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Toward a Natural Theology of Abundance: Reorientation to a Sacramental Reality

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Abstract: This paper presents the Christian incorporation and transformation of the philosophical understanding of the relation between the material and immaterial. This transformation centers on the Incarnation of Christ, which changes both the relation or contact between the material and immaterial realms, and human knowledge concerning the immaterial divine presence in material reality. More than a descriptive, historical account, the paper is primarily a conceptual presentation that retrieves the historically early thought of Irenaeus of Lyons and Athanasius of Alexandria to argue for a theological account of sacramental reality. Drawing on the metaphysical function of sacraments—themselves "visible signs of invisible grace"—which convey that there is more to material reality than meets the eye, I argue that this "more" implies what I call "a theology of abundance" that pertains to the whole of created reality, in the abundant nature of creation and of the human being in particular, and especially apparent in human knowing. The implication of such a theology of abundance is a comprehensive reorientation of human being, knowing, and expression in response to the invisible presence of the divine in visible, sacramental reality.

Keywords: natural theology; sacramental reality; Christian Platonism; Incarnation; material; immaterial; immanence; transcendence; knowing; mystery; Irenaeus; Athanasius

1. Sacramental Reorientation

The two liturgical sacraments of baptism and the eucharist are shared not only across diverse Christian denominations, but also across the two-millennia-long history of Christianity.[1] These rituals are the two "original" practices that were foundational to the beginnings of organized Christian communities in even the first century.[2] They began as communal testimonies of affirming the event of the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, and as embodied participation in this three-fold event's implications for those who called Jesus "Lord", "teacher", "anointed one" (Christ/Messiah), and "Son of God".[3] The implications for these Christ-followers were, perhaps above all, epistemological, shaping one's understanding and knowledge of God, oneself, and the world through the event of the Incarnation—changing what and how one knows and comes to know. This shift in the form and content of knowing in turn had ethical implications for this community of many individuals unified in this Christ, shaping one's actions in relation to others. Furthermore, one's entire existence and the universe itself were transformed, becoming part of a vision of reality that went beyond the material world of death and decay; a vision that offered redemption, salvation, and restoration for the visibly troubled world. The ritual practices of baptism and eucharist were, and are, a way of entering into a new-found reality with one's body and understanding, and through this understanding, reorienting one's whole existence.[4]

Over time, these ritual practices became known and defined as "sacraments", invoking the sacred or set-apart status of the revealed reality of redemption and its implications that one entered into through these rituals. In official terms, a "sacrament" became defined as a visible sign of an invisible reality that gives grace.[5] Otherwise stated, the sacraments are visible indications, or signs, of an invisible divine reference point: the invisible reality of the

God who bestowed on the world the gift of saving grace for, or redemption from, the visible realities of death and decay—especially apparent in sin: the human tendency to twist one's orientation away from God. The material or visible signs of the sacraments, then, reference an immaterial divine reality. The three-fold event of the Incarnation (Christ's life, death, resurrection) is the gift through which one can re-orient toward this invisible reality of God, a reorientation marked in these visible ritual practices.

Already apparent in "reorientation", the idea of *response* to the gift given is essential in both sacraments and is particularly clear in the eucharist. "Eucharist" means "thanksgiving" in Greek (*eucharistō*: "I give thanks") and, as such, has the notion of "response" built into the very word. The response is present in the ritual's very commemoration of Jesus's act with his disciples at the Last Supper; of breaking bread in his hands and giving it to his followers, which foreshadowed the breaking of his own body on the cross, itself the act understood as God's grace for humanity. Whether understood primarily as a memorializing and symbolic ritual, or as an encounter with the real presence of Christ,[6] the community's repetition of "doing this in memory of" Jesus is a recurrent, embodied *response* of thanksgiving for the gift of Christ's redemptive act. In the ritual act of collective consumption of bread, the individual bodies in the church community become united as the one body of Christ: the body (in the bread) is distributed across the community, giving the community members a unifying share in partaking of Christ's gift. This communal unification itself becomes a gift of thanksgiving offered in the form of embodied reorientation back to God, who gave the gift in the first place. In other words, the gift itself—the (invisible) saving grace of Christ's visible bodily act in the (visible) sign of the bread broken—in turn compels a physical response of communal, embodied reorientation to a spiritual reality that permeates yet exceeds materiality.[7]

Fundamentally, the liturgical sacraments are, in this estimation, embodied practices of responding to this new, invisible reality of grace that is present in visible reality, as revealed by the three-fold event of Christ's incarnation.

2. A Sacramental Reality of Abundance

Beyond the complex historical developments and ecclesial variations of the sacraments, which will be left aside here, the *definition* of "sacrament" conveys that there is, on the one hand, a visible reality within which we live and, on the other hand, an invisible reality beyond the physical. The focus of this paper revolves around this metaphysical (literally: "beyond or after the physical") structure that the sacraments express, and what this structure conveys in general about the relation between visible and invisible reality. It is, after all, the relation between the visible sign and the invisible reality of grace that drives the anthropological implications of reorientation (concerning knowledge, ethics, existence, and the universe), which begin with, yet go beyond, their liturgical setting. As such, this paper will explore a "natural" theology, in the broad sense of the nature of things or the nature of reality, by considering primarily the relation between the visible and invisible, the material and immaterial.[8] The relation between the visible and invisible that is present in the sacramental definition depends upon, while transforming, philosophical assumptions regarding both the relation between the material and immaterial and the implications of this relation for knowledge. In this way, the relation between material and immaterial realities that is present in the sacraments can be understood theologically to disclose a *sacramental reality* more widely.[9]

As visible signs of invisible grace, sacraments intensely convey what I will call here "a theology of abundance"—sacraments communicate, with or through material things, a divine reality that exceeds materiality. Importantly, they only do so because all of material reality is infused with the immaterial divine reality. Otherwise stated, there is much more to the material, *as such*, than meets the eye. In Christian theology, this "more", or this abundance—the spiritual reality beyond, and yet within, the material—necessarily depends upon the Incarnation. I will flesh out, in the following two sections of this paper, what I mean by this theology of abundance which, ever centered on the Incarnation, renders the

whole of reality sacramental, wherein reality is a visible sign of invisible grace that prompts reorientation and response. A sacramental reality affirms: (1) the abundant nature of all of creation (the world) and (2) the abundant nature of the human being as one part of creation, and, even more specifically, the abundant nature of human knowing. The two sections therefore exhibit two branches of this proposed natural theology of abundance—a theology of creation and a theological anthropology—but the necessarily limited expositions therein serve as mere examples of abundance encompassed in the visible-invisible relation.[10]

Since I am arguing that a sacramental reality is connected to what I call a theology of abundance, it is important to note the specificity of this term. "Abundance", meaning "an ample quantity", is derived from the verb "abound", which has its roots in the Latin *abundāre*, meaning "to overflow, be full, be plentifully supplied". This verb itself is formed from the prefix *ab* and *undāre*, meaning "to rise in waves, surge, flood", where *undāre* is a "verbal derivative of *unda* 'wave'".[11] The image of waves, in their rising and falling, is certainly an apt description of how human life is not straightforward—experienced in the rise and fall of emotions, experiences, perspectives, and relationships. These "ups and downs" already evince that there is "more" to materiality—to immanence—than the flattened, linear logic that these terms usually signify.

But apart from human experience, and applied more specifically to a sacramental reality, the imagery of waves rising and falling is illustrative for understanding a theology of abundance. Significantly, the rise and fall of a wave are defined by each other; they occur "successively" in their opposing movements but are also inextricably unified as one entity insofar as the rising of a wave is always inseparable from the falling. The abundance of a wave, in other words, is its dynamism. Unlike the related term "excess",[12] which implies unbounded overflow, abundance also encompasses the ebb rather than merely the flow. Applied to a sacramental reality, then, a theology of abundance does indeed reveal an "overflow" or "fullness", but one that always also includes within itself moments of "less" (whether experienced as reprieve or disturbance). A sacramental reality reveals the dynamic abundance in the relation between the visible and the invisible.

With this framework of abundance (and not merely excess) in mind, the following two sections argue for the sacramental reality of abundance by retrieving concepts from historically early developments in Platonically- and Neoplatonically-infused Christian theology.[13] In each section, then, I pair a philosophical principle—based in Plato's thought—with its related theological development in early Christian theology, which definitively depended upon and incorporated Greek thought while also transforming it. *This transformation was always a consequence of the revelation of the Incarnation.* I present each transformation and the ensuing theology of abundance with the help of a late antique (second to fourth century) theologian.[14] For these synthetic thinkers within early Christianity, and for this paper, the Incarnation and philosophy are radically intertwined.

The idea of the Incarnation—God embodied—is something we tend to take for granted today. But in the historical context of late antiquity, change and material decay played a central role in the radicality and novelty of understanding God as incarnate. The realities of bodily and physical corruption were concretely visible in daily life: without refrigeration and preservation techniques that we now take for granted, food, including animal carcasses, would swiftly rot; with the limits of ancient medicine, illness would regularly and inescapably wreak havoc in a person's body; and in the face of the forces of nature, death was an imminent threat that was constantly noticed, from childbirth to adulthood. So the claim that God—the perfect divine—became incarnate or enfleshed in Jesus, a man subject to the changes and corruption of fleshly life, would indeed have been something for the "Jews [to] slander and the Greeks [to] mock".[15] How, the question would run, could the perfect God possibly be visible and embodied in the physical reality of decay, imperfection, and death?

Among the Greek philosophical schools, ideas from Platonism in particular, and from its Aristotelian variation in Neoplatonism, were engaged in creative ways to address this conundrum of God incarnate. As mentioned, I will expand upon two central and interre-

lated Platonically infused assumptions that were creatively incorporated into Christian thought. These two focal points relay this abundance in (1) the philosophical principle of material and immaterial realities and its transformation into a theological abundance of creation, and (2) the philosophical two-fold principle of the limits and possibilities of human knowing and its transformation into an abundant theological anthropology. These two aspects and their influence on Christian thought concerning both the Incarnation and, in turn, the whole of reality, ground the argument for a theology of abundance: a sacramental reality.

3. Philosophy's Material and Immaterial Realities—Theology's Abundant Nature of Creation

3.1. Material and Immaterial Realities

The first philosophical assumption that is essential to a theology of abundance concerns different levels of reality: that there is a material, physical reality, as well as a "higher", spiritual reality, which is a divine realm of immaterial divine principles. As we will see, when this principle is transformed with the Incarnation, the material world takes on an abundant character.

