

**TRIPARTITE ANTHROPOLOGY IN PATRISTIC WRITINGS:
A MODERN REFLECTION**

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Introduction

Because a human being is constituted of three elements, spirit, soul, and body, which at times are said to be two, since the soul is often included under spirit (for the reasonable part of that same entity, which animals lack, is called spirit), our principal element is the spirit. Next, the life by which we are joined to the body is called the soul. Finally, the body itself, because of its visible nature, comprises our third element.¹

When we discuss our human nature and when we wish to express something of our interiority (something ‘inside of us’), we often talk about our soul or spirit. When we want to point to something primordial, basic, foundational, the most precious in us, we say either ‘soul’ or ‘spirit’. Even more, when we point to an everlasting part in us, something immortal, perhaps even divine, we interchangeably and arbitrarily use these two terms. But what is the human being composed of? Are soul and spirit synonymous? Can they be used interchangeably or do they have their own specific characteristics and functions within the construct of a person?

Saint Augustine’s passage alone (above) illustrates the unclarity often governing the soul-spirit debate. The Doctor of the Church starts by positing that the human being is made of three essential elements, but quickly after, includes soul under spirit, as spirit representing the apex of soul’s capabilities. This apex is often conflated with rational capabilities (*mens*) of the soul. This would lead us to conclude that Saint Augustine was not really a proponent of Tripartite Theology and yet he clearly starts by admitting that the human being is made of three essential elements. Why not simply exclude one of the elements and appeal to a dichotomist’s view of a person and avoid all confusion?

¹ Augustine, "On Faith and Creed," in *The Works of Saint Augustine*, (4th Release) ed. Ray Kearney and Edmund Hill, InteleX Past Masters Full Text Humanities, Volume 1/8 (2014), accessed April 10, 2025, https://library-nlx-com.proxy.bib.uottawa.ca/xtf/view?docId=augustine_iv/augustine_iv.03.xml;chunk.id=div.aug.christianbelief.27;toc.depth=1;toc.id=div.aug.christianbelief.27;brand=default, 173.

As found in numerous Christian anthropologists, the tripartite view of a person will be hard to bypass, just as many Church Fathers found the subject pertinent and hard to ignore. This is primarily due to Saint Paul. Almost all discussions pertaining to the triune view of a person lead back to Paul's letters. The most poignant among those is the famous passage found in 1 Thessalonians 5:23: "Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you completely; and may your whole spirit, soul, and body be preserved blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ." In short, the Apostle to the gentiles is in many ways the father of tripartite anthropology. This thesis will show his writing as the source of inspiration for select Church Fathers. At the same time, this thesis will briefly acknowledge the opposing view which proclaims that the tripartite anthropology is influenced by Greek philosophers, namely Plato and Aristotle. This thesis will also explore the ongoing validity of tripartite anthropology. In other words, does it maintain its validity in the contemporary world?

Statement of the Problem

When we read Scripture or the Church Fathers or any theological text dealing with Christian anthropology, we are often left wondering if the writer treats soul and spirit synonymously. In everyday vernacular, we do not generally make a difference between these two dimensions of a human being. We simply want to reveal something that is within us, hidden in the depths of our person. Nevertheless, what if spirit and soul do not mean the same thing? How differently would we understand our nature, if it turns out that there are indeed three specific aspects to us and that each one of them plays a definite role in our life? More importantly even, what if our spirituality, communion, deification depend on the proper understanding of these

parts? Have we been confusing spirit for the soul and vice versa? If indeed we have, what are the ramifications of that confusion? The proponents of Tripartite Theology claim that the human being is specifically made of three elements: spirit, soul, and body. Some of the Church Fathers, perhaps not explicitly, have shown a human being as composed of these three parts. This thesis will concentrate on the texts that deal in the most direct and the most explicit manner with the theme of a triune person. These texts are: *On the resurrection* by Justin Martyr, *Address to the Greeks* by Tatian, *Adversus Haereses* by Irenaeus, *De Principiis* by Origen and *On Christian Faith* by Augustine of Hippo.

Still, did the Fathers do so for personal reasons (style, impulse) or is there a significant or fundamental difference between soul and spirit? On the other hand, dichotomists see a human being made of only two parts, where the spirit is often seen as superfluous, or as a higher function of the soul.

In theology, there is a noticeable gap in our knowledge of the human being as it pertains to theological anthropology. There is not enough literature dealing deliberately and precisely with the composite nature of the human person. This thesis will try to close this gap with designs that deal discernably and explicitly with each of the three parts of the human being. Furthermore, we need to approximate the role of each element as they relate to each other, to the world, and to God. In contemporary views there is no noticeable distinction between spirit and soul, or how they relate to each other. We need to have some level of objective knowledge that directly deals with the three parts of the human nature. What exactly is our constitutive nature? The answer to this should not be a matter of personal choice or whim. Not knowing if the soul and spirit are the same, or if one is more important than the other is problematic and concerning. If we do not

know how many parts are included in our composition and what each of them does, we are certainly going to run into definite issues. Simply said, having only a hint or a general idea of the exact number of fundamental parts and their roles is just not good enough. This problem, if not considered seriously, can have various negative effects. We must seriously consider the works of the Church Fathers listed above who adhered to the triune vision of a human being.

This thesis will elaborate on the relationship between the three basic elements and their shared significance on our spiritual life. We hope to gain a deeper sense of our Christian life and to gain a deeper dimension of our spirituality. It is suspected that the strongest aspect of their collective view will be found in the element that is often neglected: the spirit.

It should be mentioned that it is really the spirit that sets the Tripartite Theology apart from any other theological model of the human being. We should not miss the opportunity to seriously investigate the possibility of an aspect of our nature (namely, spirit). We must try to exhaust the literature on this particular subject. By using the Church Fathers' views on this forgotten element (spirit), it will give us the credibility needed to try and build a complete theological model of a human being. Simply put, if we do not know ourselves, if we neglect the Tripartite Theology of the Church Fathers, if we keep confusing one fundamental part with another, then what can we really say about sin, resurrection or salvation? Does sin apply to the soul or spirit? The divinity of the human spirit is another salient question that necessitates further research. The doctrine of soteriology, for example, deals with the salvation of the human person. What exactly happens in that process within the person? What happens in resurrection? What happens to the spirit at death? Some of the Church Fathers have answered these questions individually, but this thesis hopes to extrapolate a shared view from their collective work. Even more importantly, the deification of a person might no longer seem so uncertain once we

consider the tripartite union of the person as a fundamental one. As much as possible, we must further our knowledge of the human being within the model of Tripartite Theology. The Church Fathers were rarely dealing directly or intentionally with the subject of anthropology, but their literature does leave enough critical material for us to synthesize their views and get a closer view of a human person. If we do not, there is just too much at stake.

Status quaestionis

All patristic texts will be sourced from the collections entitled *Ante-Nicene Fathers* and *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*. These works will serve as the primary source for this thesis. The *Ante-Nicene Fathers* (*ANF*) collection was compiled by Reverend Alexander Roberts, James Donaldson and Arthur Cleveland Coxe. Philip Schaff and Henry Wace edited the *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers* collection. These compiled works can also be accessed online in the Christian Classics Ethereal Library. The *Ante-Nicene Fathers* collection contains ten volumes and includes patristic writings before 325 A.D. Seven volumes by Saint Augustine and six by Saint Chrysostom are found in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers* Series 1. The second series of the *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers* collection contains another fourteen volumes of patristic works. The texts found in *Ante-Nicene Fathers* and *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers* will further be supported by secondary sources.

The current state of knowledge on the topic of tripartite anthropology is still murky and oftentimes considered unworthy of investigation. Researchers in the field are often dissuaded from the topic. For that reason, the model of a triune person (or Tripartite Theology) is frequently developed by other branches of academia. There are a few reasons for this. Predominately, it is

believed that the tripartite view of a person is simply an unwanted surplus of Greek philosophy. It is often believed that the trilemma is unfounded as it simply echoes Plato's trichotomy. It is also believed that Saint Paul, when talking about the three constitutive elements is simply using a literary tool. In other words, Paul is simply emphasising the salvation of a totality of the human being, by successively naming three, seemingly, different terms, but in reality, only naming one concept under three different names. He is not naming three parts of a person, but simply using three terms that mean the same thing in order to emphasise the totality of the person to be preserved until Christ's coming.

There is also an unwanted trace of heresy that follows the tripartite anthropology. This is primarily due to the element of the spirit. Apollinaris refuted that Christ had a human spirit and thus held a heretical view of Christology (one in which Christ is not fully human). Not to mention that the mere similarity of terms between spirit and the Holy Spirit could warrant an unease to approach the subject of Tripartite Theology.

Keeping that reserve in mind, there are nonetheless a few outstanding works of systematic theology relating to Tripartite Theology. This thesis will rely heavily on two major secondary sources in our reflection on the ongoing value of tripartite anthropology. One is *The Tripartite Nature of Man* by English (Irish-born) theologian John Bickford Heard and the other is *Théologie de l'Histoire* by French Jesuit Cardinal and theologian Henri de Lubac. These two works provide an extensive investigation of the topic and are oftentimes cited as authorities on the subject. They are deliberately dealing with the subject at hand and provide a detailed theological analysis of the tripartite anthropology. Reverend Heard, within the scope of biblical psychology, posits that the tripartite anthropology is clearly set out in the Bible. At the same time, he presents the spirit as the leading element of the triune human model to which he assigns

the role of the seat of divine consciousness. Henri de Lubac, an author from the 20th century and influenced by said time, takes upon himself the role of restoring and preserving human dignity. Within patristic theology, he finds significant reference to the human spirit, positing it as the basis for humanity's irreducibility to mere material existence.

Amongst various secondary sources, which include articles and theses, there is one particular article to which the author of this thesis will pay close attention. The work of Andrzej Persidok, Polish Catholic theologian, entitled "Body, Soul and Spirit. Henri de Lubac's Vision of Tripartite Anthropology," will provide us with a great summative view of de Lubac's tripartite theory. This article also contextualizes the need for the tripartite theory (more precisely, the role of spirit in the contemporary world). Within the contemporary authors, the thesis will also consider a few theological concepts that are not derived from the Tripartite Theology explicitly, but which can be traced back to the triune model. More precisely, Panayiotis Nellis' Christocentric nature of the human being is a concept which can safely be put into a parallel with the triune model.

As this thesis will undoubtedly find itself, from time to time, in the defence of Saint Paul's trichotomy against the accusations of it being an unoriginal borrowing from Greek philosophy, it will be wise and advantageous to consider a few proponents of such a view. More specifically, this thesis will explore the arguments found in the fifth chapter of *Paul's Anthropology in Context* by Dutch theologian, George van Kooten. Eirini Artemi is another scholar who believes, alongside van Kooten, that Saint Paul's work is not the main source of tripartite anthropology. They both deny the Apostle such credit and assign this honour to the Greek philosophers.

This thesis will also consider texts often found outside the theological corpus. Certain works and branches of psychology and spirituality consider spirit as a fundamental part of the human being. Within these texts, spirit is understood as essential and has its origin in God. The author of this thesis will rely on the systematic exposé or summary of spirituality as found in Dr. Andrzej Jastrzebski's work entitled *Homo Theomorphicus et Theophoricus: A Receptive-Responsive Theory of Spirituality*. Here is a small sample from the fourth chapter of the book: "In the anthropology of the Eastern Church Fathers, the human being is regarded, along the lines of St. Paul's teachings, as a trichotomy (trymeria) – body, soul, and spirit – in which there is both a hierarchy and an inseparable unity of elements."²

In the same vein, it would be careless not to mention other existing and well-developed triune models of a human being. As previously stated, some of the authors considered will fall outside the perimeters of theology. Yet, the sophistication of these models and their connection to the source (Paul and Church Fathers) cannot be ignored. These texts are oftentimes neglected and superficially considered. They are regularly grouped in some sort of vague and undefined spirituality. This thesis does not aim to present these views as normative or even valid, but the appropriate consideration will be given, if anything, to contrast them with the views of the Church Fathers. This will be done in order to exhaust the subject matter. As mentioned before, the literature on the subject of the tripartite model of a human being is scarce and therefore this thesis assumes the responsibility to review almost all literature related to the subject at hand. Among these various authors, we will pay close attention to Jakob Boehme, a German philosopher, Christian mystic, and Lutheran Protestant theologian. We will consider his most

² Andrzej Jastrzebski, *Homo Theomorphicus et Theophoricus: A Receptive-Responsive Theory of Spirituality*, (Peeters Publishers & Booksellers, 2019), 158.

pertinent work: *De Signatura Rerum (The Signature of All Things)*. These authors, and many others of the same discipline, will bring the tripartite theory outside the anthropological reach and will apply it to the natural world as well. In other words, for these authors, the tripartite division of things served as unified theory of everything, while never departing from the Christian center.

Hypothesis

Is there a discernible system behind the works of the Church Fathers and does their thinking provide us with a working model of a triune person? This thesis will attempt to systematize the thoughts of the selected Church Fathers, who are proponents of Tripartite Theology, in order to build a provisional theological model of a human being; thus, also providing a basis or a rationale for the foundation of the triune model.

Research Methodology

I will use the following research methodologies:

1. **Historical Context**: This thesis will examine the historical context in which each of the Church Fathers wrote. This thesis will briefly present a biography of each Father considered. This study will mostly illustrate the culture, philosophical systems and political milieu of the time. This approach will yield results dealing with the context in which the Church Fathers cultivated their views. This, in turn, will be the first part of the thesis. The author of this thesis will try to establish the framework in which the selected

Church Fathers have been living and how this framework has influenced their thoughts.

2. **Literary Analysis:** Following the establishment of the historical context, a literary analysis will subsequently be used to analyze the styles of literature and the different modes of employing the language of the time. Here, the thesis will turn to various languages (Hebrew, Greek, Latin) pertinent to the subject. This section will be the one that will introduce the selected texts of tripartite anthropology found within the written corpus of the selected Church Fathers. With this method, the author will try to uncover the meaning behind the chosen words. This, in part, will resemble exegetical work.
3. **Comparative Analysis:** Having done the previous two parts, this next method will be used to compare similarities and differences between the writings of the Fathers. This method will help to extrapolate similar patterns of thought and ways of thinking shared by the Church Fathers. The thesis will attempt to identify and classify various theories on Tripartite Theology, organizing them into a systemized view.
4. **Theological Analysis:** Finally, the author will assess the theological significance of the work shown in the previous part of the thesis. Here, the author will engage with the texts and use this method to analyze, synthesize, and systematize the thoughts of the Church Fathers. With this method, a system of thought will be presented (one that clearly conveys the Church Fathers' views of a triune person). This thesis aspires to succeed to present, by the end, a working triune model of the human person. This thesis will rely heavily on the works of Reverend John Bickford Heard and Cardinal Henri de Lubac as

they both systematize the thoughts of the Church Fathers on the topic of tripartite anthropology.

This thesis will primarily examine only the selected texts (cited above) by certain Church Fathers. It is best understood as a textual analysis. In other words, the attention will primarily be given to the texts. This is mostly because none of the Church Fathers have a systematic theory of anthropology. Thus, it would be unwise to start from the authors and their respective theories on anthropology, as they simply do not exist. This thesis will try to derive a system that will come from these scattered texts. Having said that, this thesis will not elaborate on every single Church Father who is considered a trichotomist. Rather, it is the importance, merit, and explicit exposition of the tripartite anthropology of the selected texts that this thesis will start from and concentrate on.

While the list of all trichotomic Fathers is longer, many are excluded simply because their works are not explicitly trichotomistic as the ones found in our texts. Their works do not add anything new that our selected texts will not cover. Some of the most notable exclusions are: Hippolytus, Basil, Eusebius, Didymus, Gregory of Nyssa and Gregory Nazianzen. Most of their works do indeed discern between spirit and soul but the distinction is not enough to warrant a closer examination. For example, Hippolytus does indeed make a distinction between soul and spirit in his *Commentary on Daniel*. Still, the only time he mentions the three parts (spirit, soul, body) together in a very deliberate way is when at the end of the 38th chapter of the second book he admonishes us to "...be worthy before God, being chaste in

body, soul and spirit...”³ Gregory of Nyssa is perhaps the most notable exclusion. He too, in *On the Making of Man*, distinguishes between the spirit and the soul but merely repeats and agrees with Saint Paul. One difference is that Gregory of Nyssa understands spirit as the intellect. This, in turn, is not enough as this distinction will be covered when we consider the works of Saint Augustine. Many of the other excluded works include only a couple of lines that are commentaries and passages where the same distinction is exposed but nothing further. The selected texts in question, (as mentioned previously), the ones that this thesis considers the strongest, sufficient, and most relevant are the scattered passages found in the writings of Justin Martyr, Tatian, Origen of Alexandria, Irenaeus, and Augustine.

³ Hippolytus of Rome, *Commentary on Daniel*, trans. T.C. Schmidt, accessed December 10, 2025, https://www.pergrazia.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/12/0205_hippolytus_commentary-on-daniel_2010.pdf

Chapter 1

Historical context

1.1 Justin Martyr

Saint Justin Martyr is one of the most important Christian apologists and philosophers. He was born in Flavia (present day Nablus, Palestine) around the year 100 AD and died in Rome in the year 165 AD.⁴ He was martyred during the reign of Emperor Marcus Aurelius. Saint Justin was a Roman who converted to Christianity in the year 132 AD. Prior to his conversion, he was an avid student of philosophy. He had an unquenching desire for truth. This desire, which previously made him a disciple of Socrates and Plato, had finally led him to Christianity. He considered Christianity as an ultimate philosophy. It is known that Justin, after his conversion, had kept the robe of philosophers, illustrating that Christianity was not only a philosophy, but the ultimate one. In the introductory note, found in *The Ante-Nicene Fathers* volume 1, we read the following: “What Plato was feeling after, he found in Jesus of Nazareth.”⁵ In other words, philosophers have felt the truth and have grasped some aspects of it, but essentially have fallen short of the complete truth. It becomes clear, after reading his works, that Justin, after his conversion, was still very much a philosopher. What he had learned from his previous teachers would not be discarded but only completed and elevated by the teachings, life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

⁴ Biographical material for the life of Justin Martyr will be sourced namely (unless indicated otherwise) from *The Ante-Nicene Fathers* Vol.1 and Encyclopedia Britannica.

⁵ Alexander Roberts, Sir James Donaldson, Arthur Cleveland Coxe, *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, Vol.1 (1885; repr., Cosimo Classics, New York, NY, 2007), 159.

Saint Justin's works are separated into three categories.⁶ The first category consists of the two *Apologies* and the *Dialogue with Trypho*. These are considered as genuine works of the Saint. The second category includes the works that are considered by some as original works of Justin and by others as not original. These are as follows: *An Address to the Greeks*, *A Hortatory Address to the Greeks*, *On the Sole Government of God*, *An Epistle to Diognetus*, *Fragments from a Work on the Resurrection*, and *other Fragments*. The last category includes works that are definitely not Justin Martyr's. These are: *An Exposition of the True Faith*, *Replies to the Orthodox*, *Christian Questions to Gentiles*, *Gentile Questions to Christians*, *Epistle to Zenas and Serenus*, *Refutation of Certain Doctrines of Aristotle*.⁷

The scope of this thesis is not to expand on every work of Saint Justin Martyr. His most pertinent work, as it pertains to the Tripartite Theology, will be found in his writings on the resurrection. Still, in order to fully situate Justin's work historically, it would be worthwhile to consider some of his most theological accomplishments. This, in turn, will show the socio-cultural milieu in which Justin shaped his thoughts.

