodies as he writes, “This earnest care the provident piety of Christ’s followers takes because they believe that all that are now sunk in cold slumber will presently be alive.” Prudentius, *Liber Cathemerinon*, Loeb, X.57-60. He goes on to encourage, “Let none lament for his dear ones, for this death is the renewal of life.” Prudentius, *Liber Cathemerinon*, Loeb, X.119-120. “Do thou cover the body entrusted to thee; He who is its maker and author will not forget it, and will seek again that which He gave, the image of His own countenance.” Prudentius, *Liber Cathemerinon*, Loeb, X.133-136.

³⁵⁸ Prudentius, *Liber Cathemerinon*, Loeb, III.191-205.

³⁵⁹ McKelvie points to *A Morning Hymn* where the “exaltation of God’s forgiveness continues, clarifying that although the new light of day signifies a judgement of destruction for those who ignore God, it is a call to re-commitment and penitence for the Christian” as seen in II.97-100. McKelvie, “Cosmic,” 28.

³⁶⁰ McKelvie, “Cosmic,” 37.

the wicked, while a beatific experience awaits the righteous.³⁶¹ This thinking amplifies the critical nature of being found sinless upon Christ's second coming – for salvation would also deliver one from God's judgment. In contradistinction to this presumption, Prudentius includes verses that prophetically claim judgment for all souls.³⁶²

Eternal Life

The afterlife is given superlative imagery in Prudentius' writings. It is, after all, the ultimate reward of salvation, the epitome of deliverance from death and hell. In his mind, this is what it all points toward. He writes of heaven as housing "the blest souls with one accord unite," where they will sing praise to the Saviour amidst a flower-filled utopia.³⁶³ This afterlife is ruled exclusively by the Triune Godhead and for Prudentius, holds a mysterious wonder. The afterlife that he envisions is eternal. In it the righteous experience a bodily state where there is neither "languor nor decay," free from age and sickness.³⁶⁴ He

³⁶¹ It can also be noted that the early church professed the Messiah-judge person of Christ, which served as the motivation for repentance and hope for the afterlife. Slusser, "Primitive," 218.

³⁶² To illustrate, Prudentius writes "Then, when He had annulled death and restored man to life, He ascended in victory the lofty judgment-seat of the Father on high, carrying back to heaven the illustrious glory of His passion. Glory be to Thee, judge of the dead and king of the living, who on Thy Father's throne at His right hand art renowned for Thy merits, and shalt come from thence to be the righteous avenger of all sins." Prudentius, *Liber Cathemerinon*, Loeb, XI.103-108. Similarly, he states "Then throned on high, the Judge of all / Shall mortals to their reckoning call: / To these shall grant the prize of light, / To those Gehenna's gloomy night." Prudentius, *Hymns*, XI.109-112.

³⁶³ Prudentius, *Hymns*, V.121-124. Creating such a picture he explains, "There all the ground is covered and scented with beds of red roses; watered by running streamlets it pours forth rich marigolds and soft violets and tender crocuses. There balsam, too, exudes in a stream from its slender shoot, the rare cinnamon breathes its scent, and the leaf which the river by whose stream it grows carries from its hidden source to its mouth. The blessed souls over the grassy meads sing their sweet song in harmonious concert, and pleasantly sounds the melody of their hymns, as with white feet they tread the lilies. And the guilty spirits too, in their crowds often have holiday from punishment in hell, on the night on which the holy God returned to the world of men from the waters of Acheron, not like the morning star when it rises from Ocean and first tinges the darkness with its shining torch, but a greater than the sun, restoring new day to a world saddened by the cross of its Lord. Hell's force abated, its punishments are mild, and the people of the dead, set free from the fires, rejoices in the relaxation of its imprisonment, nor do the sulphurous rivers boil as hot as they are wont. As for us, we pass the long night with pious gladness in festal congregations, in sleeping prayer we earnestly heap up petitions that will be granted, and on the altar raised up making offerings to God." Prudentius, *Liber Cathemerinon*, Loeb, V.113-140. In this place he suggests that for "the faithful a shining way lies open to the spacious garden of paradise, and they may enter that grove which the serpent took from man." Prudentius, *Liber Cathemerinon*, Loeb, X.161-164.

³⁶⁴ Prudentius, *Hymns*, X.93-100.

sees heaven as a celestial throne from which the victorious immortal body can watch the eternal torment of the devil.³⁶⁵ Furthermore, he expresses the Lucan description of paradise, in that it reflects a measurable proximity between heaven and hell, contrary to the perception that there is a vast separation between the two.

In as much contrast as possible, Prudentius has filled the pages of his *Hamartigenia* with images of heaven's foil. He writes,

Therefore the Father, having foreknowledge, lit the fires of Tartarus dark-hued with molten lead, and in gloomy Avernus dug channels for the pitchy bituminous streams of hell, and down in Phlegethon's gulf ordained that gnawing worms indwell for the everlasting punishment of sin. For He knew that the life in our bodies came from his breath, and that the soul that had its being from the everlasting lips could not die, nor again could it return once more to heaven when it was polluted with sin, but must be plunged in the depths of the burning pit. To worms and flames and tortures He gave deathless endurance, so that the punishment should not die away through length of years while the soul never died. The torments keep alive, while they consume it, the stuff that is given them without limit of time. Death itself turns its back on the everlasting lamentations and compels the weeping victims to live.³⁶⁶

Christ's Final Rule

Finally, Prudentius gives exhortation to Christ's final rule as the crowning result of salvation in the Eschaton.³⁶⁷ He projects the idea that Christ is King and the whole world³⁶⁸ is under His Lordship whether they are lost or saved.³⁶⁹ As such, Christ proclaims His Kingdom to be eternal when Prudentius states "Christ Thy Kingdom shall for ever be, / Thy grace, might, wisdom, glory ever shine, / As in the Triune majesty benign / He reigns for all eternity with Thee."³⁷⁰ He also places Christ as the King of the church, both past and

³⁶⁵ Prudentius, *Liber Cathemerinon*, Loeb, X.109-112.

³⁶⁶ Prudentius, *Hamartigenia*, Loeb, 824-838.

³⁶⁷ Prudentius, *Liber Cathemerinon*, Loeb, XI.93-116.

³⁶⁸ "Rejoice, all ye nations, Judaea, Rome and Greece, Egypt, Thracian, Persian, Scythian: one King is master of all. Praise your Lord every one, blessed and lost alike, the quick, the feeble, and the dead; no man henceforth is dead." Prudentius, *Liber Cathemerinon*, Loeb, XII.201-208.

³⁶⁹ McKelvie, "Cosmic," 56-57; Prudentius, *Liber Cathemerinon*, Loeb, XII.204-208.

³⁷⁰ Prudentius, *Hymns*, V.161-164.

present.³⁷¹ This universal rule is expressed both through history and nature and is similar to Tertullian's concept of God's final rule.³⁷²

Conclusion

Like other early church writers before his time, Prudentius' work is marked by theological curiosity, traditional stubbornness, mysterious caveats, and aged, cultural debates. And beneath his rhetoric, there remains the voice of a Christian man seeking to know better the God of the universe. Sensing that his poems were never systematic treatises, it would be unfair to expect such a soteriology from him. But, with his learned spirit, catechistic layout, and the desire to further explore the things of God it would be just as unfair to assume theological ignorance in his works. Therefore, in an attempt to draw out Prudentius' soteriological themes from his poetical verse, a number of tensions lie beneath the theological language of the Nicene confessions. Throughout the *Liber Cathemerinon* Prudentius asserts God's solution to sin in the Incarnate Christ and yet, a perpetual attraction to the issue of humanity's sin implicitly determines his perception of Christ's atoning work on the cross. As a result, this focus fosters a synergistic sanctification model that ultimately works itself out in a heightened eschatological view of salvation, which downplays the gift of immediate participation in God.

³⁷¹ He proclaims, "He is King of the judges of former times who ruled over the race of Jacob, and King of the church which now holds sway, King both of the new temple and the old." Prudentius, *Liber Cathemerinon*, Loeb, XII.185-188.

³⁷² Pelikan, "Eschatology," 109.

Chapter 3

A Comparative Analysis

Introduction

Having gained the knowledge of Nicene salvation theology, as expressed by Athanasius, and Prudentius' soteriology proposed in his *Liber Cathemerinon*, it is now necessary to make explicit salient comparative conclusions. This final chapter argues that as the *problem* of sin dominates Prudentius' soteriology it consequently diminishes the significance and hope offered by the Incarnation of Christ, pushing him toward a works-based concept of the Christian life. All of which stands in contrast to the soteriological construct of fourth-century Nicene theology, which unquestionably emphasizes the *solution* and leads to a grace-dependent and communion-oriented view of the Christian life. As such, Prudentius' use of the Christological confessions of the Nicene Creed cannot foreshadow a salvation theology that subscribes to the underlying soteriological impetus of Nicene theology. Prudentius' confessions of the Christological tenets of the Nicene Creed have not affected his own soteriological convictions, which being heavily influenced by earlier Alexandrian and Greek thinkers, are considerably different than the foundational understanding of salvation that stands behind the Nicene Creed. Therefore, proclamation of doctrinal truth is not enough to align oneself with a particular theological system of thought, and in order to understand the intended confessions of the creed, knowledge of its underlying soteriological belief is absolutely necessary.

The Overarching Biblical Narrative

A similar biblical narrative stands as the backdrop for both Prudentius and Athanasius as they seek to gain crucial knowledge about God's actions and plans for the

created world. For many patristic thinkers this blueprint was the unquestioned reality that outlined the story of creation to the fall of humanity, and God's subsequent movement toward the redemption of all things.³⁷³ Common convention had thinkers working from within this arc drama. Even more to the point, the concern for humanity's salvation was realized from within this narrative. Despite a similar starting point, it is this dramatic narrative that drives Athanasius' theological conclusions in a way that is noticeably absent in Prudentius' poems. The narrative becomes Athanasius' foundation as well as his standard for any logical connections. This biblical drama is the history of God's creation, and thus it is the progressive history (in the sense that history encompasses past, present, and future) of God's salvation of creation.³⁷⁴ Every aspect of his speech about God and humanity relates intimately to this history. Conversely, Prudentius' *Liber Cathemerinon* does not share the same dependency upon this narrative, though it is recognized as the accepted reality. In support of this observation O'Daly convincingly adds, "Attempts to find a standard structural pattern in the poems ... are unconvincing."³⁷⁵ The biblical themes of the poem do not take a systematic or ordered form.³⁷⁶ Although Prudentius and Athanasius adhere to the accepted reality of God and His relation to creation, for Prudentius the biblical narrative does not exemplify a form of inner logic. Athanasius is acutely conscious of using the biblical narrative as a baseline for further conversation about the Christian faith, whereas Prudentius' use of it follows conventional assumptions, but has little to no awareness of his thinking's effect on the narrative.³⁷⁷ Athanasius is convinced

³⁷³ Notably Irenaeus, Athanasius and Cyril.

³⁷⁴ Athanasius, *Incarnation*, 53.

³⁷⁵ O'Daly, *Linked by Song*, 17.

³⁷⁶ O'Daly, *Linked by Song*, 18.

³⁷⁷ Guided by overall themes rather than by the overarching narrative, Prudentius' poetry tends toward moral actions and an overt interest in symbols. Cf. O'Daly, *Linked by Song*, 18-19.

that God's creation is declarative of His intent to save humanity. Consequently, all human history can be said to be salvation history. As a result of Prudentius' less ardent concern for this history, his soteriology tends to look to the future, rather than the past or present, for evidence of God's intent to save humanity. The Nicene Creed, however, is presupposed by this narrative structure. Its Christological thrust begins and ends with the description of God as Creator and His purposeful movement toward redemption.³⁷⁸ True to Athanasius' assessment, the foundational narrative permeates the organization and meaning of the Nicene Creed, intentionally driving its conclusions and claims.

The Significant Shift in Narrative Emphasis

From the biblical drama, Prudentius and Athanasius draw a clear distinction between the characters. God remains God and humans remain human. However, Prudentius characterizes this distinction primarily by its hierarchical structure. He suggests that humans are subservient to God, which then reflects the order of creation as humans rule over it.³⁷⁹ Athanasius prefers to define this character distinction by essence, for human beings, while having been created in the image of God, are not God simply in that they do not share His essence.

The differences continue. In his interpretation of the biblical narrative, Athanasius reasons that there is a problem in terms of humanity's relationship with the Creator and God is faced with a dilemma. As a result, God offers a specific solution. Prudentius also depicts the problem of human sin as it affects the relationship between the characters of the narrative, but unlike Athanasius he offers only a general solution based on a more general

³⁷⁸ "I believe in one God, the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth." Nicene Creed.

³⁷⁹ Prudentius explains, "For He has given all things to man, and we take them with a hand that bears dominion; all that sky or earth or sea produces in air or flood or field, all this has He put under me, and me under Himself." Prudentius, *Liber Cathemerinon*, Loeb, III.36-40.

perspective of the problem. What becomes evident is that each interpretation of the biblical narrative produces different practical implications based on the point of emphasis in each writer's perceived plot line. Simply put, Prudentius' chief concern is the problem, whereas, Athanasius' primary concern is the solution, which must be specific because of his conclusions regarding God's dilemma. Clearly this is a significant divergence from Nicaea's emphasis, for the creed explicitly underscores the specific solution to the problem of sin in the Incarnate Christ. The creed establishes with precision and specificity who Jesus Christ is by declaring Him as "the only-begotten Son of God, begotten of the Father before all worlds; God of God, Light of Light, very God of very God; begotten, not made, being of one substance with the Father, by whom all things were made."³⁸⁰ The Christ of the creed is the One who

for us men for our salvation, came down from heaven, and was incarnate by the Holy Spirit of the virgin Mary, and was made man; and was crucified also for us under Pontius Pilate; He suffered and was buried; and the third day He rose again, according to the Scriptures; and ascended into heaven, and sits on the right hand of the Father; and He shall come again, with glory, to judge the quick and the dead; whose kingdom shall have no end.³⁸¹

Clearly the creed articulates the unique particularity that is the solution to the problem of human sin.

Prudentius' focus on the problem arises, in part, from his concept of sin and its effect on the individual human. Sin has deeply altered the order of creation, dislocating the relationship between God and humanity. Disobedience is the factor that initially changes the relationship between God and humans. Like Athanasius, Prudentius is aware of the cosmic effects that sin has on all of creation, but chooses rather to concentrate on humanity. Further still, he narrows his attention to the individual person, the individual

³⁸⁰ Nicene Creed.

³⁸¹ Nicene Creed.

soul. And for Athanasius there is more of a communal understanding of humanity. For Prudentius, it is the body that corrupts the soul. Sin therefore, is the product of the soul being shackled to the body.³⁸² By consequence, Prudentius emits an overwhelming moral tone.³⁸³ His *Hamartigenia*

focuses on human depravity as the effective cause of a distorted and disordered ‘creation’. It shows the reader that what we casually call ‘nature’ is no longer ‘natural’. [Dykes argues] that the *Hamartigenia* creates a reader whose vocation it is to be responsible: to make choices and to take consequences The *Hamartigenia* both ‘says’ that such a response is the reader’s vocation, and is itself an agent in creating such a response.³⁸⁴

Dykes’ observation articulates well Prudentius’ moral motivation in his concern about sin. Plainly stated the *Hamartigenia* describes the human person as a “moral agent” who is “responsible for the way the world is.”³⁸⁵ Moreover, “the world ... becomes a microcosm of the irresponsible choices indulged in by God’s free creatures ... The human will is, it appears, stronger than both the devil’s wiles (it has the power to resist them) and God’s universal salvific will (the human moral agent can choose not to be saved).”³⁸⁶ Prudentius understands “that the inconsistencies of the world and the inconsistency of human experience are signs not of the divine power as indifferent, still less of the divine power as some half-sadistic games-master, but of the intrusion of bad choices, freely made.”³⁸⁷ In a

³⁸² Throughout Prudentius’ works there is a conscious battle between creation and the powers of darkness, which threaten to capture and enslave. In much the same way, there is a continual tension between body and soul. Cf. Prudentius, *Hamartigenia*, Loeb, 504-620.

³⁸³ O’Daly recognizes Prudentius’ intimate connection between overarching Christian themes and moral action. He argues that “these themes are closely related to the practice of the Christian life, to moral self-examination and exhortation, daily prayer and regular fasting, what and how to eat, how to dress, human dying, redemption, and resurrection, community and song, the role of poetry, the natural world as a key to understanding the divine, the Bible as a book of symbols that reveal something of the nature of the divine and its providential role in human lives.” O’Daly, *Linked by Song*, 18.

³⁸⁴ Dykes, *Reading*, 16.

³⁸⁵ Dykes, *Reading*, 18.

³⁸⁶ Dykes, *Reading*, 20-21. From this moral cosmology, “the world, distorted by human choice, is replicated, in its turn, in a disordered poem.” Dykes, *Reading*, 247.