Throughout the Platonic dialogues, Socrates continuously invites his interlocutors into discussions concerning the essence, or "is-ness", of things. He is not satisfied with understanding things, such as beauty or justice, merely by way of instances or examples of beautiful or just things. Rather, he wants to examine what beauty itself is, and what justice itself is.[16] This, understandably, turns out to be too challenging for his interlocutors, and his dialogues mostly end in aporia (impasse), often with his discussion partners walking away and leaving him to figure it out on his own.[17] In a few dialogues, the discussions reveal what has come to be known as the Platonic theory of Forms, which relies on the distinction between the material realm and the immaterial realm.[18] Even if Socrates is endlessly seeking the elusive definition of a thing's essence, he is at least convinced that the material instances are not the "real" thing, or the thing itself, in its entirety. The "real" thing is, instead, the immaterial Idea or Form (eidos).

It is important to draw out briefly how Plato's theory of Forms posits two realities, the material and immaterial, and how he conceives of the relation between them.[19] The varied material instances of a thing—say, instances of beauty or of goodness—are only such (beautiful or good) because of their relation to the immaterial Form (Beauty itself or the Good itself). Describing this relation is difficult, even for Socrates himself, but no matter what, it is a relation of dependence upon the Form, which introduces a strict hierarchy. In other words, it is not one particular, identifiable characteristic that is present across all beautiful things, for example, but is each thing's "sharing in" the Form of the Beautiful, or, it is the presence of the Beautiful itself in that thing.[20] This sharing-in or presence relation is described in Platonic discussions as participation: something beautiful "participates in" the Beautiful or in the Form of Beauty.[21] It is important to remember—even if one uses "x participates in X"—that it is the ideal, immaterial Form which *makes* or causes the material instance to be what it is.[22] Because of this hierarchy, Plato considers the material instances to be merely *images* or partial reflections of the real Form.[23] So, when Plato's Socrates is after the essence or is-ness of a thing, he wants to move beyond the material images, which are only ever partial, and rather understand the immaterial Form itself.

Importantly, for Plato the ultimate Form is the Good in the immaterial realm of reality.[24] Material reality reveals only *images* of goodness, not the Good itself, in its fullness or entirety. Given the relation between the instance and the Form, one necessarily first encounters in the world lesser versions or manifestations of the ultimate source, images of, for example, goodness that give us merely indications of the real Good. If possible, one makes the difficult "pilgrimage from appearance to reality", as Iris Murdoch puts it, where "reality" is the real Good and all that is illumined by the Good. This reality includes the confrontation that one's former reality was a mere appearance or lesser

reflection of the immaterial Form, or of "real" reality.[25] The Good, as the absolute Form, is obviously the "most Good", or perfect. In this way, the Platonic conception of the Good can be understood as "God", as long as it is assumed that this perfect, immaterial divine is a philosophical, impersonal principle (and the very highest principle at that).[26] As a philosophical, impersonal principle, this "divine" Good is likewise accessed philosophically and impersonally; that is, through the use of reason (Greek: logos).

Immaterial reality, then, is the realm of the divine, or of the perfect principles of the Good and the Forms, whereas material reality offers merely images constituted by their participation in that immaterial realm. That realm is the "distinct subject matter for philosophy," as Lloyd P. Gerson states, reiterating the point that the immaterial realm is accessible through reason.[27]

Because the Forms or Ideas, as opposed to material things, are the "real thing(s)", Plato is known—often pejoratively—as a philosophical "idealist". The legacy of thought that has followed from this idealism, in which ideas are more real than (what we consider) things, has been commonly construed as denigrating to the material world, including on the basis of Socrates's comments about the body being a temporary, worthless, hindering container, or even a "tomb", for the living soul.[28] The physical world and the body in this assessment are hindrances in the ascent to the real Good.[29]

Interestingly, however, when taken up into Christian theology, the Platonic assumption regarding the material world is transformed. Granted, the immaterial realm is still primary in Christianity, in that it is the realm of the divine, but the physical world is importantly affirmed and even necessary, precisely because of the Incarnation. In the Christian interpretation of this principle of two realities, Christ was understood as mediator between the physical and spiritual realms, embodied yet divinely perfect, consequently changing the very relation—and the possible contact—between the divine and the world. This newly understood relation changed the understanding of the created world as such. In other words, Incarnational affirmation is what results in a sacramental reality of abundance.

3.2. The Abundant Nature of Creation

Perhaps the most significant aspect of Christianity's early incorporation and the transformation of this philosophical principle of material and immaterial realities revolves around the description of the Incarnation as the Word, or Logos, of God. Although notoriously difficult to translate because of its many meanings, and thus often left untranslated, "logos" can be rendered as speech, discourse, word, principle, or reason (among other glosses) and was inevitably a multi-faceted term with a long history in ancient Greek philosophy.[30] Already in its Greek use, logos usefully contains within itself the material meaning of (written or spoken) words or discourse and the immaterial meaning of (abstract philosophical) principles or reason. Christianity's use of logos, in connection to the Incarnation, made this dual nature more explicit.[31]

Notably, the Johannine Gospel's philosophically infused first verses were irrefutably central to the theological development around Christ as the "Logos", or the Word: "In the beginning was the Word [Logos], and the Word was with God, and the Word was God".[32] With reference to the opening words of Genesis, "in the beginning", the Gospel writer takes up the Jewish scripture and then transforms it with the introduction of the Greek term and concept "logos". John's Gospel prologue goes on to state what became a most radical claim: "The Word was made flesh and dwelt among us".[33] This synthesis of Jewish and Greek worlds, and the transformation of both in the process, became the distinct Christian development: "Logos" as "Word", for Christian writers, did not simply signify a spoken or written word or law (of Hebrew Scripture), nor an abstract, immaterial, divine principle (of Greek philosophy), but a *person* as the visible, embodied principle (logos) of God made manifest in Jesus Christ: God incarnate.

In contrast to Plato's immaterial principle of the Good, which is attained in transcending the physical instances goodness, the Christian Logos of the perfect God *enters into* the material world. This enfleshed Logos of God presents a stark difference from the

philosophical logos. Whereas in philosophy, the immaterial realm of principles can be accessed through reason (logos), by ascending dialectically (through rational thought) from physical images or instances that participate in the Form to the Form itself, the Logos of God, on the other hand, as a name for the embodied person of Christ, transforms both the understanding of the material image of the immaterial divine and, in turn, the means of ascent to the divine.

Christ, understood as the visible image of the invisible God,[34] manifests the immaterial divine reality in physical, embodied form, very unlike Platonic imaging. The "image" of God in Christ is not a lesser, mere reflection of the divine realm, like in the Platonic view, but rather is the very principle (logos) of the divine realm made intelligible *in the flesh*.[35] Rather than ascent through reason to God (or to the Good as an impersonal logos or principle), ascent to the divine is made possible by the *descent* of that very divine Logos in Christ—one need not (only) use reason to move from mere illusory images to the "real" realm of divine reality, but rather, one can see the real, divine realm in this world, by seeing God in the flesh. Ascent to God, then, is possible through the visible image of the invisible God, and through belief that this person, visible to the eyes, is the Son of God, the Lord.[36] This has radical implications for the Christian transformation of the material world because of the newly understood, revealed relationship between the material and immaterial realities.

Athanasius of Alexandria (c. 299–373 C.E.), one of the most significant early Christian writers, is particularly compelling in his demonstration of the radical, Christ-centered transformation of Greek thought that leads to a sacramental vision of reality.[37] The Alexandrian bishop conceptualizes the Incarnation of the Word with his treatise of the eponymous title and, in so doing, reveals the ensuing abundant nature of creation or the abundance of the material world.

Introducing his own translation of Athanasius's treatise, John Behr points out that the influential early theologian's prior work, *Against the Gentiles*, is chronologically followed by *On the Incarnation*: "the first work sets up the problem that the second resolves".[38] In Athanasius's own words, the stated problem in the former work is that the Gentiles (the non-believing Greeks), "in slandering the cross[,] do not see that its power has filled the whole world, and that through it the effects of the knowledge of God have been revealed to all".[39] The consequence of not embracing this revealed knowledge of God in Christ is a perpetuation of idolatry, where idolatry is the worship of material things, including the body.[40] As Athanasius has it, idolatry is the human "preferring their own things [their bodies] to the contemplation of divine things".[41]

In the language of this paper, idolatry is seeing (and worshipping) the material for its materiality, rather than seeing that it is abundant, that it has an immaterial dimension, or that it is more than itself.[42] This dimension is revealed in "the power of Christ and his cross", which, as Behr explains (paraphrasing Athanasius's argument), "has filled the whole world, overcoming whatever has separated human beings from God, recreating them and restoring them to communion with God".[43] It is the Word or Logos of God, "the divinity of the Word of the Father and his providence and power in all things", who has made this restoration possible.[44]

As he indicates in the very title of the "second part of his double treatise", Athanasius identifies the source of the restoration by invoking not only the general immaterial divine Logos and its power, but also specifically the material "*Incarnation of* the Word" [the Logos] and "his manifestation to us *through the body*", by which he will expound upon the power of the cross against idolatry.[45] The body or incarnation of God makes the immaterial, divine power of the Logos concrete. In other words, it is specifically the embodied Logos of God which has the power to address material idolatry, which, as mentioned above, is the human preference for material things in and for themselves. But, as alluded to in the very word "restoration" (of something prior), the idolatrous state was not the original (created) state of humans, Athanasius says, even if it occurred shortly thereafter (in the Fall). Rather, the world was in fact created in goodness, because "God is good, or rather the source of all

goodness".[46] Here we see echoes of Platonic participation and the relation of dependence on the Form, where material things are good because they participate in the Good (here, of God).[47] All of creation, which was "made through his own Word, our Lord Jesus Christ", was made to dwell in that goodness.[48]

Remarkably, Athanasius's account asserts that, not only is God "the source of all goodness", echoing closely Plato's most perfect divine Form, the Good, but God also grants humanity "the grace of participation in the Word" itself: the "God Word" (Theos Logos), as Athanasius names it, gave human beings "a share of the power of his own Word" when he made them according to his own image.[49] In other words, the Logos of God made human beings according to that Logos, allowing material beings a sharing-in—a participation—in the divine immaterial Logos. It is worth noting here that Christ as the Logos and full Image of God is not the same as the human being *according to* the Logos and Image.[50] Humans are not God; a hierarchy and ontological distance is upheld.[51] Yet, despite (or rather because of) this difference upheld between creation and Creator, embodied humanity, on Athanasius's account, initially (at creation) participates in the immaterial divine reality of God's goodness and in God's immaterial abundance when made according to the image or Logos of God.