Justin is an apologist. He is defending Christians and the Christian faith against accusations. In his first Apology, (chapters 5 and 6) we come across the passage in which he uses the philosophical term *Logos* (λόγος) in describing Christ. In this section Justin is defending Christians against the accusations of atheism:

For not only among the Greeks did reason (Logos) prevail to condemn these things through Socrates, but also among the Barbarians were they condemned by Reason (or the Word, the Logos) Himself, who took shape, and became man, and was called Jesus Christ; and in obedience to Him, we not only deny that they who did such things as these are gods, but

⁶ Roberts, Donaldson, Coxe, *ANF*, Vol. 1, 161.

⁷ The subject of the authenticity of Justin's works - more notably the work on resurrection - will be elaborated on later in the thesis.

assert that they are wicked and impious demons, whose actions will not bear comparison with those even of men desirous of virtue.⁸

In this entire section, Justin is arguing that Christians are indeed guilty of being charged with atheism, but only in the sense that they do not believe in the demons who are masquerading as gods. “Hence are we called atheists. And we confess that we are atheists, so far as gods of this sort are concerned, but not with respect to the most true God, the Father of righteousness and temperance and the other virtues, who is free from all impurity.”⁹ It is worth noticing that the notion of virtue is also important to Justin. This evidently can be sourced back to Socrates, Plato, and especially Stoicism.

As a student of Socratic and Platonic texts, it is not surprising that Justin uses philosophical methods in his work. This is mostly evident in *Dialogue with Trypho*. In the dialogue, we are presented with a conversation between Justin and Trypho that is strongly reminiscent of the Socratic method. When prompted by Trypho to disclose his views on philosophy and his conversion, Justin explains how his very journey through various philosophical systems has led him to his conversion. Firstly, he had been taught by a Stoic, secondly by a Peripatetic, after that, by a Pythagorean, and finally by a Platonist. He concludes the chapter by admitting that the Platonist had provided him with great knowledge and wisdom. Yet this wisdom would not permit him to be any closer to seeing God. “...and I progressed, and made the greatest improvements daily. And the perception of immaterial things quite overpowered me, and the contemplation of ideas furnished my mind with wings, so that in a little

⁸ Justin Martyr, *The First Apology*, found in *ANF*, Vol. 1, 182.

⁹ Justin Martyr, *The First Apology*, *ANF*, Vol. 1, 164.

while I supposed that I had become wise; and such was my stupidity, I expected forthwith to look upon God, for this is the end of Plato's philosophy."¹⁰

Justin's journey to God is illustrated by a progressive climb through various schools of thought. While his journey ends with his own conversion, he nonetheless considers philosophy as "...the greatest possession and most honorable before God to whom it leads us."¹¹ The true philosophy, in the case of Justin Martyr, is Christianity. "But straightway a flame was kindled in my soul; and a love of the prophets, and of those men who are friends of Christ, possessed me; and whilst revolving his words in my mind, I found this philosophy alone to be safe and profitable. Thus, and for this reason, I am a philosopher."¹²

With the general introduction to Justin's life, work, and thought exposed, this thesis now turns towards Justin's work on anthropology. The main text that deals with the theme at hand, is the *Fragments from a Work on the Resurrection*. These fragments fall under the second category (explained above). In other words, the authorship of the fragments is disputed. The editors of *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, in the *nota bene*, at the end of the *Fragments from a Work on the Resurrection*, affirm that the fragments are probably genuine. The argument on the authorship of the texts is mainly due to the different tone and style of the text. Professor Erwin Ramsdell Goodenough, an American scholar, is one of the many who doubts that Justin wrote the text on the Resurrection for those very reasons: "But the stylistic impediments to accepting the Fragment seem insurmountable. Justin's expository method as shown in the Apologies and Dialogue is anything but ordered and compact. But the author of the fragment on the Resurrection proceeds from premise to conclusion in so neat a consecutiveness that it is hard to conceive how Justin

¹⁰ Justin Martyr, *Dialogue with Trypho*, ANF, Vol. 1, 195.

¹¹ Justin Martyr, *Dialogue with Trypho*, ANF, Vol. 1, 195.

¹² Justin Martyr, *Dialogue with Trypho*, ANF, Vol. 1, 198.

could have produced it.”¹³ There is no doubt that the *Fragments* differ in tone and style from *Apologies* and *Dialogue*. It is a systematic and argument-based style and indeed lacks personal and dialogical aspects that we associate with Justin. Professor Goodenough’s observation is not to be taken lightly. Still, there is something to be said about the thematic nature of resurrection, and in the case of this thesis, the theme of anthropology. The discussion on resurrection and anthropology, (often discussed together) perhaps does require a different tone and style. The fact that the *Fragments* differ stylistically does not preclude them from being the authentic works of the Church Father. The dry, impersonal and systematic approach found in the *Fragments* from the *Work on the Resurrection*, is possibly due to the inductive form of arguing that the Saint is using. Some of the Fathers included in this thesis will have the exact same systematic tone when it comes to the subject of anthropology and resurrection of the flesh. In short, they are inducing from a specific set of observations (what they know of Christ’s resurrection and the letters of Paul and perhaps Genesis) to general conclusions and consensus. In other words, Justin is precluded on writing on the theme of human resurrection in a personal tone, simply because it has not happened yet. He is not recounting his conversion, nor is he defending Christians against accusations of heresy. Properly speaking, Justin is theologizing. The systematic nature of Justin’s fragments is perhaps simply a glimpse of systematic theology. He was a philosopher after all. Writing in a direct and argument-based, logical manner, should not come as a surprise to us. At any rate, this should not impede this thesis in the slightest. In the words of Professor Frank J. Matera, when confronted with doubts of authorship of some of the Pauline letters, simply responds: “...we must account for the theology in all the letters that the New Testament attributes

¹³ Erwin R. Goodenough, *The Theology of Justin Martyr*, (Verlag Frommannsche Buchhandlung, 1923), accessed June 10, 2025, <https://archive.org/details/theologyofjustin00gooduoft/page/n7/mode/2up>.

to Paul, even if some are written by others in his name.”¹⁴ The author of this thesis shares the same sentiment. As mentioned before, this thesis rests on the theological value and the tradition of the accepted patristic texts.

1.2 Tatian

“Greek culture of the Mediterranean dismissed Christian beliefs as crude, ‘barbarian’ superstition, indulging in cultural imperialism toward the nascent religion. Christian reaction to these pressures was to adopt the barbarians’ position, i.e. of non-Greeks, and to identify themselves with a cultural tradition they claimed was superior and more ancient than the Greeks’: that of the Hebrews.”¹⁵ Justin Martyr and his pupil Tatian both adopted the title of ‘barbarians’ when defining themselves and other Christians. They used it in a defiant counter-cultural manner. They wanted to show Christianity as the superior religion and philosophy, which was at the same time simple enough and available for everyone. They saw Greek philosophy and religion at the opposite end of the spectrum. Greek philosophy was split into many factions, and for the most part, prescribed an end-goal that turned a disciple into an elitist. In other words, it was not for everyone. In his address to the Greeks, Tatian says the following: “...and as for those who have neither beauty, nor wealth, nor bodily strength, nor high birth, they have no happiness, according to Aristotle.”¹⁶

¹⁴ Frank J. Matera, *A Concise Theology of the New Testament*, (Paulist Press, New York, Mahwah, NJ 2020), 50.

¹⁵ Hyun Jin Kim, “Justin Martyr and Tatian: Christian Reactions to Encounters with Greco-Roman Culture and Imperial Persecution,” in *Old Society, New Belief: Religious Transformation of China and Rome, ca. 1st-6th Centuries*, ed. Mu-chou Poo et al, (Oxford University Press, 2017), accessed June 17, 2025, <https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780190278359.003.0005>.

¹⁶ Tatian, *Address to The Greeks*, found in *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, Vol. 2, ed. Alexander Roberts, James Donaldson, Arthur Cleveland Coxe, (1885; repr., Cosimo Classics, New York, NY, 2007), 66.

Justin underlines the same sentiment in the following passage: “The Word exercises an influence which does not make poets: it does not equip philosophers nor skilled orators, but by its instruction it makes mortals immortal...”¹⁷ The teacher and his disciple are adamantly proclaiming that the Word is for everyone. It is not reserved for the few who are among the leading elite. It is for everyone, since everyone is mortal. Justin and Tatian are writing and speaking in a time where accusations against Christians are mounting. The so-called barbarians are obliged to make their case in a world where speech is not free of consequences. The next passage illustrates this reality of the so-called sub apostolic era.

And this is the epoch which forced this great truth upon the attention of contemplative minds. It was more than a hundred years since the angels had sung “Good-will to men;” and that song had now been heard for successive generations, breaking forth from the lips of sufferers on the cross, among lions, and amid blazing faggots. Here was a nobler Stoicism that needed interpretation. Not only choice spirits, despising the herd and boasting of a loftier intellectual sphere, were its professors; but thousands of men, women, and children, withdrawing themselves not at all from the ordinary and humble lot of the people, were inspired by it to live and die heroically and sublimely, — exhibiting a superiority to revenge and hate entirely unaccountable, praying for their enemies, and seeking to glorify their God by love to their fellow-men.¹⁸

According to the author, at this particular time in history, the Word of God was being received by the highly elevated intellectual audience. The Gospel comes as a counter-movement and ruffles the well-established Greek culture and intellectual life. This ‘nobler stoicism’ is not taught by the highly educated, nor is it an elitist movement reserved for a select few. It is, in so many ways, going in the opposite direction of how a Greek mind would operate. It would be safe to propose that the Word requires a regeneration of the mind, in which one would experience a conversion. Unfortunately, for many apologists, and Christians in general, the authorities of the

¹⁷ Justin Martyr, *Discourse to the Greeks*, ANF, Vol. 1, 272.

¹⁸ Roberts, Donaldson, Coxe, ANF, Vol. 1, 159.

day would not have a change of minds and thus the Word would instead spread through martyrdom. The courage of the apologist would be the justification of the authenticity of the Word.

Tatian was a Syrian born in 120 AD and died in April of 173. His most notable written accomplishment is the *Diatessaron*. In it, Tatian recounts the four Gospels in one single narrative. Similar to Justin, Tatian also had a disdain for Greek philosophies and culture. Nevertheless, just as his teacher, Tatian did adopt the term *Logos* and used it to describe the intermediary nature of Jesus Christ. Tatian abandoned the Church of Rome after the martyrdom of Justin. In the year 172 he joined the ascetic group called Encratites ('The self-controlled' or 'The masters of themselves'). It was a Gnostic sect that prioritized a high form of austere asceticism. It is then that he wrote his only two surviving works; *Diatessaron* and *Discourse to the Greeks*. The editor of the *Ante-Nicene Fathers* volume 2 says the following concerning the *Diatessaron*: "Give him due credit for his *Diatessaron*, of which the very name is a valuable testimony to the Four Gospels as recognised by the primitive churches. It is lost, with the 'infinite number' of other books which St. Jerome attributes to him. All honour to this earliest harmonist for such a work;"¹⁹ In his other surviving work, *Address to the Greeks*, Tatian paints a negative view of heathenistic religion against the pure and salvific nature of Christianity.

But he found no satisfaction in the bewildering mazes of Greek speculation, while he became utterly disgusted with what heathenism presented to him under the name of religion. In these circumstances, he happily met with the sacred books of the Christians, and was powerfully attracted by the purity of morals which these inculcated, and by the means of deliverance from the bondage of sin which they revealed.²⁰

¹⁹ Roberts, Donaldson, Coxe, *ANF*, Vol. 1, 61.

²⁰ Roberts, Donaldson, Coxe, "Introductory Note to Tatian the Assyrian," trans. J.E. Ryland, *ANF*, Vol. 1, 62, 63.

It is worth noting that Tatian, just as his teacher, had unequivocally denied Greek heterogenous philosophy and heathenistic religion. They have, on the other hand, used the Greek language and its philosophical terms in explaining the Gospel and spreading the Word. To their minds, Greek thought is elevated to its proper place and perfected once the Gospel is introduced.²¹

For some critics and scholars, this idea is inversed. They claim that the Church Fathers (not only those in the post-apostolic era) have used Hellenistic power of thought to spread Christian doctrines. In other words, these first theologians would not have been able to form their theories had they not had access to the best Greek philosophies. This argument falls beyond the scope of the present thesis, and as such will not be dealt with in great detail. Still, this question will keep resurfacing in many forms throughout the thesis. If we are indeed critically considering the historical context of these texts and not establishing a hierarchy (progression) of thought, we might leave a gaping hole in our reasoning. Essentially, it is incumbent on this thesis to clearly state that the purely scientific approach of the historical-critical method does not supersede in any way, shape or form, the mystery of the Word. Scholars such as Artemi, who are building their case for the truth looking backwards into history in a straight historical line (from present to the past), are correct in saying that “Hellenistic philosophy is the root of Christian theology” and that “Christian theology could not exist without the intellectual curiosity that was unique to ancient Greece.”²² This thesis aligns more with the following statement by Alexis Torrence: “The methods of biblical studies are understandably alarming to many Christian believers, but what is

²¹ Perhaps, this is truer of Justin than his pupil, still, Tatian is a worthy philosopher who advocated for and defended Christianity. He is considered an apologist even with his fall into Gnosticism.

²² Eirini Artemi, “Embracing Greek Philosophical Thinking in the Fathers of the 2nd -5th Centuries” in *Vox Partum* 36 (2016), 31.

alarming is not so much the methods themselves as their claims to power and control over the text and its significance.”²³ Finally, suffice it to say that this thesis, while respecting the importance of the historical-critical method, is reticent to admit the over-reaching claims of such methods, over the power and the mystery of the Word. It is true that the Word broke into our human history and time, but the Word is not of history and time. The inspiration of the patristic writings does not start from Greek wisdom and ends with an assimilation of Christ. To say otherwise, especially with Justin and Tatian, indicates a questionable reading of their texts. Furthermore, if we wanted to neglect the mystery and simply concede all power to any such scientific method, we should consider the following words of Justin: “And that you may learn that it was from our teachers—we mean the account given through the prophets—that Plato borrowed his statement that God, having altered matter which was shapeless, made the world, hear the very words spoken through Moses...”²⁴

1.3 Saint Irenaeus

Irenaeus was a second century bishop of Lyon who wrote *Adversus Haereses (Against Heresies)*. He is considered a saint by almost all denominations and was recently declared a doctor of the church by Pope Francis. His theological works are emphasised by his observance of the authority of the apostolic tradition and the authority of the Scripture, which included the four Gospels. This is an important detail when considering the establishment of the New Testament

²³ John Fotopoulos, “Orthodox Christianity, Patristic Exegesis, and Historical Criticism of the Bible,” in *The Oxford Handbook of the Bible in Orthodox Christianity*, with Eugen J. Pentiu, OXFORD HANDBOOKS SERIES (Oxford University Press, 2022), <https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780190948658.013.30>.

²⁴ Justin Martyr, *The First Apology*, ANF, Vol. 1, 182.

literature as authoritative. Scholar and theologian, Michael Kruger, underlines the fact that the documents of the New Testament were first understood as Scripture by the end of the second century and this was mainly due to the works of Irenaeus. Most scholars see in Irenaeus's *Against Heresies* the first definite and official use of texts as Scripture. In this work, Irenaeus affirms the four Gospels, he quotes the New Testament as Scripture, and uses one thousand New Testament passages in total. Everything before Irenaeus, the scholars understood simply as an oral tradition.²⁵ Kruger does not deny the importance of Irenaeus's work and does concede that it is reasonable for scholars to assume that Irenaeus's *Against Heresies* is the period when the New Testament became Scripture. However, he proposes an alternative view regarding the beginning in question. Kruger argues that "...while the evidence is limited, there are still indications that books were received as Scripture prior to the time of Irenaeus."²⁶ At the same time, he also underlines the fact that Scripture did not have this 'big bang' beginning, rather it was a gradual process that undeniably began before the time of Irenaeus. This is an important detail while considering the historical setting concerning the New Testament becoming an authoritative text of the early church. It is very probable, as Kruger argues, that Irenaeus was not the one trying to establish the four Gospels as normative, nor was this an intentional act of the Church. Rather, Irenaeus was just defending Scripture against the claims made by the various heresies of the time. This, in turn, is the dynamic that defines the work of Irenaeus. In other words, In *Against Heresies*, Irenaeus defends Christianity against various forms of Gnosticism.

²⁵ Michael J. Kruger, *The Question of Canon: Challenging the Status Quo in the New Testament Debate*. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2013), 157.

²⁶ Kruger, *The Question of Canon*, 158.

According to the editors of *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, not much is known of Irenaeus's personal life.²⁷ His date of birth and death are disputed, but generally it is accepted that he was born between 120 and 140 AD. He was appointed as bishop of Lyon in the year 177 AD. This appointment to episcopacy came as a peculiar play of circumstance. As a priest, Irenaeus was sent to Rome to deal with the heresy known as Montanism. During that time, back in Gaul, the persecution took place and the bishop Saint Pothinus was martyred. Thus, Irenaeus replaced him and became the second bishop of Lyon. It is also well known that Irenaeus knew Polycarp who was a disciple of Saint John. This connection forms part of the context for Irenaeus' adamant defense of the apostolic authority.

It is worth mentioning that this was a tense and unorganized era for the early church. Historian Robert Wilken tells us that Christianity in its early stages, while coming out of the Jewish world and surrounded by such, is still very much leaning on its predecessor. For example, the Jewish custom and calendar was, at that time, well established and respected. Nonetheless, Christians started to develop their own rituals and customs. It is observed by Ignatius that Christians are gathering to break bread on Sunday (the first day of the week) which becomes their holiday as opposed to the Jewish Sabbath. In the same vein, Christians start celebrating Pasch (which becomes known as Easter) on the day of the Jewish Passover, especially in the Christian churches in Asia Minor and parts of Syria. Their fast would end on the day of Passover, 14th of Nissan, regardless on which day of the week it fell on. Other parts of the Christian world celebrated the festival of Pasch on the first Sunday right after the Passover (seeing that Christ resurrected on that day). This disagreement is finally put to rest at the Council of Nicaea. Here,

²⁷ Roberts, Donaldson, Coxe, *ANF*, Vol. 1, 312.

the bishops of the world decided that the Pasch should be celebrated on Sunday following the first moon after the vernal equinox.

