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THE CONVINCING BIOGRAPHER: THE USE OF GENRE IN ATHANASIUS' CHRISTOLOGY

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THE CONVINCING BIOGRAPHER: THE USE OF GENRE IN ATHANASIUS'
CHRISTOLOGY

A Thesis Submitted to the
Office of Graduate Studies
College of Arts & Sciences of
John Carroll University
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for the Degree of
Master of Arts

By
Angelica M. DiGangi
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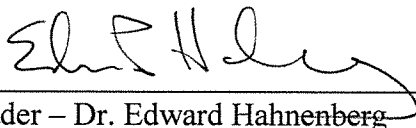
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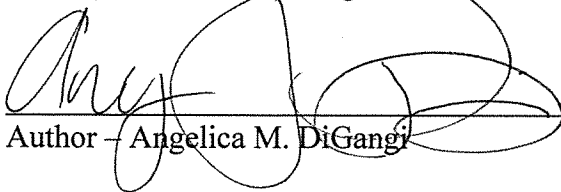


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INTRODUCTION

Pieces of literature are complex teaching tools. Authors draw on various milieu and rhetorical techniques to present ideas in creative ways. By presenting the material in such a way, the audience is moved to action that direct instruction is not able to produce. Creative tales build fantastic heroes, dramatic emotions, and elaborate situations, all set into a world that is believable or relatable. The genre of the Greek Biography (or *bios*) aimed to do such a thing by blending fiction and reality into a piece of work that demonstrates the potential for a good life. The *bios* genre presented elaborate heroes that possessed all the virtues the author held dear and demonstrated what those virtues look like when lived out in the world. *Life of Antony* is one piece of literature that fits into the *bios* genre. Written by Athanasius during the turmoil of the Arian Controversy,¹ *Life of Antony* is a detailed narrative presenting the teachings and actions of Antony of the Desert. This study aims to demonstrate the various layers that are present in this text, which Athanasius used to promulgate his Christology.

To do so, this thesis project will include three chapters that have their own methodologies. The first chapter explores the context of Athanasius' life and its influence on his Christology. It details the beginnings of the Arian Controversy and how Athanasius and Arius differed in their understanding of Jesus Christ. The second chapter then examines the development of the Greek *bios* considering the historical context from

¹ There are discussions among scholars whether Athanasius did in fact author *Life of Antony*. The debates primarily discuss the original language of the text, linguistic styles, and early attribution of Athanasius to the text. See, William Harmless, *Desert Christians: An Introduction to the Literature of Early Monasticism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 111–13 and Peter Juriss, "In Defense of Athanasius, Patriarch of Alexandria as Author of the Life of Antony: A Discussion of Historical, Linguistic and Theological Considerations," *Phronema* 12 (1997): 24–43. However, this study will acknowledge Athanasius as the author based on theological considerations, which the first chapter of this study explores.

which it came. It also will detail the change in paradigm when the subjects shifted from political to holy subjects. During this examination, it will demonstrate how the *Life of Antony* follows the holy paradigm with Athanasius using the genre to promote his Christology. The final chapter turns to focus on the text itself by introducing socio-rhetorical interpretation (SRI). Without completing a full SRI analysis, the last chapter will highlight key aspects of the text crucial for the SRI process. By doing so, it will highlight the potential of SRI's contribution to understanding Athanasius' Christology within the text.

This multi-method thesis will demonstrate the complexity of literature and how early Christians appealed to various forms of writing to promote beliefs. After many years of trials and tribulations, Athanasius knew he had to appeal to a larger audience, therefore, he turned from dogmatics to literature. Following Athanasius' Christology, *Life of Antony* presents the author's effort to demonstrate how the Divine Christ transforms Christian life. Considering Athanasius' historical context and the rhetorical force of the *bios* genre, this thesis demonstrates that *Life of Antony* is worthy of an in-depth interpretative method, such as socio-rhetorical Interpretation, to find the hidden layers of Athanasius' Christology within the text.

CHAPTER 1: ATHANASIUS' LIFE AND CHRISTOLOGY

INTRODUCTION

Many people overlook how the pillars of Christian faith developed. To contemporary Christians, it may seem absurd to ask whether Christ is God. However, before the tradition familiar to today's church developed, the question sparked an outcry of voices. During the fourth century, many explanations regarding the divinity of Christ entered Christian discourse, thereby causing the Arian Controversy to erupt. Since the answer to the question of Christ's divinity would drastically shape the faith, it was important to handle the matter appropriately. The Council of Nicæa gathered to settle the debates, and Athanasius of Alexandria became the defender of the outcome in the years to follow. The context of his time, the debates in which he actively participated, and the influence of the people around him shaped how Athanasius developed his Christology. These fourth-century debates, which Athanasius further developed and defended, became the bedrock upon which the church founded its doctrine of Christ. Athanasius' defense of the full divinity of Christ in the Arian Controversy heavily influenced his Christology, which resulted in a wide reception of his work in both the Eastern and Western traditions.

LIFE AND CONTEXT OF ATHANASIUS

The Roman Empire reached distant corners of the Mediterranean and included many diverse cultures. These cultures, usually separated by distance, tended to mingle at large port cities. One of these port cities was Alexandria, drawing a variety of Egyptians,

Greeks, and Jews, as well as different philosophies including Stoicism and Platonism.²

This mix of diverse cultures was not always peaceful. Khaled Anatolios notes that Alexandria's history is full of many revolts and persecutions, which also led to "relations between the local populace and the Roman authorities [being] strained and sometimes bloody."³ Born between 295–299 C.E. to pagan parents who later converted to Christianity, this type of environment is what Athanasius entered.⁴ There is no record that Athanasius had any sort of formal education, but it is known that he was an apprentice to Alexander the Bishop of Alexandria.⁵ Even without a formal education, it is apparent that Alexander handed down a wealth of knowledge to Athanasius. Evident in his writings, Athanasius is quite fluent in various forms of philosophy, familiar with scripture, and trained in the use of rhetoric. Anatolios points out that:

Especially his early writing displays at least a colloquial familiarity with philosophical concepts of the various schools, in particular a Stoic cosmology which is employed to speak of the Word as the principle of harmony in the cosmos, and a Middle Platonic ontology in which God is characterized as true being.... His use of classical rhetorical techniques has also been noted. The reference to Athanasius' familiarity with and

² Thomas G. Weinandy and Daniel A. Keating, *Athanasius and His Legacy* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2017), 2.

³ Khaled Anatolios, *Athanasius* (New York: Routledge, 2004), 2.

⁴ Anatolios, *Athanasius*, 3–4.

⁵ Anatolios, *Athanasius*, 4.

study of the Scriptures represent an enduring portrait of Athanasius as a theologian steeped in the Scriptures.⁶

Athanasius imbues his knowledge of philosophy, rhetoric, and scripture throughout his works. All three areas of knowledge help to put words to his ideas about Christ and salvation.

While Athanasius was a deacon to Alexander, he attended the one council that would forever change his life, the First Council of Nicæa (325 C.E.). The Council began with what may seem like a simple question: What is Christ's relationship to God? The question raised many voices within the Egyptian church (starting around 318–320 C.E.) and eventually spread throughout the Empire.⁷ Deemed the Arian Controversy, the debate drew many theologians who presented different ways of describing Christ. The beginnings of the controversy can be traced to three Alexandrian theologians before it bloomed into an empire-wide debate.

Arian Controversy

The first contribution, which certainly influenced the others to come, was made by Origen, the great theologian of Alexandria (ca. 185– ca. 251 C.E.). Origen may have been far removed from the controversy,⁸ but his theology laid the foundation for the later debates. Anatolios explains that “Origen taught that the Son was eternally generated by the Father,” but he also “maintained subordinationist language ... that while the Son

⁶ Anatolios, *Athanasius*, 4.

⁷ Anatolios, *Athanasius*, 6.

⁸ Anatolios, *Athanasius*, 7.

transcends creation, he is himself transcended by the Father.”⁹ Therefore, Christ is generated *by* God and not *from* God, supporting the hierarchical structure.

Another theologian was Dionysius (mid-third century) whose theology did address the concept of creation. Anatolios describes his theology as “the Son [was] ‘something made (*poiēma*) which came into being (*genēton*)’ and ‘not belonging (*idios*) by nature but alien in being (*ousia*) from the Father.’”¹⁰ God brought Christ into existence (created/begotten), but Christ remains distinct from God, a different essence (substance). Once again, Christ is made *by* God and not *from* God, but now Christ's creation is distinguished.

A third voice in the early discussion was Theognostus, who also addressed the issue of creation, but took a different direction than Dionysius. Anatolios summarizes Theognostus’ theory as “the being of the Son is not ‘external’ and not procured from non-existence but is from the Father’s being,” but “Theognostus spoke of the Son as a creature, *ktisma*.”¹¹ Both Dionysius and Theognostus believed that Christ was created, but Dionysius grouped Christ with all of creation, which was created from nothing, while Theognostus claimed that Christ was created from the very being of God.

These early voices produced great debates among the Egyptian churches. The debates brewed for many years before they expanded to the point that religious authority could not ignore them anymore. When the time came, the surviving theories were

⁹ Anatolios, *Athanasius*, 7–8.

¹⁰ Anatolios, *Athanasius*, 8.

¹¹ Anatolios, *Athanasius*, 8–9.

narrowed down to those of two main opponents: Alexander, Bishop of Alexandria, and Arius, a priest in Alexandria.

Drawing from the roots of previous debates and from the scriptures, both Alexander and Arius insisted on the fullness of the Godhead, but fiercely debated how Christ related to God. Demonstrating both of their influences from Origen, Anatolios summarizes, “Alexander emphasized especially Origen’s doctrine of the eternal generation of the Son and of the Son’s being a perfect ‘Image’ of the Father.” On the other side, “Arius radicalized a subordinationist streak that could also base itself on one tendency in Origen’s theology, now viewed from the perspective of a doctrine of creation.”¹² Alexander insisted on God and Christ being one in all aspects while Arius supported a hierarchical structure within the Godhead with Christ being distinct from God in having a created nature. The debate between the two men led to the Council of Nicæa and, as Alexander’s apprentice, Athanasius continued the battle after Alexander’s death, building a Christology rooted in Alexander’s. Therefore, a fuller and more in-depth examination of both sides of the Council of Nicæa is needed to fully understand Athanasius’ Christology.

Arius’ Christology

Little is known about Arius’s life or education, but what is known comes from the public accounts of his affairs.¹³ And, much like his life story, Arius’ Christology becomes known mostly through his opponents.¹⁴ Even though there seems to be an air of mystery

¹² Anatolios, *Athanasius*, 9.

¹³ See Rowan Williams, *Arius: Heresy & Tradition* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2002), 82.

¹⁴ Weinandy and Keating, *Athanasius and His Legacy*, 10.

surrounding Arius, there survives a nuanced and foundational understanding to his Christology. In a broad sense, his Christology focuses on two aspects of theology: the transcendence of God and the humanness of Christ. Arius could not reconcile the two. Thomas Weinandy and Daniel Keating explain that “for Arius, God is transcendent in that [God] is not only other than all else, but also far removed from all else,” therefore, to say Christ is God is to speak of “two ingenerate beings, one dependent upon the other, [which] would be a contradiction of terms and would destroy the unique ingenerate oneness of God.”¹⁵ Not only does the claim that Christ is God contradict Arius’ belief that God is unique, but it also contradicts the total transcendence of God. God being utterly unique and transcendent makes God separate from creation. Therefore, God could not become part of the created world, otherwise it would contradict God’s transcendent nature. Arius might deny Christ’s divinity, but he never denied that Christ was sent to do God’s work. He asserted that Christ came from God, but was created (i.e., was part of creation). Weinandy and Keating state that “while the Father created the Son, the Son created all else that existed, thus becoming the protective shield between the transcendent God and all finite reality.”¹⁶ Arius places the created Christ as a mediator between the utterly transcendent God and all of creation. Christ is still unique in that his creation was for a special purpose, to aid in God’s work of creation and mediate God’s will to creation, but he still was a created reality. This concept is where Arius’ so-called slogan grew from, “there was a ‘when’ when the son was not.”¹⁷ If Christ is created then Christ was

¹⁵ Weinandy and Keating, *Athanasius and His Legacy*, 10.

¹⁶ Weinandy and Keating, *Athanasius and His Legacy*, 11.

¹⁷ William Harmless, *Desert Christians: An Introduction to the Literature of Early Monasticism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 27.

not always with God; thus, there is a gap in time between God and Christ. Christ would have a beginning whereas God has no beginning. To summarize the first part of Arius' argument: God is alone eternal; Christ is not. God has no beginning, but Christ does have a beginning. God is uncreated; Christ is created and, like the rest of creation, he is created from nothing.¹⁸

Arius' second point focuses on the humanity of Christ. As Robert Gregg and Dennis Groh point out, "Arius' concern for doctrine [was] based in exegesis of scripture."¹⁹ What Arius refused to ignore was the human characteristics of Christ present in scripture. Specifically, he "emphasized the suffering and creaturely characteristics to be drawn from the ministry of Jesus on earth."²⁰ For Arius, it was very obvious that Christ was a human and what came with being human was limitations—bodily, emotional, and spiritual. Gregg and Groh quote Arius' followers as asking: "How is he able to be Logos or God who slept as a man, wept, and had to learn by inquiry?"²¹ Christ displayed human qualities throughout scriptures, such as weeping when Lazarus died (John 11:35), sleeping during his travels with his disciples (Matt 8:23–24; Mark 4:38; Luke 8:23), and questioning God's plan concerning his death (Luke 22:39–46; Matt 27:46), which demonstrates the changeability of creatures, not God. Weinandy and Keating explain, "in becoming human, the Son would undergo a change, and as a human

¹⁸ Based on Harmless' more detailed summary of Arius' argument; see Harmless, *Desert Christians*, 27.

