

**A Christian Ontology of the Flesh:
Word, Symbol, Performance**

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This dissertation is submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

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Maurice Merleau-Ponty responded to the loss of the body in the wake of Western philosophy after Rene Descartes by constructing a phenomenology of perception and an ontology of the flesh. His voice, although decidedly removed from the religious, is constantly brought into theological debate whether it be Judith Butler's reading of Merleau-Ponty's early lectures on Malebranche's sensuous theology, or a reading of his phenomenology for theologies of embodiment by contemporary philosophers of religion.

Within Christian theology, the body has experienced its own loss, or so contemporary critics of the Christian flesh suggest when they cast it as that which is either negated or riddled with dualism. In this line of critique, Paul and Augustine become figureheads for the loss of the Christian body. A new reading of Paul, Augustine and others at the hand of recent scholarship may, however, provide a different angle from which to approach the problem of the flesh. By defining the self as one who is informed by the senses, and thereby relationally ordered to created other and divine, perception becomes a new mode of approaching the Christian body. Here the focus is less on the absence of the body than the absence of a theological grammar of perception.

Reading perception in relation to the life, death and resurrection of Christ, the Spirit's union of the self to Christ and of God's grounding persons in the life of the Trinity, sets the stage for a uniquely embodied expression of divine presence. Here an embodied theology advances the simultaneous holding of form and content, and of the embodied expression of the divine through word, symbol and performance. A new grammar of perception arises, in this instance, which places the body central to the Christian story and which refuses any binary, dualism or negation.

Soli Deo Gloria

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Chapter 1

Merleau-Ponty and the Loss of the Body in Philosophy

René Descartes' philosophy of the mind marks the gradual loss of the body in Western philosophy.¹ The philosopher's theorising prioritised the mind with its immaterial nature over the body and its sense-perceptual engagements with the world, thereby approaching knowledge production in binary terms.² A Cartesian epistemology distinguished between that which may be known with absolute certainty (that of the intellect, reason and will) and that which may be known with a relative or derived certainty (that of the senses, and subjective experience).³ This structuring of knowledge according to objective reason and subjective experience gave the illusion that the self can bracket its sense-perceptual engagements with the world.⁴ The resultant diminishing role of the subjective and experiential in knowledge production finally lead to the evacuation of the body in philosophy.

For the French philosopher Merleau-Ponty, the loss of the body in philosophy needed recovery. By placing the body and its embodied engagements within the world central to his theorising, Merleau-Ponty set the stage for the return of the body to philosophy. Published as *Phenomenology of Perception* and *The Visible and Invisible* (unfinished), Merleau-Ponty's theorising developed at the hand of Edmund Husserl's response to Descartes, and of Jean-Paul Sartre's response to Husserl.⁵ Between Husserl and Sartre's theorising, Merleau-Ponty developed

¹ Skirry, Justin. n.d. 'René Descartes (1596-1650)'. In *Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy: A Peer-Reviewed Academic Resource*. Accessed 15 April 2019. <https://www.iep.utm.edu/descarte/#H4>.

² Skirry, 'René Descartes (1596-1650)'.

³ Skirry, 'René Descartes (1596-1650)'.

⁴ For, writes Edgar, '...we do not realize just how Cartesian we are'. Edgar, Orion. 2016. *Things Seen and Unseen*. Oregon: Cascade Books., 5. Edgar lists these dualisms as that of 'mind and body, form and matter, ideal and real, thought and things, freedom and causation, instinct and desire, animal and environment, body and world, telos and genesis, humanity and nature, and so on'. Edgar, *Things Seen and Unseen.*, 1.

⁵ Sartre's existential phenomenology is one which focusses on human existence itself and less so on the existence of the world. In his philosophical masterpiece, *Being and Nothingness*, Sartre develops two sets of realities that 'lie beyond our conscious experience: the being of the object of consciousness and that of consciousness itself. The object of consciousness exists as "in-itself". An essential feature of consciousness is its negative experience: it exists "for-itself".' An essential feature of consciousness is its negative power, by which we can experience 'nothingness.' This

his own unique phenomenology of perception which embraced the complex network of relationships in which a person exists as a sense-perceptual self.⁶

Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology is increasingly being employed by scholars in philosophy of religion. When stating the integrity of the world and humanity in relation to another, Andreas Nordlander in *Figuring Flesh in Creation*, reads Merleau-Ponty and Augustine together. He resources Merleau-Ponty's ontology when constructing a creational ontology.⁷ When addressing the tension between transcendence and immanence, Nordlander in 'The Wonder of Immanence' engages Merleau-Ponty's ontology with the logic of the doctrine of creation *ex nihilo*.⁸ Whether the material exists in opposition to the spiritual and whether that casts humans in conflict with the divine, Orion Edgar's *Things Seen and Unseen* reads the role of the flesh in Merleau-Ponty's ontology within the Christian category of the icon.⁹ In these cases, Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology renders new possibilities for thinking through dualisms which, like Western philosophy, underpin Western Christian theology. In its own attempt to straddle modern philosophical dualisms, Christian theology has relinquished the body that is so central to its Scriptures and doctrines.

The reception of this modern theological problem has often gone hand in hand with the feminist concern that a Christian flesh exists in binaries. Here, speech pertaining to life and death,

power is also at work within the self, where it creates an intrinsic lack of self-identity. To the unity of the self is understood as a task for the for-itself rather than as a given.' Onof, Christian. n.d. 'Jean Paul Sartre: Existentialism'. In *Internet Encyclopaedia of Philosophy*. Accessed 23 November 2016. <http://www.iep.utm.edu/sartre-ex/>.

⁶ I employ the term 'sense-perceptual self' as a means of describing a person whose understanding of the world is mediated by the information which comes to that person through the senses and its perceptions, as well as the processing of such information through apprehension and comprehension. The logic of apprehension and comprehension will be the focus of Chapter 4 where Malcolm Guite's, *Faith, Hope and Poetry: Theology and the Poetic Imagination*, provides a new lens for reading the relationship between words and the Word.