The second century is a tense period of time for the unity of the church. One of the main problems is the birth of Gnosticism and this, according to Robert Wilken, is a major obstacle to Christianity. Gnosis means *knowledge* in Greek. As such, it seems innocuous, but the gnosis pertains to a specific, special kind of knowledge. It is supposed to give one a special or secret understanding of the Christian faith. Gnosticism starts to grow within the Christian communities. People are attracted to it. Irenaeus is aware of it and is set in defending Christianity against Gnosticism. He is aware of the power and the talent of the gnostic writers, such as Valentinus, but ultimately, he sees it (Gnosticism) as self-serving and loosely based on the true story of Christ. Christianity, and this is really the most important aspect, is based on apostolic teachings. These are oral traditions that were transmitted from generation to generation. Robert Wilken tells us how Irenaeus listened to Polycarp (Bishop) who had talked to John (Apostle) who had seen the Master. This sentiment is also echoed by Ignatius who said that archives are in fact Jesus Christ himself.²⁸

1.4 Origen

Origen Adamantius was the name of the illustrious Church Father who was born in 185 A.D. in the city of Alexandria. He lived and worked in Alexandria and died in Tyre, Phoenicia in c. 254 A.D. He is generally considered a prodigy among early Church Fathers, and even to this

²⁸ Robert Louis Wilken, *The First Thousand Years: A Global History of Christianity*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2012).

day, he is considered as one of the most brilliant theologians that has ever lived. The amount of work he left behind and the quality of the work of the Alexandrian are evidence of a rare and high intellectual pedigree. *Hexapla*, namely, is one of those illustrious works that showcases his inestimable talent. In this work, he compiles six different extant versions of the Old Testament that he placed in six different columns side by side. This monumental work is indicative of Origen's strength of analysis and desire for truth and precision. This colossal work that took him twenty-eight years to accomplish was spread over some fifty volumes. All this for the pure attention of ascertaining the most precise meaning of the Septuagint.²⁹

Origen did not naively embrace the Greek Scriptures, which he knew from childhood: he knew well that they were a translation of a Hebrew original, and he took steps to learn some Hebrew from Jewish contemporaries. Origen was the first Christian writer whom we can reasonably call not just a biblical interpreter, but a biblical scholar, and even, in something approaching a modern sense of that term, a biblical critic, who asked difficult questions about the coherence and history of the original text.³⁰

On first Principles is another of his writings where the brilliance of the Father shines. This writing displays Origen's systematic approach to Christian theology. It is worth noting that, while reading this work, one is astounded by the quality of precision and the modernity of thought.

It is equally important to mention, as we try to build the historical context of Origen's texts, that Origen, a Father from Alexandria, is much more formed in the spiritual and allegorical understanding of Scripture. This is important, as it clearly is distinct from the ways in which the school of Antioch understands the Bible. John Barton states that it has become usual and perhaps

²⁹ Alexander Roberts, James Donaldson, and Arthur Cleveland Coxe, eds, *ANF*, Vol. 4, (New York: Cosimo Classics, 2007), 230.

³⁰ John Barton, *A History of the Bible: The Book and Its Faiths* (New York: Penguin Press, 2019), 348.

overly simplistic to say that “...the Antiochenes rejected the allegorical reading in favor of literalism.”³¹ Further on, he explains that the Antiochian school of thought was more concerned with the general flow of Scripture and that they were fearful that Scripture would be lost in the allegorical and overly symbolical interpretation. However, he is aware that the distinction of the two schools of thought was not as sharp as we would initially think. Barton quotes Frances Young who further clarifies the differences of approaches of the two schools. He states that the allegory was not perceived as the main objection of the Antiochians, as allegory was a standard figure of speech. Rather, “...what they resisted was the type of allegory that destroyed textual coherence.”³²

For Origen (and Philo) allegory is of primordial importance. Origen categorically rejects a simplistic or a too-literal understanding of the sacred texts. Rather, he sees these simplistic texts as an allegory of hidden and higher spiritual truths. “Taking the text literally is often, for Origen, a sign of stupidity.”³³ To take the creation story in the book of Genesis in a literal fashion, is an obvious sign of ineptitude on the part of the reader, according to Origen. Still, Origen does not see allegory as a free pass to interpret Scripture any which way. The reading and understanding of the text must be inspired by the Holy Spirit as much as the writing was. Usage of allegory does not supplant either the need of spiritual understanding or the needs of the community. “The meaning of the text is to be sought in the *community* that interprets it.”³⁴

This, in turn, brings up another crucial and often forgotten aspect of Origen’s work. Henri de Lubac (quite possibly a leading authority on Origen) reminds the critics that Origen’s work is

³¹ John Barton, *A History of the Bible*, 351.

³² John Barton, *A History of the Bible*, 352, quoting Frances Young, 176.

³³ John Barton, *A History of the Bible*, 341.

³⁴ George T. Montague, *Understanding the Bible: A Basic Introduction to Biblical Interpretation*. Rev. ed. (New York: Paulist, 2017), 37.

not solely a product of untested intellect. Origen is above all a man of piety and orthodoxy. “We must rid ourselves of the view, still far too common, which presents Origen as almost entirely and intellectual, esoteric and rationalizing, and see him as the man of spirit, the apostle, the man of the Church which he was above all else.”³⁵

1.5 Saint Augustine

North African native, Saint Augustine (born November 13, 354 A.D., in Thagaste, Numidia, and died August 28, 430 A.D., in Hippo Regius) is one of the most influential figures in the Christian world. He converted to Christianity in 386 A.D. It is worth mentioning that in *Confessions*, we are privy to his intense and inner spiritual turmoil and his consequent surrender to God. He also lived and wrote in the shadows of the falling Roman empire. He was bishop of Hippo from 396 to 430. He is a doctor of the Church and the only Latin Father considered in this thesis. He is also the only father who lived and worked during the Peace of the Church, which consequently allowed him freedoms that his predecessors did not have. His most significant works are: *Confessions* (c. 400) and *The City of God* (c. 413–426). Some of his most influential exegetical works, which have become foundational for the Christian world, are *De Doctrina Christiana* (On Christian Doctrine), *De Genesi ad Litteram* (The Literal Meaning of Genesis), *De Sermone Domini in Monte* (On the Lord’s Sermon on the Mount), *De Consensu Evangelistarum* (Harmony of the Gospels), *Tractatus in Iohannis Evangelium* (Homilies on the Gospel of John), and Expositions on the Psalms.

³⁵ Henri de Lubac, *On First Principles*, trans. G.W. Butterworth (Notre Dame: Ave Maria Press, 2013), 15.

De Trinitate (On Trinity) must also be mentioned as it is his most illustrious theological work. In it, we find the author, in the first half of the book, clearly defending and affirming the Trinity, while in the second half he compares the Trinity to the human mind, which for him is *imago Dei*. In book XII chapter 4 of *De Trinitate*.³⁶ Augustine states that the image of God is to be found in the contemplative part of the mind, while the practical side of the mind (dealing with temporal things) does not reflect the image of God. Still, the Trinity can be found even in that part of the mind that deals with temporal things.³⁷ This becomes one of the determining elements that differentiates Augustine from other Greek Fathers. Also, equating our mind with the *imago Dei* inadvertently puts Augustine close to the views shared by Neoplatonists. Before proceeding, it is important to briefly recall what Neoplatonism entails.

Christian Wilburg in “Neoplatonism” gives a succinct overview of this philosophical school of thought. He places the movement between the middle of the 3rd century and the middle of the 7th century. He acknowledges that Neoplatonism does indeed hold Plato in high esteem but it is not necessarily dedicated to him and his ideas. Hence the name is somewhat misleading. In actuality, Wilburg sees Neoplatonism as a “...grand synthesis of an intellectual heritage that was by then exceedingly rich and profound. In effect, they absorbed, appropriated, and creatively harmonized almost the entire Hellenic tradition of philosophy, religion, and even literature—”³⁸

We will consider only the three most pertinent aspects of the Neoplatonism as they shape the intellectual milieu in which Augustine lived and wrote. The first aspect deals with the notion

³⁶ The full title of the chapter: “The Trinity and the Image of God Is in that Part of the Mind Alone Which Belongs to the Contemplation of Eternal Things.”

³⁷ Augustine of Hippo, *De Trinitate*, ed. Phillip Schaff, *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, Vol. 3, 156.

³⁸ Christian Wildberg, “Neoplatonism,” *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, (Spring 2022 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), accessed December 11, 2024, <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2021/entries/neoplatonism/>.

that the mind or consciousness is prior to the physical world, or matter. The author explains that “...mindful consciousness (*nous*, often translated as thought, intelligence, or intellect) is in an important sense ontologically prior to the physical realm typically taken for ultimate reality (Mind over Matter).”³⁹ The second aspect deals with the concept of ‘One’. He continues, “...reality, in all its cognitive and physical manifestations, depended on a highest principle which is unitary and singular. Neoplatonic philosophy is a strict form of principle-monism that strives to understand everything on the basis of a single cause that they considered divine, and indiscriminately referred to as ‘the First’, ‘the One’, or ‘the Good’.”⁴⁰ Lastly, in Neoplatonism, there is a sharp distinction and a hierarchical relationship between soul and body. “According to Neoplatonic theory, then, the world as we know and experience it in its formal and structural characteristics is the outer effect of the activity and life of Consciousness, an activity that was thought to be mediated ‘from above’ by another, intermediate metaphysical entity, Soul.”⁴¹

In *Confessions*, Augustine indicates his appreciation of Neoplatonism and thanks God for providing him with the few books of the Platonists.⁴² In the following chapters, Augustine also alludes to the priority and excellence of the interiority (inward, spiritual-self) as opposed to the exterior material world. He alludes to a spiritual never-changing immaterial *Light* that he experienced once he went deep into himself.⁴³ This again is very reminiscent of Plato and Platonists. More precisely, it is reminiscent of Plato’s cave allegory, where the light as the truth will release us from the bondages of the darkened world.

³⁹ Christian Wildberg, “Neoplatonism,” Introduction of article.

⁴⁰ Christian Wildberg, “Neoplatonism,” Introduction.

⁴¹ Christian Wildberg, “Neoplatonism,” “Soul and Nature.”

⁴² Augustine, *Confessions*, trans. R.S. Pine-Coffin (Harmondsworth, UK: Penguin Books, 1961), 144.

⁴³ Augustine, *Confessions*, 146.

Augustine's appreciation of Platonists does not overshadow his belief in Christ. When talking about the books of the Platonists, he says the following: "In the same books I also read of the Word, God...But I did not read in them that the Word was made flesh and came to dwell among us."⁴⁴ Again: "But there is no word in those books to say that in his own appointed time he underwent death for us sinners..."⁴⁵ All this to say that the influence of the Greek thought is indeed found in Augustine, as it is in all the previous fathers we have considered. But just as the others, Augustine does not try to fit his Christian beliefs within the philosophical system of Hellenistic thought. He is appreciative for what Greek philosophy offered him, just as Justin Martyr did as well. Still, excepting the few critiques of Platonic influence on Augustine, which he himself admits, Augustine is nonetheless considered a true Christian philosopher.

Augustine, the man with upturned eye, with pen in the left hand, and a burning heart in the right (as he is usually represented), is a philosophical and theological genius of the first order, towering like a pyramid above his age, and looking down commandingly upon succeeding centuries. He had a mind uncommonly fertile and deep, bold and soaring; and with it, what is better, a heart full of Christian love and humility. He stands of right by the side of the greatest philosophers of antiquity and of modern times.⁴⁶

"Augustine of Hippo was perhaps the greatest Christian philosopher of Antiquity and certainly the one who exerted the deepest and most lasting influence. He is a saint of the Catholic Church, and his authority in theological matters was universally accepted in the Latin Middle Ages and remained, in the Western Christian tradition, virtually uncontested till the nineteenth century."⁴⁷ Both of these praises describe one crucially important aspect of Augustine's character

⁴⁴ Augustine, *Confessions*, 145.

⁴⁵ Augustine, *Confessions*, 145.

⁴⁶ Philip Schaff, *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, Vol. 3

⁴⁷ Christian Tornau, "Augustine of Hippo," in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, Summer 2024, ed. Edward N. Zalta and Uri Nodelman (Metaphysics Research Lab, Stanford University, 2024), <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2024/entries/augustine/>.

and profession that ties him with all the fathers that have been considered thus far. He is considered a philosopher.

Christian thinkers have always drawn on philosophy to help answer these kinds of questions. In the earliest years of Christianity, running roughly from the second to the seventh centuries CE, and often called the “Patristic” period, the emerging Christian Church faced the daunting task of defining doctrinal orthodoxy in the face of internal and external challenges. In pursuing this task, Patristic thinkers typically did not understand themselves as “theologians” in contrast to “philosophers”. Indeed, they may not have endorsed any sharp distinction between philosophy and theology at all. But they still reasoned about their Christian commitments in the intellectual idiom of the ancient Mediterranean world, which was the idiom of Platonic, Aristotelian, and Stoic philosophy. Although modern thought tends to assume a sharp disjunction between philosophy and theology, it is not at all obvious how to distinguish them in a principled way. Suppose that we take philosophy in the broadest sense to be the systematic use of human reason in an effort to understand the most fundamental features of reality, and suppose that we take theology in the broadest sense to be the study of God and all things in relation to God. Then we should expect to see considerable overlap between the two: after all, God, if there is a God, is surely one of the fundamental features of reality, and one to which all the other features presumably relate.⁴⁸

In this excerpt above, we have somewhat of an introductory and preliminary understanding of how philosophy and theology relate. Nonetheless, it perfectly meets the needs of this thesis. Put simply, the Church Fathers were philosophers. It was not the absence of the term ‘theologian’ that prevented them from identifying as such. Rather, they were engaged in the exegesis and systematic theology in a very philosophical way.

The background discussion (presented in the first chapter of this thesis) has, for the most part, focused on the fact that the Church Fathers (considered in this paper) lived and wrote within the context of the Hellenistic world; the world teaming with various philosophies. This fact alone

⁴⁸ Thomas Williams, *Christian Theology and Philosophy*, *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, Fall 2021 Edition, ed. Edward N. Zalta <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/christiantheology-philosophy/>.

is the common denominator of all the historical discrepancies that could be found amongst all the Fathers. In other words, the philosophical (mostly Platonic) influence on the patristic texts is the point of contention. While some other historical, political, and biographical aspects will undoubtedly have some influence on the Fathers and inform the style of their texts, it is really the philosophical style of arguing, writing, and exegesis that shapes the patristic thought.

That said, the Fathers examined in this thesis are, for the most part, aware of this fact; they are self-aware. Justin Martyr is a self-proclaimed philosopher who understands Christianity as the ultimate philosophy; the pinnacle of all the Greek philosophies. Tatian is not only aware of it, and in fact uses the philosophical terminology, but is, at the same time, actually condemning the Greek philosophy and culture and their ways. Saint Irenaeus engages with Platonic thought when he depicts God as a simple, incomposite, and partless being. “Irenaeus, furthermore, draws a logical connection between God’s simplicity and the doctrine that there is one God to the exclusion of others, as he says, thereby pressing Platonic doctrine into the service of his distinctly Christian theological convictions.”⁴⁹ Origen’s preference for the intellect over the body is evident and very much aligns itself with Platonic thought. “God therefore must not be thought to be any kind of body, nor to exist in a body, but to be a simple intellectual existence, admitting in himself of no addition whatever...”⁵⁰ “While inheriting many ideas from Plato, Origen adapted them in accordance with Christian doctrine. Both Origen and Plato emphasized that the soul governs the body and is superior to it in both status and importance. The image of God

⁴⁹ Grayden McCashen, “Irenaeus’ Theology in Second-Century Platonism and Christianity,” *The Journal of Theological Studies* 75, no. 1 (2024): 148–69, <https://doi.org/10.1093/jts/flae007>.

⁵⁰ Origen, *On First Principles*, trans. G.W. Butterworth, intro. By Henri de Lubac, foreword by John C. Cavadini (Notre Dame, IN: Ave Maria Press, 2013), 14.

resides in human soul, not the body, guiding individuals toward the perfection of the soul and the attainment of the whole virtues.”⁵¹

It would not be profitable to offer further proof of Greek influence on the Fathers. Rather, it would be much more pertinent to see the way in which they can be synthesised. This author is not necessarily convinced that Christian theology (and definitely not Tripartite Theology) would be devoid of wisdom and direction without the influence of Greek thought. For example, Henri de Lubac has much more of a nuanced approach to this dilemma. He supports a continual development of Christian thought. In other words, it did not start with Hellenism, nor has it stopped developing. He says that: “Repetition of formulas does not assure the transmission of thought. It is not safe to entrust a doctrinal treasure to the passivity of memory. Intelligence must play a part in its conservation rediscovering it, so to speak, in the process.”⁵²

De Lubac fosters an active and intellectually engaged form of understanding. Pope Benedict XVI says the following: “The Fathers did not simply adopt Hellenism: they transformed it in the light of the Gospel.”⁵³ And finally Russian theologian Georges Florovsky adds: “Was not that which the XIXth century historians used to describe as a Hellenization of Christianity rather a *Conversion of Hellenism*?”⁵⁴

As previously noted, this thesis does not intend to prove or disprove the influence of Greek thought on patristic thought. It would be dishonest not to admit that patristic thought had

⁵¹ Zhimeng Lin, “Origen and Plato on the Superiority and Perfection of the Soul,” *Religions* 16, no. 1 (2025): 1, <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel16010092>.

⁵² Henri de Lubac, *Paradoxes of Faith*, trans. Paule Simon and Matthew J. O’Connell (San Francisco: Ignatius Press 1987), 23.

⁵³ Joseph Ratzinger, *The Spirit of the Liturgy*, trans. John Saward (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2000), 33.

⁵⁴ Georges Florovsky, *Christianity and Culture*, Vol. 2 of *Collected Works* (Belmont, MA: Nordland Publishing Company, 1974), 123.

been growing in the most philosophically-fertile soil of the Greco-Roman culture. It would be negligent not to present Greek philosophy as the most pertinent historical and cultural aspect of the Patristics (especially during the ante-Nicene and Nicene era). Having said that, this thesis does intend to show that the primary patristic source of the subject at hand (Tripartite Theology) is not to be found in Greek thought, but in the thought of Saint Paul. This fact does not reject the Greek character of patristic thought, but it does challenge the notion that Greek philosophy is its primary source. In closing remarks, had Christ lived in ancient Egypt, the Church Fathers would have then talked and written about the Saviour in terms of *Ka* and *Ba*. The form of thought would have been Egyptian, but the spirit would be the same.

Chapter 2

Literary Analysis

2.1 Justin Martyr

The resurrection is a resurrection of the flesh which died. For the spirit dies not; the soul is in the body, and without a soul it cannot live. The body, when the soul forsakes it, is not. For the body is the house of the soul; and the soul the house of the spirit. These three, in all those who cherish a sincere hope and unquestioning faith in God, will be saved. Considering, therefore, even such arguments as are suited to this world, and finding that, even according to them, it is not impossible that the flesh be regenerated; and seeing that, besides all these proofs, the Saviour in the whole Gospel shows that there is salvation for the flesh, why do we any longer endure those unbelieving and dangerous arguments, and fail to see that we are retrograding when we listen to such an argument as this: that the soul is immortal, but the body mortal, and incapable of being revived? For this we used to hear from Pythagoras and Plato, even before we learned the truth. If then the Saviour said this, and proclaimed salvation to the soul alone, what new thing, beyond what we heard from Pythagoras and Plato and all their band, did He bring us? But now He has come proclaiming the glad tidings of a new and strange hope to men. For indeed it was a strange and new thing for God to promise that He would not keep incorruption in incorruption, but would make corruption incorruption.⁵⁵

There is a lot to consider in this passage. First, there is a rather precise account of the relationship between the elements. Secondly, there is a hint of what spirit might be (aside from its relational attributes to the other two elements). There is also refutation of Greek philosophy's view of salvation of the soul only. Lastly, and directly connected to the previous point, Justin Martyr reminds us of Pauline thought where corruption will be made into incorruption.

Justin Martyr, in the fragment *On the Resurrection*, is laying out the defence for the reality of resurrection. He argues that there really is no point to the Christian faith had the

⁵⁵ Justin Martyr, *On the Resurrection*, ANF, Vol. 1, 298, 299.