But the human forgetting of their source of goodness and existence, and the consequent focus on material things in and for themselves, renders humanity, by their own choice, bound to the material—bound even unto material death. The idolatry or choosing of the material, in other words, ends only with the material. In Athanasius's words:

> "For God has not only created us from nothing, but also granted us by the grace of the Word to live a life according to God. But human beings, turning away from things eternal. . .were themselves the cause of corruption in death."[52]

Death is a result of this movement away from humanity's created orientation to the immaterial God, who had granted its existence and goodness. The result of no longer seeing creation as abundant, as pointing beyond itself to the Creator, is seeing the created world as merely material and self-determined.[53]

In response to humanity's self-determined material bounds, the Logos of God extends his goodness into creation once again, Athanasius says, by entering corruptible materiality as himself a human: "the incorporeal and incorruptible and immaterial Word of God comes into our realm. . .condescending towards us in his love for human beings".[54] Ever emphasizing the love of God in this radical Incarnation, the Alexandrian bishop says that "the Word himself submitted to appear through a body, so that as a human he might bring humans to himself and return their sense perception to himself" and, consequently, to God, since he is himself God.[55] In this movement, "the Word unfolded himself everywhere", such that "[e]verything is filled with the knowledge of God. . .[B]y means of [the body] he made himself visible, remaining in it and doing such works and giving signs which made him known to be no longer a [mere] human being but the God Word".[56] While the Logos appears visibly in the Incarnation, Athanasius qualifies that God "was not formerly distant", so as to point out that God's proximity to the world is one thing, and the world's proximity to God, or lack thereof, is another.[57] Directionality matters here, as it does in participation in general. God makes the world be and makes it good; humans turning away from this source causes their relational distance from God.[58]

Because God is the source of creation's participation in and proximity to himself, Athanasius further expounds how restoring this participation also needed to come from God, the Logos, calling this the "re-creation" of all that is: "its *recreation* was accomplished by the Word who created it all in the beginning".[59] This re-creation "renew[s] again the 'in the image,' so that through it human beings would be able once again to *know* him".[60] Radically, knowledge of the immaterial God is made possible *in and through* the material, precisely in Christ's body. Christ's embodiment becomes, in fact, the vehicle for knowing God, renewing both the "in the image" of humanity and the knowledge of God's proximity

to humanity. Kathryn Tanner powerfully contrasts the material bounds of human power with the needed divine Logos for restoring the "in the image":

> "Humans, instead, have the image of God only by clinging to what they are not—that divine image itself—in love. There is only one perfect or express image of God—the second person of the Trinity—and that perfect image becomes humans' own only through their exceedingly close relationship with it—e.g., *by its own actual presence within them*, made their own by the first person of the Trinity through the power of the Holy Spirit *on the basis of the second person's incarnation in human flesh*."[61]

Reiterating the directionality of the restoration stated here and elsewhere throughout the treatise, Athanasius offers the beautiful image of "a good teacher who cares for his students [by] condescend[ing] to teach by simpler means those who are not able to benefit from more advanced things" as an illustration for the Logos's condescension to the material world.[62]

Further illustrating this point, Athanasius uses the spatial language of "downward" and "upward" to communicate the renewed relation between the material and the immaterial.[63] Recalling that idolatry is the fixation on the material in and for itself, he offers the powerful visual image of attention to the material (downward) reality in contrast to the immaterial (upward) reality: "human beings, having rejected the contemplation of God as though sunk in an abyss with their eyes held downwards", became stuck "*seeking God in creation and things perceptible*", creating, by their own power, new material gods, or idols, as mentioned.[64] Since the material world is where the human seeks God, and it is not in the human's own power to raise their own eyes upward again, Athanasius tells his reader,

> "the lover of human beings and the common Savior of all, takes to himself a body and dwells as human among humans. . .*so that those who think that God is in things corporeal* might. . .know the truth and through him might consider the Father. . .[O]n whatever they cast their sense perception there they saw themselves being drawn and taught the truth from all sides."[65]

In other words, the Logos *descends to the level at which humans tend to look for God*.[66] In this descent, the Incarnation of the Logos recreates the possibility of knowing God, the immaterial source of goodness in all things, through materiality.[67] This restoration occurs in seeing Christ, the Logos in the flesh, in the very corporeal realm, because Christ's own physical body, as human yet divine, raises human eyes to God again.[68]

Athanasius's account is a radical example of the incorporation and transformation of the philosophical relationship between the material and immaterial realities. Ever centered on the Incarnation, philosophical participation is transformed into Christological participation, giving all of reality a sacramental or abundant character.

4. Philosophy's Limits and Possibilities of Knowing—Theology's Abundant Nature of the Human

4.1. The Limits and Possibilities of Knowing

As demonstrated above, the material Incarnation changes not only the relation between the material and immaterial, but also the possibility of knowing the immaterial divine *in* the material realm, which evidently leads us directly into the philosophical issue of human knowing and its theological transformation, which emphasizes its abundance. The second philosophical assumption concerns, then, the limits and possibilities of knowing: that it is necessary to recognize what (and that) one does not know in order to pursue further thought.

Arguably, the most important characteristic of Plato's Socrates is that he knows that and what he does not know—this starting point drives several Platonic dialogues. Many of the dialogues begin with Socrates's mistrust of his own knowledge of something, which generally takes the form of asking another person about the topic; someone who supposedly knows the subject area better than he. The reason for this starting point is stated explicitly

in the *Apology*, when Socrates is relaying the Oracle at Delphi's testimony that "no one was wiser" than Socrates, a "riddle" which the arch-philosopher is perplexed by, as he is "very conscious that [he is] not wise at all".[69] In the course of trying to understand this riddle by comparing himself to a "reputed wise" man, Socrates comes to the conclusion that he is indeed "wiser than this man" because, although "it is likely that neither of us knows anything worthwhile, . . . [the reputed wise man] thinks he knows something when he does not, whereas I [Socrates] do not know, *neither do I think I know*. . .".[70] It is precisely in Socrates's knowing that he does not know, knowing the limits of his knowledge, that his wisdom is found.[71]

Moreover, Socrates's acknowledgment of his lack of knowledge is actually what allows him to pursue further knowledge by way of discussion with others and, in particular, others who claim to know. In other words, a positive understanding of "limits" that leads not to resignation but to an acknowledgment of one's own ignorance precisely allows for the ensuing possibility of the further pursuit of truth itself. It is the difference between the pure limits of "I do not know and cannot know" and the possibility-filled limits of "I know that I do not know and will therefore pursue knowing".

Importantly, limits correspond to knowledge based on the material or visible, and possibilities correspond to knowledge related to the immaterial or invisible reality. When one comes up against the limits of material knowledge—in observation, discursive reasoning, and explanation—and, like Socrates, recognizes that, as material, this is only one form of knowledge, one is propelled into new possibilities via immaterial knowledge, resulting in a positive sense of mystery.[72]

This positive sense of mystery is different from an assertion of only the unbounded possibilities of immaterial knowledge. While unbounded possibility is the stark opposite of only material limits, it is in fact likewise a one-sided position, and thus ironically limited. The issue in this paper of the limits and ensuing possibilities of knowing can therefore be framed as never succumbing to only one of these sides or kinds of knowing. Knowing is not only the knowing of limits on the basis of the material, nor is it only the possibility of transgressing those limits through the immaterial. The first would lead to pessimistic resignation or skepticism; the second to illusory arrogance. The simultaneity of both limits and possibilities reveals the abundant character of human knowing, recalling especially the earlier image of waves—one "entity" in its rise and fall—present in the etymology of abundance. In the very recognition of what we do not know (the "fall" of a wave), we are propelled into further knowing—in new, varied forms (the "rise" of a wave). In this way, then, abundance is evinced in a positive relation to mystery.

This positive sense of mystery is further clarified by Michael A. Sells: "Mystery is neither a set of abstruse doctrines to be taken on faith nor a secret prize for the initiated. Mystery is a referential openness onto the depths of a particular tradition".[73] With this emphasis on openness and depths—an emphasis that avoids both a resigned "faith" and an elite "secret"—Sells helpfully identifies the possibilities of knowing that are contained within mystery. These possibilities of mystery go beyond the material limits of explanatory knowing and beyond immaterial obscurity, whether in "doctrine" or "secret knowledge", which is likewise limited because it is one-sided. Karmen MacKendrick indicates a similar sense of the possibilities within (positive) mystery by contrasting it to "the dominance of human knowing over the rest of materiality," arguing that "the highest knowledge open[s] onto mystery, so that the most important kind of knowing is the ability to recognize the unknowable in what we know".[74] Importantly, if "what we know" is the material (broadly understood), then, as MacKendrick has it, the ensuing implication is that "mystery. . .is material".[75]

This picture of "material mystery" corroborates the idea that materiality is permeated with that which goes beyond or exceeds the material; thus, the abundance related to the limits and possibilities of knowing (i.e., mystery) is intrinsically connected to the first principle discussed in this paper: material and immaterial realities.[76] Human knowing, then, reflects the abundant relationship between material and immaterial realities when

it likewise includes the coincidence of knowing in relation to both. This coincidence is apparent in the dialectic or dialogue between knowing the two realities. Already alluded to in the mention of Socrates's further pursuit of knowing in conversation, the dialectical method itself is the philosophical manifestation of the abundance of knowing present within human limits. This is because it acknowledges what one does not know, and, in this very acknowledgment, pursues further knowledge in dialogue with others.[77]

When this philosophical principle is transformed in a Christian theology of abundance, the dialectic or dialogue between knowing the two realities is intensified through the mystery of the divine and human Son of God. As such, human knowing, in its upholding of both (material) limits and (immaterial) possibilities, is a unique part of creation that manifests a theology of abundance and a sacramental reality.