⁷ Nordlander, Andreas. 2011. *Figuring Flesh in Creation. Merleau-Ponty in Conversation with Philosophical Theology*. Sweden: Lund University.

⁸ Nordlander, Andreas. 2013. 'The Wonder of Immanence: Merleau-Ponty and the Problem of Creation'. *Modern Theology* 29 (2): 104–23.

⁹ For Edgar, parallels exist between an incarnational logic in Merleau-Ponty's theorising of the body, and the Christian understanding of embodied existence in light of the doctrine of the incarnation. Edgar continues, 'Merleau-Ponty's logic is *incarnational* in the sense that it takes as its icon the flesh, a supposed "union of opposites" which, inasmuch as it succeeds in uniting them, announces their originary individuation and the possibility of their transformation'. Edgar, *Things Seen and Unseen.*, 2.

spiritual and physical, body and soul, takes on a competitive tone as though the entities exist mutually exclusive from another. Exchanging the complementary for the competitive, means that speech that relates to the relationship of human and divine becomes hyper-spiritual and loosed from its embodied moorings. A flesh constructed upon such binaries loses the body which is so central to Christian theology and its literature. The dominant concern that thus arises from any dualistic reading of the body, is the loss of the subjective and experiential means by which a person can know the divine in their embodied circumstance.

Neglecting a corporeal mode of perceiving the divine results in the concomitant loss of words to describe the transformation of the self in the face of the divine. Each person has a set of words that serves to describe what their senses perceive. The use of these words forms patterns of thinking that shapes the way the world presents itself to a person. The words that thus founds a person's description of the world, this dissertation suggests, is a certain type of grammar – one which by definition implicates the senses as well as the world in which it exists.

When speaking of a corporeal grammar then one is referring to a vocabulary that holds visible and invisible simultaneously. The usefulness of the term 'corporeal grammar' comes to play where abstract and corporeal perpetually meet, especially in theological description since theology (*theo-logos*) concerns speech as it pertains to God. Furthermore, to remove the body (the foundation of all grammar) from theological speech is to ignore a central part of the Christian narrative. The recovery of the body in theology starts with the very fact that God created persons in the flesh, and that the very same God was born of that flesh through the virgin Mary.

Rendering the possibilities that arise between the materiality of existence and the revelation of God in the incarnation, starts with a reading of Merleau-Ponty's writings. His theorising, in its construction of a phenomenology of perception and an ontology of the flesh, provides a philosophical framework that brings embodied existence in relation to self and other. While Merleau-Ponty was decidedly non-religious in his thinking, his understanding of perception and the ways in which it structures how and what persons know, provides new possibilities for the body and its learning in Christian theology. Two questions frame our reading of Merleau-Ponty in relation to the Christian flesh, 'What does it mean to exist as a person in the flesh?' and 'how does this flesh shape the relationship of self to divine?'

The title of this dissertation, 'A Christian ontology of the flesh: Word, Symbol, Performance', suggests the centrality of the nature of existence in the flesh, and of its perception

of the divine. The study attempts to formulate the ways in which the senses are attuned to the divine through the very immanent experience of perception and does so by articulating what it means to have flesh structure existence from the perspective of God's continuous presence to, and upholding of, the created order. Here, one approaches flesh from the perspective of God's continued presence to the created order as both human and divine.

When engaging with questions that relate to the nature of being, one is engaging in the study of ontology. The focus of this dissertation, albeit unconventionally so, studies the nature of being from the perspective of the flesh. In one sense, this is to engage with Merleau-Ponty's flesh – that designation which describes the ways in which existence is perpetually open to the world which influences it. Indeed, Merleau-Ponty's theorising of the flesh provides a route by which to conceptualise the permeability of existence and, therefore, is pivotal in establishing the foundations upon which this dissertation builds its own conception of the flesh. In another sense, the term calls to mind the doctrine of the incarnation. Flesh here demarcates two worlds melded as one: those physical characteristics typically circumscribed by the body, and the spiritual world, characterised by the participatory existence that Christ makes possible to all who are founded in him.

As soon as one begins to speak of the incarnation one begins to move in the domain of theology proper and so the natural conclusion may be to think of the present investigation as an investigation of a theology of the body, this is true. But there is more which this dissertation seeks to say particularly as it relates to the flesh: that the flesh, through a person's thoughts, words and gestures, brings into existence a divine reality uncaptured by the language of the body. Here, one moves away from Merleau-Ponty's flesh in its immanent sense to a flesh that effects a change in the realm of the transcendent (in the Christian doctrinal sense). An ontology of the flesh thus pursues the possibility that actions oriented toward the divine, may quasi-sacramentally make the Word present by the Spirit.

Establishing the difference between a theology of the body and an ontology of the flesh falls within the respective outcome which each discipline pursues. Since this dissertation suggests that it is reasonable to think of the Christian flesh as a flesh that alters and effects the divine reality in which persons find themselves as Christians, it functions as a Christian ontology of the flesh.

A risk characterises the undertaking, in trying to articulate an ontology of the flesh, one may lose the body, once more, to abstraction. To avoid abstractions like this, focus will be given

to the doctrine of the incarnation. The writings of a select group of theologians will be read and analysed as a means of understanding the relationship between the flesh of persons and the flesh of Christ incarnate. Attention will be given, especially, to the ways in which texts can make visible the truth of which they speak. The approach thus focuses on the content of their writings as well as the form in which such content is presented.¹⁰ By paying attention to the stylistic features of the text, to the nature of the language used, and to the visceral metaphors employed, the embodied expression of the doctrine of the incarnation is allowed to speak for itself through a variety of textual mediums. When a text speaks in its own right as the embodied articulation of God-with-us, the incarnation is expressed in word, symbol, and performance.