Every Church Father's section will begin by the most expository excerpt of their tripartite theology. The section's merit is determined by the fact that the three parts are deliberately named. Consequently, other passages will be given in support of the main opening passage. Other passages will also be introduced that might go against, or challenge the tripartite vision.

resurrection not occurred. Since we are already familiar with the dichotomist view of Plato where the immortal soul is trapped inside the mortal flesh, Christianity, then, void of resurrection, brings nothing new to the understanding of the human being and salvation. Jesus does indeed bring salvation to the person, to the whole person, for that matter. This is the point that this thesis is interested in. Justin Martyr, in defending resurrection, gives his definition of a person. It must be mentioned, as with all other Church Fathers, anthropology is never dealt with in a separate way. The anthropological definitions are only offered when they relate to another aspect that is arguably more important. In this case, Justin inadvertently gives a description of a person while he is defending the resurrection of the flesh.

The person is in fact tripartite. Not only that, he also gives a clear hierarchy of importance to the three parts (Augustine will do the same): "...for the body is the house of the soul; and the soul the house of the spirit."⁵⁶ He presents the person as layered concentric circles. The most precious part, the most central circle, the immortal one, is in fact the spirit. The spirit is housed in the soul while the soul and the spirit are housed in the body. The body is the outermost circle, holding the two other parts. This fact does not make the body any less intrinsic to the foundation of a person. It is for this reason that the resurrection of the flesh makes sense. Contrary to the Platonic views of the incorruptibility of the soul, Justin reminds us that Christ brings incorruptibility (immortality) to the body too. The whole person will be saved.

In the eighth chapter of the same fragment, Justin talks about the human person in what seems like a dichotomist way. This seems a direct contradiction to the triune vision explained above. "For what is man but the reasonable animal composed of body and soul?"⁵⁷ He steadily

⁵⁶ Justin Martyr, *On the Resurrection*, ANF, Vol. 1, 299.

⁵⁷ Justin Martyr, *On the Resurrection*, ANF, Vol. 1, 297.

repeats the same sentiment again a few lines after, stating that: “He (God) has called not a part but the whole (person), which is the soul and the body.”⁵⁸ Clearly these two excerpts are in apparent opposition to the opening lines of chapter ten (the first quote of the chapter). In sum, they clearly support the dichotomist, even Platonic, interpretation of a person. Had it not been for those opening lines of the tenth chapter of the *On the Resurrection*, it would have been safe to assume that Justin is in fact a dichotomist. Is Justin unaware of such contradiction, and is he unable to keep the same line of thought from one paragraph to the next, or is there another reason for this? There is one more line to consider in that same opening paragraph of the tenth chapter. “These three, in all those who cherish a sincere hope and unquestioning faith in God, will be saved.”⁵⁹ It is perhaps admissible to assume that Justin understands a believing person as a triune being, and an unbelieving one as made of soul and body. Is it the fact that “...those who cherish a sincere hope and unquestioning faith in God,” those who accept Christ as the Saviour and profess their faith in Him, are indeed in possession of the spirit? This question will be dealt with later in the thesis.

2.2 Tatian

Die to the world, repudiating the madness that is in it. Live to God, and by apprehending Him lay aside your old nature. We were not created to die, but we die by our own fault. Our free-will has destroyed us; we who were free have become slaves; we have been sold through sin. Nothing evil has been created by God; we ourselves have manifested wickedness; but we, who have manifested it, are able again to reject it. We recognise two varieties of spirit, one of which is called the soul (ψυχή), but the other is greater than the

⁵⁸ Justin Martyr, *On the Resurrection*, ANF, Vol. 1, 298.

⁵⁹ Justin Martyr, *On the Resurrection*, ANF, Vol. 1, 299.

soul, an image and likeness of God: both existed in the first men, that in one sense they might be material (ὕλικοι), and in another superior to matter.⁶⁰

In this passage, we are reminded that it is our free will that has brought evil upon us. Tatian's view of the world is reminiscent of that of Saint Isaac of Nineveh's, whereby he too urges us - through rigorous asceticism - with the same phrase, 'to die to the world'. For this thesis, this sentence should grab our attention: "We recognize two varieties of spirit, one of which is called the soul (ψυχή), but the other is greater than the soul, an image and likeness of God."⁶¹ Tatian leaves a precious gem in his words. First, we must get over the hurdle where he claims that there are two spirits, or two varieties of spirit. This, at first glance, might go against the tripartite view that we are defending here in this paper. But we must remember that not one of the Church Fathers we are considering is deliberately talking about anthropology, and even less so, tripartite anthropology. They are only hinting at something they are considering as a given.

Tatian does indeed refer to the first spirit as the soul, but the other one is not only greater than the soul, it is actually the image of God. We might safely assume that he is not talking about flesh. Tatian might not explicitly call the spirit as the image of God, but he does insinuate that one part of us, the greatest part, is the actual image of God. Let us consider a passage that might further our understanding of Tatian's anthropology:

⁶⁰ Tatian, *Address to the Greeks*, in *ANF*, Vol. 2, ed. Alexander Roberts, James Donaldson and Arthur Cleveland Coxe, (originally published 1885; New York, NY Cosimo Classics 2007), 69.

...for the dwelling-place of the spirit is above, but the origin of the soul is from beneath. Now, in the beginning the spirit was a constant companion of the soul, but the spirit forsook it because it was not willing to follow. Yet, retaining as it were a spark of its power, though unable by reason of the separation to discern the perfect, while seeking for God it fashioned to itself in its wandering many gods, following the sophistries of the demons. But the Spirit of God is not with all, but, taking up its abode with those who live justly, and intimately combining with the soul, by prophecies it announced hidden things to other souls. And the souls that are obedient to wisdom have attracted to themselves the cognate spirit; but the disobedient, rejecting the minister of the suffering God, have shown themselves to be fighters against God, rather than His worshippers.⁶²

Tatian is indicating here the relationship between the soul and spirit. According to the text above, we were separated from our native and inherent spirit. Yet, the soul, remorseful, remains desirous of the forgone spirit and continues to search for it. In the pursuit for its companion, in confusion, it can sometimes adhere to false gods or demons. It is only through wisdom that the obedient soul attracts the lost spirit. It is incumbent on us to ask what is the nature of this wisdom and how does it attract the innate spirit back into our fold?

The soul is not in itself immortal, O Greeks, but mortal. Yet it is possible for it not to die. If, indeed, it knows not the truth, it dies, and is dissolved with the body, but rises again at last at the end of the world with the body, receiving death by punishment in immortality. But, again, if it acquires the knowledge of God, it dies not, although for a time it be dissolved. In itself it is darkness, and there is nothing luminous in it. And this is the meaning of the saying, 'The darkness comprehendeth not the light.' For the soul does not preserve the spirit, but is preserved by it, and the light comprehends the darkness. The Logos, in truth, is the light of God, but the ignorant soul is darkness. On this account, if it continues solitary, it tends downward towards matter, and dies with the flesh; but, if it enters into union with the Divine Spirit, it is no longer helpless, but ascends to the regions whither the Spirit guides it...⁶³

Firstly, Tatian duly reminds the Greeks that soul is indeed mortal and only finds immortality in the truth and light. This is how the mortal soul attains immortality; it is by drawing back to itself the innate spirit with which it once walked before the fall. In a word, it is

⁶² Tatian, *Address to the Greeks*, ANF, Vol. 2, 71.

⁶³ Tatian, *Address to the Greeks*, ANF, Vol. 2, 70.

Logos. *Logos* is the light and wisdom that darkness comprehended not. It is by being acquainted by the light of *Logos* that the material-dwelling soul is pulled to immortal heights.

We must admit a certain confusion of terms here. There is a mention of spirit, Spirit, and Holy Spirit. For the immediate purpose, we can say that the writings of Tatian leave enough information to conclude that the spirit is the inherent part of the human being that was inseparable from the soul. After the fall, the spirit left us, but the power of *Logos* (by the power of its light and truth) reintegrated us with the Holy Spirit, in whom we are elevated to our native spiritual region and are reunited with our spirit as well. “The perfect God is without flesh; but man is flesh. The bond of the flesh is the soul; that which encloses the soul is the flesh. Such is the nature of man’s constitution; and, if it be like a temple, God is pleased to dwell in it by the spirit, His representative...”⁶⁴ The key word in this quotation is ‘representative’. Lowercase ‘spirit’ is His representative in us, according to Tatian. Later on, we will compare and attempt to complete the full anthropological picture; but for the immediate purpose, we may draw some preliminary conclusions.

Tatian sees the flesh as being bonded (tied together) by the soul. The soul is δεσμός (bond) of the flesh. The soul is mortal unless it partakes in the truth of *Logos*. The wisdom of the Word guides the lost soul back into the authentic union with the innate spirit; i.e. God’s representative.

2.3 Saint Irenaeus

For that flesh which has been molded is not a perfect man in itself, but the body of a man, and part of a man. Neither is the soul itself, considered apart by itself, the man; but it is the

⁶⁴ Tatian, *Address to the Greeks*, ANF, Vol. 2, 71.

soul of a man, and part of a man. Neither is the spirit a man, for it is called the spirit, and not a man; but the commingling and union of all these constitutes the perfect man. And for this cause does the apostle, explaining himself, make it clear that the saved man is a complete man as well as a spiritual man; saying thus in the first Epistle to the Thessalonians, ‘Now the God of peace sanctify you perfect (perfectos); and may your spirit, and soul, and body be preserved whole without complaint to the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ.’ Now what was his object in praying that these three—that is, soul, body, and spirit—might be preserved to the coming of the Lord, unless he was aware of the [future] reintegration and union of the three, and [that they should be heirs of] one and the same salvation? For this cause also he declares that those are ‘the perfect’ who present unto the Lord the three [component parts] without offence. Those, then, are the perfect who have had the Spirit of God remaining in them, and have preserved their souls and bodies blameless, holding fast the faith of God, that is, that faith which is [directed] towards God, and maintaining righteous dealings with respect to their neighbours.⁶⁵

In this passage, Saint Irenaeus, while talking about salvation, is clearly indicating that man is made of three parts (spirit, soul and body). He is insistent on showing that a person cannot exist solely as one of those parts. A complete human being is made only when these three parts are mixed. Regarding salvation, he also quotes Saint Paul who anticipates the reunification of these three parts when the second coming of Jesus occurs. All three must be blameless when presented to the Lord. In other words, why would Saint Paul ask for sanctification of these three if they were not needed for salvation. In other words, a person is saved wholly, not partially. In the next passage, he will demonstrate the hierarchy of the three parts.

... That there are three things out of which, as I have shown, the complete man is composed—flesh, soul, and spirit. One of these does indeed preserve and fashion [the man]—this is the spirit; while as to another it is united and formed—that is the flesh; then [comes] that which is between these two—that is the soul, which sometimes indeed, when it follows the spirit, is raised up by it, but sometimes it sympathizes with the flesh, and falls into carnal lusts. Those then, as many as they be, who have not that which saves and forms [us] into life [eternal], shall be, and shall be called, [mere] flesh and blood; for these are they who have not the Spirit of God in themselves. Wherefore men of this stamp are spoken of by the Lord as ‘dead;’ for, says He, ‘Let the dead bury their dead,’ because they have not the Spirit which quickens man’.⁶⁶

⁶⁵ Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, ANF, Vol. 1, 532.

⁶⁶ Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, ANF, Vol. 1, 534.

In this short passage, we are shown in more detail the interaction between the three parts. We are also shown the sequence in which the elements come into existence. The spirit is the one that sustains and preserves life. It is formed with the body and united to it. I suppose that he means that the spirit begets a form to which it is attached. When this is accomplished, only then does the soul appear as the link between the two. This shows the process of elements coming into existence. It is peculiar to notice that the soul is the last of the three to come into existence. We can assume that this is referring to the book of Genesis where God breathes the spirit of life (spirit) into the earthly Adam (body). Only then does Adam become a living soul. There is a definite process to ‘becoming’ according to Irenaeus. We are also instructed by this Church Father to understand that the soul is what we mostly consider ourselves to be. It is essentially our self, or psyche. The soul has a choice. It can be drenched in sensual and worldly affairs and thus be brought down and become carnal. It can also choose to be elevated by following the life-giving spirit. Irenaeus clearly lays out the consequence of not yielding to the spirit that forms [us] into life [eternal]. According to Irenaeus, if one chooses to ignore the spirit, one is merely flesh and blood. In other words, he or she is deprived of the spirit of the Lord, and in even more drastic terms: dead. “And for this cause does the apostle, explaining himself, make it clear that the saved man is a complete man and a spiritual man...”⁶⁷ Irenaeus understands Paul’s words in the following way: A person is saved only if they are complete. The completion is predicated on the attainment of the spirit. Thus, a saved person is a complete person, which means a spiritual person. Irenaeus continues to expand on anthropology through the writings of Saint Paul. He comes to a pertinent point at which the nature of the spirit is elaborated on.

⁶⁷ Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, ANF, Vol. 1, 532.

But we do now receive a certain portion of His Spirit, tending towards perfection, and preparing us for incorruption, being little by little accustomed to receive and bear God; which also the apostle terms “an earnest,” that is, a part of the honour which has been promised us by God, where he says in the Epistle to the Ephesians, “In which ye also, having heard the word of truth, the Gospel of your salvation, believing in which we have been sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise, which is the earnest of our inheritance.” This earnest, therefore, thus dwelling in us, renders us spiritual even now, and the mortal is swallowed up by immortality. “For ye,” he declares, “are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit, if so be that the Spirit of God dwell in you.” This, however, does not take place by a casting away of the flesh, but by the impartation of the Spirit.⁶⁸

Spirit, here, is an ‘earnest’. It is a portion of the Holy Spirit we can receive. It is a foretaste of heaven. It can be understood as a promise or a pledge. In the most literary sense, it is a down payment, as in ‘earnest-money,’ intended for a full payment later on in the future. It (earnest) might be understood as the spiritualizing force (seed) by which the entire person slowly becomes spiritual. The spiritualization begins with the acquirement of the spirit. Still, there is a lingering and persisting confusion that follows this term, spirit. From the passage above, we are led to believe that we receive a portion of the Holy Spirit, that dwells in us as the foretaste of the things to come, but also as the acting agent of spiritualization, by which mortality is swallowed up. How is this ‘portion’ of the Holy Spirit different from the fundamental triune element, spirit? This essential question will serve as the central point of the final section of this thesis, where the nature of the spirit will be examined in detail. Still, the following passage will underline once again the continuing confusion of the different parts carrying the same name: spirit, Spirit, Holy Spirit.

In fact, the sixth chapter of the fifth book in *Against Heresies*, is titled thusly: “God will bestow salvation upon the whole nature of man, consisting of body and soul in close union, since the Word took it upon Him, and adorned with the gifts of the Holy Spirit, of whom our bodies

⁶⁸ Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, ANF, Vol. 1, 533.

are, and are termed, the temples.”⁶⁹ In it, we see clearly that Irenaeus names only body and soul as the whole nature of man. Still the first paragraph of that chapter posits something different. “Now the soul and the spirit are certainly a *part* of the man, but certainly not *the* man; for the perfect man consists in the commingling and the union of the soul receiving the spirit of the Father, and the admixture of that fleshly nature which was moulded after the image of God.”⁷⁰ He begins this section by apparently contradicting the title of the chapter by stating that the soul and the spirit are definitely part of man. He continues by clarifying that the soul without the spirit received from the Father, and the flesh, cannot be called the perfect man, in the parlance of Saint Paul. There is definitely an ambivalence to the nature of the spirit. The spirit seems to be a part of man only as much as it is received or acquired. Ontologically speaking, spirit would not be a part of man, it seems. Yet, these texts confidently call spirit, body, and soul as parts of the human being, as we have seen. One possible conclusion that presents itself is that the spirit is, definitively and ontologically, a part of us - but not ours. One last passage will perhaps provide more clarity.

But this event happens neither to the soul, for it is the breath of life; nor to the spirit, for the spirit is simple and not composite, so that it cannot be decomposed, and is itself the life of those who receive it. We must therefore conclude that it is in reference to the flesh that death is mentioned; which [flesh], after the soul’s departure, becomes breathless and inanimate, and is decomposed gradually into the earth from which it was taken.⁷¹

In this passage, Irenaeus is indicating that death happens to the body and not to the soul or the spirit. Once again, this way of writing clearly and undoubtedly presents the human being as ontologically triune. Interestingly enough, the soul is the breath of life but the spirit is the very

⁶⁹ Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, ANF, Vol. 1, 531.

⁷⁰ Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, ANF, Vol. 1, 531.

⁷¹ Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, ANF, Vol. 1, 533.

life of those who receive it. Once again, beyond all the triune expositions of the human being presented by Irenaeus, the spirit seems to be caught somewhere between the human and divine sphere. It is ontologically and innately a part of a human being and yet there is always a hint of reception of it. Could all this have been bypassed by simply saying that the soul receives the earnest of the Holy Spirit and not introduce spirit at all as the fundamental element of the human being? Irenaeus choose not to do so. We could also argue that the soul itself is also received, as totality of life itself is the gift of God, but the spirit is somehow doubly received. Or is it perhaps the ultimate place in the human being where the Holy Spirit can dwell in?

In the second section of “Anthropologie Tripartite” entitled “Tradition Patristique” in *Théologie de l’Histoire*, de Lubac provides an abundant amount of evidence for Tripartite Theology as found in the texts of the Church Fathers. He provides a perfect summary and commentary worthy of consideration for this thesis. The section in question is divided into two sections. The opening section deals with the first two centuries and the second part depicts the timeline from Saint Augustine to the present day.

The first subsection of the chapter is dedicated to Saint Irenaeus. In that section, de Lubac, also underlines the same confusion of terms as we have found. For him, the spirit seems to be of human origin, and at times, of divine origin. De Lubac is aware of this confusion as well. The one possible conclusion that draws itself is that there is a certain correspondence between human spirit and the Holy Spirit. Saint Irenaeus proposes trichotomy and dichotomy from one text to another. It is safe to assume that he does not assign spirit as a constitutive component. Rather, it is a potential that is fulfilled through the reception of the Holy Spirit. It is only after the reception of the Holy Spirit that the human being carries the spirit with him. In other words, for Irenaeus, it is quite possible that a human being is not innately composed in a triune way. The

human being has the potential to be better and that perfection is fulfilled in his or her participation with God's Spirit.

This is only one possibility and the confusion surrounding the trichotomy is not solved. "De toute évidence, Irénée compte ici trois éléments dans l'homme. Seulement, s'agit-il simplement de l'homme, ou de l'homme parfait? Ou plutôt, pour parler sans ambiguïté, s'agit-il simplement de l'homme 'parfait', c'est-à-dire complet en sa nature, ou de l'homme divinisé par la participation de l'Esprit de Dieu? Ou bien encore, Iréné mêle-t-il les deux choses?"⁷² This sentiment of ambiguity is mostly due to the lack of systematic thought in the works of Saint Irenaeus.⁷³

2.4 Origen

Let the reader take this also into consideration, that it is observed with regard to the soul of the Saviour, that of those things which are written in the Gospel, some are ascribed to it under the name of soul, and others under that of spirit. For when it wishes to indicate any suffering or perturbation affecting Him, it indicates it under the name of soul; as when it says, 'Now is My soul troubled;' and, 'My soul is sorrowful, even unto death;' and, 'No man taketh My soul from Me, but I lay it down of Myself.' Into the hands of His Father He commends not His soul, but His spirit; and when He says that the flesh is weak, He does not say that the soul is willing, but the spirit: whence it appears that the soul is something intermediate between the weak flesh and the willing spirit...⁷⁴

It is notable that Origen not only distinguished between the soul and the spirit but sensed a possible confusion between these two elements and has tried to address it. In this passage, he is

⁷² Henri de Lubac, "Anthropologie Tripartite" in *Théologie de l'Histoire*, (Paris: Desclée de Brouwer, 1990), 130.