4.2. The Abundant Nature of Human Knowing

Incorporated into Christian theology, the Incarnation intensifies a positive relation to mystery in the intensification of both the limits and possibilities of knowing. The limits embedded in knowing this mystery do not imply a negation of knowledge, but rather imply a positive assertion of the limits to merely one kind of knowledge (either material or immaterial) in two ways. First, as we saw with Athanasius, merely material knowledge and its limits ("idolatries") are overcome in the Incarnation of the Logos, in Christ's restoration of the immaterial dimension within material creation itself. Yet, second (on the other side of the coin, so to speak), God's material manifestation in the Incarnation nevertheless preserves God's full immaterial essence—itself infinite divine perfection—as still not completely apprehensible. Articulating these two kinds or "sides" of knowing in relation to naming the divine, Sells identifies "the [medieval] distinction between two kinds of naming; between God-as-he-is-in-himself and God-as-he-is-in-creatures".[78] Humans can know and name God based on material reality (in creation) because the Incarnation offers certain knowledge in the flesh, yet the immaterial reality of God ("in himself") remains nevertheless beyond complete comprehension.[79]

With this frame in mind, we can see how idolatry, based on Athanasius's account, relies on and produces only one side or kind of knowing, and we can recall its inevitable material limits. As for the "other" side or kind of knowing—only its unbounded possibilities—we can look to the ancient issue of Gnosticism. It is worth noting that, when only framed as unhinged "possibility" without acknowledging the necessity of limits, knowing likewise, even if ironically and unintentionally, becomes limited in the way that Sells alluded to above: by being secret knowledge for the initiated—for how else could the lack of pervasiveness of this unbounded knowing be explained? This one-sided emphasis on the possibilities of immaterial knowing, for a select few, is observable in the phenomenon of second-century Gnosticism. Derived from the Greek word *gnosis*, meaning knowledge, Gnosticism is the retroactive name applied to certain branches of thought within the ancient burgeoning Christian movement which, in varied ways, asserted a secret or special spiritual knowledge.[80] This emphasis was countered in the development of early Christianity, as prominent Christian bishops continuously defined orthodox Christianity against such a position.[81] What became the orthodox position stemmed from, in the language of this paper, the affirmation of the need for *both* limits and possibilities of human knowing, ever grounded in the emphasis on the material Incarnation of the immaterial God.

Among the earliest Christian bishops, Irenaeus of Lyons (c.130–c.200 C.E.) recognized the necessity of, and wisdom in, affirming both the limits and possibilities of human knowing, as opposed to valuing only one side of this dichotomy. Penning a "detection and refutation of *gnōsis* falsely so-called" in approximately 180 C.E., which came to be known as *Against the Heresies* from the Latin translation,[82] Irenaeus identifies certain positions within this "false knowledge" and offers counterarguments to these Gnostic propositions, particularly those which deny the fleshly reality of the Incarnation—Christ's suffering, death, and resurrection.[83]

Irenaeus's opposition to this denial of materiality importantly centers on the knowledge that embraces a positive sense of mystery in God becoming embodied. He explicitly points out the different opinions which deny the Incarnation:

> "Not one of the heretics is of the opinion that the Word was made flesh...the Word of God [in the heretics' creeds] is presented as without flesh and incapable of suffering, as is 'the Christ who is above'. Some say that He revealed Himself as a transfigured man, but was not born or made flesh. Others deny that he took human from at all."[84]

On this account, the Gnostic response to the theoretical difficulty of the Incarnation—the issue of the divine entry into the material reality of imperfection, decay, and death, mentioned earlier in this paper—is to maintain the divine status of Christ ("who is above") by elevating his acts as divine illusions that appeared one way to the human eye, but were mere material covers for a spiritual reality. For example, Irenaeus goes on to say, "some of them have the audacity to claim ... [that] [Christ] Himself did not take up the Cross and [that He] abandoned the plan of suffering".[85] Prioritizing the immaterial, these Gnostics believed that the divine Christ did not actually die in the crucifixion, but rather thought that the body hanging on the cross was a mere physical illusion while, as Irenaeus relays it, the spiritual Christ "fled from Jesus [during the Passion]".[86]

In contrast, Irenaeus asserts, "He appeared as man in the fulness of time", declaring Christ's full entry into the material world and finite time, "and, being God's Word, He summed up in Himself all things in heaven and on earth. He united man with God and brought about communion between God and man".[87] Christ unites in himself the material realm of humanity and the immaterial realm of the divine. Irenaeus thus ever emphasizes the necessity of affirming both material and immaterial realities that are made apparent and in fact commingled in Christ, rather than only favoring the immaterial as the Gnostics did. In asking "What is [God] like? How great is He?", Irenaeus responds that "He is invisible and inexpressible to all He has made, *but by no means unknown*".[88] In other words, God is simultaneously knowable and unknowable, or, recalling the earlier image in this paper, abundant like the rise and fall of waves. And it is essential to uphold this sense of abundance, in contrast to the Gnostic emphasis that Irenaeus portrays in his treatise, due to the latter's one-sided stress on only the immaterial God, which is accessed with special immaterial knowledge.

Irenaeus expounds where the danger lies in the emphasis on spiritual knowledge when he relays that the Gnostics claim "they *already comprehend Him* and are established in their knowledge of Him, [and] they do not say that they are in a passion of perplexity, but rather *in the knowledge and apprehension of the truth*".[89] To "imagin[e] that you can pass through and beyond the realms of God" is, Irenaeus pointedly asserts, to "fall into insanity, regarding yourself as loftier and better than your own Creator".[90] Insanity on this count is to make perfect sense of everything with your own special knowledge. Along similar lines, the second-century bishop reports that some Gnostics "dream of a non-existent deity above [the only true God], so that they will be regarded as having discovered the 'great God', whom no one can know, who does not communicate with the human race".[91] Along with the contradiction in "discovering" something "no one can know", this postulation of a higher divinity, and the pride in one's own discovery thereof, causes those who hold this position "to wallow in total error" as well as contradiction, which stems from how "[t]hey want to be verbal sophists rather than disciples of truth".[92] Furthermore, it is arrogance, Irenaeus contends, "to investigate things which are above us and at present beyond our reach, ... [to] treat God like a book to be opened and act as if we had already found the unfindable".[93] This multi-faceted danger of total knowledge and comprehension, which prioritizes special immaterial knowledge, neither acknowledges what it does not know nor affirms the (related) ever abounding pursuit of knowing God further through the revealed paradox of the Incarnation.

To avoid the dangers of one "side" of immaterial knowing, Irenaeus advises his audience to "keep your knowledge in its proper place. In ignorance of the good, do not try to rise above God Himself, for He cannot be surpassed".[94] God, against the Gnostic assumption, is incomprehensible, but this incomprehensibility is held positively rather than from a standpoint of lacking a higher or secret knowledge. This is because the Incarnation of Christ offers humanity "the Incomprehensible through the Comprehensible, the Invisible through the Visible", which affirms "knowledge in its proper place" because of the material revelation of the immaterial divine.[95] Irenaeus thus counters the proposal of perfect knowledge by returning the focus yet again to the Incarnation. He reiterates this point with the idea that Christ "present[ed] God to men" and yet "He safeguarded the invisibility of the Father...so that [the human being] might always have something towards which he could advance".[96] In other words, these very limits of material knowing (wherein God's invisibility is retained) are exactly what propel a further pursuit of (or advancement towards) knowing the immaterial God.

These possibilities of knowing, then, must always occur along with the limits of knowing. So, when the bishop of Lyons says that "we ought to leave all difficult questions to Him who in part gives us His grace,"[97] this does not imply a resigned position of ignorance that seeks no further. Rather, we can recall the positive sense of mystery described earlier. Just as Socrates's position—knowing that he does not know—is precisely what propels him to further knowing, Irenaeus's suggestion here is to acknowledge the limits of one kind of investigative, discursive knowing that broadcasts (too swiftly and suspiciously) "explanations" for difficult questions, such as we saw with the Gnostics.[98] Recognizing that there are, as Irenaeus puts it, things "beyond our reach", beyond our discursive comprehension, even though Christ "has come within reach of human knowledge," demonstrates divine grace precisely because it affirms the consequence of the Incarnation: the necessary limits and possibilities, or the abundant nature of knowing.[99] In other words, this paradox means that knowledge of God is possible, but this knowledge will not be comprehensible in only one way.

This paradox can be further clarified with recourse to the Logos. Christ, the visible image of the divine Logos, makes the invisible God known; yet in this very manifestation, God's invisibility remains. Recalling the Christian use of Logos described earlier and its inclusion of the material and immaterial, we see Irenaeus elucidate the abundance of human knowing through the logos given to humanity by the abundant Logos of God.[100] As we saw with Athanasius (who is of course writing after Irenaeus), this logos is granted initially at creation *and* is made manifest in the Incarnation of Christ—both "dispensations" of the Logos reveal the immaterial God in materiality. Consequently, this logos establishes the material reality of the human being as abundant, or as participating in immaterial divine abundance.

It is important that this abundance is known not merely through reason, but also through another kind of knowing; that is, revelation. Irenaeus articulates this God-given relation between reason [logos] and revelation of the Word [Logos]: "reason [logos], implanted in their minds, moves [human beings], and *reveals to* them that there is one God, the Lord of all".[101] The Logos is the revelation of God within the human being. The abundant nature of the human, then, implanted by the very Logos of God, directs the human to know this abundant divine Logos.[102] But when the logos within the human being is stifled by tending to only one kind of knowing, and thus is insufficient in revealing its divine source, the Logos of God makes himself known again, in a new way, through a new revelation: "Everything became new when the Word, in a new dispensation, came in the flesh to win back to God man who had gone off from God. Thus men were taught to worship, not a different God, but the same God in a new way".[103] In this new revelation of Logos—the Incarnation of "our teacher, who is the Word"[104]—it is newly possible that:

"all creatures learn from His Word [Logos] that there is one God and Father, who contains all things in Himself and grants existence to all, as it says in the Gospel:

'No one has ever seen God; the only Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, *he has made Him known*.'" [John 1:18][105]

This new knowing must uphold an affirmation of the Logos in the flesh, while it also upholds the abundant essence of this same God in his immateriality.