³⁸⁷ Dykes, *Reading*, 52. It is interesting that “The *Hamartigenia* is a Latin hexameter poem which understands the world as being damaged by human choices, and shows that the first damage that was done

similar view of the gift of free choice, both Athanasius and Prudentius charge humanity with the responsibility of sin. Prudentius argues,

Mankind is responsible for evil in the world, and responsible for the submissions, surrenders and concessions made to the devil However, despite the astuteness of the father of lies, it is the human person, as a free moral agent, who is still responsible for all the evil in the world. The human moral agent cannot transfer responsibility to the devil, because the human moral agent has free will.³⁸⁸

The poet expresses his understanding of falling into a sinful life in terms of its idolatrous nature when he wants to write about the faith as an offering to make up for the time he wasted loving the world.³⁸⁹ In a similar tone, Athanasius describes the misuse of humanity's free choice as idolatry. His ideas closely resemble the Apostle Paul's as he explains to the Roman Christians that humanity, "Professing to be wise ... became fools, and exchanged the glory of the incorruptible God for an image in the form of corruptible man and of birds and four-footed animals and crawling creatures."³⁹⁰ Like Paul, Athanasius asserts a concept of sin that expresses humanity's propensity toward idolatry of self, rather than worship of God.³⁹¹

In the patristic period, a concept of sin was foundational to understanding the nature of God's salvation.³⁹² Methodius of Olympus (died c. 311),³⁹³ who was a strong opponent

was at the Fall, the choice of Adam and Eve to sin. However, sin has occurred since this first event, and in many various ways, yet the poem focuses on sexually related sin as the most effective cause of the perversion of that goodness which still remains in the world after the Fall." Dykes, *Reading*, 16. "It is a sin poem ... where much is perverse, reversed and twisted." Dykes, *Reading*, 27-28.

³⁸⁸ Dykes, *Reading*, 18.

³⁸⁹ Cf. Prudentius, *Preface*, Loeb, 31-33. Similarly, he writes in his *Apotheosis* of the soul being lured and tempted once it was attached to the earth by way of a body. Giving into selfish desires echoes a similar concept of idolatry of self that Athanasius expresses. Prudentius, *Apotheosis*, Loeb, 898-908.

³⁹⁰ Romans 1:22-23, NASB.

³⁹¹ Cf. Athanasius, *Incarnation*, 61, 63.

³⁹² For example, McMahon reasons that "if one conceives of sin as tantamount to a disruptive noise that awakens a sleeping god (as in the Babylonia creation story, *Enuma Elish*), then one might expect that salvation would entail placating, appeasing, putting to bed, or possibly even killing the irate god. If, on the other hand, sin is understood as a crime against the sovereign ruler of the kingdom, then perhaps a kind of punishment is in order, one that fits the crime." McMahon, *Jesus*, 154.

of Origen, took “a view of sin and moral ability” that was very different from “the later Alexandrian school, as represented by Athanasius, [who] laid more stress upon the guilt of sin and the need of grace.”³⁹⁴ Both writers acknowledge that sin is more significant than immoral behavior.³⁹⁵ For Prudentius it is the fact that sin penetrates the human soul through the fleshly body.³⁹⁶ Like Methodius, he tends to practice a synergistic reaction to sin in that the human being, through moral action, can wrestle and win the battle between the good of the soul and the bad of the flesh. For Athanasius sin is the rejection of God as God and the misuse of free will to choose self over God.³⁹⁷ On this basis, the human being relies solely on the grace of God in His gift of His image to overcome sin through Christ. Though there are dangers to combining the Pelagian and Arian controversies, Anatolios warns, both “were resolved in the ‘orthodox’ tradition by the same basic insight: our salvation can only be worked by God.”³⁹⁸

While both writers recognize the reality of the problem, their interpretations and emphasis differ. Undoubtedly this difference is enlarged in their attempts to understand the solution. To be clear, both Prudentius and Athanasius proclaim that it is the Incarnational event that makes a way for humanity to step into a right relationship with God. Moreover, both writers declare the universal intention of God’s salvation. The person of Jesus Christ

³⁹³ Methodius was a well-educated man known also for his writing abilities. His works have generally been ascribed to the end of the third, beginning of the fourth century. From this basic information, and Prudentius’ known reading skills, it cannot be ruled out that he may have been familiar with Methodius’ works. Johann Peter Kirsch, “St. Methodius of Olympus,” *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, vol. 10 (New York: Robert Appleton Company, 1911), <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/10243a.htm> (accessed May 29, 2013).

³⁹⁴ Scott, *Origen and Development*, 213-214.

³⁹⁵ This being a reflection of the scriptural witness, the writer of Hebrews reasons, “How much severer punishment do you think he will deserve who has trampled under foot the Son of God, and has regarded as unclean the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified, and has insulted the Spirit of Grace? For we know Him who said, ‘Vengeance is Mine, I will repay.’ And again, ‘The LORD will judge His people.’ It is a terrifying thing to fall into the hands of the living God.” Hebrews 10:29-30, NASB.

³⁹⁶ Cf. Prudentius, *Apotheosis*, Loeb, 909-914.

³⁹⁷ Cf. Athanasius, *Incarnation*, 61, 83.

³⁹⁸ Anatolios, *Coherence*, 204.

is proclaimed as the Second Man and declared to be the solution to humanity's predicament. In summary, it is the Incarnational event that makes possible the benefits of salvation for all. It is Prudentius' declarations, however, that seem less thought through. In contrast, it is Athanasius who works out the dilemma that is before God. Emphatically he assesses, "with death holding greater sway and corruption remaining fast against human beings, the race of humans was perishing, and the human being, made rational and in the image, was disappearing, and the work made by God was being obliterated."³⁹⁹

At this point a basal question arises both in Prudentius and Athanasius that solidifies their divergent patterns of thought from here on. For Athanasius the question is posed: What then was God to do? For Prudentius, though never stated directly, but implied, the question arises: What then is humanity to do? The ontological versus anthropological basis realigns both writer's concerns and method of reasoning in their attempts to offer a solution to the dilemma of sinful humanity. Athanasius' question allows him to rely on the overarching narrative and to see the solution from God's perspective. Prudentius' question causes him to re-evaluate the problem and offer a general solution that cannot express its depth and assurance here and now.

Athanasius concludes that God foreordained the Incarnation of the Word. By answering the question from God's perspective he is able to reason the effect, necessity, and singularity of God's work through Christ. This reasoning opens up a number of questions regarding the specificity of God's action; without its contemplation, conclusions about the solution remain general, and the practical outcome is limited to an anthropological orientation, as in Prudentius. It is here that Athanasius and Prudentius establish principles that determine the outcome of later implications.

³⁹⁹ Athanasius, *Incarnation*, 63.

Emphasis Revealed by Salvation Defined

This divergence in plot emphasis is clearly evidenced in both definitions of salvation. For Prudentius salvation is rescue from sin, death, and the devil. For Athanasius, salvation is rescue from sin to new life, characterized by participation in God. Sergius Bulgakov suggests that there is a propensity for a definition of salvation to be either *from* or *for*, when in actual fact it must contain both/and as Athanasius articulates.⁴⁰⁰ Often the Incarnation is

represented in Holy Scripture as the salvation of man from sin by the Lamb of God's sacrificially taking upon Himself the sins of the world. This corresponds to the real and concrete accomplishment of the Incarnation 'for us men and for our salvation.' But the first half of this formula of the Nicene Creed, 'for us men,' has a more general meaning than its particular application in the second half, 'for our salvation.' Furthermore, the texts ...⁴⁰¹ indicate not the immediate, redemptive goal of the Incarnation but its final and universal goal: the goal of uniting all heavenly and earthly things under Christ. In the juxtaposition of these two goals, there is no either/or; there is only both/and. More precisely, the soteriological redemption is the path to 'our glory.'⁴⁰²

Because Prudentius' definition of salvation emphasizes the first half of Bulgakov's observation (deliverance from death, sin, and the devil), any act that promotes purity and dispels sin and darkness plays a cooperative part in acquiring God's salvation for the individual. Contrary to Prudentius' scope, Athanasius understands salvation in a much fuller sense. In an insightful bit of logic and a reiteration of Bulgakov's perception of the scope of salvation, Purves argues,

The Gospel has to overcome not only our sin unto death but also our inability to offer to God the worship and service that God rightly commands. This is not merely moral and technical incompetence to be overcome by renewed effort. Neither is it a question of our becoming more religious. It is a mistake too to offer an account of

⁴⁰⁰ Sergius Bulgakov, *The Lamb of God*, trans. Boris Jakim (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2008), 170.

⁴⁰¹ 1 Peter 1:19-20; 1 Corinthians 2:7; Ephesians 1:4, 5-6, 9-10, 3:9-11; Revelation 22:13; John 3:16-17; 1 John 4:9, 19. Bulgakov, *Lamb of God*, 168-169.

⁴⁰² Bulgakov, *Lamb of God*, 169-170.

the agency of the Holy Spirit at just this point when that means bypassing the vicarious priesthood of Christ. *Christian faith teaches that between God and ourselves stands the need for an atonement, not only as the means of dealing with sin, guilt and death, but also as the means of our return to relationship with God and service of God, to life in communion with God.* Too often, a theology of atonement has attended to the former without attending also to the latter, leaving us still to our own devices, whether in faith looking for the fruits of sanctification in order to have assurance, or in life and ministry looking to the success of our best efforts in order to have confidence that our work is blessed by God. The effect is to throw us back upon ourselves at the last moment, leaving both faith and ministry to be worked out in terms of our own response, with no role for Jesus Christ at just that point where we need him most with respect to the practice of faith and ministry. This is a drastic and ultimately fatal abridgement of the Gospel.⁴⁰³

In a truncated way, Purves distinguishes Prudentius' limitations in theological reasoning. By narrowing his definition of salvation, the poet must conclude that humanity is left to his or her own devices. Caught up in his focus on the problem, his logical and practical outcome is to deny the Incarnate Christ's place as Priest. In this way, he can still proclaim Christ as the solution to humanity's problem of sin, but the efficacy of the Incarnation in terms of Christ's atoning work is mitigated. One practical outcome that speaks to Prudentius' reasoning is that the effects of Christ's work wait to be actualized in the future. In contradistinction, the atoning outcome for Athanasius' concept of salvation is manifested in the believer immediately and continues throughout the future.⁴⁰⁴

Professing the Person and Work of Christ

The Starting Point

Prudentius and Athanasius profess, in their respective works, that Christ is the Word of God, the Son of God, the second member of the Trinity, very God, and very Man

⁴⁰³ Purves, "Priesthood," 3, emphasis mine.

⁴⁰⁴ Cf. Romans 8:8-23, NASB; Galatians 3:26, NASB; 1 John 3:1, NASB.

as it is articulated in the Nicene confession.⁴⁰⁵ Nevertheless, both writers showcase very different contiguous theologies, which in Prudentius' case begins to disconnect his claims about Christ from his underlying logic. In order to demonstrate this disassociation, a necessary place to begin is with the assertions of Christ and the supporting claims of both writers. Well-known is Athanasius' insistent inseparability of creation and redemption as his theological starting point. Following many of Irenaeus' foundational principles here, he argues that God establishes Himself as love in His act of creation by naming Himself Savior before creating. As such, the being and action of God cannot be separated. In support of this concept, Bulgakov strategically points to the scriptural testimony that declares "the coming of Christ into the world, the Incarnation, is predetermined before the creation of the world. That is, it is included in God's pre-eternal plan for the world, in His counsel concerning the world."⁴⁰⁶ As a result "The Incarnation is not *only* the means to the redemption; it is also the supreme crowning of the world, even in comparison with its creation. In the Incarnation, God showed His love for creation."⁴⁰⁷ By this definition, God is a God of love by holding together the act of creation and His being as Savior. Maintaining these two aspects, Bulgakov echoes Athanasius in that "The Incarnation was accomplished in all its significance as it was pre-eternally established in God's counsel, but it was accomplished *for the sake of fallen humanity*."⁴⁰⁸ In proclaiming the person and

⁴⁰⁵ "And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only-begotten Son of God, begotten of the Father before all worlds; God of God, Light of Light, very God of very God; begotten, not made, being of one substance with the Father, by whom all things were made." Nicene Creed.

⁴⁰⁶ Bulgakov, *Lamb of God*, 168. Here, Bulgakov is referring to passages like: 1 Peter 1:19-20; 1 Cor. 2:7; Eph. 1:4.

⁴⁰⁷ Bulgakov, *Lamb of God*, 169, emphasis mine.

⁴⁰⁸ Bulgakov, *Lamb of God*, 170, emphasis mine. Pressing the issue further, Bulgakov argues against the notion of the Incarnation as God's reaction to human action. He writes, "As a result of the Fall, the Incarnation was, first of all, the means to salvation and redemption. It preserved the totality of its significance beyond the limits of redemption, however, for the Incarnation is not exhausted by redemption. The *casus irrealis* here consists in supposing that, if man had not sinned, God could have left Himself unincarnate. The

work of Christ, Athanasius safeguards his conviction that behind the entire redemption story is a God who loves.⁴⁰⁹ It is this loving God that overshadows all of Athanasius' conclusions about Christ and it is this loving God that cannot be sensed to the same degree in the confessions of Prudentius' poetic rhetoric. Without an understanding of God as foreseer of the problem *and* solution, the problem for Prudentius is given greater significance and humanity must play a greater part in the solution.

The Word God

If the starting place for Athanasius is God and His loving act of creation, the second point of concern is a theology of the Word. Early on, the church father identifies the Word as being God Himself. Therefore, He is rightly given praise as Creator and Sustainer. This connection is less overt in Prudentius, for his language declares God the Father to be Creator, Provider, Sustainer, but the question remains: Does he attribute these titles to the Word? There is evidence to suggest that a lack of a theology of the Word could have been a Latin influence. Daniélou claims, "The Muratorian Canon provides us with invaluable evidence of the situation at the end of the second century with regard to Latin translations

Incarnation is thus made dependent on man, and in particular on his fall, on original sin, and, in the final analysis, even on the serpent. But ... the mystery of the Incarnation was decided 'before the foundations of the world'; that is, it expresses the most fundamental and determining relation of God to the world and not only to a particular event in the life of the world, even if an event that is of capital importance for us. The world did not use man's fall to compel God to make Himself incarnate." Bulgakov, *Lamb of God*, 170.

⁴⁰⁹ This love, Tanner argues is in the fact that "The nature of God establishes the nature of both our creation and salvation because God's intent in creating us is to save us by giving us the character of God's own life. Behind the whole story of creation and salvation lies the general fact that God wants us to enjoy what God is in unity with him." Kathryn Tanner, "Creation and Salvation in the Image of an Incomprehensible God," in *God of Salvation: Soteriology in Theological Perspective*, eds. Ivor J. Davidson and Murray A. Rae (Surrey: Ashgate Publishing, 2011), 61. However, one cannot mistake this for suggesting that creation was necessary, for "the necessity of creation does not follow from the proper life of Divinity and Divinity's self-positing; there is no place for creation in Divinity itself. And in this sense, the creation of the world can only be the proper *work* of Divinity, not in His hypostatic nature, but in His creative freedom. In relation to the life of Divinity *itself*, the world did not have to be." Bulgakov, *Lamb of God*, 119.

of Greek texts.”⁴¹⁰ The Monarchians were a strong presence in Rome who avidly “denied the theology of the Word and were content with a Jewish monotheism.”⁴¹¹ As a result, the Muratorian Canon bears witness to a movement away from a theology of the Word and toward a development of Logos theology.⁴¹² Still closer to Prudentius and his poetic contemporaries was Commodian (born c. 250), who was heavily influenced by Monarchian ideas.⁴¹³ These accusations are based on Commodian’s non-existent theology of the Word, “which was very much in favour in the East, and which Tertullian and Hippolytus were disseminating in the West during his time. Commodian stands in the tradition of the Judaeo-Christian monotheism which acknowledged the Son of God only during the incarnation.”⁴¹⁴

It is in declaring the divine and human nature of the Incarnate Word that propels Athanasius to conclude that He is the *only* means of salvation.⁴¹⁵ Without a robust understanding of the Incarnate Word as Christ (fully human, fully God) and as located in God Himself, Prudentius cannot make the same conclusion.⁴¹⁶ Prudentius’ limited concept of the significance of the Word fractures the efficacy of Christ’s work and motivates him to find other means of salvation that are supplementary to the Incarnate Christ. It is Athanasius’ belief in Christ as the Incarnate Word that propels the declaration of His ability to mediate God’s salvation directly and thus immediately affect humanity’s sinful condition. Without a similar concept of the Word, Prudentius struggles to see how Christ’s

⁴¹⁰ Jean Daniélou, *The Origins of Latin Christianity*, vol. 3 of *A History of Early Christian Doctrine Before the Council of Nicaea* (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1977), 13-14.

⁴¹¹ Daniélou, *Origins*, 13-14.

⁴¹² Daniélou, *Origins*, 13-14.

⁴¹³ Daniélou, *Origins*, 111.

⁴¹⁴ Daniélou, *Origins*, 111.

⁴¹⁵ Athanasius, *Incarnation*, 93.

⁴¹⁶ For hints of Prudentius’ vision of Christ as fully God and fully human see Prudentius, *Liber Cathemerinon*, Loeb, XI.41-72; XII.65-68.

work is immediately efficacious. Moreover, it is clear, both in Athanasius' own exposition and in the language and structure of the Nicene Creed, that the identity of the Word Incarnate stands as the foundation on which to move forward to express exactly what Christ, the God-Man has done. Without this basic theology of the Word, the Christological claims of the Nicene Creed are disparaged.