The expression of the incarnate God through word, symbol and performance establishes what I would like to call an embodied theology. An embodied theology reads the incarnation from the perspective of the sense-perceptual self and its unique grammar of embodied perception. Two simultaneous events occur when the incarnation is read through the body; the living Word is experienced through the particularity of existence, and the incarnation is re-articulated at the hand of a particular time and context. To read the incarnation through the lens of its lived expression through the bodily reality of persons, is to take part in God's revelation in the flesh. This mode of taking part may variously be termed participation, union, and deification. All three terms describe God's presence in the created order and the participation of a person as an embodied individual in that presence. To speak of participation is, therefore, one mode of articulating existence as it relates to the God by whom the created order exists, in whom persons find their ultimate expression, and through whom persons are sustained in that expression. When persons partake in God's revelation in this embodied manner, they make the incarnation visible anew within their context and time. A new language is born from their engagement with God that is instructive for a Christian ontology of the flesh and its pursuit to render new ways of speaking of the body in relation to the divine.

Within the church today, the body has become a site with its own set of challenges. For persons who have experienced trauma, for example, the body is both that which is made in the image of the divine, and simultaneously a site where violence has occurred. This simultaneity can lead to a disassociation of sorts, of body and God, of earthly and heavenly, and of the experiential

¹⁰ I follow the cue of Janet Soskice here who reminds of the significance of paying attention to the form and content of theological writing. For further reference see Soskice, Janet Martin. 1987. *Metaphor and Religious Language*. Oxford: Oxford University Press., 37.

and ineffable. A myriad of anxieties can arise at these intersections since any disassociation or distance between self and God may lead to the erroneous conclusion that God is removed from the sense-perceptual self, and thereby absent to the embodied realities of such persons. In response, one seeks a framework which recovers the body and its learning for theology by embracing the embodied nature of its existence, and by bringing such existence into conversation with a God who is both immanent and transcendent to existence.

Chapter one constructs a vocabulary with which to speak of existence as it relates to the embodied and sense-perceptual ways of existing in the world. The key terms are flesh and body, two integrated but distinctive expressions of a singular self and its engagements with the world in which it functions. Within this dissertation, flesh describes the subjective and individual experience of self in relation to a created and divine other.¹¹ Body describes the subjective but *collective* experience of being relationally ordered to a created or divine other.¹² Both terms describe a complex yet holistic rendering of a person's embodied engagements with the world, and both definitions recognise that being embodied means being shaped and formed by those with whom one engages as well as the world in which one exists. The Chapter suggests that a different frame of reference, the sense-perceptual self, may help bridge the perceived disparate relationship between flesh and body.

The presence of the created or divine other which defines persons as sense-perceptual selves, relates in a Christian ontology of the flesh both to the realm of the immanent and the transcendent. The question is however, whether the relationship between immanent and transcendent exists in competitive and mutually exclusive terms. Is a rendering of the Christian flesh plagued by the binaries of Spirit and flesh, of spiritual and material, and of soul and body? Chapter two takes this question as its starting point by re-engaging the critique of a negated Christian flesh. The re-reading aims to construct a conceptual framework by which to hold together that which seems disparate from another. By establishing a conceptual framework which can act

¹¹ Chapter two will elaborate on these terms. I draw here on Susan Eastman's innovative readings of Paul. Eastman, Susan G. 2017. *Paul and the Person: Reframing Paul's Anthropology*. Michigan: Eerdmans., Eastman, Susan Grove. 2018. 'Oneself in Another: Participation and the Spirit in Romans 8'. In *'In Christ' in Paul: Explorations in Paul's Theology of Union and Participation.*, edited by Michael J. Thate, Kevin J. Vanhoozer, and Constantine R. Campbell, 103–26. Michigan: Eerdmans.

¹² See note above.

as a foundation for the consideration of the flesh and body in Christian terms, a shift is made to the early church's reception of the one instance within the Christian story where the immanent and the transcendent converge, the incarnation.

The conciliar debates of the early church wrestled especially with the doctrine of the incarnation. The debate central to the topic at hand was the nature of Christ's existence as a human and as God. Some rendered Christ fully human but not fully God – that is, Christ was begotten by God and therefore existed as a result of God's creative act. Others rendered Christ fully God but not fully human – that is, Christ was so truly God that his existence in the flesh was somehow distant to and removed from the suffering that he would have experienced as a person. Both renditions present significant problems to the doctrine of the incarnation and the implications it has for embodied existence. If Christ was not fully human, he would not have changed the ontological status of existence in the flesh, and if Christ was not fully divine, he would not have inaugurated persons into God's divine economy. The absolute affirmation of Christ's humanity and divinity at the incarnation proves essential to the proper articulation of the place and role of the flesh in relation to God. The third Chapter sets up a rendition of the incarnation fertile for a reading of the flesh as that which takes part in the Second Person of the Trinity while making visible the invisible.

Establishing the ways in which the incarnate Word is present to persons and how such a presence transforms the meaning and extent of the flesh, requires further consideration. The fourth Chapter describes the ways in which the senses register God's presence as the incarnate Word. The relationship between the visible and invisible is explored with the intent on describing how words, thoughts, and deeds can make God incarnate. This incarnational logic supplies one avenue for thinking through the dynamics of the body and its perception of the divine by considering the relationship of the incarnate Word to the words of the rhetorician and the Christian poet. Both groups take Scripture to be normative insofar as its words are inspired by God. A similar logic pertains to the words of the sense-perceptual self whose words, while not directly inspired by God, still has God as its divine referent and thereby undergoes a transformation. Since words are never spoken independently from the body, an examination of words as they relate to the incarnate Word is an examination of the embodied nature of texts. These textual modes of speaking through words embody and thereby perform an incarnational logic.