⁷³ Andrzej Persidok, "Body, Soul and Spirit. Henri de Lubac's Vision of Tripartite Anthropology," *Verbum Vitae* 40, no. 3 (2022): 719-720, accessed November 8, 2024, <https://czasopisma.kul.pl/index.php/vv/article/view/13747>.

⁷⁴ Origen, *De Principiis*, ANF, Vol. 4, 289.

mostly concerned with Christology and the confusion between Christ's soul and spirit. Given the fact that Christ, in His perfect humanity, has a human soul (blameless and sinless) and a human spirit, we must assume that the same parts can be applied to us. Even if for the moment we neglect making the parallel between Christology and Anthropology, Origen still provides a valuable insight to the inner-workings of a tripartite person, whether perfect or not. Similar to other Church Fathers, Origen also posits the soul as the weak link between the flesh and the spirit. It is, once again, the spirit that is put on the highest pedestal. The soul is the bond, the weak link, between the flesh and the willing spirit. In another passage he is more forthcoming on the subject of anthropology: "For as man consists of body, and soul, and spirit, so in the same way does Scripture, which has been arranged to be given by God for the salvation of men."⁷⁵ This thesis does not aim to elaborate on the spiritual understanding of Scripture, as proposed by Origen. Rather, our interest lies in the explicit statement about the trichotomy of the human being. Origen, like all the Fathers in this discussion are unequivocally stating that the human being is a triune being. Not only that, we are beginning to see certain aspects that are repeated from one Father to another, leading us to think that there might be a unity or a system behind their thoughts.

Let us now consider de Lubac's exposition of Origen. In contrast to Saint Irenaeus, with Origen, de Lubac sees a more direct and straightforward anthropology. "Irénee parlait surtout de l'Esprit de Dieu, même quand cet Esprit, participé, devenait, par consentement de l'âme, l'esprit de l'homme. Origène parlera plus explicitement de l'esprit de l'homme, en tant qu'ouverture à l'Esprit de Dieu."⁷⁶ It is in Origen, that de Lubac sees the spirit understood as the point of contact

⁷⁵ Origen, *De Principiis*, ANF, Vol. 4, 359.

⁷⁶ Henri de Lubac, "Anthropologie Tripartite," 134.

between the human being and God. In other words, there is no confusion between the nature of the spirit. We have, in Origen, a much more defined if not even contemporary⁷⁷ view of anthropology, where the human being is, as Saint Paul presents, a clear composite of the three essential elements. The following is a very succinct summary of de Lubac's interpretation on Origen provided by Persidok:

The author of *Catholicism* focuses primarily on two distinctions introduced by the Alexandrian. Firstly, he notes that *pneuma* for him is, first and foremost, the life of God at its source but, in the second place, it is also the life of God given to man: as he becomes a participant in this life, the man himself becomes the spirit (*pneuma*). Secondly, Origen distinguishes two types of participation in *pneuma*: the first type is natural participation, related to the bond between man and God at the level of creation; the other type is participation in supernatural life, and only in this case there is a transformative action that results in the spiritualization of man. De Lubac concludes that although the author of *On the First Principles* sometimes uses the term "spirit" to refer to the moral conscience of man, the main meaning of this term in his works is "the point of contact between a man and the divine *Pneuma* who inhabits him." The spirit in man is proof of "a certain hidden transcendence of the man over himself," a certain "opening," and even "a certain received continuity between man and God."⁷⁸

It is worth mentioning that de Lubac sees in Origen the notion of 'natural spirit'. There is definitely a *pneuma* that belongs naturally to all of us, on the level of creation, and the one we could call ours. In fact, it is precisely these points that distinguish Tripartite Theology. More precisely, *pneuma* elevates the image of the human being from a bi-une one to a triune one. In other words, it is the natural spirit, the human spirit, the innate openness to God and the foundational desire of salvation that define the tripartite mode. Yet this level mainly characterizes the inherent bond between the person and God. This relates to the creation of man and it is as de

⁷⁷ We say contemporary (or even existentialist) only in the sense that the human being is considered as a closed off unit of existence; a discernible self-sufficient existence. While it is a separately considered existence, it is nonetheless in its nature connected and open to a God. Origen aligns with these views easier than St. Irenaeus. For him, spirit is not confused with the Holy Spirit.

⁷⁸ Andrzej Persidok, "Body, Soul and Spirit," 720-721.

Lubac calls it: a natural participation. The supernatural participation is the one where the person participates in his or her active spiritualization. This relates to *theosis*. Simply put, de Lubac sees two sides of Origen's understanding of *pneuma*. On the one hand, the *pneuma* traces back our relation and existence to God; our origin and Creator. It is the living present imprint of God in us. On the other hand, the *pneuma* relates to our future selves. It relates to a spiritual becoming of the person. It is the possibility of spiritualization. In this way, *pneuma* is the icon of our ancestry and the active ferment of our future.

It is also worth noting the various descriptives concerning the spirit of man. The spirit is a 'hidden transcendence of the man over himself', a certain 'opening', and a received continuity between man and God'.

2.5 Saint Augustine

Because a human being is constituted of three elements, spirit, soul, and body, which at times are said to be two, since the soul is often included under spirit (for the reasonable part of that same entity, which animals lack, is called spirit), our principal element is the spirit. Next, the life by which we are joined to the body is called the soul. Finally, the body itself, because of its visible nature, comprises our third element.⁷⁹

The opening passage of this thesis reminds us that the Doctor of the Catholic Church unambiguously declares that the human being is made out of the three parts (spirit, soul, and body). The distinction that follows clarifies that the soul is sometimes included within the definition of the spirit, as the spirit is basically the reasonable part of the soul. Nonetheless, Augustine is clearly indicating, whether we want to combine the two together or not, that the

⁷⁹ Augustine, "On Faith and Creed," *Intelix Past Masters Full Text Humanities*, 173.

spirit alone fulfills a role that is essential to the human being. In other words, he is not denying the existence of spirit, even if the distinction is not clear.

As mentioned before in the first chapter, Augustine's understanding of spirit as the chief element and the rational apex of the soul, is not to be taken lightly. Spirit is not a simple activity of the mind; or an exercise of the intellectual or cognitive capacity. We must remember that the human mind for Augustine is *Imago Dei*. If it weren't so, Augustine would have aligned himself more with the philosophies of electiveness where someone's intellectual capacity leads to the salvation of (even the communion with) God. The image of God is not attained by the exercise of the mind; it is already so, ontologically speaking.

“Yet, because the soul still lusts after the desires of the flesh, it is called flesh and is opposed to the spirit not by nature but through its sinful habits.”⁸⁰ As we go through the proponents of the Tripartite Theology, we will soon realize that the soul is often that which we call ourselves. According to Saint Augustine, the soul, the link between body and spirit, is what can keep us chained to the carnal and sinful desires. It is also important to notice that the soul is not opposite in nature to the spirit, but it is opposite only in its sinful desires. So far, after consulting the Church Fathers, we might assume that the spirit, the third element, the one that differentiates dichotomy from trichotomy, cannot sin.

The true worth of the ternary view of a human person should start to take form. On the one end, we have the spirit, and on the other, the body. The link between them is what needs fixing; the link, or the bridge is the soul. It is what we are, living souls. We are informed

⁸⁰ Augustine, "On Faith and Creed," *Intelix Past Masters Full Text Humanities*, 173.

by the spirit of the Lord, but the body too, with its sensory centres, also informs us. We are in between two fires. Let us see how Saint Augustine sees the healing of the soul.

Where true faith and good dispositions are concerned, the soul, for its part, cannot be brought into subjection to the spirit, thereby facilitating harmonious activity, as promptly as the spirit becomes subject to God. Instead, let its impulses, by which it dissipates itself in the direction of what is carnal and transitory, be restrained in gradual fashion.⁸¹

The important point to see here is how the spirit is quickly put into subjection to God. Moreover, it is also important to underline, as simple as it might seem, that the spirit and God are not one and the same. Therefore, for Augustine the quickly subjugating human spirit is in fact human, otherwise it would not need subjugating to begin with. Still, the spirit does seem to belong more to the divine side as opposed to the soul.

Another aspect that strikes us is that salvation is a gradual process of the soul restraining itself from sinful desires. Also, there is a promise and hope of harmonious activity once this gradual rectifying is complete. Saint Augustine continues: "...because the soul also undergoes purification, acquiring a natural stability through the dominance of the spirit, which is its head, and whose head in turn is Christ, we must not lose hope that the body, too, will be restored."⁸² Augustine's ternary view is almost complete.

We know that the spirit is in fact the dominant righteous force to whom the soul must be subjugated. We might assume that the spirit in question is in fact the Holy Spirit, received at baptism. It is the divine life that dwells in us; it is the breath of life. It is, for lack of a better word, a divine *spark* within us, perhaps a seed of eternal life. It is the divine call of God. It is the

⁸¹ Augustine, "On Faith and Creed," Intelix Past Masters Full Text Humanities, 173.

⁸² Augustine, "On Faith and Creed," Intelix Past Masters Full Text Humanities, 173.

Word. The soul that is entrenched in the senses of the body and sinful desires must heed to the call. Once again, the soul is what we call ourselves. “What good will it be for someone to gain the whole world, yet forfeit their soul?” (Matthew 16:26) This is the importance of the soul.

When Jesus asks us to carry the cross and follow Him, we can clearly now interpret this as us heeding to the call of the spirit within ourselves. This is the strength of the ternary vision of the human being. Through the spirit, Jesus calls to us. He calls to the soul, for it to die unto Him, if we want to live and save ourselves.

Let us now talk about the body. This is what Saint Augustine says: “According to the Christian faith, therefore, which cannot deceive, the body will rise again. And if this sounds incredible to anyone, it is because he understands flesh in its present condition, not as it is destined to be in the future, because at that moment of angelic transformation it will no longer be flesh and blood but only a body.”⁸³

In the Christian faith, eternal life is preceded by the death and resurrection of the body. What is essential to understand is that the emphasis is not given to the body over other parts. There is no one part without the other. For Christians, the soul is not trapped in the body. Once again, the soul, spirit, and the body are one whole. It is erroneous to think that one supersedes the other. Even though the soul must concede to the call of the Holy Spirit and the teaching of Christ, nonetheless, the whole person is called. More simply, even if the call is directed to the soul (one aspect of the ternary view) it is the whole person (body, soul, spirit) that is meant. Having said that, the body that rises is not the same body that died. It will be a transformed body. This is what Saint Paul says: “The body that is sown is perishable, it is raised imperishable; it is sown in

⁸³Augustine, “On Faith and Creed,” *Intelix Past Masters Full Text Humanities*, 173.

dishonour, it is raised in glory; it is sown in weakness, it is raised in power; it is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body.” (1 Corinthians 15:42-44) For Saint Paul, the natural body is sown first and the spiritual comes later; it is the spiritual body that is raised. The resurrection is the transformation of the body from one state to another, a more noble state. What is even more important is that Saint Paul purposely says, ‘it is raised a spiritual body,’ it is not a spirit that is raised, it is the body. Let us quickly summarize the main point discussed so far.

According to Saint Augustine, the three aspects of the human being (body, spirit, and soul) relate to each other in a specific way. The soul must be subjected to the spirit and progressively detach itself from earthly senses and heed to the call of the spirit. In doing so, it will rejoin the harmonious activity and as such, will be restored and will progressively take the body under the same restoration. Hopefully, Saint Augustine’s thought has illustrated for us the beauty and importance of the triune model of a person. It has hopefully also described the essence of each part. Let us end this section by saying that if a human being is to be taught and guided towards redemption and eternal life, it is the totality of that person (body, spirit, soul) that must be taken towards such redemption. It is this precise totality of humanity that was assumed by a loving God in order to show Himself and save us.

De Lubac gives an overview of Augustine’s anthropology as well. De Lubac is aware that for the saint, the spirit (*spiritus*) takes on the role of mind (*mens*). “Le terme de *mens*, on le sait, tient dans son œuvre une place privilégiée.”⁸⁴ De Lubac, just as we did, quotes from Augustine’s *De Fide et Symbolo*, where *spiritus* et *mens* share the same role. “Dans le *De Fide et Symbolo*, en même temps qu’il distingue *anima* et *spiritus*, Augustin identifie *spiritus* et *mens*.”⁸⁵ To clarify,

⁸⁴ Henri de Lubac, “Anthropologie Tripartite,” 145.

⁸⁵ Henri de Lubac, “Anthropologie Tripartite,” 146.

de Lubac does not imply that Augustine identifies two different things: spirit and mind. Instead, he identifies the spirit as the mind. In his footnotes, de Lubac supports and clarifies this by adding the original text in Latin ‘*rationali spiritu, quae mens etiam nominator*’. This identifies the spirit as the rational capacity which is also called the mind. As we have shown before, this lack of distinction between *mens* and *pneuma* wraps the saint’s anthropology with an ambiguity of which de Lubac makes a note. De Lubac ends the section on Augustine by underlining that sentiment of ambivalence: “...plus porté à s’exprimer dans un vocabulaire emprunté pour une part au néo-platonisme, Augustin met sous le mot *spiritus* une réalité qui ressemble parfois plus au *noûs*...de la philosophie grecque qu’au *pneuma* du texte sacré.”⁸⁶

In the next chapter of the paper, we will jump centuries and appeal in greater detail to the brilliant and diligent work of John Bickford Heard and Henri de Lubac. But before we do, let us remind ourselves of the objective of this paper. The Church Fathers that we have considered thus far, are proponents of the triune model. Some of them are more deliberate in their attempts and some only imply the triune understanding of a human being. It is crucial for us to remember that we are not using a methodology based on data or scientific experience. We are theologizing. A purely reductive and scientific method will not help us here. By the end of this thesis, we will not be able to count on our fingers the parts that make up our being. In other words, a scientist, or scientism might be satisfied by reducing the human being to a body, but the theological anthropology will always show the human being in some relation to God. For that reason, we should not pine after trichotomy as ultimately superior to dichotomy. But this thesis aspires to make the case for the former as I believe it carries a more potent symbolic value. Having said that, Tripartite Theology should not be understood solely as a symbol or an apt metaphor for a

⁸⁶ Henri de Lubac, “Anthropologie Tripartite,” 147.

human being. The reasons for Tripartite Theology are not just subjectively appealing; they do in fact carry theological import and convey the nature of the relationship between man and God in a more deliberate and precise manner. To play the devil's advocate, we could easily say that the human being is made of only two elements since the soul is often included under spirit. Often times, the soul is replaced by the spirit and vice versa. If Saint Augustine is willing to go from three elements to two elements from one sentence to another, maybe the exact number is not important. Maybe the Church Fathers use these terms (body, flesh, soul, spirit) interchangeably, as they see fit? This, I would presume, is the prevailing feeling today. Plato had sensed a truth in separating the human being into two parts. He sensed a divinity implied in humanity, but his instincts, bereft of Scripture, led him to see the soul (arguably the divine part) as trapped in the material body (the lesser part).

We propose using numbers as symbols that transmit meaning. It is the meaning that counts for us. Church Fathers could have easily said (being influenced by Greek philosophy) that man is made of four elements and that his soul is the quintessence or synthesis of these four. They could have also said that a human being is made up of one element. One has to think of the concept of the Trinity. How does God live equally in three persons? As such, the Trinity is not mentioned in the Bible. Neither does the word 'Trinity' or any explanation of it appear in the New Testament. This is not a cause for alarm. Our main concern is the promotion of understanding and deepening of faith. The concept of the Trinity is a symbol that carries a meaning, truth. The meaning itself goes beyond the symbol. If the symbol or concept had fulfilled its role of transmitting the meaning, one should not pine after the symbol anymore.

To illustrate this point further, I will quote a prominent Egyptologist who under the heading, *Correspondence of Numbers*, says: "Oneness is always origin, either metaphysical or as

final accomplishment. The number *two* always indicates complementarities, oppositions, sexuality. The number *three* always speaks of the original ternary, be it the Trinity of the divine Word or the basic ternary in the ultimate reduction of all understanding.”⁸⁷ In this Egyptologist’s mind, numbers also have symbolic values. They are not necessarily a linear procession of $n, n+1$. In other words, the number 5 is not simply and only *more* or bigger than 4, even though, in the general understanding of mathematics, 5 is always bigger than 4. In Schwaller’s view, it is more important to realize that the number 5 is another form of expression, just as is the number 4. It is also important to remember that the Jewish tradition holds certain numbers as perfect or even sacred. Some of these numbers include 3, 7, 12, 40, 153... Jesus rose after the third day, the world was created in seven days, the flood lasted for forty days, Jesus caught one hundred and fifty-three fish... These numbers are symbols of perfection or completion. They do not carry a numerical value only. Or that is not their importance in matters of theology. The flood did not last forty days. The length of the flood differs from the priestly tradition to the Yahwist tradition. Once again, the numbers are conveying something bigger than themselves. The exact number of elements that go into the constitution of a person could be said to be in the hundreds, especially if we were to consult a scientist, someone who deals with visible elements and has no interest in soul or spirit. So, which number is right? The number of parts will always depend under which angle we look at the person. In the Christian view, man is made in the image of God. If, for the moment, we abstain from the influence of Greek thought and philosophy, the God of Israel that spoke to the inspired writers never mentioned anything beyond the unity or singularity of a person. Older Jewish tradition does not conceive of the soul as something separate or existing

⁸⁷ R.A. Schwaller de Lubicz, *Sacred Science: The King of Pharaonic Theocracy*, (Rochester, VT: Inner Traditions International, 1961), 206.

without the body. Even more, it does not conceive of anything beyond the body. Even to this day, the Catholic view of the soul is not independent or separate from the body. They are considered as one. Yet, it is clear that trichotomists (some of them Church Fathers, some Doctors of the Church) are still persistently presenting and defending the triune view of a person. Their view of anthropology is not inconsistent with the Christian dogma. The point I am trying to make is that the exact number of parts or elements will never fully explain a human being. So, the question that will undoubtedly arise is, *what is the point then of the ternary view, if it is not unconditionally true?* There are a few reasons. Firstly, it is helpful. It works. It can be put to the test; it has an experiential dimension and value. Its purpose is to explain the nature of a human being who is made in the image of God.

Once again, I approach Tripartite Theology in the same sense as the Church Fathers. I would not base my entire theological views on it and force Scripture and tradition to fit around it. The trichotomy of a human being, or dichotomy for that matter, are not inscrutable. Having said that, there is definitely one aspect of Tripartite Theology that should have jumped out at us, and it is solely that one aspect that will perhaps give this thesis its full merit. I am not necessarily defending trichotomy because it shows the human being as a union of three elements as opposed to two. Tripartite Theology is not better because it has more elements than dichotomy. It is not less truthful because it has less elements than the four-elements theory of a person. The allure of Tripartite Theology is that it names one part (the main part) of the human being. Every single Church Father that we have seen thus far has named this part and has given it its rightful place at the top. In the next chapter of the paper, I will present the thinking of Reverend Heard and Cardinal de Lubac who unapologetically defend Tripartite Theology for exactly that same reason. That reason, that named supreme element, is spirit.

Chapter 3

Theological Analysis

So far, this thesis has sought two things. Firstly, we hope that we have sufficiently presented the historical context in which each Church Father lived and worked. Secondly, we hope that we succeeded in presenting the most pertinent texts, found in the patristics, for the validity of Tripartite Theology. We have considered the most relevant and explicit patristic texts that deal with the triune model of a human being. We have also analyzed and compared the texts, and we have hinted at possible conclusions that arise from them. In other words, the historical and exegetical part of the thesis has been completed. Thus, we have come to the last part of the thesis. In this section, we will try to define a system of thought behind the scattered texts of the Fathers. This thesis will attempt to discern a theological system and provide a meaning from what has been presented thus far.