By invoking the Incarnation of the Logos again, Irenaeus further draws out this paradox and in so doing gestures towards the ensuing possibilities of expression, in God's own Word and, in turn, in human expression to and about God in response. The translation of "logos" as "word" and its interplay with the related term "expression" is especially evocative here: "The Father, invisible though He is to us, is known by His own Word, and though inexpressible, the Word expresses Him to us".[106] The Word expresses the inexpressible divine reality to the finite world. This expression of the divine Word changes human knowledge of—and expression concerning—what it means to be made in the image of this inexpressible, invisible God.[107]

5. Conclusions: Reorientation through a Theology of Abundance

"The purpose of all of matter," Hans Boersma argues, "is to lead us into God's heavenly presence. Thus are the church's sacraments simply the beginning of the cosmic restoration. *The entire cosmos is meant to serve as a sacrament*: a material gift from God in and through which we enter into the joy of his heavenly presence".[108] This paper has explored the metaphysical relation between the visible and invisible or material and immaterial, as demonstrated in philosophically infused early Christian theology, to understand how the whole of reality is sacramental—to see how, in Boersma's terms, reality serves as a sacrament; a visible gift of invisible grace. Clearly, this has not simply been a descriptive, historical account of Platonic principles and the early Christian incorporation and transformation of those principles; rather, it has been primarily a conceptual presentation—retrieving historically early Christian thought—which serves a theological account of sacramental reality. In other words, based on the contours of early Christian thought, merely glimpses of which we have seen in this paper, a sacramental view of reality is one in which the Incarnation affects an understanding of the relation between the material and immaterial—therefore of the whole of being—and the ensuing implications for knowing, which I have framed as a "natural theology of abundance," as described in two sections.

First, invoking the thought of Athanasius, I presented the abundant nature of creation through the theologically transformed philosophical principle of material and immaterial realities. The reality of the immaterial divine implies that there is "more" *in* the material than simply the material. Second, I presented the abundant nature of the human being as one specific part of the material world and considered, with Irenaeus, human knowing specifically, in conjunction with the second philosophical principle of knowing's simultaneous limits and possibilities. The abundance of human knowing reflects the first principle of both material and immaterial realities, and, as such, we saw the necessity of ever upholding both "sides" of this abundance. Maintaining abundance in knowing avoids both an unbounded immaterial knowledge and a resigned position of not knowing; rather, a positive sense of mystery is maintained, which allows for the further pursuit of knowledge and the possibility of a knowledge that goes beyond discursive reasoning.

With this presentation, it is important to now consider, even if briefly, the reorientation that follows from a sacramental reality in a parallel fashion to the essential element of response and reorientation intrinsic to the liturgical sacraments. As we have seen, a sacramental reality conveys immaterial abundance in material creation and in human knowing. Responding to this sacramental reality, then, involves nothing less than an existential affirmation of this abundance.

Existential affirmation of a natural theology of abundance, or of a sacramental reality, is found in the endurance of a positive sense of mystery at every level of one's being.[109] This sense of mystery simultaneously embraces both the limits and possibilities of knowing, as grounded in the Incarnation. Here we can recall again the imagery of waves in one

unified yet overflowing, dynamic entity. As the twentieth century theologian Henri de Lubac expresses it:

> "[Mystery] conveys dynamism and synthesis. It focuses less on the apparent sign, or rather the hidden reality, than on both at the same time: on *their mutual relationship, union and implications*, on the way in which one passes into the other, or is penetrated by the other."[110]

Affirmation of abundance occurs in the dynamism and synthesis of mystery; that is, in the affirmation of the mutual relationship, or the union between material and immaterial reality. In this estimation, an existential affirmation of a positive sense of mystery has infinite possibilities.

One significant way this mystery has been upheld in the lives of Christians throughout history is in mystical experience. While there are abundant sources on mysticism—including the noteworthy volumes on Christian mysticism by Bernard McGinn—we can look here to an insight from Mark A. McIntosh, who articulates mystical theology in terms akin to the natural theology of abundance described in this paper:

> "[M]ystical theology attends to and seeks to understand the mystical *presence of God in all things*; it seeks to *recognize* and *respond to* that presence as a divine invitation to ever-deeper communion, an invitation inherent in the ongoing activity of creation and new creation."[111]

Recognizing and responding to the immaterial divine presence in all of materiality depends upon the initial communication of God, itself grounded in love. Thus, McIntosh goes on to say that "the divine communication, mystically present in the very giving of all things to be themselves, is love, a beckoning to share in that inexhaustibly giving life which is God the Trinity".[112] This idea of divine communication as a beckoning through all things (into participation, or a sharing-in God, no less) recalls the Logos of God in all of reality, the notion of dialogue built into the limits and possibilities of knowing, and the connection of the Logos to expression. The idea of God's beckoning as present in all things leads beyond mystical experience per se (as a heightened recognition of God's presence) to another avenue of reorientation based on a sacramental reality; namely, the possibility of varied expressions that respond to God, as in a dialogue, and thus uphold a positive sense of mystery.

While the notion of expression as a response to a sacramental reality can only be gestured at very briefly here, it is nonetheless worth mentioning for some of its many possibilities, all of which emphasize the dialectical character encompassed in abundance and the ensuing reorientation through response.

First, we can look to the phenomenon of expressing, communicating, or relaying a mystical experience as a response to God's initial beckoning. Communicating or relaying to others—in writing or speaking—is an essential aspect of the very experience of God's presence in all things, even if, as Bernard McGinn points out, "the experience in itself defies conceptualization and verbalization".[113]

Second—and very much related although not confined only to relaying mystical experience—the most appropriate expression in response to God's initial abundant beckoning always includes both positive (kataphatic) and negative (apophatic) statements about God or the experience of God—often articulated with the approximative language of "beyond", e.g., "God is beyond being", and "God is beyond our conceptions of goodness".[114] This kind of abundant language is a fitting response because it corresponds to the abundant relation between the material and immaterial itself expressed in the Incarnation.

Third, expression in response to God can be understood as going beyond merely human speaking. This expression beyond human speaking is apparent in the "voice" of creation as a whole (non-human nature),[115] as well as in myriad human *embodied* expressions or lived actions, including gratitude,[116] wonder,[117] attention to the other,[118] and especially love.[119]

Fourth, and finally, dialogue (dialectic) itself, in how it both acknowledges what one does not know and pursues further knowing, can become a site of expression not only in response to or about God; dialogue can, rather, be understood as imbued with the divine Logos in its very form, no matter the content and interlocutor. Dialogue is therefore perhaps the centerpiece of reorientation to a theology of abundance, since the manifestations of expression described above are each themselves forms of response. These dialectical expressions respond to and affirm a positive sense of mystery at every level of one's being and therefore are manifestations of an existential reorientation to a natural theology of abundance; a sacramental reality.

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Notes

[1]　My immense thanks to Maria Dasios for her generous and impeccably timed feedback on my former draft, and for the reorienting, invigorating resources she passed along that truly made this version of the paper possible. My gratitude, too, for Mitch, who propelled me past limits and into further possibilities for this paper. For the gift of possibility-filled dialogue, I am beyond thankful.

[2]　These are the two characteristic Christian rituals, drawn from the New Testament writings (first century C.E.). See also Ferguson (2009). N.B. The sacraments are discussed and interpreted in myriad ways across Christian history, including into the present; their descriptions are likewise varied in early church writings by various church fathers in different contexts and time periods. Acknowledging this variation, my focus is on the broad metaphysical function of the sacraments, as will be explained, in regards to their two-fold nature of being material and immaterial, or as a site of immanent-transcendence. For more on immanent-transcendence, see note 8 below.

[3]　Hans Boersma expresses this embodied participation succinctly: "The result of this sharing in Christ is that believers participate in heavenly realities", going on to clarify that "[h]eavenly participation means that life on earth takes on a heavenly dimension", in Boersma (2011, pp. 4–5).

[4]　As Rowan Williams puts this point regarding early Christian self-understanding: "To be a Christian at this stage was not primarily to possess a certain set of beliefs about a distant God or even a recently active saviour-figure; it was to see and imagine oneself afresh in relation to the stories of the saviour, and to be involved in a rapid but far-reaching reconsideration of what could truthfully be said about both God and humanity in this light The believer is someone who is inhabited, more deeply and comprehensively than others, by the holy presence out of which all things come, and is at the same time an inhabitant of a world that is larger than that immediately visible or tangible", in Williams (2020, p. 11).

[5]　Augustine is known as the source for this definition, but it is reiterated throughout church history. See, for example, Hugh of St. Victor, Peter Lombard, Thomas Aquinas. Interestingly, Philipp W. Rosemann's point regarding Augustine's definition corroborates this paper's thesis: "If, as Augustine had it, a sacrament is 'a visible sign of an invisible grace,' then the entire created universe can be understood as a vast sacramental system that points to its Creator", in Rosemann (2017, p. 65). He goes on to say that Peter Lombard's *Sentences*, and his definition of the sacraments therein, clarified the sacraments in their sanctifying role to address this issue: "the sacraments were instituted not only for the sake of signifying, but of sanctifying as well", Lombard, Sentences, book III, dist. 1, chap. 4, No. 2, 2:233, as quoted in Rosemann (2017, p. 66). See also Thomas L. Humphries, Jr., "St. Augustine of Hippo", in the same volume.

[6]　Boersma (2011, p. 25).

[7]　David Bradshaw's article corroborates this idea of reorientation with an argument concerning how the early Church "designated the Christian sacraments and their rites as 'mystical' because they draw participants into a higher level of reality," in Bradshaw (2015, p. 137). He points out "that the mystical (that is, the *mystikos*) originally had *nothing to do* with extraordinary states of consciousness! It instead pertained precisely to the sort of event or relationship epitomized by the Transfiguration: the use by God of the sensible, not only to reveal a higher reality, but *to place the participants in communion with that reality*", (p. 145), emphasis in original. Thus the liturgy brings one into a "higher reality" that is always there: it is "[the act] of all of creation joined in worship around the throne of the Creator. It is, in other words, not something that any earthly body creates by its own performance, but an eternally existing reality into which one enters, as a member of the body which is the Church, into communion," (p. 151).

[8]　The related dichotomy of "immanence" and "transcendence" is helpful for further understanding the relation between the material and immaterial. In recent works, the troubling of the opposed character of immanence and transcendence has been

helpfully offered in discussions on these two terms, and variations thereof, and these works have significantly impacted the development of this paper's thought. See, for example: Haynes (2014); Taylor (2007); Dupré (1993); Otten (2020); Hampton (2019); Davison (2019); Wirzba (2015); Foltz (2014); Desmond (1995); Macquarrie (1984); Sherman (2014); MacKendrick (2021); Kerr (1997); Williams (2018). See also the essays offered in Hampton and Kenney (2021) for more on how the relationship between transcendence and immanence is developed in different ways (and in varied terms) throughout Christian history and thought. See Chenu et al. (1997) for the developments around "nature" in Christian thought.