Self-performative speech rests on the ability of the sense-perceptual self to register the divine in its own embodied terms. The unique grammar of perception a person employs to speak of the divine, in turn, shapes the ways in which Christ is made incarnate to such a person. Chapter five reads one particularly embodied articulation of the divine as instructive for the conceptualisation of a theological grammar of perception. Christ revealed to the sense-perceptual self, here becomes Christ revealed in feminine and visceral terms. This manner of speaking takes the logic of the incarnate Word a step further by clothing the Word in a uniquely feminine grammar. With this grammar a new perceptual framework is established whereby those aspects that concerns the female body becomes the imaginative landscape in which Christ reveals himself.

The embodied rendering of Christ's relation to the female religious person illustrates how divine truths may be articulated in embodied terms. Here theological speech becomes self-involving and inductive. When theology is done through the body, new ways are created for speaking about the Word's presence to the desires, affections, and afflictions that go hand in hand with embodied existence. As persons participate in the Word through their very own embodied engagements, the manner of such engagements become expressive of the state of relations between self and divine other. With this logic of ordering, the senses are not only attuned to the divine, but also signal to the presence of the Word. The sense-perceptual self here assumes a gestural posture insofar as it signals towards the state of relations between self and divine other.

Chapter six shows how the relationship between the form and content of theological writing presents itself in a literary masterpiece increasingly studied within the discipline of literature and theology. Here bodies are to the fore as they serve to gesture to different states of relation between self, other, and divine. In continuity with Chapter five, Love orders the senses in Chapter six. Love gestures to the divine and serves as indicator of the presence or absence of right relations between persons. In their varied depictions in grotesque, reconciliatory, and beatific terms, bodies perform through a myriad of postures that which is invisible. By weaving the intricate web of relations that constitutes the sense-perceptual self in narrational and poetic form, bodies become the register for the reception of the divine.

The final Chapter brings into relief a theology where the flesh is structured by the Word's incarnation, perception is ordered by the revelation of God's presence to persons through their embodied existence, and finally where the unique sense-perceptual expression of God's presence to persons renders a performative embodied existence. It does so by building on Merleau-Ponty's

phenomenology and ontology which provides the grammar for the intertwining of self and divine, and the logic for perception as that which is at the heart of experience and knowledge production. Perception, Chapter seven suggests, mediates between the God who is immanent yet invisible, and so holds together the embodied and divine. Through perception, Chapter seven shows, persons may register the divine affectively, and thereby participate in the life of the Trinity. It concludes by suggesting that the loss of the body in Christian theology is not so much a loss, but a latent and under resourced dimension of Christian theology. By doing so, it presents the problem of the loss of the body as the absence of a theological grammar of perception.

Before one may consider the implication of a Christian ontology of the flesh as performative and sacramental however, one must determine the place of perception to persons and their relation to the things of nature. Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology with its attempt to return the body to philosophy is to be considered. On the one hand, his recognition that persons cannot exist independent of their sense-perceptual surroundings, and on the other hand, that persons are intertwined with others, are two insights which bring the body centre stage. By allowing Merleau-Ponty to speak first, the Western philosopher's embodied philosophy acts as springboard from which to take flesh as an integrated, complex constellation of sense-perceptions forward. It is to understand personhood as being open to be relationally ordered to self and other.

In what follows, the body-subject and the manifold ways in which its existence informs and is informed by the myriad relations in which it stands, will be considered.¹³ By focussing on the body and its parameters as the defining aspect for an ontology of the flesh, three elements of Merleau-Ponty's theorising may be discussed: first, with regards to the role of the agent in the world¹⁴ – what is the relation of the sensible to the sentient? Second, with regards to phenomenology – what is the place and function of the agent in establishing a continuum between self and other, and third, how does this interaction establish a continuum of reciprocal existence? By starting with Merleau-Ponty, a Christian ontology of the flesh may establish the irreducibility of both God and the body.

¹³ Rivera, Mayra. 2015. *Poetics of the Flesh*. Duke: Duke University Press., 60.

¹⁴ I choose to employ the term 'agent' and 'agency' in this study because it suggests two considerations which need to be borne in mind; that the body is a unity – a holistic entity constituted by both the body and flesh and that its functioning in the world is never something other than as living, embodied being.

Toward a Phenomenology of Perception

The gradual recovery of the body in Western philosophy started as the examination of embodiment and its perceptual engagements. This meant exploring the relationship between a perceiving self and the world and examining what the nature of such perception is. The German philosopher, Edmund Husserl (1859-1938), took up this task by spearheading a new field of philosophy, named phenomenology. Phenomenology examines existence as it is revealed generally and perceived subjectively by a sense-perceptual self.

Husserl's theory of double sensation served as a basis for Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology of perception, and as a basis for Merleau-Ponty's friend and peer, Jean-Paul Sartre's ontology of nothingness. Both philosophers introduced the work of Husserl to French philosophy, albeit in different ways.¹⁵ Although Sartre took Husserl's theory of double sensation in a different direction than Merleau-Ponty did, Merleau-Ponty was still shaped by the theorising of his peer. Both Husserl and Sartre thus played a part in the formation of Merleau-Ponty's unique phenomenology of perception, for he 'was a phenomenologist above all, yet he differed in fundamental ways from the three other major phenomenologists, Husserl, Heidegger, and Sartre', writes Taylor Carmen.¹⁶

In *Phenomenology of Perception* and *The Visible and Invisible* (unfinished), Merleau-Ponty articulates the differences between himself, Husserl and Sartre. He does so by conceptualising his ontology of the flesh, a response to the perceived dualistic structuring of existence in Husserl, and the dichotomous relationship between subject and object in Sartre.¹⁷ In the former, Husserl's theorising is associated with the object/consciousness binary which describes on the one hand, a 'subject as part of the world, that is, existing empirically' and on the other hand,

¹⁵ Carmen and Hansen note, 'In the 1930's, he [Merleau-Ponty] and Sartre both, although separately and in different ways, discovered the works of Edmund Husserl, Martin Heidegger, and Max Scheler, introduced them to a French audience, and began to make their own original contributions to the field.' Carmen, Taylor, and Mark Hansen. 2004. 'Introduction'. In *The Cambridge Companion to Merleau-Ponty*, edited by Taylor Carmen and Mark Hansen, 1–25. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press., 5.