¹⁹ Robert C. Gregg and Dennis E. Groh, *Early Arianism: A View of Salvation* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1981), 3.

²⁰ Gregg and Groh, *Early Arianism*, 2.

²¹ Gregg and Groh, *Early Arianism*, 4.

being he could suffer and die.”²² Even further, it displays the creaturely limitations of knowledge and understanding. Athanasius quotes Arius as saying:

If the Son were, according to your interpretation, eternally existent with God, he would not have been ignorant of the [last] day, but would have known it as Word; nor would he have been forsaken [Mark 15:34] who was coexistent ... for being the Word, he needed nothing. But since he is a creature and one of the things originated, therefore he spoke in this way, and needed what he did not have, for it is proper to creatures to require and need what they do not possess.²³

As Arius states in the first part of his argument, God is utterly transcendent from all else; therefore, God is separate from (transcendent) all created order. God does not possess the qualities of creation, but Christ does possess these qualities, which leads to Arius' conclusion that Christ was not divine; he was a creature. Alexander's response to Arius' claims are represented in the outcome of the Council of Nicæa and are carried into Athanasius' own Christology.

The Council of Nicæa

The Council of Nicæa, whose impact is still present today, aimed to define doctrine crucial to the faith. In 325 C.E., 318 bishops came together in Nicæa at the order of the Emperor Constantine to put an end to the now very public debate over Christ's divinity.²⁴ Athanasius was just a deacon at the time he attended the Council with Bishop

²² Weinandy and Keating, *Athanasius and His Legacy*, 11.

²³ Weinandy and Keating, *Athanasius and His Legacy*, 11.

²⁴ Weinandy and Keating, *Athanasius and His Legacy*, 12.

Alexander and recorded the events. According to Athanasius' notes, the Council became a game of words. Anatolios explains, "as recounted by Athanasius, the main challenge for those who wanted to decisively refute Arius's doctrine was to find a way to articulate the relationship between the Son and the Father that could not be co-opted by Arius."²⁵ The Council then defined two words that became important to addressing the question of Christ's divinity, *monogenēs* and *homoousios*. Unlike Arius, the Council wanted to make note that "originated" (γίνομαι) and "begotten" (γεννάω) were two different terms. Weinandy and Keating specify that "what is begotten is always of the same nature as the begetter.... God the Father created the world and so all creatures are of a different nature than God, but he begot his Son and so the Son shares in [God's] very divine nature."²⁶ To be "originated" is to be made or created, while to be begotten is to be of the same nature.²⁷ *Homoousios* ("of one essence/being"), a unique term not found in scripture, was brought into the discussion, alongside begotten, to further emphasize that Christ and God are of the same essence.²⁸ These two terms are then used within the response refuting each of Arius' claims.

Arius followed a methodological chain of ideas to derive his claim that Christ was not divine. To summarize them once again, Arius claimed that "the father alone is God, the son was made, the son was from nothingness, and 'there was a 'when' when the son was not.'"²⁹ The Council of Nicæa, in its response, directly refuted each of these claims.

²⁵ Anatolios, *Athanasius*, 11.

²⁶ Weinandy and Keating, *Athanasius and His Legacy*, 14.

²⁷ This specification becomes important while refuting Arius, which will be examined shortly.

²⁸ Weinandy and Keating, *Athanasius and His Legacy*, 14.

²⁹ Harmless, *Desert Christians*, 27.

For the first, the Council determined that “the Father is transcendent in that he exists in a singular manner distinct from all else, but he does not exist such that he is infinitely removed from all else.”³⁰ Instead of Arius’ view of God and creation, utterly separate with a great, unbridgeable gap between the two, the Council affirmed divine immanence in the Creation. As for the second, the council asserted that “the Father, being almighty, created all things and he did so by creating all things through his eternal Son.”³¹ Christ was not created, but participated in the action of creation with God. A creature, with all its limitation, cannot create at the level of God; therefore, Christ is not a creature. The third point is addressed when the council states that “as the only begotten Son, the Son is not ontologically a different kind of being from the Father, a creature, but he is begotten from the very same being or nature as the Father.”³² If Christ is not a creature (a part of creation), then Christ is not from nothingness. Instead, Christ is begotten and shares the same nature (essence) as God. To address the final point, the council made it clear that “there was never a ‘time/when’ God was not the Father, and so there never was a ‘time/when’ the Son was not.”³³ Christ was always with God, for he is one-in-being with God. Therefore, it is impossible for God the Father to exist at any point without Christ.

The Nicene Creed presents these four points, the official dogmatic statement produced by the council. A section of the Nicene Creed reads: “I believe in one Lord Jesus Christ, the Only Begotten Son of God, born of the Father before all ages. God from

³⁰ Weinandy and Keating, *Athanasius and His Legacy*, 13.

³¹ Weinandy and Keating, *Athanasius and His Legacy*, 13.

³² Weinandy and Keating, *Athanasius and His Legacy*, 13.

³³ Weinandy and Keating, *Athanasius and His Legacy*, 13.

God, Light from Light, true God from true God, begotten, not made, consubstantial (*homoousion*) with the Father; through him all things were made.”³⁴ Athanasius’ Christology further nuanced the doctrine of the Nicene Creed, but the creed did not put an end to debates as the council had hoped. Alexander died shortly after the council (328 C.E.) and Athanasius succeeded as Bishop of Alexandria.³⁵ From his new position, Athanasius continued to defend the doctrine of Nicæa. Unfortunately, ten years after the beginning of the Council of Nicæa, another council subverted the doctrine: The Council of Tyre affirmed Arian Orthodoxies, charged Athanasius with crimes, and exiled him.³⁶ This is not the only conciliar reversal or exile that Athanasius will have to overcome in his lifetime. Athanasius was bishop for forty-five years and spent fifteen of them in exile, the time divided among five total exiles.³⁷ Along with the exiles, thirteen various councils were held, most notably the Council of Antioch and the Council of Constantinople, even further debating the nature of Christ’s divinity, and all were heavily influenced by surviving Arian theologians and political figures of the time.³⁸ However, over these years of councils and exiles, Athanasius did not sit idly. Athanasius continued to write and produce some of his most famous works, such as *Life of Antony* and *Orations against the*

³⁴ English translation from “What We Believe,” United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, accessed November 26, 2018, <http://www.usccb.org/beliefs-and-teachings/what-we-believe>. Greek word added by me, from the Greek text in Geddes MacGregor, *The Nicene Creed: Illuminated by Modern Thought* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1980), ix.

³⁵ Anatolios, *Athanasius*, 12.

³⁶ Anatolios, *Athanasius*, 12–13.

³⁷ Harmless, *Desert Christians*, 36.

³⁸ A summary of the various councils can be found in Anatolios, *Athanasius*, 15–30.

Arians.³⁹ The ever-present threat of Arianism is noticeable in his works, and his writings staunchly defended the Nicene Christology.

ATHANASIUS' CHRISTOLOGY

Constantly on the defense, Athanasius develops his Christology with Arianism always on his mind. Drawing from the influences of his past, including Platonic thought and Alexander's Nicene teachings, Athanasius constructs a Christology heavily focused on the divinity of Christ. Although Athanasius penned numerous pieces concerning Christ and the Trinity, this section of the study will focus on his major work constructed shortly after the Council of Nicæa: *Contra Gentes — De Incarnatione*.

Contra Gentes — De Incarnatione (c. 328 C.E.) had two goals, to reassert the transcendent nature of God and to proclaim that Christ's divinity mediates the transcendent nature of God.⁴⁰ In the first part of his argument, Athanasius draws on his Platonic heritage. J. Rebecca Lyman notes that "he uses the metaphysical commonplaces of divine transcendence from contemporary Platonism: ὁ ὑπὲρ πάσης οὐσίας, ὁ δημιουργός, ἀόρατος, ἀσώματος, ἄτρεπτος, ἁπλοῦς" (the one above all beings, the creator, unseen, without body, unchangeable, simple/single).⁴¹ Athanasius does not deny Arius' claims that God is utterly transcendent and distinct (or different) from all else. He acknowledged that there was a complete and full separation of God from the Creation.

³⁹ For a summary of Athanasius' exiles and the works produced see Harmless, *Desert Christians*, 33–36.

⁴⁰ See David M. Gwynn, *Athanasius of Alexandria: Bishop, Theologian, Ascetic, Father* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 66.

⁴¹ J. Rebecca Lyman, *Christology and Cosmology: Models of Divine Activity in Origen, Eusebius, and Athanasius* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 132. Greek translation done with help from Dr. Gwendolyn Compton-Engle.

David Gwynn explains that “the Godhead, eternal and immutable, is utterly separate by *ousia* (essence) and *physis* (nature) from the created order, brought into existence in time and mutable.”⁴² The term *ousia* is brought back into the discussion to distinguish the essence (or being) of God from that of the created world.

What differentiated Athanasius from Arius was that Athanasius believed the gap between God and creation could be bridged. Athanasius states in *Contra Gentes*: For God, the creator of the universe and king of all, who is beyond all being and human thought, since He is good and bountiful, has made humanity in His own image through His own Word, our Savior Jesus Christ; and He also made humanity perceptive and understanding of reality through its similarity to Him, giving it also a conception and knowledge of its own eternity, so that as long as it kept this likeness, it might never abandon its concept of God.⁴³

God may be “beyond all being,” but God did not create to leave creation totally on its own. God planted the seeds for humanity to know and understand its Creator. As Gwynn summarizes, “God did not abandon humanity, and through His love humanity could still seek to know God. The likeness of God remained visible within human souls, and [God] was revealed through creation itself.”⁴⁴ Humans need only to turn to themselves to know and understand God, for humanity is created in God’s own image. Human nature reflects God’s nature in the created world; this concept will flow through the rest of Athanasius’

⁴² Gwynn, *Athanasius of Alexandria*, 67.

⁴³ Gwynn, *Athanasius of Alexandria*, 67.

⁴⁴ Gwynn, *Athanasius of Alexandria*, 67.

Christology. The key point from this passage is God “made humanity in [God’s] own image *through [God’s] own Word, our Savior Jesus Christ.*”⁴⁵ Christ, the Divine Word, bridges the gap between God and creation. Which is why “it is the Word who binds all creation together.”⁴⁶ It was through Christ that creation was made, enabling humans to be made in God’s image. However, because of humanity’s Fall, sin blinds humans. Therefore, as Gwynn explains, “for it was in order to rescue humanity from its errors that the Word Himself took on a created form. Therefore, ‘although He is incorporeal by nature ... through the mercy and goodness of His Father He appeared to us in a human body for our salvation.’”⁴⁷

Now, the idea of God “taking on” a human body raised concerns for Arius because it meant that the essence of God was subject to change. Athanasius counters this claim precisely with his immanent God argument. Harmless summarizes that, if Christ (and God) are everywhere in creation precisely *because of* the creative relationship, then “just as God can be present everywhere in a changing material universe without its impairing [God’s] own unchangeability, so Christ as God Incarnate could become present in a human body without its impairing his unchangeability.”⁴⁸ Athanasius did not see the human body as the dominant being in the reality of Christ. Harmless quotes Athanasius as stating that Christ “also being in a human body and giving it life himself, he accordingly gives life to everything, and was both in all and outside all.... For he was not

⁴⁵ Emphasis added.

⁴⁶ Gwynn, *Athanasius of Alexandria*, 68.

⁴⁷ Gwynn, *Athanasius of Alexandria*, 68.

⁴⁸ Harmless, *Desert Christians*, 88–89.

bound to the body, but rather he controlled it, and was only at rest in the Father.”⁴⁹ Since Christ is present in all of creation, it is Christ who has control over the body and not the other way around. This view of the relationship between Christ and the human body has its weaknesses, which this chapter later examines. Athanasius’ discussion in *Contra Gentes* explains how and why the Divine entered into the Creation in Christ, but *De Incarnatione* explains the significance of the incarnation.

Athanasius claimed that the divine Christ had to entered into the Creation so that the bridge between God and the Creation could close and the errors of humanity could be corrected. In *De Incarnatione*, Athanasius explains how this could be done and what would be the result of it. He insists that Christ must be divine to complete this plan. Gwynn explains that “only through the incarnation of the divine Son and Word, Athanasius maintains, could salvation and revelation be received by humanity.”⁵⁰ Humans erred by sinning and turning away from God, and God corrected it in a two-fold way: The Word became Christ to die and to restore the divine image in humanity. Gwynn quotes Athanasius’ explanation:

For since the Word realized the human corruption would not be abolished in any other way except by everyone dying — but the Word was not able to die, being immortal and the Son of the Father — therefore, He took to Himself a body which could die, in order that, since this participated in the Word who is above all, it might suffice for death on behalf of all, and because of the Word who was dwelling in it, it might remain incorruptible,

⁴⁹ Harmless, *Desert Christians*, 89.