Jesus Christ's Divinity and Humanity

The divine nature of the Incarnate Word is significant for Athanasius. Akin observes "that if Jesus Christ is not divine, then his death provides only an example of how the creature is supposed to obey the Creator, which means salvation is by works. But since the Savior is God incarnate, then his atoning death was the act of God satisfying himself – therefore salvation is by grace alone."⁴¹⁷ It is the divine nature of Christ's personhood that unites Him uniquely with God, the Father. In agreement, Prudentius emphasizes Christ's divinity as he boldly opposes Marcion who sees God as "the demiurge who creates a world of contradiction and cruelty. This god is capricious and partisan. Marcion understands Jesus Christ to be the saviour sent by the Heavenly Father, but He is sent to rescue us from the God revealed in the Old Testament. He is not the fulfillment of what has previously been revealed."⁴¹⁸ It is in his *Hamartigenia* that Prudentius ardently debates this viewpoint and elevates the divinity of Christ. Scholars, such as Dykes, have argued that Prudentius purported adoptionist or docetic ideas, wherein the humanity of Christ is severely mitigated.⁴¹⁹ In support of Dykes' proposal, some implications of these viewpoints are

⁴¹⁷ Akin, *Church*, 697.

⁴¹⁸ Dykes, *Reading*, 13.

⁴¹⁹ Dykes, *Reading*, 250. Dykes suggests that "A comparable misalignment between title and poem has been detected in the case of the *Apotheosis*. As the poem concerns itself with Christ, the Incarnation and the doctrine of the Trinity, 'Apotheosis' could be read as meaning Christ's divinization: to put it another way, it could be seen as evidence of Prudentius's adoptionism or docetism. A more orthodox reading of the title is

evident in Prudentius' *Liber Cathemerinon*. For example, he tends to downplay the humanity of Christ as it identifies with human beings. Instead, it is Christ's divinity that allows Him to triumph over sin, death, and the devil.⁴²⁰ Furthermore, the Incarnation is little more than the gateway by which Christ came to abolish sin.⁴²¹ The Incarnation is detached at a personal level from its value for the believer. Similarly, the death of Christ remains in the realm of quelling sin, and thus, it cannot transform the very nature of humanity.⁴²² Without assurance of Christ's humanity, His work cannot be the pinnacle of salvation. It is from this position that Prudentius views the crux of salvation to be eschatological.⁴²³ It is no doubt that Prudentius' practical theology downplays the humanity of Christ, though his professions of Christ follow the dual-natured confessions of Nicaea.

Clearly, maintaining the paradoxical nature of Christ (fully God, fully human) throughout one's theological reasoning vastly affects soteriological implications. As it has been noted, beginning with a limited view of the nature of the Word and His participation in creation leads to a disadvantage in Prudentius' view of the person of Christ. Prudentius' implications do not show evidence of grasping the Word Incarnate as fully human. In contrast, Athanasius' meditation on the humanity of Christ leads him to a number of key conclusions: (1) immediacy of Christ's work, (2) significance of Christ's work, (3) assurance of salvation for humanity, and (4) what participation in God looks like after the Incarnation. It is these conclusions that cannot be determined in Prudentius' thinking.

to see it as referring to the divinization of the human soul through its incorporation in Christ." Dykes, *Reading*, 250.

⁴²⁰ Cf. Prudentius, *Liber Cathemerinon*, Loeb, XII.1-56; Prudentius, *Apotheosis*. Loeb, 1-1084.

⁴²¹ Cf. Prudentius, *Liber Cathemerinon*, Loeb, XI.43-48.

⁴²² Cf. Prudentius, *Liber Cathemerinon*, Loeb, I.69-72; IX.83-98.

⁴²³ Cf. Prudentius, *Liber Cathemerinon*, Loeb, II.1-12; XII.185-204.

Speculation suggests that it may have been due to his treatment of sin or an incomplete part of his soteriology.

For Prudentius, the person of Christ is for humanity the perfect example of how a person can pursue and know things of the Spirit (righteousness) while in a mortal frame.

This is not who the person of Christ is for Athanasius. Purves comments,

The danger for orthodoxy is likely always to lie in thinking of the incarnation itself as the whole Gospel, which undercuts Christ's ministry in our humanity in a docetic ... way. When the incarnation is not thought through in terms that include the priesthood of the humanity of Christ it means, in fact, the rejection of the atonement. It is not yet salvation just that God is in communion with us, and that God has acted in Christ for us, but that we should be in communion with God. For this, Christ must, from the side of our humanity, be our High Priest, offering by his own hand vicariously our human sacrificial response to God, confessing our sin and living the filial life that God requires, so that in and through him in his priestly humanity is both the holy word of God to us and the righteous response of humankind to God. This claim for the priesthood of Jesus Christ is no doubt large and controversial, yet the actuality of the Gospel rides on the back of its truth.⁴²⁴

In summary, therefore,

The priesthood of Christ takes us into the center of the Gospel, not only at the point of atonement for sin, *but also at the point of our sharing in the fellowship of Christ's self-sacrifice, which is the sum of Christian life and ministry*. It is Christ's priestly ministry that enables us to hold salvation and discipleship together *as Gospel*. The great danger is always that at the last moment Gospel becomes its opposite, in which everything depends upon us – our faith, our decisions or works exercised as in a legal or commercial transaction. God in Christ acts in a two-fold way in the flesh of our humanity as our atoning priest, bringing God to us and us to God, to bridge the gulf which separated between what sin had made us, and what it was the desire of God's love that we should become. The redemption of us who stand condemned in our sins is only truly and fully seen in its relation to the results contemplated, namely, our participation in eternal life through our adoption as children of God.⁴²⁵

Prudentius' inability to have the dual-nature of Christ's person permeate his theological thinking has, in effect, disconnected him from an ability to reason humanity's participation

⁴²⁴ Purves, "Priesthood," 2. Furthermore, "the claim that Christ's priesthood entails the singular efficacy of his atonement strains the nerve of post-modernist inclusivism." Purves, "Priesthood," 2.

⁴²⁵ Purves, "Priesthood," 4, emphasis mine.

in God, through Christ. More severe yet, Purves emphasizes the devastating effects this outlook can have on one's concept of the atonement and salvation in its entirety. It is this disconnect in Prudentius that separates Christ's work from the Christian life.

The Image of God

The image of God in humanity stands out as a differentiating factor in this analysis, for Athanasius upholds it as determining, and Prudentius does not see it as directly affecting the efficacy of salvation through Christ. Common to the patristic period, the concept says, "Humans are created in the image of God because, unlike other creatures, they have reason or free will or the ability to rule over others as God does."⁴²⁶ To some degree, this perspective is identified in Athanasius' writing, however he includes a number of significant nuances.⁴²⁷ From this basic formula, Tanner argues that "The underlying problem is simply the presumption that human beings have a definite nature to begin with, that could be considered in itself and perfectly well specified in its own terms."⁴²⁸ Avoiding the pitfalls that Tanner identifies, Athanasius views humanity's nature as necessarily existing as it is only with the grace of God's gifts, for without them there is an ontological vulnerability that would eventually collapse into non-being.⁴²⁹

What does being created in the image of God mean for Prudentius? To start, he views the human soul as created and fashioned by God, given qualities that are divine, and filled by God.⁴³⁰ However, unlike Athanasius, Prudentius is much less concrete on what this means and the implications that affect humanity in relation to the Word's Incarnation.

⁴²⁶ Tanner, "Creation," 62.

⁴²⁷ Cf. Athanasius, *Incarnation*, 57.

⁴²⁸ Tanner, "Creation," 62.

⁴²⁹ Cf. Athanasius, *Incarnation*, 59.

⁴³⁰ O'Daly clarifies this conversation by suggesting that Prudentius "considers this likeness to apply to the human body as much as to the soul (see also *Apoth.* 797-9). In this he departs from much of early Christian exegesis, which declares that the soul-mind alone is an image or likeness of the divine." O'Daly, *Linked by Song*, 106.

It would seem that “likeness” for Prudentius refers to wisdom and ruler-ship. A question arises: Do human beings need the grace of God to exist as they are? It is this concept that becomes foundational in Athanasius’ system of thought. As created in the image of God, human beings are able to participate in God. This principle determines how Athanasius views the Christian life. Because of Christ, this dynamic has been transformed and humans directly and immediately participate in God. Prudentius remains with a previous understanding of participation, wherein contemplation of the Divine (and good works) brings one closer to God, while sin corrupts and separates one from God. In this explanation, the Incarnation seems to have little immediate effect on Prudentius’ view of salvation.

Implications for Understanding Soteriology

By emphasizing different points of the narrative as they apply to the Christological tenets of Nicaea, there are direct implications for understanding soteriology, particularly in terms of its application. Both writers purport Nicene descriptions of who Jesus Christ is and what He has done, but in assessing their greater theological frameworks, Prudentius’ commitment to the Nicene confessions can be questioned. Because these two thinkers have diverged at critical junctures already, it is likely that practical implications will also show similar differences. Such a comparison is the most significant, for it begins to connect Prudentius’ practical and proclamatory theology. By examining the practical elements of Christian faith, the disconnect between Prudentius’ declarations of Nicaea and alignment with its underlying soteriology is most clearly seen.

The Crux of the Biblical Narrative

First, just as each story has a climactic moment, the crux of the biblical narrative is viewed quite differently for these two writers. In Athanasius' thinking there is no doubt that the solution is the climax to the narrative. It is the death of the Incarnate Word that positions itself at the very heart of his thinking.⁴³¹ In stark contrast, Prudentius orients his narrative around future events, meaning that the climax of his salvation narrative is eschatological.⁴³² Athanasius centralizes and emphasizes the bodily death and resurrection of Christ. It is, therefore, the victory "within" human beings that he is expositing; Prudentius does not seem to hold to this emphasis. As a result, there is less stress on the necessity of the Incarnation of the Word.

It is Christ's death that urges Athanasius to contemplate the effect for humans, but only because he foundationally understands the significance of Christ being the Word of God. This is the concept of the high-priestly work of Christ and its immediate significance for humanity. From this perspective, three consequences arise. "First, it is only on the basis of Christ's priesthood that the reconciliation between God and the world can be reclaimed as the heart of the Gospel and the center of Christian life."⁴³³ Second,

There is no possibility within our humanity of an adequate response to the word of God or the reign of God, except as Christ makes that response for us. It is Christ as our priest who stands before God as the person of faith, the Mediator given by and

⁴³¹ Cf. Athanasius, *Incarnation*, 93.

⁴³² This is reflected in Prudentius' over-excitement about the future. In the analysis of his soteriological system, it was found that his most focused area was the final results of salvation. Cf. Prudentius, *Liber Cathemerinon*, Loeb, II.1-12.

⁴³³ Purves, "Priesthood," 3. Insightfully, Purves discerns a noticeable shift in contemporary mainline protestant communities to abandon the atonement "in order to make way ... for the discussion of the Christian's moral and social responsibility. The major tension that has opened up within modern Protestantism can be charted by the modernist tendency to give the prophetic ministry of Christ prominence at the expense of his priestly and royal ministries. In this way, Protestant Christianity is in process of a remarkable though reductionist redefinition as it journeys en route to the fulfillment of Kant's vision of a religion of ethical imperatives. *It has been forgotten that social ministry is the fruit of atonement and faithfulness to Christ's reign; and that salvation is not reducible to successful social ministry.*" Purves, "Priesthood," 3, emphasis mine.

as God, yet standing wholly within our humanity, who proclaims and answers God's word, and who announces and lives God's reign. It is to his answering and living that we are joined, making Christian faith, life and ministry possible.⁴³⁴

And third,

to construe Christian faith, ministry and life on any other basis than a sharing in Christ's priesthood is to cast us back upon ourselves in order to make it practical. This is a ... Pelagianism that arises out of an idealist theology construed as a principal, that turns Jesus into a set of ideas that we must bring to application, and which thereby is inherently abstract.⁴³⁵

In helpful fashion, Purves succinctly and correctly names Prudentius' theoretical theology as it stands in isolation from his practical theology. The bold Christological confessions of the Nicene Creed, while profound statements of faith, cannot remain as such if they are not applied and allowed to affect one's practical theology. It would be reasonable to suggest that Prudentius' identification with the Nicene expression of the Gospel is limited to proclamation, for the truth of its statements have not transformed his thinking in practical terms. Making this connection explicit, Bulgakov suggests that "the high-priestly ministry is usually considered exclusively from the point of view of *redemption* ... and the Incarnation is linked to sin" as has been evidenced in Prudentius' thinking.⁴³⁶ "But in reality the high-priestly ministry is not limited solely to redemption from sin; its meaning extends further," which is Athanasius' exposition of what Nicaea is saying.⁴³⁷ Christ's high-priestly ministry "establishes the universal *deification* of man's creaturely being However, the relation between redemption and the deification or sanctification of the human essence ... is such that the former precedes and conditions the latter."⁴³⁸ By reversing this order, Prudentius limits his understanding of the practical consequences

⁴³⁴ Purves, "Priesthood," 3.

⁴³⁵ Purves, "Priesthood," 3.

⁴³⁶ Bulgakov, *Lamb of God*, 334.

⁴³⁷ Bulgakov, *Lamb of God*, 334.

⁴³⁸ Bulgakov, *Lamb of God*, 334.

redemption has for the Christian life. In this way, Christ is seen as merely the proclaimer of salvation, rather than being Salvation Himself.

The Christian Life as Participation in God

Second, the Christian life, the place of human action in salvation, and the concept of participation in God differ from Athanasius to Prudentius. At the outset, it must be noted that both men recognize the importance of the Christian life in the process of salvation, though one sees it in communion with the Triune God already and the other sees it as a precursor to future salvation. As such, human action for Prudentius is in service to accruing salvation. For Athanasius, human action witnesses to the completed work of Christ. Both echo the language of Paul in that Christians are called away from their former ways of living to a new life, which is active and engaging. Athanasius encourages his readers to turn from their previous lives toward a new one, renewing themselves and putting on a new self that is in the likeness of God.⁴³⁹ As such, his view of human action is a response to the already completed work of the Word. It is a witness, an acknowledgement, and praise of what is done and continues to be done.⁴⁴⁰ By contrast, Prudentius views human action as cooperative in and with God's salvific work.⁴⁴¹ In this dynamic, Christ is not the effective sole substitute. Righteous works become the way in which individuals can show repentance and gain pardon for their sin. Prudentius affirms a concept that guarantees the forgiveness

⁴³⁹ Cf. Ephesians 4:17-32, NASB.

⁴⁴⁰ Cf. Athanasius, *Incarnation*, 113-119. Barth captures Athanasius' concern when he defines discipleship. He explains, "The call to discipleship is the particular form of the summons by which Jesus discloses and reveals Himself to a man in order to claim and sanctify him as His own, as His witness in the world." Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics: Index Volume with Aids for the Preacher*, eds. G. W. Bromiley and T. F. Torrance (Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers, 1977), 453.

⁴⁴¹ As an example, both writers hold a special place for education and study in the Christian life. For Prudentius, scholarship in the form of poetry is understood as atoning, whereas for Athanasius study and the task of writing his conclusions down are in response to the transformation Christ has brought about. In this way, theological inquiry is essential to the life of the believer, but "the absolute lordship of Christ is methodologically *a priori* of Christian reflection." Anatolios, *Athanasius*, 84-85.

of post-baptismal sin and re-establishes the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, so as to reaffirm one's confidence in salvation. By contrast, Athanasius finds the assurance of salvation in the person and work of Christ as opposed to human agency.⁴⁴² But for Prudentius, continual abolishment of sin is required to access God's salvation.⁴⁴³ Without reserve, Hugh M. Scott explains that in this system, Christ is the author of salvation, but not its finisher.⁴⁴⁴ As a result, "the domain of human sanctification only indirectly [relates] to the redemption of Christ" and later thinkers would carry this trend toward "legalism, sacramentalism, priestcraft, and all the excesses of monkish devotion."⁴⁴⁵

For Athanasius, the Christian life, which includes good works, flows out of professing the person and work of Christ as it continually witnesses to the reality of what has taken place in the Incarnation of the Word (the internal transformation in humanity). The Christian life is sanctifying, as it is a resultant witness to Christ's atoning work. Conversely, Prudentius' attitude toward the Christian life is motivated by the threat of sin and the devil's schemes. Once again, this shows a mitigation of the human transformation by the Incarnation of the Word. From this position, Prudentius' expression of good works becomes moralistic.⁴⁴⁶

⁴⁴² In a similar way Cyril tends to emphasize God's action, as opposed to human action, in accomplishing salvation: "God gave us the initial beatitude; we lost it, and he gives it to us anew in salvation." Fairbairn, "Patristic Perspective," 94.

⁴⁴³ How is this different from the Old Testament covenant with Israel and her continual need for sacrifice? Cf. Hebrews 10:1-18, NASB.

⁴⁴⁴ Scott, *Origin and Development*, 200.

⁴⁴⁵ Scott, *Origin and Development*, 200.