¹⁶ Carmen, Taylor, and Hansen. 'Introduction', 1.

¹⁷ Margaret Whitford explains, 'Rationalism would make consciousness the measure of Being, reducing Being to the categories proposed by consciousness. Phenomenology on the other hand recognizes that the creation of order through conceptual patterning is limited by the very structure of consciousness, in particular the necessity for consciousness to be situated and to be limited by its perspective'. Whitford, Margaret. 1979. 'Merleau-Ponty's Critique of Sartre's Philosophy: An Interpretative Account'. *French Studies* XXXIII (3): 305–18., 307.

a subject existing independently from the world as consciousness.¹⁸ At play in the object/consciousness binary is the world as it presents itself to the senses, and the shaping of such perceptions by the independent subjective and conscious self.¹⁹ In the latter, Sartre's ontology of nothingness gives primacy to the conscious self, divorcing perception from the world in which such perception takes place.

Husserl wrestled with the primacy that mind had over body in Descartes' epistemology. Of concern was the self-sufficiency of the mind to perceive the world objectively. For the mind to know it must exist relationally, however, and for the mind to exist relationally, it requires a means, the body. Mapping the relationship between mind and body also meant mapping the relationship between mind and world, a relationship best described by the word intentionality.²⁰ Husserl's theory of intentionality set the stage for the mutual inherence of mind and world (things of nature). Intentionality thus described the relationship of the subjective self to things of nature, and how the subjective self is the condition of possibility for the things that are perceived. Adam Smith explains

¹⁸ Barbaras, Renaud. 2004. 'A Phenomenology of Life'. In *Merleau-Ponty: Perception, Structure, Language*, edited by Taylor Carmen and Mark Hansen, 206–30. New Jersey: Humanities Press., 206.

¹⁹ Barbaras further distinguishes these two engagements as the empirical and transcendental consciousness., Barbaras, 'A Phenomenology of Life', 208.

²⁰ McIntyre, Ronald, and David Woodruff Smith. 1989. 'Theory of Intentionality'. In *Husserl's Phenomenology: A Textbook*, edited by J.N. Mohanty and William McKenna, 147–79., 149.

'Husserl's interest in intentionality was inspired by his teacher, Franz Brentano, who himself picked up the term 'intentional' from its use in medieval philosophy...Brentano is most famous for a very strong doctrine about intentionality. He claimed that intentionality is the defining characteristic of the mental, i.e., that *all* mental phenomena are intentional and *only* mental phenomena are intentional. This claim has come to be known as "Brentano's Thesis". But almost all philosophers, including Husserl, consider the first half of Brentano's Thesis too strong. Moods such as depression or euphoria are not always "of" or "about" something; and as Husserl notes, sensations such as pain or dizziness are not obviously representational or "directed toward" some object. Husserl's interest is in those mental states or experiences that *do* give us a sense of an object, and those mental phenomena *are* intentional; he calls them "acts" of consciousness. Husserl seems to have thought that only states of conscious awareness are intentional, but we need not be that restrictive: if there are unconscious beliefs and desires, for example, they too should be counted as intentional mental phenomena. See 'Theory of Intentionality', 149. For a more elaborate exposition of Husserl's theory of intentionality, see McIntyre, Ronald, and David Woodruff Smith. 1982. *Husserl and Intentionality: A Study of Mind, Meaning, and Language*. Dordrecht and Boston: D. Reidel.

that, intentionality mediated between the world as ‘a kind of absolute’ which the mind cannot construct, and the world as ‘entirely *relative* to the existential projects of the *bodily* subject’.²¹

One faculty of the mind by which intentionality functions, is consciousness.²² To be conscious of something is to have the mind inclined to that particular thing. It is as Carmen and Hansen note, to have ‘consciousness *of* something, that our mental attitudes are directed toward objects and states of affairs in the world.’²³ The distinction between the act of inclining oneself to an external world and having one’s experience of that world shaped by one’s own subjectivity, is a distinction Husserl marked as one between the ‘*objects* and the *contents* of consciousness’.²⁴

David Woodruff Smith frames these two realities by correlating *objects* of consciousness with that which exists ‘outside’ of consciousness, and *contents* of consciousness with that which exists ‘inside’ consciousness. Objects of consciousness describe things of nature that are material,

²¹ Smith, A. 2007. ‘The Flesh of Perception: Merleau-Ponty and Husserl’. In *Reading Merleau-Ponty: On Phenomenology of Perception*, 1–22. London: Routledge., 32.

²² McIntyre, Ronald, and David Woodruff Smith. 1989. ‘Theory of Intentionality’. In *Husserl’s Phenomenology: A Textbook*, edited by J.N. Mohanty and William McKenna, 147–79., 149. ‘Husserl’s interest in intentionality was inspired by his teacher, Franz Brentano, who himself picked up the term ‘intentional’ from its use in medieval philosophy...Brentano is most famous for a very strong doctrine about intentionality. He claimed that intentionality is the defining characteristic of the mental, i.e., that *all* mental phenomena are intentional and *only* mental phenomena are intentional. This claim has come to be known as “Brentano’s Thesis”. But almost all philosophers, including Husserl, consider the first half of Brentano’s Thesis too strong. Moods such as depression or euphoria are not always “of” or “about” something; and as Husserl notes, sensations such as pain or dizziness are not obviously representational or “directed toward” some object. Husserl’s interest is in those mental states or experiences that *do* give us a sense of an object, and those mental phenomena *are* intentional; he calls them “acts” of consciousness. Husserl seems to have thought that only states of conscious awareness are intentional, but we need not be that restrictive: if there are unconscious beliefs and desires, for example, they too should be counted as intentional mental phenomena. See ‘Theory of Intentionality’, 149. For a more elaborate exposition of Husserl’s theory of intentionality, see McIntyre, Ronald, and David Woodruff Smith. 1982. *Husserl and Intentionality: A Study of Mind, Meaning, and Language*. Dordrecht and Boston: D. Reidel.