⁵⁰ Gwynn, *Athanasius of Alexandria*, 69.

and so corruption might cease from all humanity by the grace of the resurrection.⁵¹

Death was the inevitable result of human sin, but God does not wish that humanity should die; in fact, God had promised that would never happen again (Gen 8:21). Therefore, God sent one who “might suffice for death,” the one-in-being uncreated Son, for God (and Christ) is able to act on behalf of all creation. Not only does the incarnation provide the avenue for the atonement of death, it also transforms humanity. As Athanasius states above, “because of the Word who was dwelling in it, it might remain incorruptible, and so corruption might cease from all humanity.” The Word reminded humans of what humanity was meant to be, what the right relationship between God and Creation was to look like, through the incarnate Christ. Gwynn explains that “through participation with the divine Word, made possible by the incarnation, humanity could be made perfect and free from sin and preserve the knowledge and unity with God that was lost when men and women turned away into error.”⁵² The death of Christ on the cross and his resurrection may have overcome death; but final salvation, liberation from sin, comes from the act of the incarnation itself. In a passage that Gwynn calls “perhaps the most famous lines Athanasius ever wrote,” Athanasius describes salvation as such: “through death immortality has come to all, and through the Incarnation of the Word the universal providence and its leader and creator the Word of God Himself have been made known. For He became human that we might become divine; and He revealed Himself through a

⁵¹ Gwynn, *Athanasius of Alexandria*, 68.

⁵² Gwynn, *Athanasius of Alexandria*, 69–70.

body that we might receive an idea of the invisible Father.”⁵³ The famous line “He became human that we might become divine,” which appears in different ways in Athanasius’ other works,⁵⁴ does not mean humans can actually become God. Instead, Athanasius is speaking of a renewal of spirit. As Harmless explains the concept:

When Athanasius says the Word assumed a human body, he means that God climbed into human skin, so to speak, and renewed it from the inside, restoring it to immortal life. This was like a new creation, as dramatic as the creation that created the human race in the first place. Only this time, Christ as God recreated us from inside, renewing that which is vulnerable to death — the body — and recharging it with divine life, that it not corrupt, die, and drift back into the nothingness from which it was made.⁵⁵

Christ demonstrated the potential for humans to return to the image in which they were born. This process is called “‘deification’ or ‘divinization.’”⁵⁶ As Athanasius had discussed in *Contra Gentes*, God is good and, if God made human creatures in God’s image, then the Creation is good as well. The problem was humanity chose to turn away from God, turn away from goodness. Christ came to renew humanity and make divine life possible for all.

Fitting to Athanasius’ context, the divinity of Christ was essential for his Christology. Without it, the whole concept fell apart. Therefore, Gwynn explains that

⁵³ Gwynn, *Athanasius of Alexandria*, 69.

⁵⁴ See Harmless, *Desert Christians*, 90.

⁵⁵ Harmless, *Desert Christians*, 90.

⁵⁶ Gwynn, *Athanasius of Alexandria*, 69.

“the one who became incarnate for our sakes had to be the eternal and true Son and Word of the Father. None could bridge the ontological divide of God and humanity except a mediator who was Himself divine by nature.”⁵⁷ No matter how elevated a human is, no mere human death can make up for the death of all humanity and no mere human can recreate the human image. Only God has the ability to implement the salvation that Athanasius proclaims. Therefore, Athanasius continuously writes against the Arians. Gwynn notes that “the great danger that Athanasius saw in ‘Arianism’ was precisely the separation of the Son from the Father to an extent that he believed made the Son’s saving work impossible.”⁵⁸

However, Arius had a different view of salvation that did not need a divine Christ. In fact, Christ as human is what made Arius’ theory of salvation work. Gregg and Groh summarize that “salvation for Arianism is effected by the Son’s identity with the creatures — that which links Christ and creatures to God is conformity of will.”⁵⁹ Unlike Athanasius, Arius’ soteriology relied on a link between Christ and humanity. Using “Stoic-influenced ethical theory,” the creature Christ “could not be considered *sophos*,” which meant he lacked “certain knowledge of his own or his Father’s essence.”⁶⁰ Christ may not have been wise, but that lack of knowledge demonstrated another human characteristic, the ability to grow and improve.⁶¹ The key to improvement was making the choice to improve for the good. Arius, along with other philosophers, stressed

⁵⁷ Gwynn, *Athanasius of Alexandria*, 70.

⁵⁸ Gwynn, *Athanasius of Alexandria*, 70.

⁵⁹ Gregg and Groh, *Early Arianism*, 8.

⁶⁰ Gregg and Groh, *Early Arianism*, 16.

⁶¹ Gregg and Groh, *Early Arianism*, 18.

“progress toward perfection.”⁶² As a creature, Christ had free will to make his own choices. For Arius, Christ made choices that followed the path towards perfection (*cf.* Luke 2:52). As Gregg and Groh summarize, “the early Arians put forward a picture of the Christ remarkably like [a Stoic hero] ..., who possessed the requisite aspiration to perfection and virtue though lacking in perfected knowledge and complete control of his emotions.”⁶³ Therefore, salvation for Arius was demonstrated in Christ’s actions. As the previous quote states, salvation comes from “conformity of will.” By conforming to the will of God (developing virtue), Christ and humanity find salvation.

Whether it was consciously a direct attack on Arianism or just a product of Alexander’s teachings, Athanasius’ Christology took the opposite extreme of Arius. Though his Christology may have succeeded in being the opposite of every aspect of Arianism and simultaneously defended and built upon the winning Nicene theology, Athanasius’ Christology does come with some faults. One that is notable, but does not become a concern until after Athanasius’ time, is described by Gwynn as “‘spacesuit’ Christology.”⁶⁴ This critique charges that Athanasius presents the human body as “merely the tool of the Word”; “the divine Word puts on His body like a suit and does not share in the body’s human experiences.”⁶⁵ Athanasius’ prime focus on the divinity of Christ left the human reality of Christ with little examination. Maybe it was done out of fear of giving the Arians any resources to discredit his Christology; but, based on his context,

⁶² Gregg and Groh, *Early Arianism*, 17.

⁶³ Gregg and Groh, *Early Arianism*, 18.

⁶⁴ Gwynn, *Athanasius of Alexandria*, 71.

⁶⁵ Gwynn, *Athanasius of Alexandria*, 71.

Athanasius seemed to be more concerned with protecting the divinity of Christ. Even then, Gwynn notes that Athanasius did not abandon the human body totally. Gwynn quotes Athanasius discussing Christ's need for eating, drinking, and his birth: "But these things are said of Him, because the body which ate and was born and suffered was no one else's but the Lord's; and since He became human, it was right for these things to be said of Him as a man, that He might be shown to have a true, not a phantasmal body."⁶⁶

Athanasius does address the fact that Christ did indeed have a real body. That would be important for his Christology: For one, there needs to be a real body so that it may die. Therefore, Christ did experience some human experiences such as hunger, thirst, and suffering. Despite any weaknesses, Athanasius' Christology and his incredible defense of the Nicene Creed was widely received in both the Eastern and Western Church.

RECEPTION OF ATHANASIUS' CHRISTOLOGY

Athanasius was awarded the epithet of "*contra mundum* (against the world)" for a reason.⁶⁷ Even though the Council of Nicæa had issued a creed defining the divinity of Christ, it did not put an end to the disagreements. Athanasius used his position as bishop to defend the divinity of Christ; however, his opponents' determination to promote their anti-Nicene beliefs did not waiver. Athanasius faced many battles against his anti-Nicene opposition for many years. Anatolios dedicates a large portion of the first chapter in his book on Athanasius to detailing the long and complicated timeline of the reception of Athanasius' Nicene Christology.⁶⁸ For purposes of this essay, the remainder of this

⁶⁶ Gwynn, *Athanasius of Alexandria*, 71.

⁶⁷ Weinandy and Keating, *Athanasius and His Legacy*, 51.

⁶⁸ Earlier parts of this chapter have referred to Anatolios' first chapter concerning Athanasius' life. For full citation of Anatolios' book see previous footnotes.

chapter will summarize Anatolios' examination while attempting to emphasize the many people involved and the immense influence of different political figures.

As mentioned previously, Athanasius became Bishop of Alexandria in 328 C.E. He spent most of his early career travelling and visiting supporters.⁶⁹ However, this was also a time when his opponents worked to consolidate their own position. Eusebius of Nicomedia and the Egyptian Melitians formed an alliance to bring charges against Athanasius to the Emperor Constantine. They accused Athanasius of threatening a Melitian priest, organizing the murder of another bishop, and illegally arranging his election. Athanasius had the opportunity to defend himself before the Emperor at the Council of Tyre, but it is speculated that Constantine wished to have unity and peace in the area and therefore affirmed Arian theology and exiled Athanasius to Gaul.⁷⁰ This was the first of many exiles Athanasius experienced during his lifetime at the hands of an emperor. Constantine died in 337 C.E. and Constantius took power, allowing the exiled bishops to return. However, Eusebius wasted no time in organizing another group against Athanasius. When accusations again came out against him, Athanasius went on a campaign to gain support that won over the current Pope Julius. Nonetheless, several bishops (including ones who were present at Tyre) gathered another council in Antioch in 339, which revived the previous charges and added new ones. They accused Athanasius of inciting violence in Egypt and returning to Alexandria illegally. With **Constantine** **[SEM1]** present, the Council deposed Athanasius and appointed a replacement bishop. The replacement, Gregory of Cappadocia, forcibly took the seat in Alexandria, compelling

⁶⁹ Anatolios, *Athanasius*, 12.

⁷⁰ Anatolios, *Athanasius*, 12–13.

Athanasius to flee to Rome.⁷¹ This began Athanasius' second exile. During his exile, Athanasius found refuge with Pope Julius, who attempted to help him gain support. However, Julius' actions further escalated the problem.

In 341 C.E., Julius tried to convene a council to reinstate Athanasius and allow him back into Alexandria, but the Eastern bishops were not happy with a Roman intervention in the matter. This started a division between the Eastern and Western church. Instead, the Eastern bishops held their own councils without the Pope. When Julius appealed to the Western Emperor Constans, they held the Council of Sardica in 343 C.E., inviting the Eastern bishops. However, the Eastern bishops objected to the accused (Athanasius) being present during the council, so they left. When they entered Eastern church territory, they had their own meeting with the Eastern Emperor Constantius and excommunicated Athanasius and Julius, among others.⁷² In an attempt to gain unity, the Western Emperor Constans appealed to Constantius. They held yet another council in Antioch in 344 C.E., which came to sort of a compromise in theology. Simply put, it rejected the “non-being” of the Son, but still affirmed the Son as “‘subordinate’ to the Father.”⁷³ After the conclusion of the council, Alexandria welcomed back Athanasius and initiated the “longest period of uninterrupted residency” for him.⁷⁴

Athanasius remained in Alexandria for ten years from 346 to 356 C.E. As Anatolios notes, this is referred to as “The Golden Decade.”⁷⁵ Even though it seemed like

⁷¹ Anatolios, *Athanasius*, 14–16.

⁷² Anatolios, *Athanasius*, 20–22.

⁷³ Anatolios, *Athanasius*, 23.

⁷⁴ Anatolios, *Athanasius*, 23.

⁷⁵ Anatolios, *Athanasius*, 24.

the situation was improving for Athanasius, his opponents were still working against him. Constans was assassinated in 350 C.E., which meant Constantius no longer felt pressure from his brother to maintain unity, and he went back to promoting the anti-Nicene supporters. He held various councils (Council of Arles 353 C.E. and Council of Milan 355 C.E.) mandating Athanasius' deposition and the exile of Athanasius and his supporters. When Constantius ordered his arrest, Athanasius fled into hiding, initiating his third exile.⁷⁶ During this third exile, the Christological debate became more complicated as others entered the fray. Aetius and Eunomius proposed differing positions of the Son being “‘unlike’ the Father” and the Son being “‘like’ the Father,” respectively.⁷⁷ Several more councils were held to try to calm the situation, but Constantius had become worn down. He held another ecumenical council as an attempt to settle the debate; this conclave decided to avoid the *ousia* language by changing “one-in-being” to “like in every way” in the creed.⁷⁸ The Western bishops were unhappy about the change and persistently appealed to the emperor. Finally, another compromise was made to remove “in all respects” and the Council of Constantinople ratified a new creed in 360 C.E.⁷⁹ Throughout this process, Athanasius was still in exile hiding among the monks. During this period, Athanasius wrote *Life of Antony*. However, not long after the council in Constantinople, Constantius died and Athanasius returned to Alexandria.⁸⁰

⁷⁶ Harmless, *Desert Christians*, 58–59. Also see, Anatolios, *Athanasius*, 24–26.

⁷⁷ Anatolios, *Athanasius*, 27.

⁷⁸ Anatolios, *Athanasius*, 28–29.

⁷⁹ Anatolios, *Athanasius*, 29–30.

⁸⁰ Anatolios, *Athanasius*, 30.

Emperor Julian succeeded Constantius and allowed exiled bishops to return to Alexandria, but not to their previous seats and only as civilians. However, Athanasius' supporters rejoiced in his return and he began to gain power unofficially among the people. Julian, who was an apostate, did not want to see the rise of Christianity and viewed the rising fame of Athanasius as a threat. Therefore, Julian exiled Athanasius later in the same year he had returned to Alexandria (362 C.E.). Athanasius' fourth exile did not last long, for Julian was killed about a year later and Jovian became emperor. Jovian was a supporter of Athanasius and allowed him to return.⁸¹ However, Athanasius' time in Alexandria again was short-lived. In 364 C.E., Jovian died, and Valens took over the Eastern empire. Being an anti-Nicene, Valens demanded that those who returned under Jovian must go back into exile. Therefore, Athanasius entered his fifth exile. Once again, his exile was short-lived; protesters objected to Valens' order and he reversed his declaration.⁸² Athanasius again returned to Alexandria in 364 C.E. after only a few months in exile. He remained there as bishop until his death in 373 C.E.⁸³ Athanasius' reception at the time of the Arian controversy could be described as rocky at best. As Anatolios notes, "he had spent 17 of his 46 years as bishop in exile."⁸⁴ His election to bishop was disputed from the beginning⁸⁵ and, even though Nicæa had made its mark,

⁸¹ Anatolios, *Athanasius*, 31–32.