9 This idea has precedence in recent thought, for example: Boersma's (2011) work argues for a vision of sacramental reality, and he argues that the Catholic *ressourcement* movement assumes a sacramental ontology in Boersma (2009). I believe that the recent scholarly conversations around immanent-transcendence (see previous note) are likewise arguing for such a view of reality.

10 While I am focusing on parts of a theology of creation and of a theological anthropology, this theology of abundance could also be developed in relation to the abundant nature of speaking, which has its precedence in scholarship on apophaticism. Boesel and Keller's (2010) volume is endlessly rich on the topics of apophatic materiality, apophatic theological anthropology, and apophasis in language. See especially the following chapters, which greatly influenced the development of this paper: Cox Miller (2010); Stang (2010); Burrus and MacKendrick (2010); Tanner (2010b). See also Sells (1994).

11 "Abound". Merriam-Webster.com Dictionary, Merriam-Webster, https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/abound. (accessed on 21 April 2022).

12 Thanks to Willemien Otten for emphasizing, in a personal conversation, the theologically necessary distinction between abundance and excess.

13 Boersma argues for a sacramental reality and likewise draws on early philosophically-infused Christian sources in Boersma (2011). Similar ideas are present in Chryssavgis and Foltz's (2013) volume. See also Wirzba (2015); Davison (2019); Williams (2018); Foltz (2014). For more on Christian Platonism, see Hampton and Kenney (2021). See more on sacramental reality and immanent-transcendence in note 8 above.

14 I have chosen the two early Christian bishops Irenaeus of Lyons (c.130–c.200 C.E.) and Athanasius of Alexandria (299–373 C.E.) (although I present them in reverse order, for explanatory purposes). However, the themes I draw out are present in many other early church fathers, including Origen of Alexandria, the Cappodocians (especially Gregory of Nyssa), Augustine of Hippo, Pseudo-Dionysius, Maximus the Confessor, and John of Damascus. The reason for this prevalence is that these theologians engage and develop, in varied ways, the broad areas touched on here, that is, theologies of creation and theological anthropologies, as well as, relatedly, theologies of language and speaking. Building on these insights, and developing their own, later theologians likewise engage these themes into the medieval period: see for example John Scotus Eriugena, the Victorines, Nicholas of Cusa, Meister Eckhart. Based on this prevalence, I am convinced that the entirety of Christian thought can be engaged through this concept of a theology of abundance.

15 Athanasius (2011, §1, p. 51). Citations are numbered sections and corresponding page numbers in this edition. Athanasius's reference here is to 1 Corinthians 1:23: "but we proclaim Christ crucified, a stumbling-block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles".

16 For example, Plato, *Phaedo*, 57a-118a (on beauty) and Plato, *Republic*, 327a-621d (on justice); Cooper (1997, pp. 49–100, 971–1224).

17 For example, Plato, *Euthyphro*, 2a-16a and *Gorgias*, 447a–527e; Cooper (1997, pp. 1–17, 791–870).

18 For example, Plato, *Phaedo*, 57a–118a; *Symposium*, 172a–223d; *Phaedrus*, 227a–279c; *Republic*, 327a–621d; Cooper (1997, pp. 49–100, 457–56, 971–1224).

19 To avoid confusion and error, it is worth clarifying my use of the word "reality" here. As I will explain, Plato holds that there is only one *true* reality (of Forms), insofar as Forms are the only real things; however, what is *experienced* in the world (a material instance of a Form) is experienced as reality. The image of a mirror helps elucidate this point: a face reflected in a mirror is not the *real* thing, the actual face; but that reflected image is experienced as a reality (revealing a real face), and one can know in part the actual reality of the face through this image, though only in part—for example, physical facial features, but not the personality that accompanies the face. To reference Plato's own allegory of the cave (*Republic*, Book VII), the Sun is actual reality; but the fire within the cave, or rather, what is produced by the fire, namely, the shadows, are experienced as reality. On this account, it is perhaps more accurate to say that, for Plato, there is one reality with its reflections; however, the language of two realities in this paper intends to render explicit that the material and the immaterial can each be experienced as distinct realities.

20 Socrates's own words, concerning beauty, are worth citing at length to see the contrast between a particular characteristic that all beautiful things display and the presence of the Form that makes those things beautiful: "I think that, if there is anything beautiful besides the Beautiful itself, it is beautiful for no other reason than that it shares in that Beautiful, and I say so with everything. . .I no longer understand or recognize those other sophisticated causes, and if someone tells me that a thing is beautiful because it has a bright color or shape or any such thing, I ignore these other reasons—for all these confuse me—but I simply, naively and perhaps foolishly cling to this, that nothing else makes it beautiful other than the presence of, or the sharing in, or however you may describe its relationship to that Beautiful we mentioned, for I will not insist on the precise nature of the relationship, but that all beautiful things are beautiful by the Beautiful. . .it is through Beauty that beautiful things are made Beautiful" (Plato, *Phaedo*, 100c–e; Cooper 1997, p. 86). Socrates likewise communicates the participatory relation elsewhere, such as in the *Parmenides*, *Republic*, *Phaedrus*, and *Symposium*.

21 For helpful and succinct explanations of participation, and of its development in Christianity, see Hampton and Kenney (2021), especially the following chapters: te Velde (2021); Davison and Sherman (2021); Hampton (2021). See also Davison (2019) and Sherman (2014).

22 As Andrew Davison helpfully points out: because of this priority of Form over material instance, it is more accurate to reverse the directionality (and move the active verb) and say, rather, that Beauty (actively) participates the beautiful thing, or even projects beauty into a beautiful thing. See Davison (2019, pp. 36–37). This directionality is likewise described succinctly, albeit in different terms, in the chapters mentioned above (previous note). Davison and Sherman describe it as causal, calling it "a relation of derivation that is abiding and continuous" (2021, p. 360). Hampton likewise points to the implication built into Plato's language of derivation that "the one participating is ontologically distinct by its contingent sharing in the non-contingent form in which it participates"(2021, p. 388). This issue of ontological distance will return shortly in this paper. For his part, Rudi te Velde expresses the point, and corroborates the notion of "two realities", with the language of "the truth behind" changeable material reality: "[participation] signifies the relationship between the changeable reality of the senses and the transcendent reality of the Forms. [It] connects the world of Becoming with the world of true Being; what comes to be is explained by reference to an eternal paradigm, which is the truth behind the changing reality of our experience. Participation entails the presence of the higher in the lower, of the universal Form in the particular instance of the Form" (2021, p. 122).

23 On this point of images, and the related issue of similarity and dissimilarity, Davison and Sherman point out that, while "the participatory language of imitation brings in the idea of likeness, it entails an equally important note of unlikeness" (2021, p. 360).

24 For example, Plato, *Republic.VII*, 514a–519d (education described with the allegory of the cave), especially 517b–d (the upward journey into the light of the Sun); Cooper (1997, pp. 1132–36, esp. p. 1135), a passage which greatly informs this paragraph. In this passage, Socrates distinguishes between the visible, knowable realm and the intelligible realm, which "controls and provides truth and understanding" (517c). Cf. *Republic.VI*, 506d–509d (the analogy of the sun as the Good); Cooper (1997, pp. 1127–30).

25 Murdoch (1998, p. 387). See also Murdoch (1977) and Murdoch (1970), for more on the Good. See also earlier note (note 19) on "two realities".

26 See Murdoch (1970, especially pp. 54, 68–70, 90–101). Murdoch "suggest[s] that God was (or is) a *single perfect transcendent non-representable and necessarily real object of attention*" and argues that "moral philosophy should attempt to retain a central concept which has all these characteristics" (p. 54), emphasis in original.

27 Lloyd P. Gerson describes how "at the apex of the intelligible world is the superordinate Idea of the Good, the unhypothetical principle of all. It is this principle that provides the explanation for the existence and essence of the Forms, and, indirectly, for everything else" (Gerson 2021, p. 16). See his discussion of reason (p. 19) and his description in the rest of the chapter around the shifts concerning the Good, especially its identity with the One, in the development of Platonism's different strains.

28 Often referred to as soma-sema, from the Greek. See, for example, Plato, *Cratylus* 400c; Cooper (1997, p. 118) ("some people say that the body [sōma] is the tomb [sēma] of the soul"); *Phaedo* 82e; Cooper (1997, p. 72) ("[the soul] is imprisoned in…the body"); *Phaedrus* 250c; Cooper (1997, p. 528) ("buried in this thing…we call a body"); *Gorgias* 493a; Cooper (1997, p. 836) ("I even heard one of the wise men say…that our bodies are our tombs").

29 Although it is broadly true that Socrates presents a devalued understanding of the material world, the Platonic *legacy* in its varied interpretations were not so straightforward. This is because, arguably, the participatory ontology of material things already betrays an abundance insofar as the beauty present to the naked eye is only beautiful on the basis of the immaterial Form—there is more to this instance of beauty than it seems. Christian Platonism, as alluded to in the rest of this paper, takes this implication to its end point by continuously pointing to the Creator source of created beauty.

30 The philosophical concept of logos was later clarified—as the principle of intelligibility between the material and immaterial realms—by Plotinus, the significant 3rd century C.E. philosopher, who offered the world his systematic *Enneads*, and, in so doing, the synthesis of Plato and Aristotle which is now known as Neo-Platonism. For the place of logos (reason/intellect/thought) in different strains of Greek philosophy, see the selections in Inwood and Gerson (1997).

31 For helpful and succinct elucidations of the Christian-Platonist interpretations of logos, see Hampton and Kenney (2021), especially the following chapters: Dillon and Tolan (2021); Radde-Gallwitz (2021); Corrigan (2021); Boulnois (2021); Edwards (2021); Kenney (2021). See also Bradshaw (2013).

32 John 1:1. Commentaries on John's Gospel in particular were penned throughout church history (e.g., Origen, Cyril, Aquinas, Eriugena).

33 John 1:14.

34 Colossians 1:15–20.

35 Kathryn Tanner points out: "Because the divine image is all that its archetype is, it is not an image by participation at all, if participation means sharing in something that one is not" in Tanner (2010a, p. 7). John Behr corroborates this point by discussing Athanasius's "contrast between what is 'proper', what belongs to something as its 'own', and what is 'outside'. Christ is the 'proper' Son and Word of God, in contrast to those who, from 'outside' God, are adopted as sons, who, by participation in his 'own' Word share in the property of being 'rational' [logos]" in Behr (2011, p. 28). Further clarifying: "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. . .He is what it is to be God, and so is the exact image of the Father" (p. 35).