²³ Carmen and Hansen, ‘Introduction’, 5.

²⁴ Carmen and Hansen, ‘Introduction’, 6. Carmen and Hansen contrast the intentionality of consciousness thesis with that of psychological phenomenology when they write, ‘This distinction allows us to conceive of intentionality as something different from an irreducible to the causal connections between external objects and internal psychological states, for the objects of my awareness are not (ordinarily) the contents of my mind; rather, those inner contents constitute my awareness *of* outer objects. Intentional content is not (ordinarily) *what* I am aware of; it is rather the *of*-ness, the directedness of my awareness’, 6-7.

and which exist in space and time, and are in that sense “real” (*reale*).²⁵ Contents of consciousness describe subjective experiences. Experiences are ‘events of consciousness’ and, unlike material things which are framed by concrete contexts, events of consciousness ‘are temporal but not spatial and so are not “real”. Their essence is that of being a consciousness *of* something, which does not entail their being spatial (§§34-36).’²⁶ Whereas objects of nature are then external to the self and so require consciousness to attain them through perception, experiences need no mediation.²⁷

The above basic exposition of the relation of the world to a subjective self shows the main components of Husserl’s transcendental phenomenology. Its starting point is the seat of consciousness, the mind.²⁸ While the mind mediates between sense-perception and experience, the external world with its independent objects of nature exists apart from consciousness, and presents itself naively, without the prior interference of a subjective self.²⁹ The mind cannot exist independently of the body however, and thus finds itself within a binary existence; it exists both as consciousness and as a body. To perceive a thing of nature through consciousness is, according to Husserl, to experience two events simultaneously.³⁰

The dual aspects of experience make the self both an object of that which is perceived (body), and the condition of its possibility (mind).³¹ Here, differentiation is made between body and mind. It is what, Barbaras, Smith, and others call a ‘dual-aspect’ ontology.³² A dual-aspect ontology has the perceiving self take part in two realms of experience simultaneously. The body, Husserl divides into ‘*Körper*’ and ‘*Leib*’, the former referring to the physical body and the latter to the living body.³³ It is particularly the living body, with its meaning laden interactions with the

²⁵ Smith, David Woodstruff. 1995. ‘Mind and Body’. In *The Cambridge Companion to Husserl*, edited by Barry Smith, 323–93. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press., 338.

²⁶ Smith, ‘Mind and Body’., 337.

²⁷ Smith, ‘Mind and Body’., 338.

²⁸ Smith, ‘The Flesh of Perception’., 3.

²⁹ Beyer, Christian. 2016. ‘Edmund Husserl’. In *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. The Metaphysics Research Lab. <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/husserl/#SinHorInt>.

³⁰ Baldwin, Thomas. 2004. ‘Editor’s Introduction’. In *Maurice Merleau-Ponty: Basic Writings*, edited by Thomas Baldwin, 247–54. New York: Routledge., 247.

³¹ Barbaras, ‘A Phenomenology of Life’., 208.

³² Smith, ‘Mind and Body’., 324.

³³ Smith, ‘Mind and Body’., 324.

world that 'is essential for perception of the world and for being in the world'.³⁴ With regards to the role of the body, Smith expands:

My physical body, the material *I*, is my body *qua* physical: this body as defined by purely physical attributes of space, time, matter, and causality, and so instantiating the essence Nature. By contrast, my living body, the animate-organism *I*, is this body *qua* living: "my body" as defined by intentional attributes of volition and kinesthesia as well as spatiotemporal-material attributes, i.e., my body as that organ which I move by will and whose movement I am aware of kinaesthetically.³⁵

Husserl divides the body into *Körper* and *Leib*, while he divides the mind into various faculties including, 'Seele', 'Mensch', 'Geist' and the 'pure *I*' (soul, human being, spirit and the 'pure *I*').³⁶

Smith continues to describe the mental aspects as follows:

My soul or psyche, the psychological *I*, is then that aspect of my living body which "animates" it, what makes it a living body, a psychophysical animal. And my spirit or human *I* [*Ich-Mensch*] is then *I qua* human being: an embodied, personal, social being who belongs to the world-of-life, or "life-world" [*Lebenswelt*], the surrounding world as defined not by physics but by everyday life. The empirical *I*, the *I* of everyday experience, from which all philosophical reflection begins, is the human *I*. Finally, the pure *I* is *I qua* subject of intentional experiences or acts of consciousness.³⁷

The simultaneity of nature and consciousness constitutes a perceiving self as holding to 'the natural, bodily moment' and to 'the mental, experiential moment of the *I*'.³⁸ With the agentic role that consciousness plays in perception, a thing of nature transforms into a phenomenon when consciousness engages with it. While external things of nature exist independent from the sense-

³⁴ Smith, 'The Flesh of Perception', 5.

³⁵ Smith, 'The Flesh of Perception', 5.

³⁶ Smith, 'Mind and Body', 324.

³⁷ Smith, 'Mind and Body', 324.