⁸² Anatolios, *Athanasius*, 32.

⁸³ Anatolios, *Athanasius*, 33.

⁸⁴ Anatolios, *Athanasius*, 33.

⁸⁵The Melitian Schism not only began with a disagreement with the then Bishop of Alexandria, Peter, but the Nicene Creed also affirmed that Melitian clergy could continue to practice only under the authority of the Bishop of Alexandria. Therefore, they had an unpleasant history with the seat in Alexandria and, when a non-Melitian Christian was selected to replace Alexander, the group felt even more alienated and began to fracture. For more information, see Anatolios, *Athanasius*, 5–6.

less than ten years later anti-Nicene supporters made a move to gain the majority.

Athanasius was elected into a church already unsteady and ready to fight. Fortunately, Athanasius was not one to back down easily. He endured battles with six emperors, and survived at least eight councils and five exiles; all were attempts to keep this Nicene Christian out of power. However, while the opposition became battle-worn or died, the Council of Constantinople (which gave us the official creed of the Church today) supported Nicene theology, paving the way for Athanasius' success. After remaining steadfast against many enemies, Anatolios explains "Athanasius would be looked upon henceforth as a standard of orthodoxy."⁸⁶

CONCLUSION

Athanasius was born into a world full of turmoil and continued to experience the chaos throughout his life. From the beginning, great minds surrounded him and he was introduced to diverse schools of religion and philosophical thought. This diversity not only provided a well-rounded education for Athanasius, but it also supplied a foundation for many debates and controversies. While studying under Alexander, the Bishop of Alexandria, Athanasius became an immediate player in the Arian Controversy — a fact that would influence the rest of his career. His Christology continuously became an avenue to refute the claims made by Arians and to proclaim the full divinity of Christ. Although it took many councils and exiles, Athanasius' Nicene theology eventually was accepted by the wider church. Athanasius further developed this Christology to set standards for the monastic movements of the time, presenting Antony of the desert as a

⁸⁶ Anatolios, *Athanasius*, 33.

symbol of what is possible in the process of deification. Athanasius' Christology also became the foundation other theologians referenced to support their own theologies, which eventually influenced the outcomes of the Iconoclastic and *Filioque* Controversies in the West. Athanasius went from the label of *contra mundum* to becoming a Father of the Church through his persistence and well-defended Christology.

CHAPTER 2: THE GREEK

BIOGRAPHY

INTRODUCTION

It was not uncommon for rhetoric to occupy much of the written and oral sphere of public discourse in antiquity. Rhetoric is an umbrella that covers many different genres and styles that branch in many directions depending on the different circumstances and intentions of the writing. The Greek biography (*bios*) genre developed out of turmoil suggesting how society should function or how one should live their lives. The genre contains many characteristics that authors use to present their idea of the good. Some of the characteristics include the use of a nonfictional subject, exaggerated virtues, and dismissal of competing ideas. First seen with political figures, the genre eventually entered the fields of philosophy and religion. The subjects then became holy sages who illustrated these characteristics as well as performing miracles, understanding the divine will, and having extraordinary wisdom.

Athanasius' *Life of Antony* contains the various elements of the Greek *bios*. Depicting the life of an Egyptian monk, *Life of Antony* presents a holy philosopher who emulates Athanasius' Christology in the form of asceticism. During a time of his own turmoil, Athanasius developed a Christology viewed as controversial. Even though the Council of Nicæa had made its creedal statement, many Arians still held positions of power and rejected the Nicene theology. Therefore, Athanasius was put into a position where he had to defend his ideology. To do so, he produced a large body of writings, including the *Life of Antony*, in which the protagonist holds beliefs similar to Athanasius.

Athanasius may not state outright that Antony followed his Christology, but he is clear about his intentions in writing his story: he calls for the emulation of Antony.⁸⁷ With such a purpose, Athanasius draws on the genre of the Greek *bios*. Through an examination of the development of the Greek *bios*, it can be demonstrated that Athanasius' *Life of Antony* illustrates the characteristics of this genre.

HISTORY AND CONTEXT

The fourth century B.C.E. marked a turning point in Greek history. It began with the fall of Athens in 404, which “left Greece with an unstable [political] system.”⁸⁸ In its vulnerable state, control of Greece shifted among different ruling powers (including Sparta, Thebes, and Persia), leaving Athenian citizens disenchanted about their ideal *polis*.⁸⁹ Greek identity began to change when their current reality did not match their previously thought potential. The Greek state was no longer holding the power and suddenly their culture was not the only option. With the shift in public thought came a shift in Greek culture. Albrecht Dihle explains that there were “increasing attempts to solve as many problems as possible by rational means, resulting in prose becoming the suitable vehicle for discursive thought.”⁹⁰ Much of intellectual life focused on resolving questions of the natural world through reason. The problems they were now facing were tangible and concrete, which left people seeking answers that were not idealistic but pragmatic. This shift resulted in dramatic literature being an inadequate form of

⁸⁷ *V. Ant.* Introduction; *V. Ant.* 94:1–4.

⁸⁸ Albrecht Dihle, *A History of Greek Literature: From Homer to the Hellenistic Period*, trans. Clare Krojzl (New York: Routledge, 1994), 173.

⁸⁹ Dihle, *History of Greek Literature*, 173.

⁹⁰ Dihle, *History of Greek Literature*, 174.

communication, ushering in an era that saw a significant decline in poetry and an increase in prose as well as the sales of books.⁹¹ Simile and metaphor may have remained, without the meter, in prose, but writing styles moved in a direction that could demonstrate complex ideas. Plato used dialogues to convey ideas in a dialectical form, but Aristotle, Plato's student, ushered in the form of rhetorical prose.⁹²

Still recovering from the downfall of Athens, writers employed Aristotle's technique of eliciting "reactions of the psyche" in an attempt to persuade the readers.⁹³ Xenophon (430–354 B.C.E.) began to use rhetoric in areas outside the explanation of philosophical concepts. Introducing rhetoric into history, Xenophon wrote *Cyropaedia*, "a biographical legend" about Cyrus of Persia, to demonstrate the life of an "ideal ruler."⁹⁴ Xenophon's hope was to build upon historical events to present a well-known figure exemplifying an ideal. As Dihle explains, it is "not intended to be read for the sake of historical instruction, however, but rather to reveal how a just ruler should be brought up, how he should treat friends, foes, soldiers, adviser and subjects, ... and so on."⁹⁵ At a time when leadership in Greece was unstable and far from satisfactory, Xenophon wanted to proffer a possible solution to the problem by presenting the conduct of a proper leader. This method of presenting history develops over time into a genre of its own, the *bios*. Patricia Cox notes that "in antiquity, biography was not simply a subgenre of history. It had its own unique characteristics, and sustained historical veracity was not one of

⁹¹ Dihle, *History of Greek Literature*, 174.

⁹² See Dihle, *History of Greek Literature*, 175–76.

⁹³ Dihle, *History of Greek Literature*, 216.

⁹⁴ Dihle, *History of Greek Literature*, 216.

⁹⁵ Dihle, *History of Greek Literature*, 216.

them.”⁹⁶ Just as Xenophon’s *Cyropaedia* was not meant to be read as unadulterated history, the *bios* genre developed from the genre of history and held its own as something unique and different.

EARLY STRUCTURE OF THE BIOS

Starting with its early beginning, Isocrates followed a particular framework that caught on with other biographers. Cox explains that “the organizational scheme that Isocrates used, while basically chronological, was punctuated with descriptions of the hero’s virtues apart from his acts.” In particular, Isocrates maintained a “bipartite division of the biography into *praxeis*, a chronological account of the life, and *ēthos*, a systematic treatment of character.”⁹⁷ It was clear that specific actions by the subject were not a concern to Isocrates unless they supported important claims he was trying to make. Isocrates’ basic point was to emphasize a certain quality, virtue, and/or noble character. Others, like Aristoxenus of Tarento (c. 360–300 B.C.E.), picked up the schema to encourage other thoughts alongside their idea of excellent virtues. Cox demonstrates that Aristoxenus’ innovation was to “[capitalize] upon the Hellenistic habit of composing derogatory books on rival philosophical schools by using biography for this purpose.”⁹⁸ A shift occurred where one of the virtues the subject possessed was the ability to recognize right from wrong, promoting the right schools of thought and degrading the wrong schools. This structure continued under the Roman Empire and other authors adopted the use of the *bios* for this purpose.

⁹⁶ Patricia Cox, *Biography in Late Antiquity* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1983), 5.

⁹⁷ Cox, *Biography in Late Antiquity*, 8.

⁹⁸ Cox, *Biography in Late Antiquity*, 10.

One element of the *bios* genre that holds strong throughout its development is its use in conflict. The *bios* pieces routinely extolled certain philosophies and devalued others, demonstrating a period of conflict in philosophical thought. Eventually the *bios* entered the religious sphere where the same method of promoting one belief over another continued. Cox explains that the genre was “involved in religious controversy and so attempted to sway not mere opinion but belief. We shall see that the nature of this struggle led to a new standard for biographical idealization, the ‘divine sage,’ a literary type that became a major influence on the portrayal of the character of philosophers in Late Antiquity.”⁹⁹ The authors of the *bios* began to blend philosophy and religion, presenting the subjects as holy exemplars.

SHIFT TO THE HOLY

Religious controversy spurred discussions on topics like the nature of truth, proper practice, and correct belief in God. As the polemic increased, theologians adopted the rhetorical use of the *bios*, opening the conversation to a wider audience. As Cox describes, “the image of the philosopher” now included “‘holy’ embellishments,” such as “miracle- and magic- working, prophecy, and the more usual business of superior intellection,” inviting all to what she calls “the new holy personality cult.”¹⁰⁰ The subjects of the biographies transformed from virtuous citizens (or political figures) to holy philosophers. While vices and virtues still measured their character, now they also exemplified spiritual life; they demonstrated the holy man’s perfect relationship with God. Christian thinkers debated what this perfect relationship looked like, how it was

⁹⁹ Cox, *Biography in Late Antiquity*, 16.

¹⁰⁰ Cox, *Biography in Late Antiquity*, 19–20.

acted out. Therefore, much like the use of the *bios* within the philosophical schools, the author's theology drives the character of the holy man. Cox details the general characteristics authors would follow to present their holy men. These will be examined in the following pages and then used to demonstrate how Athanasius' *Life of Antony* fits the *bios* genre.

Shifting to the characteristics presented by Cox, the first trait of the holy philosopher is wisdom. She states that "chief among [the] characteristics is wisdom. Generally [the philosopher] is shown to possess superior gifts of perception and understanding from a very early age."¹⁰¹ Much like the infancy narratives of antiquity, stories of childhood were written in hindsight to present the unique attributes and upbringings that led to the subject becoming someone significant in adulthood.¹⁰² Cox explains that, "in portraits of divine philosophers, there is more than simply a hint of future grandeur in the child; rather his wisdom is already fully developed."¹⁰³ The child philosopher's unique circumstance was possessing incredible intelligence from the very beginning. This meant their vast knowledge did not come from education, but rather was innate. However, education was not entirely absent from the philosopher's life. Samuel Rubenson explains that education became a literary device; it did "not add anything, [but] simply confirmed inherent and divine wisdom and established the language of the holy man."¹⁰⁴ The young philosopher's encounter with education was an opportunity to

¹⁰¹ Cox, *Biography in Late Antiquity*, 21–22.

¹⁰² See Margaret Nutting Ralph, *And God Said What? An Introduction to Biblical Literary Forms* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist, 2003), 172.

¹⁰³ Cox, *Biography in Late Antiquity*, 22.

¹⁰⁴ Samuel Rubenson, "Philosophy and Simplicity: The Problem of Classical Education in Early Christian Biography," in *Greek Biography and Panegyric in Late Antiquity*, ed. Tomas Hägg, Philip

demonstrate the innate wisdom already given to the philosopher. Furthermore, Cox argues that depicting the educational process “highlights the two sides of the philosopher’s nature, which are sometimes difficult to reconcile: his superiority to other men, which is due in part to his great wisdom, and his humanity, which suggests that he must have passed through the various stages of life like other men.”¹⁰⁵ Despite the young philosopher’s unique circumstances, he was still human experiencing a human life. The philosopher’s wisdom may present itself as something unattainable, but the philosopher’s actions should be attainable by humans. Otherwise, the audience would not be able to mimic the virtues of the philosopher. From his profound wisdom, the holy philosopher gained knowledge about certain aspects of life. This knowledge became crucial to the holy man when putting his superior wisdom to practical use.

The philosophers' extraordinary wisdom was not meant to be stored within the mind, but was to help others. Another feature Cox notes demonstrates this quality. The holy philosopher possessed “insight into human nature” which gave him “real sympathy and concern for the welfare of his fellows.”¹⁰⁶ The philosophers use their wisdom to help others, but how the philosophers knew what to do came from a divinely instituted insight. Much like how Antony attributed his healing miracles to God,¹⁰⁷ the philosophers attributed their insight to the divine. Cox explains that “the emphasis that biographers

Rousseau, and Christian Høgel (Berkeley and Los Angeles: Regents of the University of California, 2000), 114.

¹⁰⁵ Cox, *Biography in Late Antiquity*, 22–23.

¹⁰⁶ Cox, *Biography in Late Antiquity*, 23.