For this purpose, we will rely on our two major secondary sources. The first one, chronologically speaking, will be the work of Irish-born theologian Reverend John Bickford Heard. The second source will be the work of French Jesuit Henri de Lubac. The reason we have selected these two authors is mainly due to their systematic approach to the topic of Tripartite Theology. Consequently, we hope that their work will systematize the patristic texts and provide the groundwork for the possibility of a tripartite theology.

3.1 John Bickford Heard

The Tripartite Nature of Man by Reverend John Bickford Heard deserves a proper investigation and a research paper of its own. It is an illuminating book that summarizes the

reasons for the tripartite understanding of a human being. Our exposé on the tripartite theology would not be complete if we did not introduce his work. To help us situate the scope of his work, we will share the overview of Heard's thesis found in the book's preface.

At the very beginning of the preface, Heard offers his thesis in a very straightforward way. "A very few words will explain the object and the scope of the following treatise. It is the attempt to weave into one connected whole those passages scattered up and down the Word of God which speak of human nature as consisting of three parts -spirit, soul and body."⁸⁸ He continues by pointing to an obvious oversight in Christian anthropology. That is, we do not consider the difference between soul and spirit as much as we do with soul and body. In other words, the trichotomy, as found in Scripture and the writings of the Church Fathers, that clearly sets out the three main parts, is never fully developed, and definitely underdeveloped in terms of spirit. He continues to define the Pnuma: "The Pnuma is that part of man which is made in the image of God - it is the conscience, or faculty of God-consciousness which has been depraved by the fall, and which is dormant, though not quite dead".⁸⁹ The Reverend brings a few interesting points as he develops his theory. Firstly, the use of consciousness in the description of spirit is rather new and does align itself more with psychology than physiology. Secondly, the fundamental element in question is "depraved" ever since the fall of humanity. This aligns itself well with the admonition of Saint Paul who urges us to be chaste in spirit, soul, and body before the Second Coming of Christ. In other words, the spirit is not perfect, nor whole, and is definitely not divine.

⁸⁸ John Bickford Heard, *The Tripartite Nature of Man: Spirit, Soul, and Body Applied to illustrate and explain*, (Forgotten Books, 2012), vii.

⁸⁹ Bickford Heard, *The Tripartite Nature of Man*, vii.

It is also pertinent to elucidate the twist in terminology about spirit that Heard brings to the foreground. This is where the modern character of his thought is felt the most. To clarify, he proposes that the branch known as Biblical Psychology is well defined in the books of Scripture but is rarely recognized. This is why the Reverend uses terms such as consciousness and psychology in general. “Yet divines have paid too little attention to the psychology of the Bible, and in consequence obscurities, if not positive errors, have crept into theology, which can only be cleared up by bringing the light of biblical psychology to bear on theology.”⁹⁰

There is one other pertinent aspect found in the book’s preface. It deals with the historical sources of Tripartite Theology. It will come as no surprise that John Bickford Heard is considering the Bible as the source material, as was mentioned before, but what needs clarity is the fact that he categorically rejects the idea that Plato or Aristotle could have hinted at anything close to the Christian anthropology. As we will see later on in the thesis, Heard and de Lubac are adamant in assigning the true source of tripartite anthropology to the works of Saint Paul. This is what Heard says: “...yet to this day divines treat the distinction of soul and spirit as if it were only a verbal one, and speak of mortal body and immortal soul in phrases which are unconsciously borrowed from Plato rather than from St. Paul.”⁹¹ In another section, Heard simply calls the *pneuma* as “...the pneuma of St. Paul.”⁹² Heard does credit Aristotle’s view on human psychology but considers it as a preamble or a preface to the true doctrine of Christian psychology. In other words, void of revelation, Aristotle’s *De Anima* would have been a complete work.

⁹⁰ Bickford Heard, *The Tripartite Nature of Man*, viii.

⁹¹ Bickford Heard, *The Tripartite Nature of Man*, vii.

⁹² Bickford Heard, *The Tripartite Nature of Man*, vii.

All in all, this short summary and commentary on the preface of the book gives us an indication of what Reverend Heard attempts to accomplish in *The Tripartite Nature of Man*. He, as many contemporaries of his time, are proposing to further unfold the biblical psychology, in which the element of spirit plays a crucial role. Heard is unyielding in defending that the complete nature of man is only found in the Bible and as such, no other philosophy or science can give a clearer image of the human being. In this last view he will be in accord with de Lubac, another author who finds that theological anthropology is the only true anthropology.

The modernity of nineteenth century thought will be felt in the author's treatment of the subject. Heard is exceptional at summarizing the development of the tripartite theology, showing the interplay of the three constitutive parts. To give us a small taste of his work, let me give a short quote here: "... the body serves the soul or psyche, and the soul the spirit."⁹³ This should not come as a total surprise to us as we have already seen the implied hierarchy and interworking of the three parts. At first glance, Reverend Heard is simply echoing what we have already seen in the Church Fathers. We have already been acquainted with the notion that there are three parts to a theological understanding of man, and that there is a system of operation between those parts. The distinction lies in the fact that the author now treats the trichotomy explicitly. He has sensed a value in the writings of the Church Fathers. While they treat the subject in relation to other aspects of theology, Heard is purposefully extrapolating and isolating the implied trichotomy. In doing so, he never strays from Scripture and the Greek Fathers. Still, treating the subject in this isolated manner does lend itself to criticism. But before criticizing his vision, let us first develop it.

⁹³ Bickford Heard, *The Tripartite Nature of Man*, 22.

As previously mentioned, trichotomy does not supersede other theological anthropologies because it simply adds a third part, or because it denies other elements. Its pertinence lies in the fact that it shows the third part (spirit) explicitly; not just as a constitutive part, but as the most important one. In doing so, it relies heavily on Scripture and the works of the Fathers. The importance of the spirit as a separate constitutive part has been overtly defended by Reverend Heard. It might come as a surprise to us but Heard defends the trichotomy and importance of spirit against Saint Augustine himself. This, in turn, is his criticism of Saint Augustine's anthropology. What could Heard possibly reproach to Saint Augustine? We have seen that Augustine names the three parts and implies spirit to be the highest one; the one that is subject to God. So, where is the issue? Let's go back to our opening quote of the paper: "Because a human being is constituted of three elements, spirit, soul, and body, which at times are said to be two, since the soul is often included under spirit (for the reasonable part of that same entity, which animals lack, is called spirit), our principal element is the spirit."⁹⁴ Even though Saint Augustine names the three elements and gives the highest place to spirit, he unfortunately does not clearly set spirit and soul apart. For him, even though he is not talking about anthropology per se, soul is contained under spirit. Spirit is the same entity as the soul; it is only its reasoning capacity that sets the spirit apart. It actually does not even set it apart; spirit is like the pinnacle of the soul, its highest mode, if you will. Heard names a few relevant causes for this confusion. "It is only what we might expect, that the distinction of *psyche* and *pneuma* was caught by the Greek, but lost or neglected by the Latin Fathers. The Latin language wanted the precision of the Greek, and *spiritus* and *anima* never acquired the same precision of meaning as *pneuma* and *psyche*."⁹⁵

⁹⁴ Augustine, "On Faith and Creed," Intalex Past Masters Full Text Humanities, 173. Emphasis is mine.

⁹⁵ Bickford Heard, *The Tripartite Nature of Man*, 5.

Reverend Heard implies two things here: firstly, the Latin language lacks subtlety to express what Greeks have previously named and set apart, namely *pneuma* and *psyche*. Heard gives the example of *geist* (spirit) and *seele* (soul) in German and *esprit* (spirit) and *âme* (soul) in French. Both German and French, according to the author, have the subtlety required to distinguish between the two elements. This is the first probable cause for the confusion. The second and more probable one is the heresy associated with the tripartite view that has led Saint Augustine to drop the difference altogether.

We do not mean to imply that the trichotomy of man, as made up of body, soul, and spirit, was not traced out by the early Greek fathers. The distinction of Psyche and Pneuma, on which the doctrine of the trichotomy chiefly rests, was caught by the Greek fathers, but in most cases they founded no teaching on it; and as the only fathers who did so, Origen and Apollinaris, fell into error on the subject, we hardly wonder that Augustine thought it safer to pass it by as an unprofitable distinction : Origen, by holding that the spirit of man was ... impassive of evil, led the way to a theory of the purgation of evil by punishment, which must result in the salvation of all; Apollinaris, by denying to Christ a human Pneuma, and declaring that the Holy Spirit in His case supplied the place of the third part of our nature, thus impaired his humanity. Thus the doctrine of the Pneuma fell into undeserved reproach, and at last was quite lost sight of.⁹⁶

We can assume that Saint Augustine simply dropped the distinction between the spirit and soul so not to be associated with heresies. It does become rather difficult to maintain the triune view of a person without being tempted to venture outside Scripture and established tradition. We will not go into a detailed exposition on heresies. It suffices to say that the subject of human spirit can lead to many avenues, often leading us astray. For example, we can confuse spirit with the Holy Spirit, as Apollinaris did. We can assume that the spirit is the divine element in us that is incapable of evil, as Origen did. We do not want to deny human spirit to Jesus, nor do we want to attach partial divinity to humanity. Reverend Heard does bring a valid objection to

⁹⁶ Bickford Heard, *The Tripartite Nature of Man*, 5-6.

Augustinian anthropology. If we are to consider theological anthropology in such a rigorous manner as reverend Heard does, we must be clear on whether spirit and soul are separate elements or whether one is just a higher faculty of the other. We must clearly set out which aspects of humanity belong to each category. (As a side note, the author of this thesis does not agree fully with the distinction pastor Heard makes. As shown before, Augustine, even if he includes the spirit with the soul, does not deny the existence of spirit. The distinction might not be as sharp as it is with the other Church Fathers, still it adds a dimension to the triune anthropology that the other Fathers omit.)

“The *Pneuma*, or conscience toward God, is the differentia of man, his title to immortality, his distinguishing mark from all; the lower creation.”⁹⁷ Reverend Heard calls *pneuma* “...the indwelling of God in man,” and how we must be acquainted with that part, the only part that is capable of receiving God. He continues: “As we generalize all our animal functions under the head of body, and our intellectual acts under the head of soul, so the devotional and dutiful seem to require a distinct centre.”⁹⁸ This centre is *pneuma*. In many other places, Reverend Heard calls *pneuma* the ‘organ of God-consciousness’. On page 97, he gives a clear and penetrating vision of the interrelationship of the constitutive parts and the relation of those parts to God:

Spirit is the only part in man which fully images forth the inner nature of God. God is spirit: Man is a spirit in a soul and a soul in a body. Thus, we must penetrate through the two other courts to get into the shrine of man’s being before we come to that which is properly and truly divine, and by which we see God. The animal nature in man does not reflect God at all, while the rational and intellectual nature reflects him only partially.⁹⁹

⁹⁷ Bickford Heard, *The Tripartite Nature of Man*, 149.

⁹⁸ Bickford Heard, *The Tripartite Nature of Man*, 108.

⁹⁹ Bickford Heard, *The Tripartite Nature of Man*, 97.

Reverend Heard alludes to the fullness of psychology only when spirit is considered: “If we can distinguish between soul and body, as all psychologists do, who are not materialist; are we not bound equally to distinguish between soul and spirit.”¹⁰⁰ Again, on page 93 of *The Tripartite Nature of Man*, we see another vital aspect: “But the Pneuma is not only that which lies behind the psyche as the psyche does underneath the bodily organism, it is that part of man which is unable to expand of itself or to attain to its proper end in consequence of the fall.”¹⁰¹ He adds: “God-consciousness-which is dead or dormant in a great degree since the fall, and which is the office and work of the Holy Ghost first to quicken, and then to direct, sanctify and govern.”¹⁰² Finally, before summarizing and giving a unifying view of Heard’s theology, we will see his definition of the soul: “Man became a living soul, in the sense that his Nephesh or self is the meeting point, or *tertium quid* of these two natures, body and spirit.”¹⁰³

I have selected these passages from Heard’s work since I believe they not only fortify what we have already seen, but they also add new dimensions to Tripartite Theology. For Reverend Heard, the spirit is as real as the psyche. I say this only because of how easily we accept and understand the psyche as real. After all, psychology is to some extent a science. What about the spirit? If we gave it the same level of attention as we give to the psyche, what would that entail? Actually, Reverend Heard does use terms such as, Christian Psychology. This implies that a Christian must consider the third element (spirit) when he or she tries to understand himself or herself and his or her origin and place in the world.

¹⁰⁰ Bickford Heard, *The Tripartite Nature of Man*, 104.

¹⁰¹ Bickford Heard, *The Tripartite Nature of Man*, 93.

¹⁰² Bickford Heard, *The Tripartite Nature of Man*, 92.

¹⁰³ Bickford Heard, *The Tripartite Nature of Man*, 48.

In recent centuries, we have arguably moved from a God-centred reality to a self-centred one. Psyche became the sole reference for the interior dimension of man. The question is: can the interiority sustain itself under the weight of the psyche, or can a human being find peace and solace if he never considers the third constitutive part, the spirit? For Reverend Heard, the answer is a resounding, no. As we have seen, Heard keeps the same level of importance amongst all three parts. The body serves the soul; the soul serves the spirit. I am sure that he would not object if I continued in the same vein and added that the spirit serves and receives God. For Heard, the spirit is akin to an organ in the human body. That's the level of importance he gives to it. It is understood that he does not mean that in materialistic terms, just as the psychologist does not treat the brain, but the psyche. For Heard, the spirit of modern man is in the process of atrophy ever since the fall of humanity. We are not capable of hearing God. Our spirit antenna is not picking up that frequency anymore, or maybe the antenna is angled the wrong way. Heard reminds us that, "God makes himself known in silence and stillness."¹⁰⁴ Are we perhaps expecting the signal to come from the psyche? Heard would dissuade us from that hope. We are the psyche, in a sense. We are the living soul, the nexus between spirit and body. It is quite possible that the noise of an overworked psyche is indeed drowning the spirit-signal. For him, psyche (with all its powers of logic and reason) only partially reflects the image of God. To get to the centre, to the indwelling place of God, we must go past and through the psyche. If we abide by the rules of psyche and logic, we will undoubtedly look for a world made in our image, not the other way around. "When logic run mad takes its own laws of thought for the laws of

¹⁰⁴ Bickford Heard, *The Tripartite Nature of Man*, 112.

things... it will of course apply this method to theology, and, spinning out of its own logical cobwebs, pretend to see in these the mystery of God and universe.”¹⁰⁵

There is one more aspect of Heard’s view that is seldom mentioned when talking about spirituality. Reverend Heard is aware that the spiritual part of man is not something we can turn on and grow or nurture out of our own volition. In other words, we have no providence over the God-consciousness organ. We read, “God-consciousness-which is dead or dormant in a great degree since the fall, and which is the office and work of the Holy Ghost first to quicken, and then to direct, sanctify and govern.”¹⁰⁶ This is probably the most important aspect of the spirit dimension of man. It must be grasped fully if we are to understand properly the tripartite theology as it pertains to the nature of the human being. Heard writes with full intention that spirit, while being the golden nugget in the ore under the body and the soul, “...is that part of man which is unable to expand of itself or to attain to its proper end.”¹⁰⁷ This must be undertaken by the power of the Holy Spirit. This, in turn, reminds us of Saint Augustine who says that the soul must yield to the spirit. The spirit is not ours to manipulate or play with. We do not grow our spirit, but Christ grows in us. This would be a more poetic way of putting it. It is the designated place of receiving God and grace. To put it in more descriptive terms, the spirit is our opening to God. If the power of the will does indeed reside in the psyche (meaning we can use it), and not in the spirit, this means we can only choose whether we want to pay attention to the spirit or not. In other words, the choice, or choosing, is indeed under our providence, but the spirit, as constitutional as it is, is not. If we do choose to pay attention to the leading spirit, the signal will

¹⁰⁵ Bickford Heard, *The Tripartite Nature of Man*, 140-141.

¹⁰⁶ Bickford Heard, *The Tripartite Nature of Man*, 92.

¹⁰⁷ Bickford Heard, *The Tripartite Nature of Man*, 93.

get stronger, and we might eventually be brought closer to the image in which we were originally created.

Let us use conscience as an example. In the simplest terms, conscience is the voice of God that comes from the spirit of man, from the place where the voice of God is heard. If the soul does not yield to the call of conscience, the call might after a prolonged period of negligence, lose its impact and due reverence. If, on the other hand, we nurture the spirit, we will hear God's voice and perhaps deafen the huffing and puffing of the overworked psyche. All this to say that humans cannot save themselves. No matter how much we try to glorify our efforts and prompt the psyche to heavenly heights, if we refuse to cooperate with Christ, if we ignore the organ of God-consciousness, we might forever be trapped in our own mental fancy with no end in sight.

There is a lot more to consider in *The Tripartite Nature of Man*. We have kept its scope limited to a strict definition of anthropology, but this work stretches far beyond that. For instance, we have not considered the topic of resurrection and the analogies between the Trinity and the triune human model. While the rest of the Reverend's book is a thought-provoking read, it would simply fall outside the scope of this thesis.

3.2 Henri de Lubac and a Summative Understanding of Christian Anthropology

If Heard, within the framework of biblical psychology, had demonstrated the tripartite nature of the human being, not only as a possibility, but a fact to be discerned in close scriptural analysis, then de Lubac, while continuing the tripartite tradition, goes one step further: he does

not simply depict humanity as triune, he is defending it against the growing spiritual ignorance of the modern world.

Henri de Lubac was a theologian who devoted much more space in his works to theological reflection on the man than to any of the dogmas of faith. This was due to his conviction that the crisis of faith and progressing secularization he observed were not so much the result of a rational negation of the credibility of Christianity but of a certain, increasingly dominant, vision of humanity in which there was no more room for any opening towards Transcendence.¹⁰⁸

De Lubac's views on tripartite anthropology have been scattered throughout many of his works, such as *Catholicism*, *Affrontements*, and *Sur les chemins de Dieu* to name a few. His "Anthropologie Tripartite," on the other hand, is fully dedicated to the topic of tripartite anthropology. "Anthropologie Tripartite" (Tripartite Anthropology) is the second part of the first volume of *Théologie de l'Histoire* written by the prominent French Jesuit theologian. This section contains four chapters ("Saint Paul," "Tradition Patristique," "De Saint Augustin à Nos Jours," et "L'Esprit") dedicated to the subject of tripartite theology with a special emphasis on the nature of spirit.

De Lubac comes after Heard as the most contemporary expert on Tripartite Theology. He draws some of the main conclusions that are also found in the work of Reverend Heard. Just as Heard, the French theologian underlines the importance of the so-called third element; spirit. They both recognize the long patristic tradition that promoted the tripartite model of the human being. They both offer the extensive lists of Church Fathers who have been generally known as trichotomists, and they both underscore the discrepancies found between the Greek and Latin approach to the subject.

¹⁰⁸ Andrzej Persidok, "Body, Soul and Spirit.," 730.