⁴⁴⁶ It is important to keep in mind that "No ecumenical council dealt with disputes concerning salvation until the fifth century, so the patristic era displays a remarkable lack of clarity or consensus on the subject. For example, the Western church began to understand the doctrine of justification in terms of merit. Since Latin was the language of the Western church, some of the misunderstandings may result from problems in translating the Greek New Testament word *dikaioo*, 'to justify,' to the Latin *meritum*." Alister McGrath, *Iustitia Dei: A History of the Christian Doctrine of Justification*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1998), 14-16. Moreover, "The Greek term means 'to consider one as righteous' while the Latin word means 'to be worthy.' This subtly shifts justification from being God's acquittal of the believing sinner to the sinner's transformation into a person worthy of God's esteem. Early Latin writers such as Tertullian

In the same way that Athanasius has structured his concept of salvation, Irenaeus, before him, shows similar implications for understanding a life of communion with God. Hart argues that the idea of adoption sits at the centre of Irenaeus' thinking and causes him to hold together a person's being and their relationships.⁴⁴⁷ From this platform,

Participation, for Irenaeus, does not mean merely sharing in some qualities of God, and it emphatically does not mean virtual absorption into God's being. Instead, Irenaeus uses the idea of participation in a decidedly personal way: through our union with the natural Son of God, we become adopted sons and daughters, and thus we share fellowship or communion with God. Sharing in God's qualities (such as incorruptibility) follows from this primarily personal way of looking at salvation. By using the idea of participation in God to refer to adoption and communion, Irenaeus plots ... a personal trajectory, which part of the Church will subsequently follow in describing salvation.⁴⁴⁸

Distinctly different, Origen proposes a universe whereby "the very existence of the physical realm is a result of sin ... [and] the pre-existence of the souls gives those souls a kinship with God that the bodies, created later, can never have. This, in turn, prevents him from seeing human beings as whole persons, and thus makes it difficult for him to see salvation in personal terms."⁴⁴⁹ The consequence of Origen's thinking is present in Prudentius. For Origen's system to work,

salvation becomes the task of the human soul to achieve mystical union with God, and this soteriology bears an unmistakable resemblance to the Middle Platonic philosophy that had seeped into second-century Alexandrian Christianity through Philo and Clement. This strong emphasis on salvation as the task of the human soul leads Origen to view participation in God primarily as sharing in God's holiness, wisdom, and other qualities, not as sharing in his personal fellowship.⁴⁵⁰

began to teach that man can earn merit so as to make God his debtor and can satisfy his obligations to God through deeds of penance." McGrath, *Iustitia Dei*, 23; Cf. Akin, *Church*, 697.

⁴⁴⁷ Trevor A. Hart, "Irenaeus, Recapitulation and Physical Redemption," in *Christ in our Place: The Humanity of God in Christ for the Reconciliation of the World*, essays Presented to Professor James Torrance, eds. Trevor A. Hart and Daniel P. Thimell (Exeter: Paternoster, 1989), 165–166, 180; Cf. Fairbairn, "Patristic Soteriology," 295.

⁴⁴⁸ Fairbairn, "Patristic Soteriology," 297.

⁴⁴⁹ Fairbairn, "Patristic Soteriology," 298.

⁴⁵⁰ Fairbairn, "Patristic Soteriology," 298.

Prudentius' notion of participation in God seems to reflect Origen more readily than Irenaeus or Athanasius. Even so, the resemblance increases as Fairbairn explains that Origen's

focus on the free human action to ascend to God, in contrast to a paradigm in which God's downward action is the primary focus, promotes a view of Christian life in which our action is the key to union with God. His depiction of salvation as participation in God's qualities, as purification so that we can see God as he really is, creates a climate in which the personal dimensions of salvation are underemphasized.⁴⁵¹

The Atonement

Third, theoretical and practical consequences of the atonement differ from Prudentius to Athanasius.⁴⁵² For Prudentius, the individual Christian life is a necessary part of the atoning work and functions to secure a person's right standing before God and procure eternal life. In the poet's case, baptism becomes the primary act of atonement for the believer (with the exception of martyrdom).⁴⁵³ Baptism takes on many of the effects that the Incarnation has for Athanasius. For instance, it establishes the new allegiance to Christ. Water baptism functions synergistically with Christ's work to abolish the sin of the individual person so that he/she may receive the hope of eternal salvation. As such, Prudentius envisions a Christ who is limited in His ability to atone immediately and fully, thus, human agency holds a significant place in accruing assurance of one's salvation. Without an understanding of atonement that is effectual eternally and once for all⁴⁵⁴ the

⁴⁵¹ Fairbairn, "Patristic Soteriology," 300. Cyril too, views "salvation as a participation in God's qualities But like Irenaeus and Athanasius, and unlike Origen and Gregory of Nyssa, he places his dominant emphasis on salvation as personal participation *Christians receive both the status of adopted sons and communion with the Father and the Son.* Fairbairn, "Patristic Soteriology," 304, emphasis mine.

⁴⁵² For a succinct description of the history of redemption theology, including atonement-like theories and the Incarnation's effect on redemption and deification see Bulgakov, *Lamb of God*, 342-410.

⁴⁵³ Appealing entirely to Prudentius' personal concern for the problem of sin, martyrdom offers the perfect atonement offering. Whereas, Athanasius would argue that any other form of atonement was unnecessary based on the value of the new covenant erected in Christ.

⁴⁵⁴ Hebrews 9:28; 10:10, NASB.

poet's angst regarding personal sin is well warranted. For Athanasius, the Incarnation and atonement are inextricably held together.⁴⁵⁵ In the same vein, Purves argues that together these two aspects of Christ's priestly ministry are at the centre of the Christian faith, for it is

through his incarnation he took on our human nature, and from within it healed it and made it holy in himself, and which he offers up to God in and through himself on our behalf. As Son of God, Christ represents God to us. He is the word of God, Emmanuel. As Son of Man, Christ represents humankind to God. He is the appropriate response to God from the body of the flesh. Christ's priesthood in this way is determined by who Christ is in the personal union of his incarnate personhood, as wholly God and wholly human, and what God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, wills in and through him that we should be and do.⁴⁵⁶

Efficacy and Assurance

Fourth, the acceptance of the efficacy of Christ's work and subsequent assurance of salvation is also quite different in Prudentius and Athanasius. Righteous acts become the token of assurance for Prudentius, as it is critical for one to avoid sin so as to avoid losing the Spirit of God, which is acquired by a chaste heart. This concern necessitates the acts of repentance and penance. Among these righteous acts, martyrdom stands alone in providing optimal assurance of *immediate* salvation. In the place of Christ's similitude with humanity's humanness, martyrs are believed to act as redemptive mediators. Their holy blood, mimicking the Old Testament sacrifices, is expiatory for the community and their sacrificial suffering accomplishes all that is required for immediate salvation. In

⁴⁵⁵ Purves, "Priesthood," 1.

⁴⁵⁶ Purves, "Priesthood," 1. "This priestly response," Purves argues "is in act as well as word, and its consequence is the cross, in which he bears in his body the terrible cruelty of our separation from God, and offers the self-sacrifice in which priest and victim are identical, united in his person. His *homologia* or confession of our sin as Apostle and High Priest ... as he enters within the veil of the holiness and judgment of God, is a substitutionary atonement, an offering on our behalf in which the sinless one confesses our sin before God. This is utterly an act of God's grace and love, because Christ offers himself in unflinching obedience from and to the Father, with whom he is unbreakably linked, and in an unbreakable link with us, with whom he chose to join himself. Not only is God in Christ reconciling us to God, but also humankind is in Christ being reconciled to God in a unique and once for all union of word and action in which the Mosaic and Aaronic priesthoods of the Old Testament are united, fulfilled and transcended." Purves, "Priesthood," 2.

consequence, the efficacy of Christ's work, particularly His sacrificial death and glorious resurrection, is mitigated and rendered insufficient. In the absence of Christ's completed work, Prudentius accentuates a futuristic climax to salvation, where all will, one day, be completed. Subsequently, Prudentius is forced to find the assurance of salvation in the supplementary acts of atonement.

For Athanasius, this rationale cannot be accepted. He understands that the Incarnate Word, both His death and resurrection, needed to be a very unique sacrifice – so unique it could not be replicated in any way, for it was the all-sufficient, one-time, sacrifice. For Athanasius, the work of Christ completed at the cross is immediately efficacious. As such, life for the believer turns instantaneously from certain mortal death to promised immortality with God. There is surety in Athanasius' thinking that does not resonate in Prudentius. In Athanasius there is "The definitive stability and security worked by Christ" to counter the ontological instability humanity is created with.⁴⁵⁷ As a result, the nature of the human person is founded in Christ, which is no longer outside of God. Because Prudentius does not exposit this change in humanity's nature as a result of the Incarnate Word, the nature of humanity remains the same and so there *cannot* be this same assurance.

Eschatology

Fifth and final, as a result of their differing emphases, the end result of the narrative is significantly diverse. Both writers argue for a future resurrection because of Christ's bodily resurrection, but Athanasius expresses the future hope of the resurrection as an opportunity to reiterate the victory over death won at the cross. Whereas, for Prudentius, the details of eschatological salvation are expressed with deep longing and expectancy, for they epitomize what is ahead, rather than the results of what has already taken place. For

⁴⁵⁷ Anatolios, *Athanasius*, 61.

Prudentius sin reveals itself in a tension of allegiance. It is Christ's death that overturns this allegiance and reverts creation's order back to the original design.⁴⁵⁸ Therefore, final restoration is viewed as a re-uniting of the intended relationship with God. All returns to what it once was. For Athanasius, there is a transformation that occurs with the Incarnation of the Word that changes everything! Therefore, the end result of salvation is not a reversion, but a re-creation.

Prudentius gives exhortation to Christ's final rule as the crowning result of salvation in the eschaton. Because Christ is King, the entire world is under His Lordship. With Athanasius this Lordship begins on earth. A major difference therefore is that the afterlife is highlighted in Prudentius. It is, after all, the ultimate reward of salvation. It would seem that for Prudentius, this is what the whole of the Gospel narrative is moving toward. It is the climax to the narrative. Whereas for Athanasius, it is the Incarnate Christ's death and resurrection that is climactic, and the afterlife continues to witness to this already completed work.

Conclusion

Misinterpreted as a systematic handbook to Nicene theology, Prudentius' bold Christological confessions proclaimed throughout his *Liber Cathemerinon* remain less attached to the intended theological structure supporting such claims. True to his Origenian roots, Prudentius' contemplations contain avenues of speculative thinking, whereas Athanasius opts to project what is certain. At times, Prudentius' tendency toward

⁴⁵⁸ For a description of life before the fall see Prudentius, *Liber Cathemerinon*, Loeb, III.101-110. Dykes describes "'Sponte' [as] a sign of the world before the Fall, before sin, before law (an idealized prelapsarian world). We find this usage deftly being exploited by Prudentius, but already present amongst his predecessors. That is, we find that when the world, although personified as human, works of its own free will, and is not subject to human will, it is unfallen." Dykes, *Reading*, 49. Moreover, Padovese notes Prudentius' tendency to move toward an eschatology that returns humanity to this previous state. Padovese, "Soteriologia," 389.

speculation misguides his practical implications farther away from his original declarations. Both thinkers exhibit a basic concern for God's plan of salvation for humanity; however, Prudentius emphasizes that which humanity is saved *from*, while Athanasius chooses to highlight that which humanity is saved *for*. Likewise, Prudentius' consciousness remains on the problem of sin, while Athanasius centres around the Incarnate Word as God's foreordained and singular solution.⁴⁵⁹ Ultimately, Prudentius' hope of individual salvation, which is ultimate deliverance from sin, death, and the torments of hell, is gauged by his own capacity to ward off sin and pursue righteousness. In Athanasius, this system of pursuing God is transformed by the Incarnation of the Word, understood most precisely by Jesus' death and resurrection.

Both authors articulate the necessity of the Incarnation differently. Prudentius sees it as necessary before humans can participate in acts of righteousness, for this cannot happen until the devil is overthrown and Christ is the figure who does that. For Athanasius, the Incarnation is viewed as the *only* solution for human salvation based on the criteria set forward by God, as outlined in his arguments for Divine dilemma. Moreover, both writers seem to understand that salvation absolves sin and charges Christians to live a life of righteousness and obedience (as Paul repeatedly stresses). However, in Athanasius' understanding, God saves humanity from death for a life of obedience. Prudentius seems to understand God as responding to a life of obedience by saving humanity from sin. As the *Hamartigenia* proposes a moralistic cosmology,⁴⁶⁰ Prudentius' *Liber Cathemerinon* does the same; "Moral action affects the way the world is: not just *mala moralia*, but *mala*

⁴⁵⁹ Much like the writer of Hebrews points out, there is a significant contrast between Sinai and Zion and to the believer the writer reiterates that it is because of Christ "you have come to mount Zion and to the city of the living God." Hebrews 12:22, NASB.

⁴⁶⁰ Dykes, *Reading*, 23.

physica, are, in this schema, a human responsibility.”⁴⁶¹ It is in this way that Prudentius tends toward a synergistic view of salvation; whereas, Athanasius recognizes a grace-based view of salvation, wherein the human can participate in God as part of his or her sanctifying process. In both thinkers there is a decided place for human action. For Prudentius it stands as a precursor to humanity’s salvation, but in Athanasius it is in response to humanity’s salvation.

From this position, Athanasius’ concept of good works becomes an opportunity to participate or commune with God and embody the Word, but it is actualized by the grace of God. Participation in God remains works-focused in Prudentius because of the fact that the Incarnational Christ leaves little impression or immediate effect on the believer. This is an example of not simply using the right “terminology”, but also understanding what is meant.

For Athanasius, Christ’s death and resurrection is the climax of God’s salvation narrative. Prudentius may write this way, but his overall theology suggests that he looks to the future for salvation’s climax. More specifically, Christ’s crucifixion is not the focal point of Prudentius’ *Liber Cathemerinon*. The poet’s focus on the problem of sin perpetuates his view of Christ’s work as limited to conquering death, the devil, and sin. In consequence, Prudentius is more likely to fill the need for atonement with righteous acts. As demonstrated, he places a high priority on the cooperative action of humanity in the atoning work of salvation, which creates a sense of sanctification that is precursory to justification. His theological reasoning is forced to adopt another element, outside of Christ’s work, in order to fully appease humanity’s sin. In turn, Christ’s exclusive salvific work is insufficient, and Prudentius’ theology demands another propitious solution. His underdeveloped theology of Christ’s work and person leads to an equally underdeveloped

⁴⁶¹ Dykes, *Reading*, 23.

theology of the Word of God. By contrast, Athanasius' focus necessarily rests on Christ's work because of his *a priori* of the Word. This results in his emphasis on God's solution as opposed to the problem. The implications for Athanasius are that Christ's work makes possible humanity's life in God. Subsequently the means of salvation is the Word Incarnate alone, for "the Gospel stands or falls then, on the singularity of Christ's soteriological Sonship."⁴⁶² Although Prudentius uses the coined phrases of the creed, his poetry lacks the reasoning that gives power and clarity to its expression. This being evidenced primarily by the disconnect between his proclamations and practical implications. For the most part, he looks to the future for an eschatological salvation that is accomplished and assured only in the age to come. Athanasius expresses the unique transformation of the entire world through the Incarnate Word, wherein salvation is manifested here and now and continues through to the future.

Prudentius' use of the Nicene terminology cannot claim him as a flagship for Nicene theology. McDonald makes the point that simply using the requisite language does not guarantee an accurate representation of the truth that it portrays.⁴⁶³ As one of the best examples, Athanasius gives expression to what the full humanity and full divinity of the Incarnate Word means, while Prudentius simply uses the language.⁴⁶⁴ Thus, theological doctrine is important, but it can significantly deter one's thinking if not understood. Athanasius delves into the Christological confessions of Nicaea in order to give expression and clarity to the issue of God's plan of salvation for humanity. Limited by his inability to articulate the truths of the Christological Nicene confessions, Prudentius remains fixated on

⁴⁶² Purves, "Priesthood," 1.

⁴⁶³ H. D. McDonald, "Development and Christology," *Vox Evangelica* 9 (1975): 5-6.

⁴⁶⁴ Because Prudentius has minimized the reasoning behind his conclusions they are less effective and tend to lead him to practical implications that stand outside of the intended theology of Nicaea.

the problem, because the problem has not really been solved for him. Without the same hope and assurance that the Incarnation gives to Athanasius, Prudentius is undoubtedly left in his own angst looking ahead to the possibility of a future assurance.

Conclusion

Synthesis

The goal of this study is to determine whether Prudentius' understanding of salvation, as presented in his *Liber Cathemerinon*, is truly consistent with Nicene soteriology. Having reviewed Nicene soteriology, as explicated by Athanasius, it is clear that Nicaea understood the Word Incarnate, by means of His life, death, and resurrection, as God's intended and humanity's only redemptive solution. Thus, the Nicene Creed answered the question of salvation theology with *Who*. By contrast, Prudentius defined the Incarnation of Jesus Christ predominantly by the event's ability to rescue sinners from the despair of their sin; as such, it was viewed as the first example of a redemptive solution. In turn, this kind of approach determined an ethics-driven salvation. Prudentius exhibited a fixation on the *problem* of human sin and its effect on individual salvation rather than emphasizing the unique *solution* offered in Jesus Christ, as Nicene theology did. All of this was in light of the fact that the *Liber Cathemerinon* explicitly postulated the Christological phrases of the Nicene Creed. And thus, a disconnect between Prudentius' claims about Christ, the solution, and his underlying salvation theology emerged. Ultimately, Prudentius' concept diminished the hope offered by the Incarnation of Christ, which led him to a works-based concept of the Christian life. In contrast, Nicene soteriology emphasized the sole solution and led to a grace-dependent and communion-oriented view of the Christian life. This study demonstrates that Prudentius' concept of salvation is inconsistent with the foundational soteriology of Nicaea, even though his writings share the Christological claims of the creed.