¹⁰⁷ *V. Ant.* 56:12–13.

place on their heroes' wondrous insight is intended to point to divinity."¹⁰⁸ Quoting from Philostratus' *Vita Apollonii*, an Asclepian priest explains the difference between God and human beings: "for the latter, because of their frailty, do not understand their own concerns, whereas the gods have the privilege of understanding the affairs of both [humans] and themselves."¹⁰⁹ A divine being understands the nature of all things, including what causes grief and happiness.

Biographers are not presenting the philosophers as divine beings, but as humans who have been gifted by God. These characteristics placed the ideal philosophers with one foot in the realm of the divine and the other in humanity. This provided them with the means to demonstrate translation of divine will into human action. Therefore, acting on this tension, the authors of biographies noted the subjects for their immense kindness towards their fellows. Cox notes a couple stories, including Origen, who provided comfort to Christian martyrs, and Pythagoras, who took pride in giving comfort to his disciples through medicinal means.¹¹⁰ The philosophers' insight into human nature provided them with the deeper knowledge of the struggles of the soul, giving them the urge to care and provide.

Though the philosophers taught and demonstrated virtues through words and actions, their teachings would die with them if not for disciples to pick up where they left off. Therefore, Cox notes that another feature of the holy philosopher "[was the] desire to

¹⁰⁸ Cox, *Biography in Late Antiquity*, 23.

¹⁰⁹ Philostratus *Vita Apollonii* 1.11; cited in Cox, *Biography in Late Antiquity*, 23.

¹¹⁰ Cox, *Biography in Late Antiquity*, 23.

communicate [wisdom].”¹¹¹ The presentation of the philosopher as a teacher played yet another vital role in the efficacy of the *bios* as a “recruitment” tool. Cox explains that “divine philosophers are proselytizers, and their teaching not only touches but changes the lives of their disciples.”¹¹² The philosophers’ ability to communicate and demonstrate their insight and wisdom led to their acquisition of followers. This gathering of disciples around the philosopher demonstrates a key purpose of the *bios*: to persuade the audience that the philosopher is worthy of imitation. Origen “remarked in his *Against Celsus* that the real defense of the holy man lies in the lives of his genuine disciples. ... Biographers agreed [that] one of the important measures of a philosopher’s stature was the quality and quantity of his disciples.”¹¹³ Not only did the number of followers represent the popularity of the philosopher’s teaching but also, just like the saying “a student is only as good as the teacher,” the effective application of the teaching in the disciples’ lives is evidence of an effective teacher. The philosopher’s wisdom is “successfully embodied” by the followers and carried on after death.¹¹⁴ The gathering of disciples demonstrated that the philosopher’s teachings were practical, worthy of spreading, and the philosopher’s life worthy of imitation. Cox paints the picture thus: “the biographers’ [*sic*] conception of the divine philosopher and his circle of disciples resembles a universe in miniature, with the philosopher at the center radiating the light of wisdom in the form of

¹¹¹ Cox, *Biography in Late Antiquity*, 24.

¹¹² Cox, *Biography in Late Antiquity*, 24.

¹¹³ Cox, *Biography in Late Antiquity*, 24.

¹¹⁴ Cox, *Biography in Late Antiquity*, 25.

faithful followers.”¹¹⁵ The philosopher becomes known through his teaching and consequently through his disciples.

A final characteristic of the holy philosopher accentuates the philosopher’s wisdom and virtue. Cox states that “the trait that complements the philosopher’s wisdom is his devotion to an ascetic lifestyle” because “asceticism was, in effect, a salvation from the body”; the “philosopher is united to God by his abstinence.”¹¹⁶ During a time when most people had a dualistic worldview, the virtuous philosopher had to maintain a perfectly good (holy) nature. The optimal way to achieve this was through asceticism. Cox quotes Apollonius saying, “hard as it is to know oneself, I myself consider it still harder for the sage to remain always himself; for he cannot ever reform evil natures and person.... A man who is really a man will never alter his nature.”¹¹⁷ A philosopher remained in an unchanging state through ascetic practices, which provided practical guidelines to produce a stable nature. Through an austere lifestyle of minimal food, clothing, and shelter, the body became subservient to the soul. As Plotinus explained, “it is absurd to maintain that well-being extends as far as the living body, since well-being is the good life, which is concerned with the soul and is an activity of the soul.”¹¹⁸ A good life is one that perfects the soul, and producing a good soul requires removing one’s focus from the body. The ascetic community followed a “counterpoise” view that any pleasure provided to the body detracted from the development of a good soul.¹¹⁹ The ascetic

¹¹⁵ Cox, *Biography in Late Antiquity*, 24–25.

¹¹⁶ Cox, *Biography in Late Antiquity*, 25–30.

¹¹⁷ Philostratus *Vita Apollonii* 6.35; cited in Cox, *Biography in Late Antiquity*, 25.

¹¹⁸ Plotinus *Enneads* 1.4.14; cited in Cox, *Biography in Late Antiquity*, 27.

¹¹⁹ Plotinus *Enneads* 1.4.14; cited in Cox, *Biography in Late Antiquity*, 27.

lifestyle may have given a practical guideline to follow, but it also made a statement within (and against) society. An ascetic stood out in a crowd by his/her appearance: an emaciated frame, distinctive aroma due to lack of hygiene, and austere clothing (often nothing), among other things. For the biographers, this was an opportunity to highlight their ideology as a counterpoint to the wider culture. Cox explains:

But the sage's physical withdrawal from the ways of the world is not just for the purpose of public relations; it is also a sign of his freedom. The more he retreats from the society around him, the freer he is from the passions that bog down and befuddle lesser minds. His spirit is liberated, and this gives him the rare ability to exercise his wisdom in communication with the gods. This idea points to the other, interior or spiritual aspect of the divine sage's asceticism, because the sage's physical withdrawal is simply the outer manifestation of certain philosophical convictions.¹²⁰

The philosopher's outward behaviors represented the inner virtues the biographer deemed important. Cox warns that this is not to be viewed as pure "manipulation of [the] material merely for objective, sociopolitical ends"; rather, the work is more "a reflection of the author's deep sense of himself."¹²¹ The holy man presented within the pages reflects the not only the author's theology but also the author himself. This self-reflection of the author becomes important in the development of the Greek *bios* as it became a new literary genre.

¹²⁰ Cox, *Biography in Late Antiquity*, 28.

¹²¹ Cox, *Biography in Late Antiquity*, 135–36.

THE GREEK BIOS

With its divergence from history, the framework typically did not follow a strict chronology and historical events were only pertinent if they highlighted a virtue of the subject. Cox notes that the only common theme is an informal “structural framework” that is “quite uncomplicated, resting simply on an account of events in a man’s life.”¹²² Each *bios* had its own unique subject that built a framework suited for that specific subject depending on their teachings and deeds. Therefore, as Cox further explains, “each act, whether it is an actual physical deed or a verbal act, is a star in the hero’s personal constellation; it illumines an aspect of the ideal that his life represents in the biography.”¹²³ Each virtuous deed serves as a landmark along the holy journey of the subject.

Similar features were present in ancient panegyrics. Panegyric and biography are two genres that employ the rhetoric of praise and glorification. However, while both genres took on written form, their mode of communication remained different. Hägg and Rousseau explain that the panegyric was an epideictic speech that maintained “a number of constant topoi and strategies,” whereas, biographies were “more versatile and elusive.”¹²⁴ [SEM2] Panegyrics follow a similar structure that takes on the form of a speech. The *bios* is more of a literary form, which allows more room for adaptation but also a sense of privacy. Contrasting the different forms, Hägg and Rousseau explain that, with a panegyric, “a speaker addresses an audience, and he is standing in person before the

¹²² Cox, *Biography in Late Antiquity*, 55.

¹²³ Cox, *Biography in Late Antiquity*, 57.

¹²⁴ Hägg and Rousseau, “Introduction,” 2.

audience. His own reputation is palpably at stake,” whereas “the writer of a biography may hide behind his text.”¹²⁵ Without direct exposure, the author may feel free to express ideas and concerns without the fear of repercussions, allowing for stronger ideals and word-choice to come out. Another result of this freedom was the author having the opportunity to convey information in a way that embeds personal opinions within the biographical information. As Hägg and Rousseau explain, “the biographical subject often [merged] with the biographer’s own persona and agenda.”¹²⁶ The result of this merger was the life story of an influential person wrapped in the convictions or ideology of the biographer. As Cox explains, “biographies were *personal statements*, statements which, though couched in religious and philosophical terms, addressed sociopolitical and cultural concerns as well.”¹²⁷ The author used the exemplary life of a person as a vehicle to present the biographer’s ideas on how one should live a virtuous life or build a faithful community.

Following Cox’s note about being born out of controversy, “the writers of biographies of holy men were also engaged in a battle, yet theirs involved not only philosophical conviction but religious belief as well. We could say that their heroes had become emblems in a holy war.”¹²⁸ Cox is careful with her wording here, referring to the subject as “emblems” because the subjects of these biographies are not just pawns in a game played by the author. Biographers did not arbitrarily select their subjects and mold

¹²⁵ Hägg and Rousseau, “Introduction,” 3.

¹²⁶ Hägg and Rousseau, “Introduction,” 3.

¹²⁷ Cox, *Biography in Late Antiquity*, 135. Emphasis added.

¹²⁸ Cox, *Biography in Late Antiquity*, 135.

them to portray whatever the authors wanted. The subjects were chosen because they already idealized what the authors wanted. The biographer did not consciously manipulate the material.¹²⁹ Rather, “the prism-wielding biographer ... dictates the active mission of his hero, [so] it is actually the biographer whose activity we are emphasizing.”¹³⁰ This calls into question how the reader can distinguish what is historically accurate concerning the subject and what represents the author’s worldview. The blending of author and subject, and the resulting difficulty in separating them, becomes apparent in the *Life of Antony* where Antony’s actions and words tend to fit into the schema of Athanasius’ theology. In fact, many of the characteristics of the *bios* are present in that text. The rest of this examination revisits these defining marks of the *bios* and demonstrates their appearances within the *Life of Antony*.

LIFE OF ANTONY AS A GREEK BIOS

The examination thus far has revealed common trends within the genre of the Greek *bios*. Biographies depicting holy philosophers tend to follow two arcs of characteristics: (1) the standard layout of the Greek *bios* established by the earlier models and (2) the schema of the holy. The two interweave creating an expansion of divine wisdom into the rhetorical and philosophical foundation. Athanasius’ *Life of Antony* employs this expanded foundation to present a model for his Christology. Going forward, this examination will identify the common characteristics in the context of *Life of Antony* to show that the *Life* has a rightful place within the *bios* genre.

¹²⁹ Cox, *Biography in Late Antiquity*, 135–36.

¹³⁰ Cox, *Biography in Late Antiquity*, 145.

Early Characteristics of the <i>Bios</i>	The Paradigm of the Holy Philosopher
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Balance of <i>Praxeis</i> and <i>Ethos</i> • Exaggeration of Vices and Virtues • Born out of Controversy 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Extraordinary Wisdom • Insight to Human Nature • Communication/Teaching • Ascetic Lifestyle

Although the structure of the Greek *bios* is rather informal, what brought various works together under one genre was the presentation of extraordinary, virtuous lives.

Athanasius' *Life of Antony* presents the extraordinary life of Antony of the Desert, the exemplar of the ascetic lifestyle. Athanasius is clear about his intentions for he introduces his work by saying, "I know that even in hearing, along with marveling at the man, you will want also to emulate his purpose, for Antony's way of life provides monks with a sufficient picture for ascetic practice."¹³¹ The usual landmarks that constructed the journey of a holy philosopher filled Antony's life so that Athanasius could defend his claim of emulation.

Cox suggests three foundational literary characteristics of all biographies: (1) a balance of *praxeis* and *ethos*, (2) an exaggeration of vices and virtues, and (3) a story born among controversy. Biographies made a point to demonstrate both the *praxeis*, the "chronological account of the life," and the *ethos*, the "systematic treatment of character" of the subject.¹³² Both served key purposes in the *bios*: one described a very human life,

¹³¹ *V. Ant.* Introduction.

¹³² Cox, *Biography in Late Antiquity*, 145.

while the other described a human who possessed something extraordinary. The elements of *praxeis* “demythologized” the subject, creating a person not drastically different from the audience, while *ethos* compiled a set of virtues to emulate.¹³³

From beginning to end, Athanasius presents a balance between the two practices. Antony’s life began and ended in normal human fashion: having been born and raised in typical family life,¹³⁴ he eventually fell ill and died many years later.¹³⁵ At the same time, Athanasius has many tales about Antony’s virtuous deeds. For example, Antony wins battles against the devil, defeating “foul thoughts” with prayer,¹³⁶ and discerns between good and evil spirits.¹³⁷ Athanasius illustrates that Antony not only had a humble beginning and ending but also lived a virtuous life. These demonstrate Antony’s humanity, but also demonstrate the possibility to grow virtuous from those human qualities.

The exaggeration of vices and virtues highlights historical fact taking a backseat to the character of the subject. Cox explains that the “biography does not aim to give exhaustive historical reporting. It succeeds in its portrayal of character by a careful selection of whatever actions serve best to illustrate it. This ‘*pars pro toto*’ technique was well suited to the perpetuation of political and moral ideals.”¹³⁸ This exaggeration of character over history is evident in Athanasius’ writing. In one notable scene from the

¹³³ See Cox, *Biography in Late Antiquity*, 8–9 and 58.

¹³⁴ *V. Ant.* 1–2.

¹³⁵ *V. Ant.* 91–93.

¹³⁶ *V. Ant.* 5:23.

¹³⁷ *V. Ant.* 35–37.