³⁸ Smith, 'Mind and Body', 336. 'Much as Descartes distinguished the essence of mind (thought) from the essence of body (extensions), so Husserl distinguished the essence of consciousness from the essence of nature. But whereas Descartes also distinguished the *I* or *res cogitans* from the body or *res extensa*, Husserl insisted that the "*I*" and the "body" are distinct aspects (moments) of a single individual – and likewise that, in the event of thinking, the "mental" event and the corresponding "natural" event are two aspects (moments) of a single event.', 336.

perceptions of a person, and are presented objectively to the senses, a person's subjective engagement therewith transforms the things of nature into phenomena.³⁹

Defining the roles that mind and body play in perception is integral to Husserl's theory of double sensation because it provides a structure by which one may analyse perception. Phenomenology theorises the relationship between nature and consciousness while also interrogating the intersection of these two. At the intersection of consciousness and body, lies the task of phenomenological description. Phenomenological description differentiates between consciousness which functions apart from the things of nature, and the things of nature itself in its description of a phenomenon.⁴⁰ This phenomenological act, also called the transcendental phenomenological method, requires that the perceiving self 'bracket' their subjectivity in the act of perception.⁴¹

At this point, Merleau-Ponty's critique of Husserl arises. It is questionable whether a perceiving self can truly remove its consciousness from the embodied manner in which that person observes the world.⁴² Can intentionality, a tool of consciousness and a mental state, exist independently from the world in which it functions?⁴³ Husserl wishes to account for its possibility by using the category of experience.⁴⁴ It appears Husserl wishes to advance a phenomenological conception of intentionality.⁴⁵ It too fails because, as Merleau-Ponty shows in his *Phenomenology*

³⁹ Smith, 'Mind and Body'., 323–24.

⁴⁰ This differentiation is the differentiation between the ideal and real. See Carmen and Hansen, 'Introduction'., 7.

⁴¹ Christian Beyer further explains, '...Husserl demanded (in *Ideas*) that in a phenomenological description proper the existence of the object(s) (if any) satisfying the content of the intentional act described must be "bracketed". That is to say, the phenomenological description of a given act and, in particular, the phenomenological specification of its intentional content, must not rely upon the correctness of any *existence assumption* concerning the object(s) (if any) the respective act is about. Thus, the *epoché* has us focus on those aspects of our intentional acts and their contents that do not depend on the existence of a represented object out there in the extra-mental world.' Beyer., 'Edmund Husserl'.

⁴² Barbaras, 'A Phenomenology of Life'., 208.

⁴³ McIntyre, 'Theory and Intentionality'., 151.

⁴⁴ McIntyre, 'Theory and Intentionality'., 151-2.

⁴⁵ As McIntyre and Smith suggest: 'that intentionality is something we know about first and foremost from our own, "first-person" knowledge of our experiences and their "internal" character; that it is a property our experiences have *in themselves*, as subjective experiences, and independent of any of their actual relations to the external world; and that therefore intentionality cannot be explained from a purely objective, "third-person", point of view if such a viewpoint cannot accommodate this internal and subjective character of our experiences. In so thinking, Husserl

of Perception, the senses and the information which it produces as a result of a person's embodied existence, cannot be conceptualised prior to the very fact of existing as a sense-perceptual being in the world.

The irreducibility of the things of nature and of the body's belonging to such objects, is picked up by Merleau-Ponty in his phenomenology of perception.⁴⁶ As Andreas Nordlander shows:

Merleau-Ponty is clearly a transcendental philosopher...Yet with the discovery of the corporeal subject he breaks with this tradition in two important respects: First, by showing that the constituting structures are not primarily in the mind, as categories or concepts, but in the body as an acquired schema for sensorimotor interaction; and second, by consequently insisting that constitution must be reciprocal *between* the subject and the world, rather than unidirectional *from* some other worldly subject.⁴⁷

Merleau-Ponty progresses from Husserl's thinking by insisting that the body and its engagements with the world cannot be bracketed. To exist in the world, and to perceive the things of nature as a subjective self, means to have consciousness shape the world with which it engages, and to have consciousness shaped by the very same world. A dual-aspect ontology thus falls short in accounting for the reciprocity between consciousness and nature.

Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology of perception took stock of the limitations of a dual-aspect ontology and sought to complete, as Renaud Barbaras suggest, the phenomenology of Husserl by developing a phenomenology of life.⁴⁸ He did so by taking into account the irreducibility of the world in which a subjective self exists,⁴⁹ and theorised an ontology which mediated subject and object through the union of their existences.⁵⁰ The result was a perceiving

holds a *phenomenological* conception of intentionality. See McIntyre, 'Theory and Intentionality', 152-3.

⁴⁶ Barbaras uses the term 'irreducibility' in his theorising. I follow his cue. Barbaras, 'A Phenomenology of Life', 208.

⁴⁷ Nordlander, *Figuring Flesh in Creation*, 30.

⁴⁸ Barbaras, 'A Phenomenology of Life', 208.

⁴⁹ Barbaras, 'A Phenomenology of Life', 208.

⁵⁰ Barbaras explains, 'In this sense, I believe, phenomenology is essentially *phenomenology of life*: the problem posed by Husserl in *The Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology* (§53) concerning the dual status of the subject – its being both part of the world and the condition of the world – is *the same as the problem of the status of life*. I would like to show, then, that Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology is really a *phenomenology of life*, which means

and subjective self whose sense-perceptions were neither bracketed from its lifeworld nor existed independently. Equally so, mind and body are mutually inhering and cannot exist in strictly immanent and transcendental terms. Instead, the body inhabits two spaces, the sensing self and that which is sensed, thus experiencing double sensation.⁵¹

Merleau-Ponty's peer and friend, Jean-Paul Sartre, also incorporated Husserl's phenomenology in his theorising.⁵² Both agreed that the various reductions, or bracketing, in Husserl's transcendental phenomenology amounted to 'illegitimate abstractions from the concrete worldly conditions of experience'.⁵³ Margaret Whitford describes the differences in approaches as: 'Merleau-Ponty's primary concern was with the pre-reflective, pre-conceptual areas of experiences' whereas 'Sartre's thought is dominated by the problem of human freedom and its implication'.⁵⁴ What Sartre sought to do, was to account for a person's relation to the world as both subject and object in a manner which mediated some tensions found in a transcendental phenomenology.