Implications

The findings of this study suggest several implications, particularly for theology and ethics. Generally, a constructive warning can be issued in terms of following Prudentius' paradigm.⁴⁶⁵ The poet's line of thinking tends toward a dangerously pluralistic understanding of salvation, which threatens the Gospel message and the significance of the person of Jesus Christ. More specifically, there stands a warning against segregating various aspects of theology, namely Christology from soteriology. Unlike Prudentius, it is important to recognize both what the church was saying about Christ at Nicaea and why they were saying it.⁴⁶⁶ Understanding patristic soteriology clarifies patristic Christology. In recent years a number of pointed discussions have, by consequence, called for a re-evaluation of Christology.⁴⁶⁷ In light of this focus, Fairbairn makes the argument that understanding the Christological controversy of the patristic period matters

⁴⁶⁵ This warning does not go without modern examples. Systematic theologians since the fourth-century have had similar conclusions to their thinking in terms of identifying and understanding the person of Jesus Christ. Both Rudolph Bultmann and Paul Tillich, while working to conceptualize the person of Christ, end up situating His identity and Incarnation to the peripheral edge of the Christian faith. Like Prudentius, the practical implications of a rationale ultimately deems Christ ineffective and insignificant. For an introduction to each theological system see Rudolph Bultmann, *Jesus Christ and Mythology* (Albans Place: SCM Press, 1960); Paul Tillich, *Systematic Theology* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1957). In clear contrast, modern theologians Dietrich Bonhoeffer and Karl Barth found the essence of Christian faith and practice on the unique identity and work of Jesus Christ. For an introduction to the Christological claims expressed by these theologians see Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Who is Christ for Us?* eds. Craig Nissn and Renate Wind (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2002); Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, eds. G. W. Bromiley and T. F. Torrance (Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers, 2010), especially vol. I.1, IV.1, IV.2, IV.3.1, and IV.3.2.

⁴⁶⁶ Fairbairn, "Patristic Perspective," 92-93.

⁴⁶⁷ Two particular areas of study are the atonement and reflections on the doctrine of the eternal generation of the Son. The former, initiated by Hans Boersma's work, *Violence, Hospitality, and the Cross: Reappropriating the Atonement Tradition*, has catapulted the discussion of Christ's work into a variety of avenues, directly effecting the way in which the person of Christ is understood. For works involved in the greater conversation see J. Denny Weaver, *The Nonviolent Atonement* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2011); John Sanders, ed., *Atonement and Violence: A Theological Conversation* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2006); Anthony W. Bartlett, *Cross Purposes: The Violent Grammar of Christian Atonement* (Harrisburg: Trinity Press International, 2001); Andrew Sung Park, *Triune Atonement: Christ's Healing for Sinners, Victims, and the Whole Creation* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2009); Theodore W. Jennings, Jr., *Transforming Atonement: A Political Theology of the Cross* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2009); Graham A. Cole, *God the Peacemaker: How Atonement Brings Shalom*, New Studies in Biblical Theology, ed. D. A. Carson (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2009). The latter topic has been recently re-introduced by Kevin Giles in his book, *The Eternal Generation of the Son: Maintaining Orthodoxy in*

because our understanding of [it] influences our understanding of Scripture. Whether we like it or not, whether we admit it or not, we are prone to find in Scripture what we think the early church believed Scripture to be saying about Christ. But if what we *think* they saw in Scriptures is not what they actually saw in Scripture, then we could find ourselves reading the Bible looking for something that the early church did not find here, something that may or may not be there. We could potentially misunderstand the biblical teaching because we have unwittingly misunderstood the patristic church's understanding of the biblical teaching. This, in a nutshell, is why theologians and theological students today should care about patristic debates such as the Christological controversy.⁴⁶⁸

Re-evaluating Christology apart from its soteriological roots will not be able to adequately express its critical and central impact on Christian theology and ultimately any person's Christian experience.

This study has necessarily highlighted the importance of understanding the proclamatory statements of faith, particularly those of the early creeds. Consequently, Prudentius has indirectly charged believers to be mindful of the importance of matching proclamations with practical actions. Therefore, Christian ethics are intimately connected with one's understanding of Christ and more broadly speaking, the Trinitarian expression of God's being. In this vein, Catherine M. Lacugna suggests,

The uniqueness of Christian ethics stems from the uniqueness of the economy of Christ and the Spirit; an ethics that makes little reference to the specifics of the economy, even were it ethical norms to closely approximate the teaching of Jesus, would hardly qualify as Christian. Christian ethics is not generic but christological and pneumatological; christological because in baptism we undertake to live as Jesus lived, pneumatological because the Spirit acts in us, conforming us to the person of Christ and engrafting us into the life of God.⁴⁶⁹

Trinitarian Theology. Aptly, Giles makes the argument that this doctrine is agreed to be foundational to the Christian faith, but when contemporary systematics are worked out, the effects on this particular doctrine are overwhelmingly negative and practically Arian. In favour of Giles argument, he points to Fred Sanders, *The Deep Things of God: How the Trinity Changes Everything* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2010). Giles' argumentation causes the modern concept of Trinity to be re-evaluated and once again the conversation redirects to Arius and Alexander, in which the latter insists on the eternal generation of the Son. Re-visiting this aged discussion, Giles has entered the contemporary debate, which at its heart is about the person and work of Jesus Christ.

⁴⁶⁸ Fairbairn, "Patristic Perspective," 85-86.

⁴⁶⁹ Lacugna, *God for Us*, 408.

Moreover, Lacugna argues that there is indeed a close connection between proclaiming who God is and ethical outcomes. She demonstrates in her book, *God for Us*, “that the doctrine of the Trinity, properly understood, is the affirmation of God’s intimate communication with us through Jesus Christ in the Holy Spirit. As such, it is an eminently practical doctrine with far-reaching consequences for Christian life.”⁴⁷⁰ And so, “The doctrine of the Trinity, which is the specifically Christian way of speaking about God, summarizes what it means to participate in the life of God through Jesus Christ in the Spirit.”⁴⁷¹

Similarly, but in an older example, the subject of Clement’s *Paedagogus* is Jesus Christ.⁴⁷² Clement is careful to infer the eternal existence of the Son by identifying Jesus Christ with the pre-Incarnate Word. The purpose of *Paedagogus* is to communicate the identity, role, and actions of Christ, so as to orient each aspect of the Christian life (personal and communal) as a response to God’s command. As a result, he orders *Paedagogus* to reflect this logic. Clement simply sets his understanding of Christian behavior in direct relation to God’s command. Broadly speaking, Book I composes the foundation for Clement’s guidelines to proper living by establishing who God is and humanity’s relation to Him. Clement defines the Christian life:

Virtue is a will in conformity to God and Christ in life, rightly adjusted to life everlasting. For the life of Christians, in which we are now trained, is a system of reasonable actions—that is, of those things taught by the Word—an unfailing energy which we have called faith. The system is the commandments of the Lord, which, being divine statutes and spiritual counsels, have been written for ourselves, being adapted for ourselves and our neighbours.⁴⁷³

⁴⁷⁰ Lacugna, *God for Us*, ix.

⁴⁷¹ Lacugna, *God for Us*, 1.

⁴⁷² Clement, *Paedagogus*, I.7, Christian Classics Ethereal Library, <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/schaff/anf02.vi.iii.html> (accessed November 21, 2012).

⁴⁷³ Clement, *Paedagogus*, I.13.

Intentional participation in the Christian life follows reason and is achieved through reasonable actions, which are taught by the Word. Book II then delineates guidelines for personal living. Clement thematically expresses that intentional participation in the Christian life is how one loves God. More specifically, loving God in terms of participation is obediently responding to His commands. “And this is the love of God,” says John, “that we keep His commandments.”⁴⁷⁴

By communicating explicitly and clearly the identity and role of Jesus Christ first, Clement is able to create an argument wherein he demonstrates that proper Christian living is in no way detached from the person of Christ. Rather, he works to explain the direct connection between Christ’s work and the manifestation of one’s appropriate response to Him. As such, his proposed guidelines for Christian living are less legalistic and more an outcome to his theological premise. Because Clement has chosen to orient his view of the Christian life through the person and work of Christ, every aspect is affected. Thus, the underlying concern is for a believer to orient his or her life in response to God’s command rather than subjectively concluding the right or wrong course of action as determined by the current cultural ethic. “Grant to us who obey Thy precepts” he prays, echoing the thoughts of the writer of Psalm 119, “that we may perfect the likeness of the image, and with all our power know Him who is the good God.”⁴⁷⁵

Questions for Further Study

This thesis has also generated questions to be pursued in a future conversation. Since this study limited its attention to Prudentius’ *Liber Cathemerinon*, questions arise as to the sense of cohesive logic apparent in his full body of work. More specifically: Is

⁴⁷⁴ Clement, *Paedagogus*, III.11.

⁴⁷⁵ Clement, *Paedagogus*, III.12.

Prudentius consistent in his theological reasoning throughout his works or is there a sense of development? Focused aspects of Prudentius' thinking also require further study; for instance, the poet's concept of the soul and its relationship to the body, his concept of evil, and the degree to which Platonism influences his perception of Christianity.

Similarly, in regard to Prudentius' political involvement, the question remains: How politically tied to Nicaea was he? Religion and politics seem inseparable for Prudentius. With the installment of Spanish general Theodosius as emperor in the East after Valens, loyalty to Nicene beliefs in the East improved. In light of Prudentius' close connection to Theodosius, it is a wonder if the proclamations of the Nicene Faith were as much political as they were religious for him. To this point, Daniélou articulates the close connection between the Roman Empire and the fourth-century church. He explains, "the Latin authors were more concerned than the Greeks with institutions of society, and closer to the heart of the Empire and the Church. They were therefore led to tackle the problems of ecclesiology, both in the concrete issues raised by the actualities of Church life and in the Church's historical confrontation with the ideology of the Empire."⁴⁷⁶ And thus, the overlapping of religion and politics seems to be that much more intimate for a person like Prudentius.

On a grander scale still, this study questions the value of theological inquiry arising from literature, particularly ancient literature. For pieces that have been predominantly studied from a literary perspective, the advances in translation and interpretative resources today allow for greater theological clarity and subsequent inquiry. As a result, it is hopeful that this study's concept will predict more of the same in future patristic scholarship.

⁴⁷⁶ Daniélou, *Origins*, xvi.

Conclusion

Clement was right; “the greatest and most regal work of God is the salvation of humanity.”⁴⁷⁷ Those who met in counsel at Nicaea knew this to be true and diligently sought to clarify this grand work by identifying both the person and work of Jesus Christ. The Nicene Creed has and will continue to guide theological works. This study of Prudentius’ soteriology charges contemporary Christian thinkers to probe earlier minds as to their influences, logical outcomes, and imbued impulses. It also attempts to recognize their longstanding imprint, though they be subtle at times. Beneath the costume of culturally laden poetry, Prudentius is asking the universal question posed before him by a Philippian jailor and after him by the rest of the world: “What must I do to be saved?” All the while, Nicaea responds by noting that the question is altogether misguided. For it is God who saves and how it is done is through the unique Incarnate life, death, and resurrection of His Son, our Lord Jesus Christ.

⁴⁷⁷ Clement, *Paedagogus*, I.12.

Appendix 1

The Hermeneutical Basis for Prudentius' *Liber Cathemerinon*

Prudentius' World and Poetic Expression

Historical Spain and the Early Christian Church

Prudentius is suspected to have grown up in Calahorra, Spain.⁴⁷⁸ The country's history depicts a mixture of conflict and transformation, tradition and innovation, tragedy and victory, all of which is exposed in the eclectic identity of Prudentius' poetry. Three Greek colonies, established early on in northeastern Spain, introduced the worship of Artemis, and later excavations revealed a temple to Asclepius in Emporion.⁴⁷⁹ After the Punic Wars of the third century BC, Romans overwhelmed the Spanish peninsula and claimed the majority rule after 133 BC.⁴⁸⁰ Rome remained the predominant political and cultural power until the Germanic invasions of the fifth century AD.⁴⁸¹ In addition to the imperial cults and political transitions of Spanish culture, Christianity entered the scene, though it cannot be determined exactly when.⁴⁸² The martyrs of the Valerian persecutions (257 – 259) indicate that despite the well-established imperial cult, “Christians were already a strong minority.”⁴⁸³ Winrich Löhr estimates that by the beginning of the fourth century AD Christians made up approximately two percent of the population of the western

⁴⁷⁸ Carl A. Hanson, “Were There Libraries in Roman Spain?” *Libraries & Culture* 24, no. 2 (1989): 210.

⁴⁷⁹ Stephen McKenna, *Paganism and Pagan Survivals in Spain Up to the Fall of the Visigothic Kingdom*, Studies in Mediaeval History (Washington: CUA Press, 1938), 12.

⁴⁸⁰ McKenna, *Paganism*, 3-4.

⁴⁸¹ McKenna, *Paganism*, 3-4.

⁴⁸² McKenna, *Paganism*, 24. St. James is suspected to have preached in Spain as early as 44 AD and St. Paul notified the Roman church around 57 AD of his plans to travel to Spain after Rome (Romans 15:24); however, neither of these events is verifiable. McKenna, *Paganism*, 24.

⁴⁸³ McKenna, *Paganism*, 25. P. Theodorici Ruinart, in his *Acta Martyrum*, identifies the martyrs as Bishop Fructuosus of Tarragona and two deacons, Eulogius and Augurius. McKenna, *Paganism*, 25.

regions of the empire.⁴⁸⁴ The canons of Elvira depict these early believers as struggling to reconcile faithful Christian living with the realities of imperial power.⁴⁸⁵ Prudentius existed, therefore, in an environment that was heavily imbued with its pagan past and fighting for its Christian future.⁴⁸⁶ It is from this cultural climate that he wrote *Liber Cathemerinon*.

Biblical Narrative in the Liber Cathemerinon

It is estimated that Prudentius wrote and/or circulated his poetry between 385 and 388.⁴⁸⁷ Generally, the author exhibits a significant “familiarity with biblical texts.”⁴⁸⁸ Within his *Liber Cathemerinon* there are passages taken from the Psalms, Gospels, Apocrypha, and Epistles.⁴⁸⁹ There is no evidence to indicate that Prudentius used the Septuagint or Greek New Testament.⁴⁹⁰ John Petruccione concludes that it is highly unlikely that Prudentius read Greek.⁴⁹¹ In the knowledge of the language division between East and West, Alan Cameron explains, “A (fast decreasing) number of Latin-speaking

⁴⁸⁴ Winrich Löhr, “Western Christianities,” in *Constantine to c. 600*, eds. Augustine Casiday and F. Norris, vol. 2 of *The Cambridge History of Christianity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 9. To further characterise the nature of this early Christian community, the Council of Elvira recorded “nineteen bishops and twenty-four priests from thirty-seven local churches” in attendance and the majority of attendees were “from the southern provinces.” Löhr, “Western Christianities,” 37.

⁴⁸⁵ Michael Kulikowski, *Late Roman Spain and Its Cities* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2011), 39-40. “Prudentius’s poetry embodies the Christian appropriation, not rejection, of Rome’s pre-Christian literary legacy and espouses continued belief in Rome’s imperial mission, tied now to the victory of propagation of Christianity.” Dennis E. Trout, *The New Westminster Dictionary of Church History: The Early, Medieval, and Reformation Eras* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2008), 541.

⁴⁸⁶ There was also a stark divide in Christianity, a reaction against the original Latin-speaking Christianity, which Daniélou explains, “was basically Judaeo-Christian in character.” This was “a movement with the aim of freeing Latin Christianity from its Jewish ancestry and giving it a respectable pedigree within the Latin tradition.” Daniélou, *Origins*, 137.

⁴⁸⁷ John McClintock and James Strong, “Prudentius,” in *Cyclopaedia of Biblical, Theological and Ecclesiastical Literature*, vol. 8 (New York: Harper & Brothers Publishers, 1879), 717.

⁴⁸⁸ O’Daly, *Linked by Song*, 26.

⁴⁸⁹ O’Daly, *Linked by Song*, 26.

⁴⁹⁰ O’Daly, *Linked by Song*, 26.

⁴⁹¹ Petruccione, “St. Cyprian,” 230; Cf. R. Henke, “Der Romanushymnus des Prudentius und die Griechische Prosaspasio,” *Jahrbuch für Antike und Christentum* 29 (1986): 59.

westerners knew some Greek.”⁴⁹² Furthermore, Dean P. Lockwood notes, “The knowledge of Greek among the Christians was more practical than literary. With the decline in the traditional education in the late Roman Empire and with the changing character of the spoken Greek language, it was becoming increasingly difficult to acquire ancient Greek in western Europe.”⁴⁹³ Therefore, probability suggests that Prudentius accessed the Scriptures through a Latin translation. However, his use of Jerome’s Vulgate cannot be verified.⁴⁹⁴ Gerard O’Daly argues that “His Bible consisted of one or more of the Latin versions that pre-date Jerome, the so-called Old Latin (*Vetus latina*) translations.”⁴⁹⁵ Anthony Dykes explains that “an enduring issue for commentators has been to isolate the particular Bible verses any particular poem or passage refer to.”⁴⁹⁶ Part of the frustration comes from the fact that the *Vetus Latina* is “an assemblage of texts, which often has to be reconstructed from ambiguous indications.”⁴⁹⁷ It is, after all, “an umbrella term which is used of all Latin Bible texts before Jerome. These had diverse origins and were in no way the products of a centralized plan or any universal exercise of authority.”⁴⁹⁸ Despite the language of

⁴⁹² Alan Cameron, *The Last Pagans of Rome* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 640.