¹³⁸ Cox, *Biography in Late Antiquity*, 12.

Life of Antony, Athanasius presents a miracle that defies historical accuracy to demonstrate a virtuous Antony. Athanasius describes a scene where Antony shuts himself in a fortress for “nearly twenty years,” but emerges with “his body [having] maintained its former condition, neither fat from lack of exercise, nor emaciated from fasting.”¹³⁹ Because “the state of his soul was one of purity, ... he maintained utter equilibrium, like one guided by reason and steadfast in that which accords with nature.”¹⁴⁰ The historical expectations concerning Antony’s body are outweighed by his virtuous deeds of equilibrium. Another example would be the layout of the *Life of Antony* itself, for the *bios* follows a somewhat chronological order of events in Antony’s life with two exceptions. Towards the middle of the book, a twenty-seven-chapter explanation about discerning demons v. good spirits breaks the chronology while a twenty-one-chapter interlude describes Antony’s virtues.¹⁴¹ Antony’s insight and virtues were not only worthy of dedicating so much time and space to describe, but also worthy of breaking the chronological order.

The third foundational characteristic for Greek *bios* is the work being born out of controversy. Cox explains that the “biography was from its inception a genre that found its home in controversy ... [with] both apologetic and polemical aims.”¹⁴² As explored in the first chapter of this study, Athanasius was not unfamiliar with religious controversy. A staunch defender of the Council of Nicæa, Athanasius fled arrest, was exiled, and

¹³⁹ *V. Ant.* 14:11–12.

¹⁴⁰ *V. Ant.* 14:14–20.

¹⁴¹ See Table 3.1 in Harmless, *Desert Christians*, 61.

¹⁴² Cox, *Biography in Late Antiquity*, 135.

defended his faith through literature multiple times during the Arian Controversy.¹⁴³ Not only does the *Life of Antony* evidence the three basic characteristics of the *bios* form but, because the text derived from a religious controversy, it also takes on the paradigm of the holy philosopher.

Early Characteristics of the <i>Bios</i>	The Paradigm of the Holy Philosopher	Antony as a <i>Bios</i> Subject
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Balance of <i>Praxeis</i> and <i>Ethos</i> • Exaggeration of Vices and Virtues • Born out of Controversy 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Extraordinary Wisdom • Insight to Human Nature • Communication/Teaching • Ascetic Lifestyle 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Theodidaktos</i> (God-taught) • Inside Knowledge about the Soul and Body • Noted for Having Many Followers • Promotes the Ascetic Lifestyle

Described above, Cox lays out four main characteristics of holy philosophers: extraordinary wisdom, insight into human nature, a desire to communicate their wisdom, and asceticism. Athanasius places his subject among the holy philosophers by presenting Antony with all the standard characteristics in *Life of Antony*. Antony is known for his wisdom, but what makes him different from this model presented by Cox is that Antony is considered illiterate. Harmless notes that, “according to Athanasius, Antony’s wisdom stemmed from more than shrewd native intelligence. It came from mysterious

¹⁴³ See Harmless, *Desert Christians*, 58–59.

illuminations he received while in his mountain solitude. This [demonstrates an] image of Antony as the wise illiterate, the ‘God-taught’ (*theodidaktos*).¹⁴⁴ Antony is presented as someone without formal education but who possesses great intelligence as a gift from God.¹⁴⁵ However, as discussed previously, the childhood of the holy philosopher provided a glimpse at the successful adulthood. Cox states that the “idea that the greatness of the man must have been already evident in the child was a popular biographical convention.”¹⁴⁶ Although Antony’s God-taught wisdom was not present from childhood, Antony still had an upbringing that hinted at his extraordinary life. When considering this element, Antony’s childhood presented the perfect upbringing for an ascetic leader. *Life of Antony* notes that, as a child, Antony “was obedient,” “not frivolous,” focused on the value of scripture, and did not “seek the pleasures associated with food.”¹⁴⁷ As a young child, Antony was already exhibiting the gift of an ascetic.

Even though illiteracy deviated from the usual structure, Athanasius’ portrayal of Antony as God-taught illustrated his Christology, which was Athanasius’ intention in writing the *Life of Antony*. Whether fact or fiction, Athanasius needed Antony to be uneducated. An unlearned man with vast knowledge about the intricacies of the world and God not only further demonstrates the model of a *theodidaktos*, it also discredits the intense education of the philosophers. Antony routinely discredits the wisdom of philosopher by demonstrating how their logic leads them away from God, demonstrating

¹⁴⁴ Harmless, *Desert Christians*, 67.

¹⁴⁵ Cf. the portrayal of the youthful Jesus in the Temple, where everyone was “amazed at his understanding and his answers” (Luke 2:47),

¹⁴⁶ Cox, *Biography in Late Antiquity*, 22.

¹⁴⁷ *V. Ant.* 1:11–19.

Athanasius' views on Arius' logical conclusion.¹⁴⁸ Athanasius presents a long dialogue between Antony and some philosophers where he portrays Antony chastising the philosophers for dedicating their lives to the material world rather than to God.¹⁴⁹

Furthermore, Antony critiques the goal of their education:

And you by your syllogisms and sophisms do not convert people from Christianity to Hellenism, but we, by teaching faith in Christ, strip you of superstition, since all recognize that Christ is God, and Son of God. By your beautiful language you do not impede the teaching of Christ, but we, calling on the name of Christ crucified, chase away all the demons you fear as gods.¹⁵⁰

Antony argues here that explanations of the world are false if they do not lead back to Christ as God. The philosopher's words are meaningless, no matter how eloquent or beautiful they are, if they do not recognize Christ as God and as Creator. Harmless notes that Antony is accusing them for "confusing verbal dexterity with wisdom."¹⁵¹ Humans obtain wisdom through Christ taking on human nature and unlocking a new potential for human beings. It is a gift, as Harmless notes, that "humans deified by Christ come to share by grace what Christ is by nature;"¹⁵² renewal and knowledge of creation. For Athanasius (presented through the voice of Antony), true wisdom is found in the awe and power of Christ as God, not in formal education and syllogistic logic. Athanasius might

¹⁴⁸ The next chapter will discuss this topic further.

¹⁴⁹ *V. Ant.* 73–80.

¹⁵⁰ *V. Ant.* 78:10–17.

¹⁵¹ Harmless, *Desert Christians*, 67.

¹⁵² Harmless, *Desert Christians*, 91.

have portrayed Antony without any formal education or human wisdom, but this characterization was precisely what Athanasius needed to demonstrate Antony's success as a God-taught, holy philosopher.

Alongside wisdom, the holy philosopher has incredible insight into human nature and the relationship between body and soul, which makes the person sympathetic towards others. Athanasius presents Antony as knowing and actualizing the true nature of humanity, and he aims to teach this insight to all for the sake of Christ. The *Life of Antony* conveys that the balance of soul and body contains the truth of human nature. The natural state of the soul is “utter equilibrium,” which exists when a person is “guided by reason.”¹⁵³ Antony's wisdom into how the body and soul interact with each other leads him to teach how one reaches the natural state of the soul. If one focuses on the pleasures of the body, the soul suffers; to avoid this, the body must become “subservient to the soul.”¹⁵⁴

This is where the fourth characteristic — asceticism — is utilized in the *Life of Antony*. Antony's insight into human nature brings him to the conclusion that asceticism provides the path to the perfection of human nature, utter equilibrium. To be an ascetic was to be “withdrawn from the world,” which removed the ascetic from created reality.¹⁵⁵ The created world only served the body when all attention should focus on the soul. Therefore, Athanasius links asceticism and equilibrium in Antony, whose soul is “perfectly straight,” not turning in any direction away from God. Passion is what turns

¹⁵³ *V. Ant.* 14:19–20.

¹⁵⁴ *V. Ant.* 45:20.

¹⁵⁵ Harmless, *Desert Christians*, 64.

the soul.¹⁵⁶ Passions of the body upset the body-soul equilibrium, and asceticism is the path to correct this imbalance.

These two characteristics are present in Athanasius' Christology about the "unchanging Logos,"¹⁵⁷ which was examined in the first chapter of this essay. In brief, the unchanging Logos, or Christ as unchanging, is passion free, not affected by the body. The Incarnate Christ gave humanity the potential for an unchanging nature and proper asceticism allows one to reach this potential.¹⁵⁸ Not only did Antony show how Athanasius' Christology plays out in human life, he also taught it to others.

Turning to the remaining characteristic, Antony displays a desire to communicate his teachings. Athanasius portrays Antony as successful in this endeavor. Besides the many times we hear of Antony's disciples (or brothers who follow him),¹⁵⁹ the middle section of the *Vita* (chapters 15–48) consists of a long speech by Antony to his brother monks, teaching the rigors of the ascetic life. Twenty-seven of these chapters comprise a long monologue on the discernment of spirits. Antony is deemed the "father of monks," although there were earlier ascetics, because he is presented as the one who inspired many to venture into the depths of the desert.¹⁶⁰ Antony "persuaded many to take up the solitary life. And so, from then on, there were monasteries in the mountains and the desert was made a city by monks, who left their own people and registered themselves for

¹⁵⁶ *V. Ant.* 14, 20, and 45.

¹⁵⁷ Harmless, *Desert Christians*, 88.

¹⁵⁸ See Harmless, *Desert Christians*, 88–91.

¹⁵⁹ See Gregg, *Vita*, 15, 17, 51, 54, & 56.

¹⁶⁰ Harmless, *Desert Christians*, 60.

the citizenship in the heavens.”¹⁶¹ Once the desert became inhabited, Antony did not abandon his disciples. He continued to care for and instruct them “through regular conversation” where “he strengthened the resolve of those who were already monks and stirred most of the others to a desire for the discipline, and before long, by the attraction of his speech, a great many monasteries came into being, and like a father he guided them all.”¹⁶²

Athanasius presents Antony not only having the desire to communicate his way of life, but also as tremendously effective. Antony’s speeches about asceticism and the power of Christ are effective enough to draw others to the desert to follow Antony. Antony continues to communicate his values throughout his life, so much so that even Antony’s last words to his disciples was a “teaching moment” to remind them of their practices. After telling his disciples that he is dying, Antony states: “be watchful and do not destroy your lengthy discipline, ... paying heed to yourselves and remembering what you heard from my preaching.”¹⁶³ In his last words, Antony wanted his disciples to remember his teachings and to maintain the practice.

The Greek *bios*’ characteristic of communication was the foundation to all of Antony’s teaching moments in the *Life of Antony*. The holy philosopher’s desire to communicate was to build a new movement based on the philosopher’s ideologies. Therefore, each teaching moment was an opportunity to proselytize and add to the growing movement. This characteristic provided Athanasius with the opportunity to

¹⁶¹ *V. Ant.* 14:29–33.

¹⁶² *V. Ant.* 15:6–10.

¹⁶³ *V. Ant.* 91:10–17.

present Antony as a proselytizer and teacher both to draw in disciples and to build the growing ascetic movement.

CONCLUSION

The *bios* genre provided an outline for writers to promote a person to imitate while simultaneously promoting an idea or teaching as the truth for a meaningful life. The genre's loosely structured format allowed for a focus on the virtues of the subject while leaving chronology in the background. The subject presented many virtues so as to deem the person worthy of teaching and emulating, thereby promoting a specific ideology. This chapter aimed to outline the various characteristics of the *bios* genre and how they function to transmit an ideology. When the genre entered the realm of philosophy and religion, the key characteristics of the *bios* shifted from an emphasis on virtuous words and actions to a focus on wisdom and knowledge. Thus, the subject became the holy philosopher.

The Arian controversy, which dominated the period after the Council of Nicæa, caused hard times for Athanasius, but he remained steady in his beliefs and used the *bios* form to promote his stance. In the *Life of Antony*, Athanasius paints a picture of Antony the holy man, the ideal ascetic, who professes Athanasius' beliefs and Christology. We cannot know whether Antony truly held the same ideas as Athanasius. Rather, the point of this examination is to understand Athanasius' intentions during this time of religious conflict. As Cox explains, "when we imagine that it is the prism-wielding biographer who dictates the active mission of his hero, it is actually the biographer whose activity we

are emphasizing.”¹⁶⁴ It may be possible to get a glimpse of Antony himself through the *Life of Antony*, but there is also quite a bit of Athanasius present as well. Through the words of Athanasius, Antony takes on a life dedicated to emulating Christ and, after achieving total spiritual development, accepts the task of teaching others by promoting an Athanasian Christology.

With an understanding of the context and development of the Greek *bios* and having established the *Life of Antony* within the genre, this study will conclude with an in-depth exploration of the text itself to examine specific rhetorical motifs Athanasius used to promote his Christology through the *Life of Antony*.

¹⁶⁴ Cox, *Biography in Late Antiquity*, 145.

CHAPTER 3: SOCIO-RHETORICAL ANALYSIS OF THE *LIFE OF ANTONY*

INTRODUCTION

So far, this examination has focused on the specifics of the Greek *bios* genre and the context of Athanasius' life providing the framework for discussing the text *Life of Antony*. This concluding chapter will turn inward toward the text and examine a select portion of its content. To do so, this chapter will explore various attributes of an interpretive method called socio-rhetorical interpretation, or SRI. As defined by Roy Jeal, SRI is "a range of heuristic analytics that analyzes and interprets texts using features of rhetorical, social, and cognitive reasoning to help commentators learn how the texts under examination function to influence thinking and behavior."¹⁶⁵ It is a form of interpretation that not only considers the text itself but also the wider context that produced and distributed the text. Demonstrated in its name, "socio-rhetorical criticism integrates the ways people use language with the ways they live in the world."¹⁶⁶ The previous chapters explored the world surrounding the text (its social features), while this chapter will explore its rhetorical features.