It must be said that de Lubac's work is thoroughly and strictly scholarly and does not dare to venture too much beyond the textual evidence. It is often hard to discern his personal views due to an overabundance of textual evidence and a rather implicit system behind his summative thoughts. De Lubac carefully considers the textual evidence and presents a robust historical case for the Tripartite Theology. His work fits perfectly with this thesis as it will serve as the authoritative and the most complete summation of the Tripartite Theology as developed through history. Reverend Heard, on the other hand, allows himself a certain liberty in drawing much broader conclusions which, in retrospect, places his work perhaps outside the strict academic scope. While these two authors differ in their approach, still their conclusions are comparable. This thesis will consider de Lubac's most pertinent passages and try to clearly present the tripartite anthropology as understood by the French theologian. It will provide an opportunity to review some of the main aspects already covered.

This part of the thesis will also rely on the article "Body, Soul and Spirit. Henri de Lubac's Vision of Tripartite Anthropology," in which Andrzej Persidok, a Polish Catholic theologian, gives a concise summary and further develops the theme of tripartite theology. This work, while dedicated to elucidating de Lubac's views on anthropology, is at the same time very relatable as it presents a more contemporary setting for the trilemma. It is also significant as it offers us a small summary of de Lubac's scattered ideas on anthropology.

At the bottom of the human soul, there is a "germ of eternity" which already, in the midst of time, "breathes the upper air." It is precisely the transcendence in man, which also happens to be "the sole warrant of his own immanence." In one of his texts, de Lubac describes transcendence as "substantial interiority," distinguishing it from all the layers of psychological depth man can discover within himself by way of careful introspection. It does not only involve the movement of transcending what is superficial in man towards what is hidden but also the discovery of "irreducible interiority" which is the seal of God Himself that is imprinted on the human heart at all times. This idea of substantial (and not only psychic) interiority recurs in later works. In a work devoted to a theological theory of

cognition, *Sur les chemins de Dieu* ('On the ways of God'), the theologian argues that the moment the human spirit denies its own mystery, believing that it is transparent to itself, it begins to suffocate. It builds a world for itself which appears to it to be an infernal machine in which there is no room anymore, no free space. Meanwhile, to find himself, man must always aim higher and farther than his own self, following an impulse that does not allow him to comprehend and fulfill himself within an enclosed and complete nature. In another text, the theologian concludes that "a well conducted anthropology presupposes a theology."¹⁰⁹

Let us quickly expand on this concise summary of de Lubac's general understanding of human nature. This will serve as an introduction to his very deliberate defense of tripartite anthropology, as found in "Anthropologie Tripartite". In this brief overview of the nature of the human person, we see that de Lubac is hinting at some of the same conclusions found in the work of Reverend Heard. The similarity of these ideas is not due to any direct causality between the Irish-born Reverend and the French theologian. If the nature of the triune human being is properly understood - or at least understood in the way the Church Fathers and Saint Paul understood it - it is almost impossible not to reach the same conclusions. More precisely, this thesis is presupposing a system of thought behind these scattered tripartite anthropologies.

The most important point to be taken from this brief summary of de Lubac's thought, as provided by professor Persidok, is the apophatic nature of the human being. We have seen this idea already partially developed by Reverend Heard. While Heard also notes that the spirit, has a providence of its own within the human construct and cannot be accessed, moved or incited by the intellectual or psychological powers of the human being, de Lubac goes a step further and assigns an apophatic nature to this element. Consequently, and at the same time, he assigns the spirit as the defining element of human nature. As we are beginning to see, the tripartite nature, as firstly

¹⁰⁹ Andrzej Persidok, "Body, Soul and Spirit.," 718.

exposed by the Apostle and the Church Fathers, in the first centuries, has, in the last two centuries, grown into a fairly consistent exposition. In other words, the authors who consider the tripartite nature of humanity see in this nature an imprint of God and a radical and innate openness to transcendence. The uniqueness or modernity of de Lubac's view is also due to the socio-political and cultural context of the 20th century.

We will continue with the article in question as its introduction presents the milieu in which de Lubac is forming his theories on anthropology. Andrzej Persidok starts by giving a bleak vision of the modern world from the 18th century onwards.

The hope for removing the religious burden from man was sought, *inter alia*, in the progress of empirical science. By providing a purely natural explanation of the phenomenon of religion, it was to rid man of the burden of the supernatural. The razor of scientific reductionism that was originally turned against God began to penetrate deeper and deeper, eventually reaching what was considered the essence of human nature. The discoveries of psychology, neurology or evolutionary biology, treated as the ultimate truth about man, have shaken the faith in human subjectivity, freedom and rationality.¹¹⁰

Following this exposition, the author presents a very pertinent paradox. As the razor of 'scientific reductionism' cuts deeper and deeper into human nature, it has become clear that it was exactly something supernatural (irreducible) that made the human being what it is. "As it transpired, man could be man only owing to what was outside the boundaries of pure humanity. What many considered an unnecessary addition, proved to be the foundation."¹¹¹ He goes on to name, *parmi les plusieurs autres*, Henri de Lubac, the French Jesuit, as one of those whose mission was to preserve and illustrate that irreducible element of the human nature. This is what he says of de Lubac's mission: "While writing about the supernatural vocation of man, he

¹¹⁰ Andrzej Persidok, "Body, Soul and Spirit.," 715.

¹¹¹ Andrzej Persidok, "Body, Soul and Spirit.," 716.

referred, *inter alia*, to the biblical idea of “tripartite anthropology” according to which man is not only body (*soma*) and soul (*psyche*) but also includes a mysterious spirit sphere (*pneuma*).”¹¹²

As we have seen throughout the thesis thus far, and now with de Lubac as well, the tripartite theology is defined by this often neglected third element, and yet the chief element. For now, we are not going further into the analysis of the mysterious element. Rather, we will show where de Lubac finds the source for the existence of his element in the first place. This inevitably brings us to the first section of the volume; the one concerning Saint Paul.

Just as we have shown before, de Lubac too considers the saint’s work as the essential source for any tripartite anthropology consequently adopted or developed by the Church Fathers. The very opening lines of the “*Anthropologie Tripartite*” are once again reiterating the importance Saint Paul had on the subsequent thoughts of the Fathers. “L’antiquité chrétienne, c’est un fait, n’a pas jugé insignifiant le verset paulinien sur le corps, l’âme et l’esprit. Toutefois, d’un auteur à l’autre, les interprétations diffèrent, sans toujours s’opposer contradictoirement.”¹¹³ The section clearly states that the Apostle’s understanding of anthropology was not lightly taken. The Fathers who have expanded on Paul’s vision have not always interpreted things the same way, but they have never established contradictory statements either. For de Lubac, this is a fact.

As previously mentioned in this thesis, this point is contentious (especially when considered outside theology) and requires a proper analysis of its own. Many scholars see Plato’s and Aristotle’s influence in the texts of the Fathers. De Lubac is careful in citing that the main evidence of tripartite anthropology in Christianity is in fact found in 1 Thessalonians 5:23 “...ce qui se trouve dans son œuvre (Platon) est toute autre chose que ce que se lit chez saint Paul.

¹¹² Andrzej Persidok, “Body, Soul and Spirit,” 716.

¹¹³ Henri de Lubac, “*Anthropologie Tripartite*,” 128.

C'est une certaine trichotomie psychologique, autrement dit, une division tripartite de l'âme: raisonnable, irascible et concupiscible."¹¹⁴

De Lubac correctly reminds us that Plato is concerned with a tripartite division of the soul and not of the entire human being. This should not be surprising due to the different meanings assigned and the importance given to the human body. In other words, a Christian writer cannot allow himself or herself not to include the body in the anthropological analysis while the platonic view of the human being can easily excuse itself of any considerations of the body.

Dutch theologian, George van Kooten in his book *Paul's Anthropology in Context* has an opposing view to Lubac. While Paul is the source for the patristic texts on tripartite anthropology, as seen in de Lubac's writings, Van Kooten, denies the originality of Paul's thoughts. He, more than de Lubac, acknowledges the general trichotomic influence of the Greek thought on the Church Fathers. "Plato states here that a living human being also consists of mind, soul and body. The dominance of the mind within this tripartite anthropology is confirmed by the above passage from the Phaedrus, where Plato explicitly calls it 'the pilot of the soul'. In this way, already in Plato the outline of a tripartite anthropology begins to emerge."¹¹⁵

Van Kooten goes on to say that writers such as Philo and Paul, while influenced by Greek philosophy, rewrite these ideas on trichotomy in the context of the Scripture. This view, in our opinion, is more historical (reductive) than theological. To state that Saint Paul reworks these Greek ideas in the context of the Jewish Scripture¹¹⁶ is basically reductive. While it is important

¹¹⁴ Henri de Lubac, "Anthropologie Tripartite," 120.

¹¹⁵ George H. Van Kooten, *Paul's Anthropology in Context*, (Tubingen, Germany: Mohr Siebeck, 2008), 270.

¹¹⁶ George H. Van Kooten, *Paul's Anthropology in Context*, 270.

to recognize the influence of the Greek philosophy on patristic anthropology, this influence does not imply that Christian theology is a mere reworking of the Greek texts. In other words, Paul's transformation on the road to Damascus where he encounters Jesus Christ is arguably a more deepening experience than a mere intellectual exercise. It is also important to remember that Paul, or the Church Fathers, are not simply categorizing parts of the human being, whether it be parts of the mind or any other part. Tripartite anthropology, on the other hand, proposes a relational aspect of the three fundamental elements (including the body), not merely the soul or, in modern parlance, consciousness.

Christian anthropology can never be reduced to mere materialism, even with its emphasis on the body. This thesis, while looking for a system of thought behind Tripartite Theology, also attempts to prove that the human construct, mainly due to the nature of the human spirit, is inherently made for the experience of the divine. This ontological construct of the three fundamental parts of the human being is not even reducible to numbers.¹¹⁷ Professor Jastrzebski, in his book entitled, *Homo Theomorphicus et Theophoricus: A Receptive-Responsive Theory of Spirituality*, underlines the need for the relationality and interdependence of the three fundamental aspects of the human being.

We can say that the soul animates the body and the spirit spiritualizes the whole human being. The spirit enriches both the psyche and the matter of the human body. The spirit penetrates our entire existence and opens it up to the presence of God. Though physicality and the psyche are distinct levels of being, they are interdependent. In a radically dichotomous perspective, spirituality is not an additional, third dimension of human existence, but rather the principle that reveals itself in both physicality and the psyche.¹¹⁸

¹¹⁷ We could argue that numbers or mathematics, being descriptions and laws of the universe, belong to the metaphysical sphere. This in fact fortifies our argument but it would require a deeper discussion of the matter.

¹¹⁸ Andrzej Jastrzebski, *Homo Theomorphicus et Theophoricus*, 156.

This is an important point as it showcases the interdependence of the three elements. As said before, these elements are relational and cannot be counted as separate individual parts or objects. More importantly, they derived their existence as they relate to the Creator. These are not elements of the natural world definable by natural methods. It would be naïve to assume that any of these elements will ever be reduced to mere physical elements and be redistributed on the scientific chart of elements. Even if we ascribe a purely natural dimension to the body, still this body is in constant relationship with the soul (while the soul is governed by the spirit which is the seat of God's consciousness). Once again, the spirit, to quote Jastrzebski, reveals itself in both physicality and psyche.

We must remember that the spirit is in relation with the other two elements and as such, it bears an influence on the soul and body equally. To clarify, spirit is not merely a condition of a perception. This would relegate the spirit to a role only possible in the realm of the mind. We must remember that the spirit has an all-encompassing providence where the human person enjoys the innate openness to and the possibility of experiencing God. In this thesis, we will see that this radical openness is directly connected to the ascetical dimension. "The only trichotomy which will stand the test of our advanced school of physiologists is this, that the bodily organism, the intellectual faculties and that higher spiritual consciousness by which we know and serve God, are not separable natures, but separate manifestations of the one nature."¹¹⁹ According to Andrej Persidok, de Lubac shares the same understanding. "Already when analyzing St. Paul's tripartite anthropology, de Lubac hinted that the Apostle did not refer to a division of man into

¹¹⁹ Bickford Heard, *The Tripartite Nature of Man*, 119.

three layers placed atop each other but into three concentrically arranged spheres, for which the spirit is the center and the principle of unity.”¹²⁰

While the subject of Platonic influence on Paul is debatable, de Lubac has enough awareness to recognize and admit this prevailing power and richness of Greek philosophy at the time. De Lubac notes that, if Saint Paul is to be compared with any Greek philosopher, it is Aristotle rather than Plato. This point was also made by Heard, who advocated that, had it not been for revelation, Aristotle’s *de Anima* would have been a sufficient analysis of the human being. “Si l’on voulait donc trouver à la trichotomie paulienne un certain antécédent grec de portée philosophique, ça ne serait pas du cote de Platon qu’il conviendrait le chercher. Ça serait plutôt chez Aristote.”¹²¹ This confession is due to the fact that Aristotle does indeed name a superior element dwelling in the composition of man, an element that is immortal and divine. Yet, this comparison, while more applicable than the one with Plato, still falls short of the full meaning of the spirit as proposed by the tripartite theology.

De Lubac acknowledges that there is a certain analogy between St. Paul’s concept and earlier Greek thought. He gives an example of the trichotomy present in Aristotle, where man composed of the body and soul is completed by the mind (*noûs*), the highest and noblest of its powers. This allows him to conclude that St. Paul was probably familiar with the scheme derived from Aristotle but deliberately transformed it, replacing *noûs* with *pneuma*, and hence the concept of Old Testament origin.¹²²

In other words, *nous* and *pneuma* are different. We could hypothesize that the spirit, as explained by the Church Fathers and Saint Paul, pushes back the hierarchy of the elements of any other non-Christian model of a human being. *Autrement dit*, the spirit dethrones the leading

¹²⁰ Andrzej Persidok, “Body, Soul and Spirit,” 722.

¹²¹ Henri de Lubac, “Anthropologie Tripartite,” 123.

¹²² Andrzej Persidok, “Body, Soul and Spirit,” 719-720.

element of the Greek model. If indeed the mind is the leading aspect of the soul, as portrayed by the Greeks, as with philosophers in general, then it would not be surprising that the mind will have to descend to a second place for those who accept something or someone higher than their own mind.

Still, the tripartite model advances a relational and interactive mode of behaviour between the elements. While the spirit is nominally the apex, it does not subsist apart from the other elements. The constitutional model of the human person, according to the tripartite theory and the book of Genesis, promotes a spirit that is the breath of life, something indeed divine in us. If this line of arguing is pushed to its limits, we can conclude that there is a divine part of the human being and that while it is in us it is not ours. This inevitably involves an atemporal dimension of our very own being. It is for this reason that the parallel between the philosophical anthropological model and the theological one is hard to make (all the more with the reductive secular model). It is for this same reason that, ontologically speaking, a human person, in Christian tradition, is never fully defined. In other words, a full definition of a person will always be an impossibility. If we allow ourselves a poetic license for a brief moment, we might say that a fully defined person is in fact a dead one. If not dead, then definitely not free.

The very ordinary living presupposes and implies a dimension of divinity that the tripartite model describes. This sentiment is shared by the important Greek theologian, Panayiotis Nellas. In *Deification in Christ*, he posits Christ as the anthropologic centre of the human being. In other words, Nellas sees the human nature as Christocentric. For him, we are ontologically theocentric beings, who are deprived of our true nature if and when we live in opposition to our god-centered nature. Nellas does not consider the tripartite theology *per se* in his writing, but does hint at some aspects of anthropology pertinent to the nature of a person and

pertinent to our thesis. In other words, the incommensurability of a person is mostly due to the spiritual (spirit) element of the human being. This thesis assigns the spirit as the main element and the cause of that incomprehensibility. For Nellas, the human being who is being made in the image of God is that reason.

It is worth remembering that Reverend Heard, in fact serves as a bridge to these two views, by saying that spirit is the image of God. Nellas relies on the patristics, and in the chapter dealing with the image of God he quotes Gregory of Nyssa who more or less, in *On Making of Man*, says that God, in all his divinity, could never be understood. If we are made in the image of God, we, his most precious creation, certainly cannot be fully comprehended either. “Therefore, since one of the attributes we contemplate in the Divine nature is incomprehensibility of essence, it is clearly necessary that in this point the image should be able to show its imitation of the archetype.”¹²³ Once again this incomprehensibility is mainly due to the spiritual nature of the human being. The theocentric nature in Nellas’s writing, is the spirit in this thesis.

This can be confusing. It seems that we are assigning divinity to a created being. Even if this fulness is found in incomprehensibility, still a fulness of any aspect could imply a completion, perfection or divinity. A fulness of the unknowability, as pejorative as it might sound, is still not reserved for a created being, regardless of its rank of creation. The same goes for the spirit. The fundamental anthropological triunity does not supersede its creator, even with the spirit being one of its elements. De Lubac is also aware of this and he thinks that Saint Paul is aware of it too. It is the opinion of the author of this thesis that the following clarification made by Saint Paul deserves the utmost attention and admiration.

¹²³ Gregory of Nyssa, *On the Making of Man*, in “Church Fathers: On the Making of Man (St. Gregory of Nyssa),” accessed October 9, 2025, <https://www.newadvent.org/fathers/2914.htm>.

This pneuma is certainly not the Holy Spirit [...]. Yet it does not appear completely like a constituent part of man as such, like the body or the soul: after having said ‘the spirit of man’, Paul corrects himself in a way to say: ‘the spirit who is in him’, which marks a nuance of capital importance. Thus, what par excellence makes a man, what constitutes man in his worth among the beings of this world, much more, what makes him a being superior to the world, would be an element that, rather than being ‘of man’, would be ‘in man.’¹²⁴

As we are slowly nearing the completion of the tripartite model of the human being, this small excerpt above contains a crucial clarification that will reverberate thorough the entirety of the thesis and become a fundamental aspect of relationality between the three parts of the human being and his or her relationship to God.

Firstly, it is made clear that the spirit is not the Holy Spirit. As nominal as that might sound, it is nonetheless a significant distinction. In this line of thinking, the Holy Spirit does not replace the foundational element of spirit. It is important to recognize that the spirit exists *a priori*. It is there from the inception of mankind. Even if Irenaeus calls the spirit an “earnest” of the Holy Spirit, they are still not the same. To put it another way, all of the Fathers considered in this thesis are aware that the spirit is not the Holy Spirit, otherwise they would not have accepted such a glaring redundancy.¹²⁵ The Church Fathers deliberately speak of three parts of man, fully aware of the Holy Spirit as separate. The real praise is reserved for the last part of the sentence in the excerpt above. “What makes him a being superior to the world, would be an element that, rather than being ‘of man’, would be ‘in man’.”¹²⁶ This was hinted at in the patristics but elaborated upon in the Heidegger’s theology. De Lubac recognizes the importance of this clause and

¹²⁴ Andrzej Persidok, “Body, Soul and Spirit.,” 720.

¹²⁵ This statement is open to fallacy (*argumentum ad verecundiam*). We seem to appeal to authority and not justifying our position. It is not enough to say that the experts (Fathers) ‘would have not accepted such glaring redundancy’ without providing any evidence. We simply call the reader to consider the second chapter of the present thesis where the descriptions of the human spirit are not one and the same as the person of God; the Holy Spirit.

¹²⁶ Andrzej Persidok, “Body, Soul and Spirit.,” 720.

ends the chapter with the words of the Apostle. We will at the end give a complete model of the triune being, but for now, we must say a few words regarding this distinction.