⁴⁹³ Dean P. Lockwood, “Two Thousand Years of Latin Translation from the Greek,” *Transactions of the American Philological Association* 49 (1918): 120.

⁴⁹⁴ O’Daly, *Linked by Song*, 26.

⁴⁹⁵ O’Daly, *Linked by Song*, 26. Furthermore, “Attempts to identify which tradition (the distinction is now usually made between the ‘European’ and the ‘African’ traditions) of the Old Latin versions Prudentius used has not always succeeded, but there is some evidence suggesting that he was familiar with the African tradition, possibly reflecting the influence of African Christianity in Spain since the time of Cyprian of Carthage in the mid-third century.” O’Daly, *Linked by Song*, 26. Daniélou point to the “evidence in the *Acts of the Scillitan Martyrs* that such translations existed in Africa from 180 onwards.” Daniélou, *Origins*, 7. For further studies see J. L. Charlet, “Prudence et la Bible,” *Recherches Augustiniennes* 18 (1983): 3-149; P. Burton, *The Old Latin Gospels: A Study of their Texts and Language* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).

⁴⁹⁶ Dykes, *Reading*, 12.

⁴⁹⁷ Dykes, *Reading*, 12.

⁴⁹⁸ Dykes, *Reading*, 12.

Prudentius' biblical text, both Greek and Latin influences directed his comprehension and application of the text.⁴⁹⁹

Ideas, Culture, Theology, and Literature: Availability, Accessibility, and Transfer

An existing bishopric in Spain, during Prudentius' time, signifies that "some liturgical texts and books of the Bible were in the hands of Tarragonese Christians."⁵⁰⁰

Also, Prudentius may have been exposed to sources through his education. Spanish education was

based on the three-tiered system found throughout the Roman world. Students entered school at the elementary level and were taught by a *paedagogus*. Those who entered the second level were taught by *grammaticae* and typically matriculated in their mid-teens. Their curriculum included arithmetic, geometry, grammar, music, astronomy, and the rudiments of philosophy and rhetoric. The third level, taught by a rhetorician (*rhetor*), was generally reserved for young male scions of influential families. These students studied rhetoric and Many became lawyers and urban officials while others pursued literary careers.⁵⁰¹

He tells the reader that he "received a liberal education, was admitted to the Roman bar, practiced as a pleader, and seems to have distinguished himself in his profession."⁵⁰²

Astutely, Dykes perceives his education as an indication of an affluent family background.⁵⁰³ Both a higher social status and a good education imply access to sources.

Prudentius gives no indication as to where he studied, but if it was in his hometown of Calahorra, Gallic poet Ausonius (c. 310 – c. 395) praised the school for its rhetorical instruction.⁵⁰⁴ If it was in Tarragona, "literary and archeological evidence shows that [it] was a leading center of Christian activity in Spain and also an important locus of rhetorical

⁴⁹⁹ "In terms of chronology and location," Dykes argues, "it certainly seems possible that Prudentius had access to at least some revision of the Latin text of Genesis." Dykes, *Reading*, 254.

⁵⁰⁰ Hanson, "Libraries," 208.

⁵⁰¹ Hanson, "Libraries," 201.

⁵⁰² McClintock, "Prudentius," 716.

⁵⁰³ Dykes, *Reading*, 3.

⁵⁰⁴ Hanson, "Libraries," 216.

instruction.”⁵⁰⁵ It is expected that during the fourth century the schools and churches of these two cities would have had “a collection of learning materials.”⁵⁰⁶

In addition to public collections, C. A. Hanson proposes that private libraries existed in Spain.⁵⁰⁷ Owning these collections would have been individual teachers,⁵⁰⁸ scholars, and church leaders like Priscillian of Avila (unknown – c. 385), who seemed to have access to “a wide variety of sources.”⁵⁰⁹ It is possible that Prudentius relied on local collections only; however, his wide use of sources and ideas speculates that he had access to “a varied and possibly extensive library.”⁵¹⁰ Interestingly, there is evidence “of quite a lively book market from Rome to Spain.”⁵¹¹ Nevertheless, Prudentius gives no indication as to whether he bought or borrowed his books.

The Hermeneutical Method of a Poet

There is a sense of ambiguity in poetry that a formal exegete works hard to reduce. Prudentius does not set out a systematic explanation for his use of the biblical text, yet he does leave traces of interpretive decisions that do indicate his hermeneutical strategies. At

⁵⁰⁵ Hanson, “Libraries,” 210.

⁵⁰⁶ Hanson, “Libraries,” 200, 210.

⁵⁰⁷ Hanson, “Libraries,” 209.

⁵⁰⁸ Hanson notes that “a sizable share of the educators in Spain appear to have had Greek origins.” Hanson, “Libraries,” 201. Therefore, it is probable to suggest that Prudentius was influenced by Greek thinkers and had access to a host of Greek sources; however, this cannot be verified.

⁵⁰⁹ Hanson, “Libraries,” 209.

⁵¹⁰ Hanson, “Libraries,” 210. Prudentius “shows a very evident familiarity with Vergil (above all), with Lucretius, Catullus, Horace, Juvenal, Ovid, and with some writers who are less commonly read (certainly in this present age) such as Calpurnius Siculus and Claudian.” Dykes, *Reading*, 2. Other connections exist that suggest Prudentius’ access to these types of sources. For example, his civil role afforded him travel to the court of Emperor Theodosius, which assumes exposure to the literature in Rome. Also, he may have accessed sources through Spanish religious leader Bishop Hosius (Ossius) of Cordoba. A. T. Fear, “Prehistoric and Roman Spain,” in *Spain: A History*, ed. Raymond Carr (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 21; Cf. S. J. Kaey, *Roman Spain* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), 183. Also, he may have had contact with the well-known translators Rufinus and Jerome, who made Origen accessible to the Latin West. Henry de Lubac, *The Four Senses of Scripture*, vol. 1 of *Medieval Exegesis* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1998), 161; Cf. Kathleen Jamieson, “Jerome, Augustine and the Stesichoran Palinode,” *Rhetorica: A Journal of the History of Rhetoric* 5, no. 4 (1987): 358-359. These connections, however, remain speculative.

⁵¹¹ Hanson, “Libraries,” 203.

this point, the focus turns from his own hermeneutical method to his hermeneutical influences. Marc Mastrangelo begins this conversation by noting the “pagan intellectual inheritance” of Prudentius, which inevitably shapes the way he views the world.⁵¹² However, a more specific question arises: What or who are Prudentius’ influences in terms of biblical interpretation? O’Daly supposes that Prudentius “is heir to a long tradition of biblical interpretation, particularly of non-literal exegesis of persons and events in the Hebrew Bible.”⁵¹³ Much in line with O’Daly, this study argues that despite the diverse literary, philosophical and theological influences that affect *Liber Cathemerinon*, Prudentius echoes the non-literal hermeneutic of Alexandria, as championed by Origen, in his use of biblical narrative.⁵¹⁴

The Tradition of Alexandrian Hermeneutics and Origen’s Contribution

Understanding Ancient Allegory: Its Purpose and Intention

The term *allegory* comes from the Greek *alla* (meaning “other”) and *agoreuo* (meaning “proclaim”), which together suggests a “continuous stream of metaphors.”⁵¹⁵ The term developed in order to depict a narrative “with many parts pointing symbolically to

⁵¹² By “pagan intellectual inheritance” Mastrangelo refers to “the rich philosophical tradition that Prudentius [imbibes], directly or indirectly, beginning with Plato and extending to the Epicurean and neo-Platonic traditions.” Marc Mastrangelo, “The Decline of Poetry in the Fourth-Century West,” *International Journal of the Classical Tradition* 16, no. ¾ (2009): 121. In agreement, Neil articulates that “The Christian authors of the fourth to sixth centuries whose work survives achieved a remarkable synthesis of Greco-Roman rhetoric and philosophy, which had its origins in Athens in its golden age, the fourth and fifth centuries BC, the age of Plato and Aristotle.” Bronwen Neil, “Towards Defining a Christian Culture: The Christian Transformation of Classical Literature,” in *Constantine to c. 600*, eds. Augustine Casiday and F. Norris, vol. 2 of *The Cambridge History of Christianity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 317.

⁵¹³ O’Daly, *Linked by Song*, 27.

⁵¹⁴ In terms of methodology, the biblical narratives from Prudentius’ *Liber Cathemerinon* have been grammatically diagrammed in order to pursue the intended meaning of the text. For a detailed guide to procedure see Joel James, *Expository Study: A Practical Guide to Preparing Expository Sermons* (South Africa: Word of the Cross Press, 2008).

⁵¹⁵ Coptic Orthodox Church Network, “The Allegorical Interpretation of the Scriptures,” <http://www.copticchurch.net/topics/patrology/schoolofalex/I-Intro/chapter3.html> (accessed November 24, 2012).

spiritual realities.”⁵¹⁶ In its contemporary usage, the word *allegory* is either “(1) a *kind* of literature or (2) a *method* of interpretation.”⁵¹⁷ As a form of biblical interpretation it has its roots in Alexandrian Judaism, particularly with Philo “who made a systematic use of it to bridge the chasm between the Old Testament revelation and ... Platonic philosophy.”⁵¹⁸ Allegorical interpretation, outside of a biblical context, goes even further back to Theagenes of Rhegium (c. 529 BC – unknown), a pre-Socratic Greek, who attempted to “express philosophical ideas with mythological imagery.”⁵¹⁹ “The central idea of [allegorical] biblical interpretation is that history follows a symbolic plan organized by God: events recorded in the Old Testament have been made to happen so as to foreshadow incidents in the life of Christ as these are set down in the New Testament.”⁵²⁰ Therefore, the intention of allegory, as an interpretive tool, is to aid in understanding.

Allegory and Typology

In contemporary scholarship a significant debate has arisen over the need to clarify allegory from typology.⁵²¹ In the past, allegory has been distinguished “as a method in which earthly realities are interpreted symbolically to refer to heavenly realities,” whereas,

⁵¹⁶ Roy B. Zuck, *Basic Biblical Interpretation: A Practical Guide to Discovering Biblical Truth* (Colorado Springs: Victor, 1991), 221.

⁵¹⁷ Robert B. Sloan Jr. and Carey C. Newman, “Ancient Jewish Hermeneutics,” in *Biblical Hermeneutics: A Comprehensive Introduction to Interpreting Scripture*, eds. Bruce Corley, Steve W. Lemke and Grant I. Lovejoy, 2nd ed. (Nashville: B&H Publishing Group, 2002), 61.

⁵¹⁸ Coptic, “Allegorical Interpretation,” n.p.

⁵¹⁹ Graeme Goldsworthy, *Gospel-Centered Hermeneutics: Foundations and Principles of Evangelical Biblical Interpretation* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2006), 94.

⁵²⁰ Gordon Teskey, “Allegory,” in *The Spenser Encyclopaedia*, ed. A. C. Hamilton (London: Routledge, 2006), 53. Rightly, McGuckin gives clarification to those who view allegory as highly suspicious and out-of-date. He writes, a “source of confusion surrounding the term allegory is the tendency of the ancient interpreters to avoid it after the outbreak of the late fourth-century Origenist crisis, giving the false impression that the practice it described was then abandoned. As a result of that controversy, the use of ‘allegoria’ was condemned, after the late fourth century, as the source of what anti-Origenists believed to be the theological errors of Origen and his intellectual descendants. The general exegetical practice, however, survived virtually unchanged under the new designation of ‘theoria.’” John Anthony McGuckin, ed., *The Westminster Handbook to Origen*, The Westminster Handbooks to Christian Theology (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2004), 50.

⁵²¹ Karen J. Torjesen, *Hermeneutical Procedure and Theological Method in Origen’s Exegesis*, *Patristische Texte Und Studien* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter & Co., 1985), 6.

typology is when “historical reality is interpreted as foreshadowing another, especially the person and work of Christ.”⁵²² It must be considered that modern distinctions may have no bearing on patristic exegetical principles.⁵²³ To be frank, it is fair to assert, along with Earle E. Ellis, that typology depicts “the basic approach of earliest Christianity toward the Old Testament. It is not so much a system of interpretation as a historical and theological perspective from which the early Christian community viewed itself.”⁵²⁴ Multiple definitions result in a multiplicity of opinions, yet Stefan Nordgaard Svendsen constructively discerns the common idea and candidly calls scholars to revisit what the ancient writers are saying themselves. He writes,

all agree that whereas allegory links historical entities ‘vertically’ to noetic archetypes, typology links such entities ‘horizontally’ to later historical ones, which are then, in turn, perceived as their fulfillments and ultimate realizations certain classicists and New Testament scholars have started to question the validity of the dichotomy between allegory and typology. More concretely, they have raised the issue whether a specifically typological method really existed in the ancient world and whether, if it did, it could legitimately be construed as the opposite of allegory. These scholars notice that no ancient writers show any awareness of a distinctively typological hermeneutics.⁵²⁵

The Roots of Biblical Interpretation in Alexandria

Following the apostolic period, methods for interpreting the Scriptures began to develop into schools, one of which was the Alexandrian school, which would later be associated with an allegorical or non-literal method.⁵²⁶ Where did the non-literal influence come from and how did it become the distinction of Alexandria? To begin, allegorical

⁵²² Coptic, “Allegorical Interpretation,” n.p.

⁵²³ McGuckin, *Origen*, 49.

⁵²⁴ Earle E. Ellis, “The New Testament’s Use of the Old Testament,” in *Biblical Hermeneutics: A Comprehensive Introduction to Interpreting Scripture*, eds. Bruce Corley, Steve W. Lemke and Grant I. Lovejoy, 2nd ed. (Nashville: B&H Publishing Group, 2002), 85.

⁵²⁵ Stefan Nordgaard Svendsen, *Allegory Transformed*, vol. 269 of *Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament 2, Reihe* (Tubingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2009), 56.

⁵²⁶ Henry A. Virkler and Karelynne Gerber Ayayo, *Hermeneutics: Principles and Processes of Biblical Interpretation*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 1981), 52.

interpretation was not uncommon to Hellenistic Cynic-Stoic philosophers, who re-examined the ancient Greek myths in a contemporary context by using allegory.⁵²⁷ Early Jewish philosophers also used allegory, of which Pseudo-Aristeas and Aristobulus are examples, but it was Philo who wielded the tool “to reconcile his Greek Bible with his surrounding hellenistic culture.”⁵²⁸ Focusing this method to the Hebrew Bible, “Philo argued that the literal meaning was immature; the full and mature significance of a text was reached only through allegorical means.”⁵²⁹ Moreover, the biblical text was the means by which an individual pursued true reality.⁵³⁰ In turn, true reality was hidden in the symbols of the text.⁵³¹ Resonances of Plato are to be heard here. Though influenced by the Stoic philosophers, Philo ultimately stood in the exegetical tradition of Jewish allegory.⁵³² Hence, the school of Alexandria assumed the method of allegorical interpretation, “believing that [Scripture] hides the truth and at the same time reveals it.”⁵³³

The school of Alexandria differentiated itself from the school of Antioch primarily because it understood spiritual meaning to “[hover] above the historical meaning of the Old Testament events,” whereas the Antiochians “believed that the spiritual meaning of a

⁵²⁷ Sloan Jr., “Jewish Hermeneutics,” 61.

⁵²⁸ Sloan Jr., “Jewish Hermeneutics,” 61; Cf. Svendsen, *Allegory*, 17. It is valuable to keep in mind the history of the Jews while proceeding through the development of their interpretive methods. As, Sloan Jr. points out, “The oppression of Jews by Assyria, Babylon, Persia, Alexander, the Ptolemies and Seleucids, and Rome, along with the Hellenistic spirit that infused the Greco-Roman world, provided the context against which any Jewish attempt to make sense of their scriptural traditions took its shape. There is a positive correlation between the complexities of Jewish history during the Greco-Roman period and the multiplicity of (and often inventive) interpretative strategies adopted by Jews.” Sloan Jr., “Jewish Hermeneutics,” 57.

⁵²⁹ Sloan Jr., “Jewish Hermeneutics,” 61. At this point it is critical to hear Philo correctly. In no way did he deny the historical value of the text. “In fact, Philo had something of a two-level approach, a literal and an allegorical reading, even if the latter was the much preferred.” Sloan Jr., “Jewish Hermeneutics,” 63.

⁵³⁰ Robert W. Bernard, “The Hermeneutics of the Early Church Fathers,” in *Biblical Hermeneutics: A Comprehensive Introduction to Interpreting Scripture*, ed. Bruce Corley, Steve W. Lemke and Grant I. Lovejoy, 2nd ed. (Nashville: B&H Publishing Group, 2002), 92-93.

⁵³¹ Bernard, “Hermeneutics,” 92-93.