36 Jean-Luc Marion articulates the shift to seeing the immaterial in the material especially well: "it is necessary to cease looking at the face of Jesus simply as such, and to see it *in a certain way*, according to a double visibility, *as* putting into view the in-visible of the Father" in Marion (2016, p. 104).

37 John Behr, in his Introduction to his translation of Athanasius, says that *On the Incarnation*'s "influence on all later theology cannot be understated" in Behr (2011, p. 21). N.B. While Athanasius is not chronologically prior to Irenaeus (in the next section), his explicit development of the Word of God is used in this first section with the understanding of its priority for the theological developments to follow in this paper.

38 Behr (2011, p. 22).

39 Behr (2011, p. 23), citing Athanasius, *Against the Gentiles* §1.

40 Behr (2011, p. 23).

41 Behr (2011, p. 29), citing Athanasius, *Against the Gentiles* §3. Athanasius's clarification that "their own things" or "what is closer to themselves" refers to their bodies is found on p. 30. Behr's note on this elucidates the consequence of this idolatry: "In this way, humans fell into the chaos of the fleshly desire of the body, forgetting what they had originally received from God. With their souls directed towards the body, in, by, and for itself, the body is now the very point of human separation from God, not because of its materiality, but because it has become an idol" (p. 30).

42 Willemien Otten discusses Augustine's similar issue with "idolatry—that is, the worship of *simulacra*", going on to articulate the misplaced focus: "Because, in Augustine's view, pagans lack any recognition of God as the author of creation, they mistake creatures and their artifacts for the creator", in Otten (2020, p. 114). See also previous note above, where Behr describes this idolatry as a focus on the body.

43 Behr (2011, p. 24).

44 Athanasius (2011, §1; p. 51).

45 Behr (2011, p. 36, 37), emphases added.

46 Athanasius (2011, §3; p. 57).

47 With the disclaimer that, although he uses the language of participation in places, Athanasius is careful to distinguish himself from the philosophers, including Plato, and philosophers' creation stories, in particular creation from existing material. See Athanasius (2011, §2; p. 53).

48 Athanasius (2011, §3; p. 57).

49 Athanasius (2011, §3; p. 57).

50 As Tanner states this point clearly: "Humans are not simply the image but 'in' or 'after' it, as the verses say (Gen 1.27), because the image referred to here is itself divine—either the second person of the Trinity or the Word Incarnate", in "In the Image of the Invisible", in Tanner (2010b, p. 120). Athanasius himself uses the language of one's own vs. outside (see note 35), which Tanner echoes when she says that humans, "[b]ecause they are not God, come to image God only by receiving what is not their own", that is, God himself. She draws out the subsequent distinction between weak and strong participation in Tanner (2010a, esp. pp. 6–13, in pp. 1–57 (Chapter 1: "Human Nature")).

51 On ontological distance, see previous note, and Tanner (2010b). For example: "Since there is no ontological continuum spanning the difference between God and creatures, one cannot hope to become the divine image, this perfect or proper image, by approximating divine qualities" (p. 127); and, emphasizing the necessity of the Incarnation: "humans, considered in and of themselves, never become a proper image of God at all even when formed according to it. The image of God in a proper sense is just God, the second person of the Trinity. Not being God, humans can therefore never simply become that image in and of themselves through any process of transformation. . .And yet, without abolishing or mitigating the difference between God and humans, humans do become the divine image—by attaching themselves to it. It is by being identified with what they are not that the divine image becomes their own" (p. 127).

52 Athanasius (2011, §5; p. 61). As he addresses the reality of death elsewhere, revealing the urgency of a solution: "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" (§6, p. 63).

53 It is helpful to contrast this self-determined material focus of idols with their opposite, icons, which, as images of the divine, have an affective power on the viewer. This is drawn out in the contemporary work of Wirzba (2015), and Foltz (2014). As Wirzba puts it, the icon "overwhelms us and calls into question the expectations through which we [at first] approached it" (2015, p. 71). Foltz, with a different emphasis, presents the ancient practice of theoria in connection to nature, as active contemplation, an attentive and active "seeing" of the invisible divine in the visible world, with the result of not "fix[ing] in place" what is seen, in Foltz (2014, pp. 3–4).

54 Athanasius (2011, §8; pp. 65, 67).

55 Athanasius (2011, §16; p. 85).

56　Athanasius (2011, §16; p. 85).

57　Athanasius (2011, §8; p. 65).

58　It is worth recalling that an ontological distance is upheld, no matter the status of the relational distance. See notes 50 and 51 on ontological distance.

59　Athanasius (2011, §1, p. 53), emphasis added.

60　Athanasius (2011, §13, p. 79), emphasis added.

61　Tanner (2010b, pp. 127–28), emphasis added.

62　Athanasius (2011, §15, p. 83). Recall, too, how Logos includes the significations of discourse, reason, and principle, clearly very related to teaching.

63　See note 8 on the related dichotomy of the terms "immanence" and "transcendence".

64　Athanasius (2011, §15, p. 83).

65　Athanasius (2011, §15, p. 83), emphasis added.

66　As Behr puts this: "Once human beings had their sights set only on material, bodily things, how else could God grab our attention, as it were, apart from through a body….Although first seen as a human being, by the works he does in the body, works which are clearly not human but divine, Christ makes himself known not merely as a human being but as the Word of God himself"(Behr 2011, p. 39).

67　Behr points out that this sentiment is already present in *Against the Gentiles*: "Athanasius continues, following Paul, human beings could still have learnt about God through their sense perception for 'he so ordered creation that although he cannot be seen by nature, yet he can be known from his works' (*Gent. 35*). The order and harmony of creation demonstrate not only that there was a creator, but that there is one creator" (Behr 2011, p. 31).

68　Athanasius (2011, §16, p. 85). Contemporary engagements on materiality in late antiquity speak to the way attention is directed to God through material objects and people (saints), as conduits of Christ's power. See, for example, Dasios (2022); and Cox Miller (2010).

69　Plato, *Apology*, 21a–c; Cooper (1997, p. 21).

70　Plato, *Apology*, 21d,e; Cooper (1997, p. 21), emphasis added.

71　Some take the relaying of Socrates's ignorance as disingenuous; I take it at face value in the service of the philosophical dialogues which concern themselves with the pursuit of truth, the movement from ignorance to knowledge.

72　As Karmen MacKendrick puts this point: "Though Plato is very fond of knowledge, he and his followers always insist that human knowing is narrowly limited in comparison to all possible (and especially divine) knowing" MacKendrick (2021, p. 4).

73　Sells (1994, p. 8).

74　MacKendrick (2021, p. 4). Here she is referencing the view of "neo-Platonic theurgy". Part of her central point is that mystery and the unknowable is not just an accepted part of life in these older traditions, but is emphatically and specifically *valued*, precisely for its appeal to being beyond comprehension. The "dominance of human knowing", in contrast, relates to what Fergus Kerr calls "an ideal of total comprehension", when relaying Karl Rahner's position that resists such an ideal, relevant here: "Rahner…thinks that we are haunted by an inhuman ideal of human knowledge…*The dominance of an ideal of knowledge as total comprehension*, which Rahner seeks to demythologize…, thus distorts theological understanding of the hiddenness of God" in Kerr (1997, p. 182), emphasis added. This hiddenness of God is likewise positively held rather than understood negatively as a lack.

75　MacKendrick (2021, p. 7).

76　We can reference the powerful phrase "mystery not mastery", of the Levinas scholar Michael Purcell, to make the point stronger. Quoted in Fergus Kerr (1997, p. 180). Kerr develops this phrase in relation to Karl Rahner. See especially pp. 182–84. He relays that "Rahner wants to locate the incomprehensibility of the divine mystery properly, not just to free us from illusory ideals of knowledge. The divine mystery is not to be viewed as something to be mastered" (p. 183).

77　Apart from its manifestation in philosophical dialogue, dialectic (or, logic) was also the third and culminating liberal art, after grammar and rhetoric. These three liberal arts (called the "Trivium" in the middle ages), whose development stemmed especially from Aristotle's *Organon*, were central to the education of the Church Fathers, whose sermons, letters, and other writings are often studied for their rhetorical power.

78　Sells (1994, p. 2).

79　As Tanner puts it in the opening of her essay, "In the Image of the Invisible": "Christian theologians often maintain that God is incomprehensible, beyond human powers of positive explication through concepts and speech… The absolute fullness of being and goodness, God transcends all divisions between kinds and exceeds all bounds of a particular nature or mode of being that might allow God to be set alongside others or encompassed by anything it is not" in Tanner (2010b, p. 117). She goes on to argue for an apophatic theological anthropology, contending that, if we humans are made in this incomprehensible image, we too must be incomprehensible "both in our natural capacities and in what we become in relation to the true image, the Word Incarnate" (p. 133). This idea has significantly influenced the argument of this paper.

80　David Brakke acknowledges the difficult categorization of "Gnosticism" while he also carefully argues for and investigates "a Gnostic school of thought, the literary remnants of which can be identified and therefore can be described and studied, albeit sketchily" in Brakke (2010, p. x). Speaking to the retroactive naming and categorization issue: "Suffice it to say that in the seventeenth century Henry More (1614–1687) invented the term 'Gnosticism' for all the heresies that Irenaeus and his heresiological successors attacked. In the centuries that followed, scholars developed, refined, and debated theories of how Gnosticism arose and interacted with Christianity" (p. 19). He also discusses the "secret knowledge" aspect emphasized among a group of scholars who, at a 1966 conference, "decided that 'Gnosis' should be taken to refer to the general idea of knowledge reserved for an elite group and thus is a widespread phenomenon in the history of religions" (p. 20). While this view of Gnosticism as a category has recently been questioned and critically engaged, as Brakke elucidates, I refer to it here, notwithstanding its variations and complexities, as "a school of thought", to use Brakke's own phrase, insofar as Gnosticism demonstrates, when described by Irenaeus (who himself is the classic early source for descriptions of positions held by later-called Gnostics, such as Valentinus), a theological emphasis on what I am calling the "one side" of knowing, as opposed to one we see in Irenaeus's own view, as we will see. On this "school of thought" approach, see Brakke (2006, especially p. 248). See also: King (2003), who says that "Gnosticism is, rather, a term invented in the early modern period to aid in defining the boundaries of normative Christianity", which she takes issue with for, "[s]o long as the category of Gnosticism continues to serve as the heretical other of orthodox Christianity, it will be inadequate for interpretation of the primary materials and for historical reconstruction" (pp. 2, 3). For the opposite position (treating it as a useful category), Hans Urs von Balthasar describes its contours as a heresy in his "Introduction" in von Balthasar (1990).