When looking at the rhetorical features, SRI recognizes that texts contain multiple layers. Vernon Robbins describes the text as "an intricately woven tapestry ... [that] contains complex patterns and images. Looked at only one way, a text exhibits a very

¹⁶⁵ Roy R. Jeal, *Exploring Philemon: Freedom, Brotherhood, and Partnership in the New Society*, Rhetoric of Religious Antiquity 2 (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2015), xxvii.

¹⁶⁶ Vernon K. Robbins, *Exploring the Texture of Texts: A Guide to Socio-Rhetorical Interpretation* (New York: Bloomsbury, 1996), 1.

limited range of its texture.”¹⁶⁷ SRI provides the means to examine these various textures and how they come together to convey meaning and information. SRI separates these textures into different categories depending on how they function: inner texture for features within the text, intertexture for features outside of the text, and social and cultural texture for features that “exhibit resources for changing people or social practices.”¹⁶⁸ The purpose of this chapter is present the groundwork for completing a full SRI analysis. It will demonstrate what textures are present in the text and how SRI would begin to handle those textures to build a cohesive rhetorical theme. Therefore, this chapter will be broken up into sections as such as detailing where the selected pericope exists within the text, proposing and define what textures are present, and then explaining their significance in relation to this overall study of Athanasius’ Christology presented through the *bios* genre.

¹⁶⁷ Robbins, *Exploring the Texture*, 2.

¹⁶⁸ See Robbins, *Exploring the Texture*, 3–4; also Jeal, *Exploring Philemon*, 12–13.

<p>Ἐπειτα τί βέλτιόν ἐστι, λέγειν, ὅτι ὁ τοῦ Θεοῦ Λόγος οὐκ ἐτράπη [ἐπλανήθη]· ἀλλ' ὁ αὐτὸς ὢν, ἐπὶ σωτηρίᾳ καὶ εὐεργεσίᾳ τῶν ἀνθρώπων ἀνείληφε σῶμα ἀνθρώπινον, ἵνα, τῇ ἀνθρωπίνῃ γενέσῃ κοινωνήσας, ποιήσῃ τοὺς ἀνθρώπους κοινωνῆσαι θείας καὶ νοερᾶς φύσεως· ἢ ἐν ἀλόγοις ἐξομοιοῦν τὸ Θεῖον, καὶ διὰ τοῦτο σέβειν τετράποδα, καὶ ἔρπετά, καὶ ἀνθρώπων εἰκόνας; Ταῦτα γὰρ ὑμῶν ἐστι τῶν σοφῶν τὰ σεβάσματα.</p>	<p>Again, which is preferable, to say that the Word of God was not changed, but remaining the same he assumed a human body for the salvation and benefit of humankind — so that sharing in the human birth he might enable humankind to share the divine and intellectual nature — or to make the divine very much like the irrational beings, and on account of this worship four-footed creatures and creeping things and human images? For these are the objects of worship for you who are wise!¹⁶⁹</p>
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The primary pericope — Antony discusses with Greek philosophers at the outer mountain

to describing him has “also extremely wise.”¹⁷⁰ This grouping continues to demonstrate Antony’s wisdom by retelling his encounters with Greek philosophers. The first set of philosophers come to “test” Antony, but he turns their efforts back at them by pointing out that their arduous travels to meet with Antony illustrate that his teachings are

¹⁶⁹ All references to the English translation of the text will be my own translation based off of Robert Gregg’s translation found in: Robert C. Gregg, *Athanasius: The Life of Antony and The Letter to Marcellinus*, The Classics of Western Spirituality (Mahwah, New Jersey: Paulist, 1980), 84; Athanasius *V. Ant.* 74:13–20.

¹⁷⁰ *V. Ant.* 72:1.

important to them.¹⁷¹ Each encounter Antony has with others in this section continues the theme of people meeting with him to reveal his ignorance only to be met with Antony subverting their arguments. What follows is another small section of unnamed “others” coming to “ridicule” him, yet Antony amazes them with his wisdom.¹⁷² This group of chapters concludes Antony’s rebuttal against Greek philosophers, which defends the Christian faith while pointing out the flaws and weaknesses in the Greeks’ beliefs. He criticizes their views of the soul and mind as one, and then he defends the adoration of the cross; goes on to explain that their gods are actually creatures, and then denounces their way of justifying faith through logic and reason.¹⁷³

However, the pericope of focus for this examination is the beginning of Antony’s rebuttal against them, which follows the defending-Christ-and-critiquing-Pagans format. Specifically, Antony is arguing against the Greeks’ claim that God would have to change when becoming human. He refutes this claim by comparing the belief in a Divine Christ to the pagan worship of creatures, asking which seems more reasonable for a wise person to believe.¹⁷⁴

¹⁷¹ *V. Ant.* 72:7.

¹⁷² *V. Ant.* 73:1–3.

¹⁷³ *V. Ant.* 74:30–38; 75; 76; 77–78.

¹⁷⁴ *V. Ant.* 74:13–20.

<p>“Which is better — to confess a cross, or to attribute acts of adultery and pederasty to those whom you call gods? For that which is stated by us is a signal of courage, and evidence of disdain for death, while your doctrines have to do with incidents of lewdness” (74:8–12)</p>	<p>“Again, which is preferable, to say that the Word of God was not changed, but remaining the same he assumed a human body for the salvation and benefit of humankind — so that sharing in the human birth he might enable humankind to share the divine and intellectual nature — or to make the divine very much like the irrational beings, and on account of this worship four-footed creatures and creeping things and human images? For these are the objects of worship for you who are wise!” (74:13–20)</p>	<p>“How dare you ridicule us for saying that Christ has appeared as a human, when you, separating the soul from heaven, say that it has wandered and fallen from the vault of the heavens into a body....” (74:21–39)</p>
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Focus Pericope in Context — cohesive line of argumentation

demonstrated in blue and differing contents in green.

Part of the SRI process is to demonstrate that a focus pericope functions as a stand-alone argumentative piece. By doing so, the process will be able to function without the interruption of unrelated information. One way to demonstrate that this particular pericope is a cohesive unit is to note that the subject of the argument is different from the immediately prior and following sections. As stated previously, this

pericope concerns the Word of God, while the preceding unit discusses the cross,¹⁷⁵ and afterwards Athanasius shifts his argument to the soul and mind.¹⁷⁶ Another way we can see that this pericope stands as a cohesive unit is because it forms one complete question (“which is preferable, to say...”) and its answer. After raising the rhetorical question, Antony provides his own answer, which this chapter will explore further in the later sections. Using this cohesive unit, this examination will demonstrate the potential SRI can bring to analyzing the rhetorical force within the *Life of Antony*. Specifically, it will highlight Athanasius’ Christology of restoration.¹⁷⁷

SOCIO-RHETORICAL INTERPRETATION PROCESS

As mentioned above, the purpose of this chapter is to create the groundwork for a full SRI analysis. Therefore, the process taken here will focus on lifting out the various layers in the text and demonstrate how these layers function within the rhetorical argument. Whereas a complete SRI analysis would fully integrate the social and cultural context, as well as outside texts, this example will confine itself to highlighting where such outside sources will be useful. The focus here will rest heavily on the text itself. Among the many other textures that may be present, this examination will discuss three aspects or “textures” identified by SRI: rhetography, argumentative texture, and rhetorolects.

¹⁷⁵ *V. Ant.* 74:8–12.

¹⁷⁶ *V. Ant.* 74:21–39.

¹⁷⁷ Athanasius’ Christology of restoration will be explained further in the rhetography section. Through the incarnation, the Divine Christ unlocked the potential for humanity to be restored to its original divine image. This is referred to as *deification* in chapter one.

Rhetography

Rhetography serves as a starting point for textual analysis. What rhetography aims to do is “[indicate] the interrelationship and function of the visual and the persuasive features of texts.”¹⁷⁸ It looks for elements within the text that appeal to the senses in a variety of ways. This includes words that elicit images in the mind of the reader or words that draw the ear of the reader when read aloud. What rhetography does is demonstrate how “words are able to portray the inanimate in an animated way,” to such an extent that “things are *seen* in the imagination to be energized, working, functioning, active.”¹⁷⁹ Anyone who has been immersed in a world-building fantasy novel knows that words can easily create images, sounds, and emotions. The human imagination is able to capture these visuals and construct a particular point of view. As Jeal explains, “rhetoric, words, and literature elicit visual images in the mind that are linked, indeed necessary, to understanding (belief) and action (behavior).”¹⁸⁰ Rhetography aims to pull out these visuals elicited by the text and discuss what the author is attempting to portray by using them in sensory-aesthetic texture. Jeal explains that this texture “is revealed in the features that indicate, reflect, or evoke things discerned through visual, oral, aural, olfactory, tactile ... sensibilities.”¹⁸¹ Rhetography is the process of identifying the images, while analysis of sensory-aesthetic texture explores the use of the image within

¹⁷⁸ Jeal, *Exploring Philemon*, 9.

¹⁷⁹ Jeal, *Exploring Philemon*, 10.

¹⁸⁰ Jeal, *Exploring Philemon*, 10.

¹⁸¹ Jeal, *Exploring Philemon*, 13.

What Athanasius describes here is the renewal of a damaged image by both the creator and the subject. Both parties come together again to bring the image back to its glory. This process is not an easy task. Working little by little, the creator and the subject sit together through hours of detailed work to strip and add to the piece revealing the original image. Considering his Christology, Athanasius is demonstrating here that the divine image of humanity is so concealed by sin and corruption that it takes work from both parties, the creator and the subject, to uncover it again. The section on rhetorolects will examine the role humans play in the restoration. Within this context, Antony is presenting this concept to stress the unchanging *logos*. As Athanasius describes in *On the Incarnation*, the human Jesus could not have changed natures because only the divine could come to restore the divine image within humans. It was with divine nature (the *logos*) that humanity was created, therefore, it is this nature that returns to restore it so that it may experience salvation.

This same concept of restoration is present in another image from this pericope. Shortly after his discussion of Christ's assumption of the human body, Athanasius specifies that Christ partook in a human birth. Birth [γίνομαι] presents a strong image in this passage. Unlike the imagery of a painted panel, "birth" does not elicit beautiful imagery. Birth is painful, messy, and sanguinary, but it also the act of bringing new life. The Greek word used here for birth, γενέσει, is a conjugated form of the Greek word for creation or origin, γένεσις.¹⁸⁵ Just as birth overlays pain and blood with creation, so does

¹⁸⁵ Liddell and Scott, "γένεσις," in *An Intermediate Greek-English Lexicon*.
<http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus:text:1999.04.0058:entry=ge/nesis&highlight=creation> on April 19, 2019; converted to digital text with support from the Annenberg CPB/Project.

the crucifixion. In the scene from John 19, Jesus is pierced with a spear and blood and water come flowing from his side (v. 34). As Jesus dies on the cross, both the blood of death and the water of life flow from him. Jesus' death represents the rebirth of humanity in the resurrection. Athanasius discusses this concept in *On the Incarnation*: "The supreme object of His coming was to bring about that resurrection of the body. This was to be the monument to His victory over death, the assurance to all that He had Himself conquered corruption and that their own bodies also would eventually be incorrupt."¹⁸⁶ Jesus died and was raised that humanity may share in his resurrection; this re-birth will transform the human body and raise it to new life. As he says in *On the Incarnation*, within this section of the *Vita* Athanasius specifies that Jesus experienced these painful, bloody human experiences (birth and death) so that humanity could share in the divine nature; be re-birthed into an uncorrupt nature. The imagery of this passage elicits Christ's birth and crucifixion to emphasize that Christ shared in human experience, which opened the possibility for humanity to be restored to the divine image.

Athanasius is clever with his words, continuing this theme of Christ's renewal of humanity through repetition of the word human. Just in this short passage, forms of the Greek word ἄνθρωπος appear five times (ἁνθρώπων, ἁνθρώπινον, ἁνθρωπίνῃ, ἁνθρώπους, ἁνθρώπων). Not only does repetition cause an auditory sensation for the audience (confronted with the concept of humanity), the repetition also presents a form of progressive texture. Robbins notes that "progressive texture resides in sequences (progressions) or words and phrases throughout the unit" and "emerges out of

¹⁸⁶ *On the Incarnation* 52; Athanasius *De Incarnatione Verbi Dei* 22:23–27.

repetition.”¹⁸⁷ How the author handles a repetitive word demonstrates the progression of the argument. So, as the audience is hearing the text read aloud, they would hear the repetitive words building to the main argumentative point. In this context, ἄνθρωπος links together with κοινωνέω, which translates as “to do or have in common, to take part in or share.”¹⁸⁸

Which is preferable	
to say ...	
	assumed a human
	body ... benefit of
	humankind ...
	so that ...
	sharing in the human birth
	he might enable humankind
	to share the divine ...
or to ...	
	make the divine
	very much like ...
	human images

Repetitive nature of ἄνθρωπος and κοινωνέω following the argumentative structure.

¹⁸⁷ Robbins, *Exploring the Texture*, 9–10.

¹⁸⁸ Liddell and Scott, “κοινωνέω,” in *An Intermediate Greek-English Lexicon*.
http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus%3Atext%3A1999.04.0058%3Aalphabetic+letter%3D*k%3Aentry+group%3D42%3Aentry%3Dkoinwne%2Fw on April 19, 2019; converted to digital text with support from the Annenberg CPB/Project.