⁵³² Svendsen, *Allegory*, 17.

⁵³³ Coptic, “Allegorical Interpretation,” n.p.

historical event was implicit within the event itself.”⁵³⁴ By such definitions, Origen perpetuated the Alexandrian hermeneutic, for he stepped beyond the confines of the literal text to pursue its spiritual meaning.⁵³⁵ It was Origen’s expression and systematization of this hermeneutic, as it applied to both the Old and New Testaments, that solidified its use in the church for centuries thereafter.

Origen’s Systemization of the Alexandrian Model for the Church

As an exegete, Origen’s speculative tendencies pushed the limits in his own day and for generations after. Later Christians departed from his theological methods and conclusions but continued to follow “his lead in pursuing many of the questions he had first posed.”⁵³⁶ A. von Harnack credits Origen by articulating that “There has never been a theologian in the church who desired to be, and indeed was, so exclusively an interpreter of the Bible as Origen was.”⁵³⁷ Harnack’s accolades speak truthfully of Origen’s concern for the interpreter. As such, he recognizes the intellectual and spiritual efforts required of the task.⁵³⁸ Peter W. Martens is correct to begin with the interpreter in an assessment of Origen’s interpretive principles. He argues that, for Origen, “the ideal scriptural interpreter was someone who embarked not simply upon a scholarly journey, but, more ambitiously,

⁵³⁴ Virkler, *Hermeneutics*, 53.

⁵³⁵ McGuckin, *Origen*, 49. For an overview of Origen’s life and works see Rowan Williams, “Origen,” in *The First Christian Theologians: An Introduction to Theology in the Early Church*, ed. G. R. Evans (Malden: Blackwell Publishing, 2004).

⁵³⁶ McGuckin, *Origen*, 25.

⁵³⁷ Adolf von Harnack, *Der Kirchengeschichtliche Ertrag der Exegetischen Arbeiten des Origenes*, vol. 2 of *Die Beiden Testaments mit Ausschluss des Hexateuchs und des Richterbachs, Texte und Untersuchungen* 42.2-3 (Leipzig: J. C. Hinrichs, 1919), II.4 A3.

⁵³⁸ Peter W. Martens, *Origen and Scripture: The Contours of the Exegetical Life*. Oxford Early Christian Studies (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 6.

upon a way of life, indeed a way of salvation, that culminated in the vision of God.”⁵³⁹ The knowledge of Scripture, therefore, becomes the pathway to the knowledge of God.⁵⁴⁰

By reading through an assortment of Origen’s commentaries and homilies, the reader quickly realizes “that as he expounds Scripture he has constantly in mind several different schools of rival expositors of the text,” predominantly the Gnostics and the Marcionites.⁵⁴¹ Nevertheless, he maintains the conviction that Scripture is inspired, “not simply because it contains divine ideas, nor because the breath of the divine Spirit breathes in its lines ... but because it has God as its author.”⁵⁴² It is from this premise that Origen can establish “that prophesies of the OT have been fulfilled after they were made, and it was through the coming of Jesus that revealed what once was hidden.”⁵⁴³ In addition, his conviction of Scripture’s nature leads him to pursue its unity and thus he continually moves toward expressing a grand narrative as it is told through both the Old and New Testaments.⁵⁴⁴ It is also from this basis that Origen interprets Scripture with the use of Scripture itself.⁵⁴⁵

Like Philo, Origen recognizes the value of both the literal and spiritual sense of the text. The “mysteries in the form of the literal text” are hidden by the Holy Spirit “both as an accommodation to the simple who could benefit from the literal text and as a goad to the

⁵³⁹ Martens, *Origen*, 6. Similar to Origen’s concept of the task of interpretation, Prudentius sees writing poetry as participating in his own sanctification. From Origen’s perspective “those who studied Scripture were far more than literary technicians. At its heart, proper inquiry into Scripture ... played a privileged role in the interpreter’s journey toward salvation.” Martens, *Origen*, 12.

⁵⁴⁰ Joseph Wilson Trigg, *Origen* (Albans Place: SCM Press, 1983), 86.

⁵⁴¹ R. P. C. Hanson, *Allegory and Event: A Study of the Sources and Significance of Origen’s Interpretation of Scripture* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2002), 135. Here again, there is a striking similarity between Origen and Prudentius’ intentional defense, for Prudentius directly attacks Marcion (*Hamartigenia*) and is vigilant to protect the Gospel from heresies such as Patripassianism, Sabellianism, and Ebionism (*Apotheosis*).

⁵⁴² Hanson, *Allegory and Event*, 187.

⁵⁴³ Joseph W. Trigg, *Origen*, The Early Church Fathers (London: Routledge, 1998), 32.

⁵⁴⁴ Hanson, *Allegory and Event*, 198, 200.

⁵⁴⁵ David G. Hunter, *Preaching in the Patristic Age* (Mahwah: Paulist Press, 1989), 47.

intelligent who would work harder at understanding because of the difficulties associated with spiritual reading.”⁵⁴⁶ More specifically, he approaches the Scriptures from three angles: “bodily, soulful, and spiritual meanings.”⁵⁴⁷ In line with the tradition of the Alexandrian school, Origen proposes a multi-tiered meaning to the text. Beyond the literal meaning is the moral sense of the text, wherein it is “applied to the conduct and the piety of the ordinary Christian,” Jean Daniélou articulates.⁵⁴⁸ The spiritual sense “is the disclosure of what is present in a hidden form in the literal sense.”⁵⁴⁹ Therein, Origen uses allegory as a tool to expose the spiritual sense. A less careful assessment concludes that Origen uses allegory simply to read the New Testament into the Old.⁵⁵⁰ More accurately, John Anthony McGuckin explains, “allegory allowed Origen to read the whole Bible as a revelation of the progressive kingdom of Christ.”⁵⁵¹ As a result, Origen’s conclusions were less instructive and more meditative.⁵⁵² His findings affected the Christian life in terms of progressive sanctification as opposed to legalistic moralism.

Origen and Prudentius: A Hermeneutical Comparison

Peter’s Denials of Christ

Origen’s account of Peter’s denials in *Contra Celsum* seems to be the most literal as he retraces the denials, his repentant attitude, and thereafter-physical reaction of tears.⁵⁵³

The historical details of the fuller narrative do not seem to serve Origen’s purpose. In his

⁵⁴⁶ McGuckin, *Origen*, 50. In his *Contra Celsum* Origen “tells us that one of the functions of the literal sense is to attract people to study the Bible so that they may eventually venture upon the allegorical sense.” Hanson, *Allegory and Event*, 238.

⁵⁴⁷ Trigg, *Origen*, Early Church Fathers, 33.

⁵⁴⁸ Hanson, *Allegory and Event*, 242.

⁵⁴⁹ Torjesen, *Hermeneutical Procedure*, 7.

⁵⁵⁰ McGuckin, *Origen*, 50.

⁵⁵¹ McGuckin, *Origen*, 50.

⁵⁵² Tadrous Y. Malaty, *The Book of Genesis: A Patristic Commentary*, trans. George Botros (OrthodoxEbooks, 2004), 87.

⁵⁵³ Origen, *Contra Celsum*, in *Translations of the Writings of the Fathers Down to A.D. 325*, eds. Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1872), II.18.

Commentary on Matthew, Origen stresses the time of day that Peter denies Christ. “Peter also denies Christ, not during the day” he writes, “Moreover, it was still in the middle of the night, since the cock had not yet crowed.”⁵⁵⁴ Carrying through a negative connotation of the night, Origen further explains the significance of the event happening in the dark. He writes, “Those who fell away from Christ on the night he was betrayed did so because they had not yet received the staying power of the Holy Spirit.”⁵⁵⁵ Here, Origen alludes to the *time* in the narrative as symbolic of the time in the paschal story (the period before the gift of the Spirit). When the sequence of events revolves around symbols rather than chronological time, he is pushing the reader to consider a greater truth. Continuing in his *Commentary on Matthew*, Origen underscores that Peter was held accountable for his arrogance. “The other disciples only fell away from Jesus” he explains, “but Peter, who thought that he could begin with deceit and end up with the truth, both fell away from Jesus and also denied him because of the audacious promise he made that he would never fall away.”⁵⁵⁶ At this point, Peter is held up as an example. The description of Peter, “who thought that he could begin with deceit and end up with the truth” carries a universal tone. Ronald E. Heine articulates, “Origen speaks of his experience with Scripture from the perspective of standing within the text. He treats his hearers or readers in the same way They are to view their own lives, with their particular conflicts, within the conceptual framework provided by the biblical text.”⁵⁵⁷ It is in this way that Origen rises above the literal narrative to pursue its moral meaning for every person. Peter’s attitude, consequent

⁵⁵⁴ Manlio Simonetti, ed., *Matthew 14-28*, Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture, vol 1b of *New Testament* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2002), 251.

⁵⁵⁵ Simonetti, *Matthew*, 250.

⁵⁵⁶ Simonetti, *Matthew*, 252.

⁵⁵⁷ Ronald E. Heine, *Reading the Old Testament with the Ancient Church: Exploring the Formation of Early Christian Thought*, Evangelical Ressourcement: Ancient Sources for the Church’s Future Series (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007), 183.

action, and the result on his relationship with Jesus can no longer remain a narrative unique to Peter and Jesus. Rather, it becomes a commentary on the nature of God's goodness in comparison to humanity's fickleness, and it demonstrates the inevitable result on the God-man relationship when humanity acts and thinks as Peter does.

In *De Principii*, Origen places Paul and Peter together as examples of "men of a spiritual nature," who have weighty sin.⁵⁵⁸ Paul, for instance, "having persecuted the Church of God, and Peter to have committed so grave a sin as, when questioned by the maid-servant, to have asserted with an oath that he did not know who Christ was."⁵⁵⁹ Here, Origen's main concern is reconciling how a spiritual being can fall into such sin. Here again, the trajectory of his interest does not lie in the narrated acts of Paul and Peter; rather, he pushes past the plot to ask the theological questions. Essentially the circumstances of the narrative have led him to contemplate the greater concern of humanity's relationship with the divine (spiritual). In this way, the literal text is not discarded; instead, it functions as the jumping-off point to which a person can contemplate deeper truths.

Like Origen, Prudentius begins to treat the biblical narrative of Peter's denials of Christ by presenting a brief account of the event (*Cath.* I.49-52).⁵⁶⁰ The Lord is introduced as the authoritative voice predicting the actions of Peter, who is given the role of the second character (I.49-50). Prudentius informs the reader of Peter's actions (that he would lie (I.51)) and the result of his deed (that he would deny his Master (I.52)). The language accentuates the relationship between these two characters immediately. Peter is the receiver of the prediction, which gives him a subordinate role as he passively listens to the Lord

⁵⁵⁸ Origen, *De Principii*, trans. Frederick Crombie, I.8, Christian Classics Ethereal Library, <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/schaff/anf04.vi.v.i.html> (accessed November 21, 2012).

⁵⁵⁹ Origen, *De Principii*, I.8.

⁵⁶⁰ References to the *Liber Cathemerinon* will remain in-text throughout the analysis portion.

speak (I.49). Moreover, Peter's Master is described as being *dear* to him, and yet, Prudentius titles the Lord with Master, indicating the unequal nature of the relationship (I.52). The effect is that Peter is the learner, listener, and responder, whereas the Lord is the authoritative predictor, foreseer, and teacher. Prudentius' depiction of this relationship puts a greater weight on Peter's negative action, as does its quantity ("thrice" (I.52)). Prudentius returns to underline the relationship between these two characters later in the poem when the cock's crow is said to be "familiar" to Peter (I.63). Like Origen's interpretation, the emphasis forces the reader into comparing his or her own position with Peter's. It is also important to note that from the beginning the author is careful to relay the time sequence of the actions of the characters. For example, Peter's lies happen *before* the cock-crow (I.51). Like Origen, Prudentius interprets Peter's actions as relative to a symbol, the cock-crow.

From the beginning of the narrative, Prudentius tells the reader that the prediction for Peter is negative. It will mimic the response of the "foul voltaries of the night" who "Abhor the coming of the light" because they are "shamed before salvation's grace" (I.41-43). Also from the beginning, Prudentius introduces the authoritative actor and his action as the cock and his crow (I.51).⁵⁶¹ The prioritizing of the time sequence around a symbol (the cock-crow) aids the reader in venturing beyond the literal meaning of the text, just as in Origen's interpretation. The emphasis is reiterated yet again when Prudentius gives the reader the reason for the pre-determined result in Peter's prediction. It is a law that the action of sin is done *before* the action or proclamation of the authoritative actor, which is the "herald of the sun" (I.53-54). Just as in Origen's explanation, Peter's action and the

⁵⁶¹ This emphasis increases throughout the course of the poem, almost as if to intensify the drama. By observation, the poem moves toward Christ's conquer almost as if it equally is suggesting Christ's second coming. In this sense, the anticipation of the final event builds and so it seems to project the ever-increasing imminent sense of Christ's return.

consequent result on his relationship with the Master are no longer bound to the literal story.

Immediately following the emphasis on time, Prudentius moves toward application. He addresses all of humankind as understanding that the authoritative action (the proclamation of the dawn or its cry) causes the sinner to react in shame, which is the result (I.55-56). In essence, the author has just halted the drama of the story to get his reader to contemplate his or her own situation. It is as if he is beckoning the reader to consider for him/herself what the result will be for them if the cock were to crow at that very moment.⁵⁶² Moving forward in the poem, Prudentius steps back into the chronological events, all the while insinuating that the reader ought to remember the encouragement to apply what is happening in the narrative to the reader's own life. "Then," he writes, Peter wept (I.57). The physical action of Peter is described by bitterness and qualified by his attitude of horror (I.57). Immediately following, the author gives a particularly physical description of Peter's denial, and thus the reader understands that it was because of his physical action (his verbal denial) that he wept (I.58).⁵⁶³ After relaying the act of Peter's denial, Prudentius moves toward an interpretive assertion by proposing what he thinks really happened. Despite all that has occurred physically, Peter's spiritual status remains untainted, and consequently, his ontological reality ("faith still reigned" (I.60)), which is interestingly enough located in a physical place ("within his breast" (I.60)). It is at this point that Prudentius urges the reader to make the jump from physical and literal descriptions to spiritual realities. Much like Origen, he is concerned with the deeper truth,

⁵⁶² O'Daly notes Prudentius' thematic call "from sleep to virtue," viewing sin as "a sleep of the soul." O'Daly, *Linked by Song*, 49; Cf. Romans 13:11-12.

⁵⁶³ There is an obvious identification of the flesh betraying the soul. To some degree, it resembles Paul's conflict of natures in Romans 7:15.

which in this case is the status of a person's soul rather than simple physiology (the action of Peter's mouth).⁵⁶⁴ Prudentius has chosen to interpret this portion of the narrative by emphasizing the dichotomy between soul and body. His assertion suggests that the body can do one thing, while the soul does another.⁵⁶⁵

Prudentius continues, explaining that never after the incident did his tongue (body) betray his soul (I.61-62). The turning point, however, is with the authoritative action of the cock's crow (I.63). The response of Peter is an attitude change, in which he becomes humble. It is also an action change, in which he is humbled from his previous action of selfish vanity (I.64). Here again, Prudentius expects the reader to morally consider if these are actions he/she ought to be taking along with Peter. Overtly patterning Origen's hermeneutical method, the reader is encouraged to "view their own lives ... within the conceptual framework provided by the biblical text."⁵⁶⁶

Prudentius continues to apply the text by relaying its allegorical meaning: "Therefore," he writes, it is the belief "That, as the world in stillness lay, / What hour the cock doth greet the skies / Christ from deep Hades did arise" (I.66-68). The authoritative character goes forward with his action and the person of Christ rises from Hades. More excited still, Prudentius writes that subsequent to the crow of the cock and the rising of Christ from Hades "the bands of death were burst, / Shattered the sway of hell accurst"

⁵⁶⁴ Mastrangelo confirms that "movement from the physical to the abstract is an allegorical strategy of Prudentius in which the death of a vice represents the deconstruction of its fictional character into a set of abstract qualities that inhabit the soul." Mastrangelo, *Roman Self*, 142.

⁵⁶⁵ Origen alludes to a similar discussion by addressing the denial of Peter in a section devoted to opposing powers. He writes, "there are certain sins, however, which do not proceed from the opposing powers, but take their beginnings from the natural movements of the body." He directly goes to Paul's explanation of this conflict in Galatians 5:17: "The flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh: and these are contrary the one to the other; so that ye cannot do the things that ye would." "If" Origen continues to ask, "the flesh lust against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh, we have occasionally to wrestle against flesh and blood." Origen, *De Principiis*, III.2.3.

⁵⁶⁶ Heine, *Old Testament*, 183.

(I.69-70). The affective result of the cock's crow is that death and hell are overcome and "the hosts of the Night will dispel quickly" (I.72). The link between the literal and the allegorical meaning of the text comes through the use of themes and symbols. For example, the symbol of light and dark are representative of good and evil.⁵⁶⁷ The imagery of "dawn" is personified and given the ability to "herald," "proclaim," and "cry"; the emphasis suggests that the Divine stands as the "dawn," the "sun," and the "light."⁵⁶⁸ Furthermore, Peter and Christ are compared. Peter's reaction to the cock-crow results in a change of action (repentance) and a victorious ending – the release from his physical darkness and sin. Christ's response to the cock-crow also results in a victorious ending – a release from the physical darkness of hell. In both Origen and Prudentius, there is a conscious effort to move beyond the simplistic events of the story. In either interpretation, the literal narrative is transposed into a personal story, which finally evolves into contemplation of God's relationship to humankind collectively.