In Augustine, we have seen the soul's need to abide to the leading and rectifying force of the innate spirit. In Heard, we have seen the spirit as God's consciousness laying dormant in us. In Heard, as with all other Fathers, we have also understood our inability to reach the most interior realm of our being; i.e. spirit. In other words, we act as passive hosts to the leading spirit. Had this been the Holy Spirit, we would not have the need for this distinction. Yet the distinction remains necessary, even though the spirit is as fundamental as body and soul. Saint Paul makes the distinction by clarifying that the spirit is *in* us and not *of* us. This distinction implies that the spirit, which is not the Holy Spirit, is innately in us but not ours, properly speaking. The lack of possession implies the lack of providence over a part that, according to the literature considered thus far, is constitutional to our being. The breath of life in Genesis in fact serves as the best symbol of this imbedding spirit. In other words, the very air we breathe could serve us an illustration as well. The air is not ours but it is an essential element dwelling in us, lungs and blood, at all times. Continuing this analogy, we could admit that the spirit in us is the foretaste of heaven and a longing for and an openness to God. This openness is innate or *a priori*.

It is worth remembering that the Church Fathers are not interested in anthropology *per se*; the lack of systematic nature is not an oversight on their part. Their anthropology is always tied to a larger aspect or dogma. We have already hinted at this detail, but it is worth underlining the fact that the modern and contemporary views of anthropology are at least somewhat informed by the philosophy of existentialism.

We do not propose a lengthy description and analysis of this philosophical movement (existentialism) and how it relates to theology. It suffices to say that the human being of the

twentieth century, disillusioned by the atrocities and violence of two World Wars, is left to form his or her own meaning. The mid-20th century sees the human being as self-referring and self-defining. In turn, we are permitted and encouraged to follow our own subjective truths to achieve authenticity, and this is not to be informed by any external, divine, moral, or ethical restriction. The human existence is signed with an ultimate and somewhat anxiously ridden, freedom. We are destined to be free. While the boundaries of this freedom are debatable amongst existentialists, the human being and existence itself is self-relational.¹²⁷

For the modern theologians considered in this thesis, the ones pertaining to the truthfulness of the tripartite anthropology, they are certainly not rejecting dogma or assigning to the self ultimate freedom and definition. What they are doing is applying theology through the prevailing philosophical mode of the day; existentialism. It is for this reason that Andrej Persidok, in the opening part of his article, reminds us that in the human being (who is considered as an isolated, self-relating entity) we find the ‘spirit’ which, while foundational, is nonetheless supernatural. “Thinkers with a nihilistic inclination were prompted by this discovery to declare the end of humanity and try to build something upon its ruins. Theologians, on the other hand, have devoted themselves to finding a description of humanity that would secure its irreducible supernatural dimension.”¹²⁸

Finally, de Lubac is a 20th century defender of humanity. He sees the human spirit (*pneuma*) as the element that defies reductive tendencies of the times. Persidok was able to derive very pertinent imagery from the writings of the cardinal. He sees de Lubac employing a

¹²⁷ Kevin Aho, “Existentialism,” in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, Spring 2025, ed. Edward N. Zalta and Uri Nodelman (Metaphysics Research Lab, Stanford University, 2025), <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2025/entries/existentialism/>.

¹²⁸ Andrzej Persidok, “Body, Soul and Spirit,” 716.

very relevant image when describing the spiritual element in man; he calls the spirit the center and the apex of humanity.¹²⁹

¹²⁹ Andrzej Persidok, "Body, Soul and Spirit.," 722.

Conclusion

In the first part of the conclusion, as promised, we will revisit the aforementioned passage in 1 Corinthians 2:14-16. There, we read the following: “But the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know *them*, because they are spiritually discerned. But he who is spiritual judges all things, yet he himself is *rightly* judged by no one. For ‘who has known the mind of the Lord that he may instruct Him?’ But we have the mind of Christ.” And furthering the tripartite division, the Apostle clarifies his stand on the last group of people in 1 Corinthians 3:1 “And I, brethren, could not speak to you as to spiritual people but as to carnal...”¹³⁰

These passages from 1 Corinthians add a dimension of austere discernment to the element of spirit, or, to those who are spiritual. In other words, it is the spiritual ones that are the benefactors of the gifts of God’s Spirit. As clarifying as this passage is, in that it clearly sets out what it means practically to be a spiritual person, it is also an ambiguous passage. This passage is unclear in two ways. Firstly, it hints at a form of discrimination, where there is a certain group, the (spiritual) ones who are the only ones capable of receiving the gifts from God. The others (natural and carnal) are incapable of receiving the gifts of the Spirit of God. It seems that the ‘mind of Christ’ is not as easily deciphered as one would think or hope. The unregenerate mind is incapable of such a feat. One could argue that this line of thinking leads to another form of elitism as found with philosophers and gnostic-elitist views. Can this omission, if it is indeed one, of Saint Paul be reconciled in any way?

¹³⁰ Both of these passages and the following notations are taken from the Orthodox Bible.

Secondly, contrary to the present thesis, the spiritual man is not natural. We have so far endorsed Tripartite Theology in which a human being, a natural human being, is made of the three elements. This human being was always a natural man or woman. Here, it is suggested that the natural man cannot attain the spiritual matters, and yet, he is at the same time called to be spiritual. There seems to be a form of circular reasoning within the admonitions of Saint Paul. More precisely, how is one supposed to become spiritual and receive the Spirit of God, if he has to receive the Spirit of God to become spiritual? To further develop this point, we will examine the notes in the Orthodox Study Bible which describes all three different groups in the following ways:

1. The **natural man** (lit. “soulish”; v. 14) is one not yet joined to Christ, unenlightened and unregenerate. For such people, divine things appear to be foolishness because they inquire into divine things by human and natural reasoning rather than receiving these by faith. The natural man is also called *psychikos*.
2. The **spiritual man** (2:15) is filled with the Holy Spirit given at chrismation and is maturing in his knowledge of Christ. He or she is sometimes called *pneumatikos*.
3. The **carnal man** (lit. “fleshy”; 3:1) is the person who, while in the Church, has his mind set on earthly things, still trying to satisfy personal wants and selfish desires. The carnal person is also called *sarkinos*.

These definitions can be found in many different Bibles. They are of vast pertinence to Tripartite Theology. In them, we see every element presented as a person; anthropomorphised. In other words, there is, once again, a hierarchy of elements but also a hierarchy of people. We have already hinted at this perceived discrimination; but firstly, let us go back to the accusation of circular reasoning that we have brought forth. Is there circular reasoning in these passages? More

importantly, what consequences to the validity of Tripartite Theology, would the said consequences entail?

If we take the text in a strict, literal fashion and consider the footnotes found in the Orthodox Bible, we have to simply admit that the spiritual man is only spiritual after baptism and chrismation. Only then, is the person filled with the Holy Spirit and properly called spiritual. Are the people whom Saint Paul is addressing baptized? They obviously are. How are they then not filled with the Holy Spirit and not called spiritual? The answer to this conundrum lies in the fact that Paul does not imply that the baptized person is automatically spiritually mature. No, in fact Paul is implying that any person whatsoever can be at any given time carnal, natural or spiritual. It is quite obvious that the spiritual one is mature enough to ponder spiritual matters and receive the gifts of the Spirit of God. While the carnal or natural man cannot enjoy such honour and joy. What does this imply? Is this discriminatory?

Firstly, we must assume that this tripartite division of Christians in Corinthians is not literal, all encompassing, and final. In other words, a 'soulish' person, is not admonished to eternal perdition for not being spiritual. In the same way, a spiritual person can fall prey to their worldly joys, vanity and jealousy. In other words, the people are not divided as such; instead, it is the human character that is. Saint Paul is illustrating the importance of discernment and the freedom of the human will. No matter which way we slice it, Paul is calling us to become spiritual. He would not have done that if it were impossible for us to become that way. Therefore, it is only possible for us to become that way, since it is already part of our natural make up. The baptized community of Corinthians are criticized and urged to become spiritual. They are not condemned to stay soulish or carnal. Paul is calling us to consider what is in our power *a priori*. Paul is calling to the spiritual side that is already existent in all of us. There is absolutely nothing

discriminatory in his admonishments. There is, however, a proverbial raising of the mirror to our souls. It is quite possible to see his reproaches in a very unassuming way. Saint Paul, in a very humble way, points to our inherent ability to discern, and our spiritual faculties, and nothing more. He is not making a deep theological point, but he is nonetheless underlining a necessary spiritual aspect of our creation.

Secondly, within this apparent division of the people, Paul inserts an important view, the one we have already seen within the writings of other authors in this thesis. This idea promotes the fact that the ‘soulish’ person does not understand the ‘spiritual’ one and deems him and his spirituality as foolish. This should remind us of the relationship between soul and spirit as illustrated by Reverend Heard. Simply said, there is a proper direction of influence between the tri-unity elements. The human spirit does not yield to the soul, nor can the soul properly reach the spirit. The spirit as the center and the apex of the human being is at no time reached by the mere will of the soul. The rational and intellectual part defined by *psychikos* (or natural) does not reach or understand the spiritual centre of the human being. Even worse, or even more removed, is the carnal person who is stuck in the most basic desires of the world.

Having said that, it is quite possible to bring an objection to this view as we are claiming that there is a spiritual human being that is capable of existing without their being first a reception of the Holy Spirit. Are we proposing that spirituality does not begin at baptism? In short, the answer is yes. The answer should be apparent from the excerpt in Paul’s letter to the Corinthians. This question was hopefully answered already by the textual evidence provided in this thesis. If anything, as we have said before, *pneuma* will always trace our origin to God. Imprinted in our creation is the ability to commune with God. This cannot be completed merely with our psychic abilities, powers of the soul. This is in fact, the exact point that this thesis is

promoting. The triune person is the actual prototype. The human being does not become tripartite. This too is the way that the Church Fathers are presenting the human being. None of the Fathers appeal to baptism or anything else as prior to triunity. The person is ontologically triune. That is why the spirit is always written with a lower case 's' - spirit, and not Spirit. Simply said, the spirit is part of our innate nature regardless of baptism or anything else. It is the spiritual aspect of man that is responsible for receiving the Holy Spirit at baptism.

Yet, there is a nuance to this. This nuance escapes the vigilance of the authors cited above. We could object to their definitions and simply say that there is no such thing as a 'natural' man. As even the man who behaves as a mere intellectual, or even worse, a sophist, and considers spiritual things as foolish, is still composed with a spiritual aspect to his existence. Otherwise, Paul would not admonish them for acting in such a deplorable and immature way. If they were not capable of spirituality, Paul would have simply left them alone to be in their deplorable way. To drive this point even further, none of the Apostles would have dared to undertake any evangelising had they assumed that the audience was incapable of understanding them. They assumed that their message would be either scoffed at or accepted, among many other reactions. In other words, the message, the Gospel, was received and understood, even if on the first hearing it might seem incredulous, miraculous, and incredible. We understand that the editors of the Orthodox Bible are not considering tripartite anthropology per se and would not be erring if they simply assumed that the spiritual man is the one filled with the Holy Spirit after baptism. Yet it does beg the question as to why Saint Paul would call us to become more like the spiritual ones if it were simply impossible, even after baptism? The answer is that it is possible and it is simply a confusion of terms. While the authors of the footnotes are referring to the most acceptable understanding of the term 'spiritual,' as it applies to the human being, we on the other

hand are implying something entirely different. In the Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible we find 'spirit' defined in the following way: "A term applied to God, gods, incorporeal beings generally, and to the divine element in human personality."¹³¹ Under the heading 'The divine element in man,' we find the following description: "The divine element in man is indicated first by the view that he is created in the image of God (Gen. 1:27), which means that man is by nature like God...But the figure of an image is used in a Christian sense to indicate transformation of personality into the likeness of Christ. (Rom. 8:29; 1 Cor. 15:49; 2 Cor. 3:18)."¹³² We hope that this definition does not add anything that this thesis has not already provided. The spirit is in fact the divine element *in* man, but not *of* man. As with the other definition, the one concerning the transformation of the personality into the likeness of Christ, we will say more in the last section of the conclusion.

The spirit. The element of Tripartite Theology, a constitutional part of the human being, is first and foremost found and defined as a theological concept. This model depicts the human being as created not by nature or any force, but by God. It is thus important to remember that the human being, as the ultimate creation of God, is made in a very particular way. This thesis hypothesizes the triune model as the correct one. The fact that the spirit is the remaining element from the dichotomist model, it is only normal that it would be the most contentious element out of the three. As we have alluded before, implying spirit as a constitutional element within the human creation, has driven some to stay away from any such consideration as it can easily fall into heresy and lead to confusion. Yet there is plenty of evidence to support the validity of tripartite theological anthropology.

¹³¹ George Arthur Buttrick, ed., *The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*, Vol. 4, R-Z (New York: Abingdon Press, 1962), 432.

¹³² George Arthur Buttrick, *The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*, 434.

With the Church Fathers we have seen some sort of impulsive, almost an instinctual need to call the human being as tripartite. Perhaps this is due to already existing tripartite divisions of other things within the Greek world, and perhaps it is due to the words of Saint Paul. I hope that this thesis has provided enough evidence to keep the validity of the source in question. If anything, we should take a moment before claiming that the theological tripartite division of man is solely a reworking of already existing Greek philosophy. In our view, there is a cooperative effort of both sides in bringing out the truth to the forefront.

Within those views we have observed many similarities and some differences. In all, we think it is safe to accept that there is a pervading system of thought behind the textual evidence provided by the Fathers of the Church. Their views provide a consistent model of the human being. In sum, a person is made of soul, body, and spirit. The spirit is the highest element in the composition. The soul, for the most part, known best as the human psyche, is in second place, and in a way, stuck between the leading spirit and the passions of the body.

For the Fathers, their views on human spirit, the distinguishing element, is the most unitive one, and the most defining one. It is perhaps important to note that without the element of the spirit included in the composition of the human being, the model would crumble. The spirit (not to be confused with the Holy Spirit and always spelled with the lower case 's') is by far the grandest element in the construct of the human being and the one that clearly sets out the human being as created in the image and likeness of God. We have seen the same line of thought promoted by the modern authors as well.

Reverend Heard, as a biblical psychologist, sees the spirit as the seat of God's consciousness, amongst many other elevated things. Cardinal de Lubac sees it as the apex and the centre of the human being and defends the human nature as irreducibly spiritual, or perhaps

naturally spiritual. They both, unreluctantly, reward Saint Paul as the ultimate source of the triune model. We have also suggested some parallels with other theologians of note, all of whom might not have been directly considering Tripartite Theology, but whose views and conclusions are similar to those of the Fathers. With Nellas, for example, we have hinted at the Christocentric nature of the human being.

Before ending this thesis, there is one clear parallel that we have not openly considered and yet cannot ignore. We have hinted before that the spiritual element in the human being is the bearer of the image and likeness of God, but also it is the element responsible for the divinization of the human being. This, in turn, will bring a phenomenological dimension to the lived life of Christians. The tripartite anthropology lends itself perfectly to asceticism and *theosis* in general. Shannon L. Deer in the abstract of her thesis *Orthodox Spirituality and The Way Toward Union* illustrates the unique relationship between tripartite anthropology and *theosis*:

The Christian Orthodox fathers maintain that not only is salvation a process, but when broken down, may be divided into three distinct stages: purification, illumination, and union. Additionally, each stage corresponds to one of the three levels of being: body, soul, and spirit. During purification, which is the responsibility of man, the body is targeted through asceticism, primarily fasting and vigil. The purpose of asceticism is that man may grow detached from his physical surroundings and thus achieve what is referred to as dispassion. Purification is typically linked with the redemptive acts of Jesus Christ. During illumination, which is God administered, the soul is said to gain self-knowledge through deep humility and contrition, and thus develops a greater love for God and creation. The practice of contemplative prayer is championed during this stage. Illumination is typically linked with the sanctifying acts of the Holy Spirit. Finally, during union, which is again brought to man solely by the beneficence of God, the spirit—which is considered to be the highest dimension of the microcosm and the “container” of both the body and soul—achieves hesychia, or inward silence, and as a result becomes formally united to God.¹³³

¹³³ Shannon L. Deer, *Orthodox Spirituality and the Way Toward Union*, (MA thesis, University of South Carolina, 2006), iv.

In *On Ascetical Life* by Saint Isaac of Nineveh, the saint associates the tripartite anthropology as the direct way with the union with God. There is a way of the body, followed by the way of the soul and the way of the spirit. This is a gradual process where every step builds on the previous one. The first step involves dealing with bodily passions. The second step deals with foreign thoughts, and the final step deals with the resurrected life and the ‘moments of wonder’.¹³⁴ In his work, the saint does not overtly talk about the last stage as it is not achieved by many. This thesis will leave the parallel between divinization and tripartite theological anthropology as unfinished but it does beckon the question of the possibility and validity of *theosis* if the divinizing process stops only at the level of the psyche. If that were the case then, psychology would be an adequate means of union with God. Instead, the author of this thesis maintains that the union with God would have to build on the psychological success but eventually would require a more encompassing union, one where the spirit has to be regenerated as well.

This thesis has hopefully presented a sound argument for the validity of tripartite theological anthropology. It has hopefully also presented enough evidence to support the claim that the spirit is in fact the leading and necessary element of human nature. At the same time though, this thesis presents itself as a systematic work of theology and philosophy; it does not pertain to provide an exhaustive and final definition of spirit, even though it posits the element in question as the chief one. The spirit in its colloquial understanding assumes many roles and as such is elusive. In the medieval western world, there were many natural sciences in which the

¹³⁴ Isaac of Nineveh, *On Ascetical Life*, trans. Mary Hansbury (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1989), 13.

use of the triune model was employed in an attempt to describe the natural world. In these texts , the spirit was often presented as the element Mercury, due to its evasiveness and volatility.

In sum, we cannot claim to have a full understanding of the chief element as it would imply that we have full providence over it. We do not. As such, the most defining aspect of our selves would have to remain the most mysterious one. To illustrate this further, I will introduce and quote the remarkable words of yet another shadowy figure of the past. His words carry a tone of truth that cannot be ignored. “Therefore, God’s food must be given to the inward will of the spirit to eat of, that it may live without need and hunger as to the outward being, that it may continually mortify and break the will of the earthly selfhood, till the earthliness, viz. the earthly body freely unloose or dissolve itself in death.”¹³⁵ This quote is from Jacob Boehme’s *Signatura Rerum*. Jacob Boehme was a German mystic and philosophical theologian who lived in the sixteenth century. His words resonate the same meaning found in Saint Augustine’s theological anthropology. Boehme sees the spirit as the connection to God, where the self-will (earthly selfhood) must die to the earthliness. I strongly believe that Boehme is not implying that the earthly life is something ‘lesser’. It is the soul (seized by what he calls ‘self-will’) that wills for itself only, and that willing is what keeps it chained to the earth.

We can end this thesis with a mysterious poem which shows us the wisdom, albeit in artistic form, in which we could see the constitutive elements of a person. The author of the poem is Nicholas Barnaud (1538-1604). He was a French physician. He says, under a woodcut showing two fishes swimming in the sea, that the sea is the body, and the two fishes are soul and spirit:

¹³⁵ Jacob Boehme, *The Signature of All things and Other Writings*, (Cambridge & London: James Clarke & Co. Ltd, 1969), 294.

*The Sages will tell you that two fishes are in our sea Without any flesh or bones.
Let them be cooked in their own water;
Then they also will become a vast sea,
The vastness of which no man can describe.
Moreover, the Sages say
That the two fishes are only one, not two;
They are two, and nevertheless they are one,
Body, Spirit, and Soul.¹³⁶*

¹³⁶ Nicolas Barnaud, “*The Book of Lambspring*” in *De Lpide Philosophico Triga Chemicum* (Prague, 1599; repr. Frankfrut: Lucas Jennis, 1625).

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