By dividing the passage according to its argumentative structure, we can see that the word ἄνθρωπος occurs more frequently in the beginning half of the argument with only one occurrence in the later half. The first half of the argument attributes ἄνθρωπος to the body and humankind, whereas the one occurrence in the later half attributes ἄνθρωπος to “images.” Athanasius is trying to demonstrate that this “preferable” argument concerns the whole of humanity, whereas the “not preferable” argument concerns images and idolatry. Furthermore, this divine concern for humanity is beneficial for humans, for it enables the restoration of humanity.

The interplay of κοινωνέω and ἄνθρωπος presents its own form of progressive texture. It presents the divine (Word of God) sharing (κοινωνέω) in humanity (ἄνθρωπος), so that humanity (ἄνθρωπος) may share (κοινωνέω) in the divine. The word order is important here because it demonstrates the progression of Athanasius’ Christology. He presents an A=B, therefore B=A argument: Divinity shares humanity, so humanity shares divinity. For humanity to be restored to its original nature, Christ had to be divine. This line of argumentation becomes invalid when the divine becomes a creature. In the second half of the argument, Athanasius does even use the term “share,” but instead says “make.” For Athanasius, the divine would not become a creature, for there is no benefit to do so. A full SRI analysis would further develop this form of argumentation, but for now it will suffice to highlight Athanasius’ use of repetition and progressive word order to present his main argument.

Again, which is preferable, to say ...	<u>First Choice:</u> that the Word of God was not changed, but remaining the same he assumed a human body for the salvation and benefit of humankind –so that sharing in the human birth he might enable humankind to share the divine and intellectual nature –
or	<u>Second Choice:</u> to make the divine very much like the irrational beings, and on account of this worship four-footed creatures and creeping things and human images ? Logical Conclusion of Second Choice: For these are the objects of worship for you who are wise!

*Elements of rhetography presented in argumentative structure.
 Positive images in green and negative images in red.*

Argumentative Texture

Before now, this study has hinted at another texture present in this text.

Argumentative texture highlights precisely how the author aims to persuade the audience through the various steps in the argumentation. As Robbins describes, it is to “investigate multiple kinds of inner reasoning in the discourse,” which “presents assertions and supports them with reasons, clarifies them through opposites and contraries, and possibly presents short or elaborate counter arguments.”¹⁸⁹ This study has hinted at this texture every time it mentioned the argumentative structure of “which is preferable, to say ... or ..., for these are....” Athanasius structures his argument by posing a question of two

¹⁸⁹ Robbins, *Exploring the Texture*, 21.

choices where he places the preferable (or obvious) choice first and follows it with an objectionable one. So far, the study has focused primarily on the first half of the question. Athanasius uses divine and human imagery to build a nuanced argument for the preferable choice. The images are key for demonstrating Athanasius' Christology. However, the second half of the argument also uses imagery, but the images shift to images of animals and idols. These images demonstrate Athanasius' claim against the Arian argument.

Following the “or” phrase in the passage, Athanasius present four images: “four-footed creatures” [τετράποδα], “creeping things” [έρπετὰ], “human images” [ἀνθρώπων εἰκόνας], and “objects of worship” [τὰ σεβάσματα]. Compared to the human and divine imagery in the first half of the argument, these latter images represent non-human creatures and created idols. Both the four-footed creatures and the creeping things may represent Egyptian gods, which Athanasius and his readers would recognize from statuary and images they would have seen in public and cultic spaces.¹⁹⁰ The mention of human images and objects of worship represent idols, which the Bible forbids Christians to worship.¹⁹¹ Therefore, with his argumentative structure, Athanasius is presenting a choice between the worship of the divine being (Christ) or worship of forbidden idols. Harmless notes that this was a common argument of Athanasius, specifically in *Life of Antony*. He states that “Antony even repeats one of Athanasius's favorite arguments that if the Son were a creature, as the Arians said, then Christian worship of the Son would be

¹⁹⁰ For instance, Sakhmet the lioness-goddess and Sobek the crocodile-god both worshiped by the Egyptians. See, George Hart, “Sakhmet,” in *Routledge Dictionary of Egyptian Gods and Goddesses*, 2d ed. (New York: Routledge, 2005), 138–39; see also Hart, “Sobek,” 148.

¹⁹¹ See, e.g., Mark 12:13–17; Acts 14:15; 1 Cor. 12:2; 2 Cor. 6:16; 1 Thess. 1:9.

the worship of a creature — in other words, it would be doing exactly what pagans do: worship creatures.”¹⁹² The argumentative structure demonstrates that, if readers were to take the second choice, then they would be proclaiming pagan and not Christian belief. For Athanasius, there was no in-between. One either worshiped the Divine Christ or it was pagan worship. Interestingly, Athanasius follows the question with an answer: a mocking statement about how the second choice is illogical. The Greek philosophers consider themselves wise, yet they worship creatures and idols. This statement will be examined in the next section regarding rhetorolects.

Rhetorolects

SRI’s recognition that communities shape language to produce understanding and action led to its recognition of “emergent discourse.” Jeal defines emergent discourse as discourse that “became identifiable by its distinctive rhetorical dialects or modes of speaking.”¹⁹³ These identifiable groups of dialects are what SRI calls rhetorolects. They are defined “on the basis of distinctive configuration of themes, topics, reasonings, and argumentations.”¹⁹⁴ This specific passage highlights the wisdom rhetorolect. This rhetorolect has its own themes that aim for a specific goal. Robbins explains that “the goal of wisdom rhetorolects is to create people who produce good and righteous action, thought, will, and speech with the aid of God’s wisdom.”¹⁹⁵ Therefore, the wisdom

¹⁹² Harmless, *Desert Christians*, 95–96.

¹⁹³ Jeal, *Exploring Philemon*, 5.

¹⁹⁴ Vernon Robbins, “Socio-rhetorical Interpretation,” in *The Blackwell Companion to the New Testament*, ed. David E. Aune (Oxford: Blackwell, 2010), 192–219; quoted in Jeal, *Exploring Philemon*, 5.

¹⁹⁵ Vernon Robbins, *The Invention of Christian Discourse*, vol. 1, Rhetoric of Religious Antiquity Series (Dorset, UK: Deo, 2009), 121.

rhetorolect looks at how the author used these “distinctive configurations” to form a new way of teaching early Christian believers to live a righteous life.

This passage may exhibit many different themes or topics that present wisdom rhetorolects; for purposes of illustration of how SRI works, this study will focus on the one wisdom rhetorolect concerning the irrational versus the wise. Throughout this dialogue, we see a distinction between those who are wise and those who are irrational. Before this passage, the author refers to Antony as wise, whereas the Greek philosophers, who "are considered wise," are now considered ignorant by Antony.¹⁹⁶ Athanasius sets up the dichotomy of ignorant and wise by presenting the actors in the dialogue as one or the other. Antony, being wise, now has the upper hand over the Greek philosophers, furthering validating what he is about to say. One key phrase in this passage is the line that states: “so that sharing in the human birth he might enable [humankind] to share the divine and [intellectual] nature.” As previously discussed, Christ’s sharing in a human birth initiated a restoration of human nature towards the divine, but this line also demonstrates that restoration also occurs for the “intellectual nature” (νοερᾶς φύσεως). This study has already examined how Athanasius explains Christ’s part in the restoration through rhetography. As the wisdom rhetorolect aims to show, Athanasius also calls for action on the part of humans towards restoration. Returning to the image of restoring the painted panel detail-by-detail, Athanasius claims restoration comes from the time-consuming, patient, and hard work of asceticism. Asceticism not an easy lifestyle; it required rigorous work. Much of the work put the human body to the test with limited

¹⁹⁶ *V. Ant.* 72:1; 74:1–7.

eating and sleeping, constant prayer, and manual labor.¹⁹⁷ All of this discipline was designed to reorient humanity towards salvation through conforming the person to Christ and uncovering the passionless, obedient divine image. As Harmless describes, Athanasius presented Antony as a clear example of this salvific process. Discussing Antony's equilibrium and "calm" nature, like Christ, "Antony's steadfast calm of soul was 'natural.' It was human nature as it was made to be."¹⁹⁸ Christ came to allow the subject (the human person) to partake in the process of restoring the divine image, which required difficult and painstaking work.¹⁹⁹

To choose Antony's first option in his question is to acknowledge restoration through asceticism. Otherwise, contrary to original human nature, humans remain ignorant and "irrational beings" who pretend to be wise.²⁰⁰ That is what Antony is demonstrating in the second half of his argument. Those who act according to the second choice are not acting as Christians should. Harmless notes that Athanasius purposefully uses ἀλόγος (irrational) to show that Arians were not acting as Christians. He states that "Antony invokes one of Athanasius's favorite puns: that the Arians are [ἄλογοι] ("mindless") because they reject that Christ the Logos ("Word") is truly God."²⁰¹ The last line in this passage further demonstrates Antony's mockery of their ἀλόγος behavior by pointing out that they call themselves wise.²⁰² They claim they are wise, but they have yet

¹⁹⁷ Harmless, *Desert Christians*, 61–62.

¹⁹⁸ Harmless, *Desert Christians*, 92.

¹⁹⁹ This is Athanasius' theology of deification, which the first chapter explores further.

²⁰⁰ *V. Ant.* 74:18.

²⁰¹ Harmless, *Desert Christians*, 96.

²⁰² See *V. Ant.* 74:2.

to realize that their behavior is contrary to the reason of God (the Λόγος). Therefore, returning to the goal of wisdom rhetorically, the passage calls Christians not to act like Arians, but to work like the ascetics instead.

CONCLUSION

Socio-rhetorical interpretation is a unique method of analyzing texts that recognizes that pieces of literature comprise complex teaching tools. SRI aims to demonstrate that each text is born out of a specific milieu and written to produce specific beliefs, behaviors, and actions. It demonstrates this by employing many tools to tease apart the various layers that build upon each other to comprise the whole text. This study highlighted only a few of the layers (or textures) to introduce what the method can illuminate from a passage of the Life of Antony. A full and complete SRI analysis would require a much larger project than this essay can provide. This chapter introduced some of the textures that SRI would uncover in a text and highlighted parts of the passage that would be significant to those textures. A full SRI analysis would consider other texts that use similar language, images, argumentative strategies, and so on. It would also further draw on studies such as the previous chapters presented here to demonstrate the influence of the social and cultural environment. It would consider what the audience is bringing to the text and how that effects interpretation, future directions for the rhetorical themes (the “emergent discourse”), and several other related issues. This study provides a sample of how SRI can uncover the rhetorical force of texts, demonstrating how Athanasius aimed to persuade the reader to adopt his Christology, which is presented through the words of Antony. The rhetography demonstrated how the imagery sets up a theme of human restoration through Christ within the dialogue. The argumentative texture then showed

how the layout of the argument effectively used the imagery to drive home the importance of divine worship for that human restoration. Finally, the wisdom rhetorolect presented how the text persuades the audience to live a Christian life by contrasting irrational versus wise beings. Highlighting the potential of a socio-rhetorical interpretive approach to this text not only demonstrates the utility of this interpretive strategy for non-biblical texts, but also to lay the groundwork for further SRI studies on Athanasius' Life of Antony

CONCLUSION

Though Athanasius remained a prolific writer during his times in exile, most of his writings were letters, theologically and philosophically heavy writings directly rebuking groups and individuals. *Life of Antony* deviated from this kind of writing because Athanasius there took up a narrative form. However, this did not mean that the *Life* lacked the same force of rebuking the Arians and promoting Athanasius' Christology. Athanasius changed the genre of his writing to widen his audience.

As chapter two of this study demonstrated, the *bios* genre was a form of entertainment. The grandiose tales of the nonfictional subjects made for a fun read, attracting the attention of a wider audience so that the author may impart to many the ideas embedded in the tale. Because of Athanasius' situation (hiding in exile), using the *bios* genre would have been an efficient way of making his voice heard. Athanasius certainly drew on the rhetorical power of the *bios* by portraying Antony as the holy philosopher and following the paradigm of blending history and fiction. This way Athanasius was able to present a virtuous life, conformed to the Divine Christ, which the audience could mimic. This thesis aimed to demonstrate how Athanasius used this genre to embed his Christology in a popular narrative form.

The first chapter introduced Athanasius' own life and the circumstances out of which his Christology was born. It then detailed his Christology, including a comparison to that of Arius, demonstrating how the debate affected Athanasius' communication of his beliefs. When Athanasius presents his Christology, he does so by comparing it to Arius' and demonstrating his as correct and beneficial. The second chapter then examined the development of the *bios* genre and how it provided a structure to transmit

ideas meant to provoke action. It then presented how *Life of Antony* followed this structure to transmit Athanasius' Christology. Antony took on the role as the holy philosopher to portray a virtuous Christian life according to the Divine Christ. The third and final chapter explored some of the ways Athanasius' Christology was woven into the text with the aim of provoking action and belief. To do so, this thesis turned to a method of interpretation that considers different ways an author may weave various forms of rhetoric: socio-rhetorical interpretation. While this study does not complete a full SRI analysis, it introduces the process to the text so that a full consideration may take place in the future. For now, it highlights key aspects of the *Life of Antony* that would be important for completion of the process.

This thesis aimed to demonstrate the complexity of literature. Early Christians relied on this complexity to transmit beliefs throughout their communities. Athanasius saw the advantage of the *bios* genre and its ability to transmit beliefs in a relevant and entertaining way. Thus, *Life of Antony* became a Christological work with Antony as the virtuous Christian demonstrating a restored humanity possible only through the Divine Christ. Athanasius' admiration of the monastic movement is evident as he describes Antony's life and teachings. Through the use of literature, Athanasius rebutted the Arians by presenting his Christology of restoration through ascetic practice.

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