Jacob Wrestles

In his *De Principii*, Origen establishes that "opposing powers, or the devil himself, contends with the human race, inciting and instigating men to sin."⁵⁶⁹ Working from I Kings 22:19-23 he is convinced that "a certain spirit, from his own (free) will and choice, elected to deceive (Ahab), and to work a lie, in order that the Lord might mislead the king

⁵⁶⁷ "The popular association of demonic powers with darkness, found in the Graeco-Roman and Jewish traditions, is evoked, together with another popular belief ... that demons are put to flight by the crowing cock ... their enemy." O'Daly, *Linked by Song*, 49. This contrast of light to dark is utilized by Paul in I Thessalonians 5:1-11.

⁵⁶⁸ I have left the identification of this symbol as "the Divine" simply because Philo and Origen paid particular attention to the mystical significance of numbers and often sets of three would reflect the Trinity. Coptic, "Allegorical Interpretation," n.p. This may or may not have been Prudentius' intention here. O'Daly hesitates with a definitive answer as well, suggesting that "the light is not just the light of virtue and insight, but is Christ's light ... possibly even Christ as the light (John 1)." O'Daly, *Linked by Song*, 49, emphasis mine.

⁵⁶⁹ Origen, *De Principii*, III.2.1.

to his death, for he deserved to suffer.”⁵⁷⁰ As such, principalities exercise the power to influence humanity negatively. For this reason he takes seriously Paul’s warning, “not to give place to the devil; but ‘put on,’ he says, ‘the armour of God, that ye may be able to resist the wiles of the devil’ [Ephesians 6:13].”⁵⁷¹ Humanity’s wrestling, therefore, is “not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against the spiritual wickedness in high places [Ephesians 6:12].”⁵⁷² The Scriptures tell “that there are certain invisible enemies that fight against us, and against whom it commands us to arm ourselves.”⁵⁷³ Having established this premise, Origen believes that there is a limit to the power of human nature and as a result, no human being “could sustain, without destruction to himself, the whole simultaneous assault of these opposing powers, unless indeed the might of Him alone were to work in him, who said, ‘Be of good cheer, I have overcome the world’ [John 16:33].”⁵⁷⁴

What then is to be made of the angel of the Lord who wrestles with Jacob? In Origen’s interpretation, Jacob could not have fought an opposing power on his own, but when bolstered by “the presence of the Lord dwelling within [him], confidence in the divine help [can lead him] to say, ‘The Lord is my light, and my salvation; whom shall I fear?’ [Psalm 27:1].”⁵⁷⁵ Attempting to meet Origen at the level of his own spiritual insight, Frances Young projects that this altercation was spiritual, “wrestling to endure sufferings, to avoid being provoked into fierce anger, excessive sorrow, the depths of despair or

⁵⁷⁰ Origen, *De Principii*, III.2.1.

⁵⁷¹ Origen, *De Principii*, III.2.1.

⁵⁷² Origen, *De Principii*, III.2.1.

⁵⁷³ Origen, *De Principii*, III.2.1.

⁵⁷⁴ Origen, *De Principii*, III.2.5.

⁵⁷⁵ Origen, *De Principii*, III.2.5.

complaint against God.”⁵⁷⁶ A moral meaning is easily established, and once again Origen is attempting to move beyond the literal narrative toward spiritual truth. He perceives Jacob as wrestling his opponent, with the help of the Lord, and prevailing.⁵⁷⁷ Origen’s primary concern is once again on a grander scale. This narrative presses him to question the relationship between spiritual beings and human beings. Further still, he must speculate regarding the limits of human nature when tested against the supernatural.

Prudentius approaches Jacob’s wrestling at Jabbok in the same way he does Peter’s denials of Christ and a brief record of the events is given. In contrast to the character-focused Peter narrative, this story is recorded with a greater sense of drama as Prudentius describes the place, the setting, and the environment: “Twas ‘neath the lonely star-blue night” (II.73). Again, the author’s use of light/dark and night/day symbolism captures the brooding atmosphere of the scene. He goes on to describe the *what*, *where*, *when*, and *how* details: “Jacob waged the unequal fight, / Stoutly he wrestled with the Man / In darkness, till the day began” (II.74-76). Prudentius specifies that the relationship between the two fighters is clearly uneven (II.74). In his interpretation, Jacob fights bravely with “the Man” in the dark and perseveres until daybreak (II.75-76). The changing drama of the story is paralleled with the changing atmosphere. He writes, “when the sun rose” Jacob stopped his fighting (II.77-78). The reason for his stopping was the condition of his “shrivelled thigh” (II.78). Jacob’s weapon (his natural might) had “ebbed away / Vanquished” in the great battle (II.79-80). Like Origen, Prudentius emphasizes the limitation of natural human power, particularly when matched unevenly to supernatural power.

⁵⁷⁶ Frances Young, “Being Biblical, Being Broken and Blessed,” Lecture 4 in the St. Martin-in-the-Fields Autumn Education Programme, *The Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last: The Bible Opened for All*, delivered by Francis Young at St Martin-in-the-Fields (London, 2012), 5.

⁵⁷⁷ Origen, *Homilies on Genesis and Exodus*, trans. Ronald E. Heine, vol. 71 of *Fathers of the Church* (Washington: CUA Press, 1982), 235.

Prudentius moves into an interpretation of the text before his application. He immediately relays to the reader that Jacob is not physically dead. In fact, his physical injuries are not that severe. Therefore, the positive result is that he was not wounded in “life’s fount, the heart” (II.82). But, (note the transition, once again, from the physical to the spiritual) he quickly contrasts the positive results with the non-physical affects, which in Prudentius’ interpretation are the desired results. “But lust was shaken from his throne,” writes Prudentius, “And his foul empire overthrown” (II.83-84). Even though the physical injuries are of little significance, the greater injury is to Jacob’s soul. Prudentius interprets this narrative in terms of Jacob being defeated.⁵⁷⁸ Nevertheless, it is Jacob’s defeat that is his greatest victory. In this sense, Jacob’s defeat is “apparent rather than real.”⁵⁷⁹

Prudentius tells the reader that the lesson of this narrative is “man is whelmed by deadly night” (II.86). Like Origen, Prudentius seems to interpret humanity as it is up against an unequal opponent. He does not establish, as clearly as Origen does, that the opponent in this battle scene is a principality of the spiritual world, though his dark imagery could infer, on a moral level, Jacob waging against the darkness of his own sin. Prudentius accentuates the latter portion of the lesson, which is the exception. It is the paradoxical win within a loss. Yes, man is whelmed by darkness *unless* “he own God conqueror / And strive against His will no more” (II.87-88). Prudentius is expressing the greatest paradox of the Christian faith - the idea that loss is truly gain (Luke 17:33), that humility is exaltation (Luke 18:14b), that death is life (Philippians 1:21)! In the moral sense, Jacob exemplifies every person, “who must lay down his own will and accept the Will of God” (II.85-88). Rightly, O’Daly determines that “Jacob’s wrestling is a sign of his

⁵⁷⁸ O’Daly is quick to credit Charlet for noting that Prudentius could be patterning his interpretation of Jacob’s action after Hosea 12:2-6. O’Daly, *Linked by Song*, 78.

⁵⁷⁹ O’Daly, *Linked by Song*, 77.

virtue.”⁵⁸⁰ The results of the fight are interpreted differently in Origen and Prudentius, and yet they both have sought to (1) apply the narrative morally and (2) speculate on its deeper spiritual truths.

Moses and the Exodus of Israel

Origen appeals immediately to Paul’s interpretive authority as he begins to explore the exodus narrative. “Do you see how much Paul’s teaching differs from the literal meaning?” asks Origen, “What the Jews supposed to be a crossing of the sea, Paul calls a baptism; what they supposed to be a cloud, Paul asserts is the Holy Spirit.”⁵⁸¹ There is no doubt that this is also where Origen will go.⁵⁸²

From the outset, Origen intends to allow room for a much grander story. Picking up the narrative with the Israelites in the desert, Origen immediately applies it to a wider audience. He explains, “The children of Israel ‘departed,’ the text says, ‘from Ramesse and came to Socoth. And they departed from Socoth and came to Etham.’ *If there is anyone* who is about to depart from Egypt, *if there is anyone* who desires to forsake the dark deeds of this world and the darkness of errors, he must first of all depart ‘from Ramesse.’”⁵⁸³ The Israelite’s journey has become the reader’s journey.⁵⁸⁴

⁵⁸⁰ O’Daly, *Linked by Song*, 77.

⁵⁸¹ Origen, *Genesis and Exodus*, V.1. A common feature of Origen’s hermeneutics, as is mirrored by Prudentius, is the view that events of the Old Testament are types of sacraments. For example, “Just as Noah was saved in the Flood, so are the believers by baptism (Comm. Rom. III, I) The crossing of the Red Sea is our deliverance in baptism, by which we are rescued from the pursuit of the Egyptians, who represent the demons (Hom. Exod. V, 5).” Daniélou, *Gospel Message*, 276.

⁵⁸² Cf. Origen, *Genesis and Exodus*, V.1.

⁵⁸³ Origen, *Genesis and Exodus*, V.2, emphasis mine.

⁵⁸⁴ Origen does not hesitate to apply the text directly to an immediate context. For example, he writes, “therefore, we can ‘see’ even today ‘the Egyptians dead and lying on the shore,’ their four-horse chariots and cavalry drowned.” Origen, *Genesis and Exodus*, V.5.

In his exposition, Origen takes the time to inch through the text to illuminate every word or small phrase,⁵⁸⁵ as a result the layers of meaning begin to build. The first parting is from Ramesse, which means “the commotion of a moth.”⁵⁸⁶ Immediately, Origen connects this description to the Gospel warning against hoarding earthly possessions where moth and rust will destroy them (Matthew 6:20). In response, the reader by extension is charged to “sell all your possessions and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me. This” he clarifies, “is to depart ‘from Ramesse’ and to follow Christ.”⁵⁸⁷ The New Testament instruction functions to clarify the Old Testament narrative and unifies the texts. Like the two narratives prior to this one, the exodus generates a number of meanings. For instance, it transforms into a personal narrative, which then transforms into the Christian’s narrative and a reflection on the passion of Christ. It transforms yet again into the church’s narrative and its growing expectation of the second coming.

As Origen continues to proceed through the biblical narrative, each person, place, or thing develops these multiple meanings.⁵⁸⁸ For example, he asks the reader to go back and read again the words of Moses to Pharaoh: “We will go a journey of three days in the wilderness and sacrifice to the Lord our God.”⁵⁸⁹ Explaining, he declares,

The first day is the passion of the Savior for us. The second is the day on which he descended into hell. The third day is the day of resurrection But if according to what we said above, the Apostle teaches us rightly that the mysteries of baptism are

⁵⁸⁵ As an example, the names of each town along the way are described according to their literal titles, but Origen builds onto the literal text by paralleling the Israelite’s journey with the spiritual journey of the human being toward God.

⁵⁸⁶ Origen, *Genesis and Exodus*, V.2.

⁵⁸⁷ Origen, *Genesis and Exodus*, V.2.

⁵⁸⁸ As an example, he writes, “‘They came,’ the text says, ‘to Socoth,’ The etymologists teach that *Socoth* is understood as ‘tents’ among the Hebrews. When, therefore, leaving Egypt, you have dispelled the moths of all corruption from yourself and have cast aside the inducements of vices, you will dwell in tents. For we dwell in tents of which ‘we do not wish to be unclothed but to be further clothed’ *Etham*, they say, is translated in our language as ‘signs for them,’ and rightly so, for here you will hear it said: ‘God was preceeding them by day in a column of cloud and by night in a column of fire.’” Origen, *Genesis and Exodus*, V.2.

⁵⁸⁹ Origen, *Genesis and Exodus*, V.2.

contained in these words, it is necessary that ‘those who are baptized in Christ are baptized in his death and are buried with him,’ also arise from the dead with him.⁵⁹⁰

His language also includes references to who God is. For example, he records, “Moses is ordered to strike the sea with a rod that it might part and withdraw for the people of God who are entering the sea and *the compliance of the elements might serve the divine will*. And when the waters, which they feared, became a ‘wall of the right and the left’ for the servants of God, *they were not destructive, but protective*.”⁵⁹¹ The relationship between God and humanity is laid bare; the event declares that God is all-powerful and yet willing to bend down to the aid of His children. In opposition to the Jews whom Origen rebukes for stunting the text and squelching the Spirit, all of a sudden one of the cornerstone narratives becomes a fruitful expression of the Gospel message. It passes on the history of God’s action in and through His people, it retells of His merciful hand toward an obstinate and sinful people, it convicts the immediate reader, it recollects the Savior and His passion, and urges followers of Christ to pursue Him into the action of baptism, and it anticipates a new resurrection and a new life with God. For Origen, the text can do all this only because it is alive and active, divine in nature, the very Word of God.

The most noticeable commonality between the two interpretations is the attention to detail. Instead of truncating the narrative, the exodus drama becomes Prudentius’ poem. He takes time to develop characters, express relationships, and dramatically build the plot.⁵⁹² The narrative begins by introducing the reader to the children of God and His relationship to them: “The mighty children of the chosen name, / Saved by the merits of their sires, and

⁵⁹⁰ Origen, *Genesis and Exodus*, V.2.

⁵⁹¹ Origen, *Genesis and Exodus*, V.5, emphasis mine.

⁵⁹² Prudentius’ *Psychomachia* closely follows an allegorical reading of the Israelite’s exodus from Egypt and parallels “the reader’s own journey from a conflicted soul to a fully committed Christian.” Mastrangelo, “Decline of Poetry,” 326.

free / After long years of savage tyranny / Through the drear desert followed still that flame” (V.37-40). A few stanzas prior God is represented as a flame before Moses (V.29-32). As such, the guide in this stanza is the same God as the One who stood before Moses. The children of Israel are portrayed as mighty, chosen, saved, and they exemplify a dependent relationship to God (V.40). Similar to Origen’s expression of God, Prudentius praises Him for being active in protecting and providing for His people by striking their camp with the cloud (V.41, 43). The symbolism of night and day extends through this poem as well. The location of Israel’s dwelling is night, but God is faithful and dwells among them (“where’er they went, to lead their darkling way” (V.42)) manifesting Himself as continual light (V.44).

In contrast to God’s supernatural eminence, the people of Israel are depicted as quite human. For instance, once out of Egypt, their state of mind is surprisingly dull. The reader listens to the lethargic pace of the Israelites and imagines them being pursued intently by the most equipped army (V.57, 59). The stark contrast intensifies the drama and stirs the reader to want to shake the supposed protagonists of the story. In a state of forgetful weariness, the children of God trudge through the desert heat toward the Red Sea (V.57-59).

To offset the humanity of Israel, Prudentius alternates the account with the battle between God and Pharaoh. In contrast to the protection, care, and safety that God offers the Israelites, the Egyptian King responds in an attitude of anger and jealousy, by calling immediately upon his vast military resources (V.45-46). The King’s wealth, manpower, and weaponry (V.49-52) are compared to God’s self-control and supernatural power. The drama “is full of allegory, and portends the deeds of Christ, and the unwonted light that

shone in hell when he descended there before His resurrection.”⁵⁹³ Much like Origen’s interpretation, there remains a call to the reader to respond to what they have heard. For Origen, the invitation to baptism is clear, and with Prudentius it is the call to worship that echoes long after the poem is read. The Word of God ought to invoke action, and both interpretations have done that by treating the biblical narrative as active itself.

Conclusion

Origen’s hermeneutical treatment of the above three biblical dramas articulates a method for pursuing the spiritual meaning of the text, which later Christians would embody and actualize. Prudentius incorporates, knowingly or not, various elements from his experiences, traditions, and faith; nevertheless, it is Origen’s allegorical-spiritual hermeneutic that he reflects most in his use of biblical narrative. As it has been shown, both Origen and Prudentius advance toward interpreting the Word of God from its non-figurative expression. It is the literal text of the Bible that grounds any further exploration of its meaning. Both thinkers transition to a personal and ethical application of the text. In this transition, the inanimate nature of Scripture calls the reader into participation. The text is dynamic, having the ability to engage the reader in his or her own time and circumstance. For this reason, both Origen and Prudentius allow the text the freedom to step away from its original historical or chronological context for the purpose of expressing a deeper truth. Moreover, deeper truth *is* the pursuit of both Origen and Prudentius, who together utilize allegory as a tool for the task. The contemplation of God and His relation to humanity stands at the core of each interpretation. Thus, the interpreter is consistently pressed to meditate on the reality of humanity’s natural existence in light of God’s supernatural being.

⁵⁹³ Edward Kennard Rand, “Prudentius and Christian Humanism,” *Transactions and Proceedings of the American Philological Association* 51 (1920): 78-79.

Consequentially, it is from this theme that both Origen and Prudentius frequently return to exploring the grander narrative of the Gospel message, in which the cosmic events of God's action toward a created being, that has turned its back on its Creator, moves steadily toward its redemptive consummation.

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