81　Brakke discusses recent scholarship on the issue of orthodoxy as "identity formation", which he says emphasizes "the strategies by which individuals and groups sought to define themselves" Brakke (2010, p. 11). As Karen King describes it: "It aims to understand the discursive strategies and processes by which early Christians developed notions of themselves as distinct from others within the Mediterranean world (and were recognized as such by others), including the multiple ways in which Christians produced various constructions of what it means to be Christian", quoted in Brakke (2010, p. 11). He in turn discusses "varieties of Christianity", referencing Ehrman (2003). For the development of orthodoxy in ecclesial history, see Davis (1983).

82　Brakke (2006, p. 245) and Behr (2013, p. 13). Behr (2013) helpfully challenges the idea that Irenaeus was intolerant of certain strands of Christian thought in this work "against the heresies", arguing that his response was to those who had already excluded themselves from the Church: "It was . . . the 'heretics' that were intolerant, and the Catholic Church that preached toleration and was open to diversity" (p. 2). See also Chapter 1, "Irenaeus of Lyons: Ambassador for Peace, Reconciliation, and Toleration" (pp. 13–71). Boersma corroborates this idea, calling Irenaeus "the theologian of unity" (Boersma 2011, p. 41). For his part, David Bentley Hart calls Irenaeus "[p]erhaps the finest theological mind of that period [from the middle to late second century]" in Hart (2009, p. 96).

83　Regarding the positions of two examples of Gnostics, Marcion and Valentinus, who both left the church in different contexts and for their own reasons, but saw their own teachings as the true ones, Behr says: "Marcion and his followers were also accused of drawing two particular conclusions from their ditheism. First, a radical disdain for the material order, finding expression in a radical asceticism that proscribed marriage and prescribed sexual abstinence. And, second, a docetic understanding of Christ, denying his real human existence and thus the reality of his birth and death" Behr (2013, p. 26); and, regarding the followers of Valentinus: "Valentinian ecclesiology thus differentiates between an inner circle of the 'spiritual', and an outer circle of 'psychics' who remained beholden to an impoverished understanding of the Scriptures. . .needing further education and growth to flower into true knowledge. . .The very language deployed by Valentinus, differentiating between the 'pneumatic' [spiritual] Christians and the 'psychic' Christians, the former with a higher knowledge of things unknown to and misunderstood by the latter, is already evidence of their own recognition of their difference from the majority of other Christians in Rome" (pp. 31, 34). See also Hart's succinct chapter, "The Gnostics", in Hart (2009).

84　Irenaeus (III.11.3); von Balthasar (1990, p. 14). N.B. Hereafter, I reference Irenaeus and von Balthasar's (1990, III.11.3, p. 14) *Against Heresies* section numbers and the corresponding page numbers from this translation.

85　Irenaeus (III.18.5–6,); von Balthasar (1990, p. 16).

86　Irenaeus (II.13.8); von Balthasar (1990, p. 22).

87　Irenaeus (D.30f); von Balthasar (1990, p. 15).

88　Irenaeus (II.10.2); von Balthasar (1990, p. 33), emphasis added.

89　Irenaeus (II.18.6); von Balthasar (1990, p. 39), emphases added. As von Balthasar explains: "[Gnosticism] wants to get to know all of God's mysteries by its own powers. However surprising it may seem, it does appeal to the Scriptures, and so it is forced to posit a secret tradition, coming down from Jesus and the apostles, alongside the official proclamation of God for the simple", in von Balthasar (1990, p. 30).

90　Irenaeus (II.25.2–4); von Balthasar (1990, p. 42).

91　Irenaeus (III.24.2); von Balthasar (1990, pp. 38–39).

92　Irenaeus (IV.35.4); von Balthasar (1990, p. 38).

93　Irenaeus (II.28.7); von Balthasar (1990, p. 35).

94　Irenaeus (II.25.2–4); von Balthasar (1990, p. 42).

95   Irenaeus (III.11.5); von Balthasar (1990, p. 90).

96   Irenaeus (IV.20.6–7); von Balthasar (1990, p. 44).

97   Irenaeus (II.27.7); von Balthasar (1990, p. 35).

98   Boersma relays the position of the twentieth-century *nouvelle* theologians, who corroborate this sense of mystery as outside of discursive knowing: "For the nouvelle theologians, 'mysteries' did not simply refer to unknown or obscure divine truths that rational, discursive thought would gradually be able to uncover. An intellectualist approach like this implied that theology's task was to grasp and overcome mystery. According to nouvelle théologie, however, the purpose of theology was rather to enter into mystery's hidden depths. Truth was the dynamic realization of existential, loving engagement of the known object rather than abstract, objective analysis" (Boersma 2009, pp. 5–6).

99   Irenaeus (III.24.2); von Balthasar (1990, p. 38).

100   For more on the logos, see notes 30 and 31.

101   Irenaeus (II.6.1–2); von Balthasar (1990, p. 32), emphasis added.

102   What I am calling abundance, Tanner characterizes as "plasticity", in human freedom and undetermined variability: "The early Eastern church's stress on free will as the image of God—or often secondarily, rule in the sense of self-rule—could now be taken in a new light, not as the promotion of some vaunted power in a positive sense, an imitation of divine omnipotence, but as an interest in the unusual plasticity of human lives absent any predetermined direction by nature. Free will is an indication of variability" in Tanner (2010b, p. 125). Boersma puts the point this way: "The created order—and the spirit of the human person, in particular—sacramentally represented the supernatural reality of the mystery of God" in Boersma (2009, p. 7).

103   Irenaeus (III.10.2); von Balthasar (1990, p. 46).

104   Irenaeus (V.1.1); von Balthasar (1990, p. 57).

105   Irenaeus (II.10.2); von Balthasar (1990, p. 33).

106   Irenaeus (IV.6.3); von Balthasar (1990, p. 50).

107   Tanner again expresses this beautifully: "Humans, it is true, are determined to God—being formed in the image of God is their good, by nature. But that is just *not* to be determined in any particular direction as other things are, since God is the absolute good and not a limited one" (2010, p. 125).

108   Boersma (2011, p. 9), emphasis added.

109   The biblical Greek instances of *mysterion*, whence "mystery" is derived, was translated into Latin as *sacramentum*, whence "sacrament" is derived. Mystery and sacrament are intrinsically connected.

110   de Lubac (2006, p. 51), emphasis added.

111   Mark A. McIntosh (2020, p. 27), emphases added.

112   McIntosh (2020, p. 27).

113   McGinn (1991, p. xvii). Building upon this insight, Hampton notes that "[t]he challenge for the mystic is to find a form [of communication] that records and enacts the unique nature of their experience", and thus discusses the special place of poetics, in its approximative capacities, for communicating the mystical experience, in Hampton (2020, p. 242).

114   In contrast to kataphatic or positive theology, which are affirmative statements that posit assertions about God, the mode of denying or "away-from-saying" (Greek: apo-phanai) relies on qualifying any positive knowledge of God with the admission that we only know what God is *not*—e.g., God is good, but God is not good by our human standards of good; rather, God is good beyond our human conceptions of good. These have traditionally been understood as the two modes of speaking about God; but in the most powerful theology, they must always be paired—any affirmation must be paired with a denial or negating qualification. Discussions on apophaticism abound. See, for example, the thought-provoking essays in Boesel and Keller (2010), especially Stang (2010).

115   Lisa H. Sideris powerfully expresses this point about nature's own voice when she says that "the sounds of nature [are] voices that call on us without necessarily speaking to or about us", in "Listening to the Pandemic: Decentering humans through silence and sound" in Sideris (2021, p. 125). Otten draws out the voice of nature and its impact upon the human self in relation to the thought of Eriugena and Emerson in particular. On her account, "thinking nature" has the double meaning of both "nature (*doing* the) thinking" *and* "(*a person* who is) thinking nature" in Otten (2020, p. 6), emphases added. She clarifies that this is "a concept of nature that is fully set free, released from the constraints of human, or even divine, control and that seems to actualize most concretely there where it is able to melt with pure thinking. . .performing what Emerson calls 'onwardness,' the notion that humans are never completely in control of their own thoughts insofar as nature is always prospective, putting us on our way", 6. See also her passage on nature's expression as "a meaningful conduit with ties to both God and the human self" with the metaphors of mirror, wall, and veil, (p. 15).

116   As Jame Schaefer succinctly puts it, drawing on Ignatius of Loyola's *Spiritual Exercises*: "From an Ignatian perspective, our gratitude must be demonstrated through actions, not simply words" in Schaefer (2022, p. 252).

117　　Emily Brady draws on nature writers such as John Muir, Annie Dillard, Robin Wall Kimmerer, and Rachel Carson to elucidate wonder as "a quasi-aesthetic experience of nature which is deeply receptive and questioning", which leads to "[m]eaningful human-nature relationships [that] aim at co-flourishing" in Brady (2022, pp. 223, 226).

118　　This can be attention to the human or non-human, but either way its role is, as Sideris puts it, "decentering the self", which "effect[s] meaningful change in our lives" (2021, p. 125). This point draws on Simone Weil's "understand[ing] of extreme attention as a form of prayer" (p. 125), a notion that Iris Murdoch likewise echoes in describing "loving attention" "to express the idea of a just and loving gaze directed upon an individual reality", in Murdoch (1970, p. 33). Also called "unselfing attention", Murdoch posits it as an antidote to the following problem: "Briefly put, our picture of ourselves has become too grand, we have isolated, and identified ourselves with, an unrealistic conception of will, we have lost the vision of a reality separate from ourselves" (p. 46).

119　　As Rowan Williams puts it beautifully, in relation to "being radically receptive to God's initiative": "the effect of this is not to create a single purified individual or series of individuals; it is to create a people whose lives are defined by mutual responsibility, mutual nurture, the building up of each other by selfless love. What manifests the divine life to the world is not a series of isolated saintly lives but the fact of a church in which every life is at the disposal of every other, so that each life is valued as uniquely gifted" in Williams (2020).

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