Sartre, in *Being and Nothingness*, analyses existence in terms of its objective dimensions (*en-soi*) and its subjective dimensions (*pour-soi*).⁵⁵ *En-soi* roughly translates as 'being-in-themselves' and 'are non-conscious things, which can be said to have essences, which exist independently of any observer and which constitute all the *things* in the world'.⁵⁶ *Pour-soi* translates as 'beings-for-themselves', these beings 'are conscious beings whose consciousness renders them entirely different from other things'.⁵⁷ Broadly translated, *pour-soi* exists

Merleau-Ponty's thought completes the project of Husserl's phenomenology. Indeed, we can say that Merleau-Ponty's main purpose, from beginning to end, is to give sense to the Husserlian *lifeworld* as it is described in the *Crisis*. Thus, Merleau-Ponty's purpose is to develop a phenomenology that takes into account the irreducibility of the lifeworld.' Barbaras, 'A Phenomenology of Life', 208.

⁵¹ Nordlander, *Figuring Flesh in Creation*, 37.

⁵² Carmen and Hansen, 'Introduction', 5.

⁵³ Carmen and Hansen, 'Introduction', 8.

⁵⁴ Whitford, 'Merleau-Ponty's Critique of Sartre's Philosophy', 306. Whitford elaborates, 'Although they were both concerned to elucidate the relationship between consciousness and its world, in Merleau-Ponty's cast it was in order to define the nature and limits of our *understanding* of the world, whereas Sartre wants to provide the basis for a philosophy of *action*.' Whitford, 'Merleau-Ponty's Critique of Sartre's Philosophy', 306.

⁵⁵ Whitford, 'Merleau-Ponty's Critique of Sartre's Philosophy', 307.

⁵⁶ Warnock, Mary. 2003. 'Introduction'. In *Being and Nothingness: An Essay on Phenomenology*, xi–xxi. Abington, Oxon: Routledge., xi.

⁵⁷ Warnock, 'Introduction', xi.

conceptually as consciousness, and *en-soi* as things of nature. This schema is central as it parses the relationship between consciousness and self, and so sets the stage for the consideration of the things in nature (objects) as the constituting corporeal schema by which persons apprehend and are apprehended.⁵⁸ Tracing the distinction between being-for-itself and being-in-itself aids an existentialist account of perception.⁵⁹

Sartre uses the concept of nothingness to mediate between a perceiving self and the world which it perceives. On the one hand, nothingness is the foundation from which consciousness can identify something as true or contrary irrespective of its actual facticity.⁶⁰ On the other hand, nothingness denies the pre-reflective, subjective self, ‘*in* which the flux of our mental life is housed and *from* which it flows’.⁶¹ The twofold focus expresses the ‘groundlessness and radical freedom which characterise the human condition.’⁶² It is not the case then as it was with Husserl that the

⁵⁸ Dillon, Martin. 1997. *Merleau-Ponty's Ontology*. Second. Evanston: Northwestern University Press., 141.

⁵⁹ Sartre notes in *Being and Nothingness*, ‘...reflection has no kind of primacy over the consciousness reflected-on. Quite the contrary, it is the non-reflective consciousness which renders the reflection possible; there is a pre-reflective cogito which is the condition of the Cartesian cogito. At the same time it is the non-thetic consciousness of counting which is the very condition of my act of adding. If it were otherwise, how would the addition be the unifying theme of my consciousness? In order that this theme should preside over a whole series of syntheses of unifications and recognitions, it must be present to itself, not as a thing but as an operative intention which can exist only as the revealing-revealed (*révélante-révéléé*), to use an expression of Heidegger’s’ Ibid. xii., Mary Warnock further elaborates: ‘Existentialism is, to an extreme degree, anti-Cartesian in this matter: on the one hand, existentialists do not start from “pure consciousness” looking out upon a world about which the question arises “How do I know it exists?” On the other hand they have no hope of and no interest in a description of a “marvellous new science” of the kind envisaged by Descartes. On the contrary, they start all their reflection from the stand-point of a consciousness already engaged in an external world, of “impure” consciousness, modified in all kind of different ways by its presence in a world of things; and an impersonal or wholly scientific account of the world in terms of regularities and causal connexions seems to them inadequate to the richness of the world as it is actually experienced’. See Warnock, ‘Introduction’, xii.

⁶⁰ As a result, ‘the act of being conscious is precisely the introduction of the separation of (self)awareness from its object and of the object from its ground and, of course, the positing of the ground itself as part of the object which the awareness is not’. See Gardner, Sebastian. 2009. *Sartre's Being and Nothingness: A Reader's Guide*. New York: Continuum International Publishing Group., 15.

⁶¹ Gardner, *Sartre's Being and Nothingness.*, 15.

⁶² Onof, Christian. n.d. ‘Jean Paul Sartre: Existentialism’. In *Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. Accessed 23 November 2016. <http://www.iep.utm.edu/sartre-ex/>.

things of nature affect the consciousness, it is rather that the consciousness experiences an atheism towards the world in which it exists.⁶³

A Sartrean existentialism is sceptical of a ‘personalised’ consciousness and advances what Sebastian Gardner calls an atheistic consciousness. He explains, ‘[t]he significance of Sartre’s expunging of Husserl’s transcendental ‘I’ is to establish a kind of atheism of consciousness, directed against our naturally theistic self-conception’.⁶⁴ An atheism of consciousness implies the absence of a pre-determined and prior awareness whereby consciousness is self-reflexive. Here, the priority lies instead with describing an object as already existent in the world prior to a person’s engagement with it. Hazel Barnes describes the relationship between subject and object in the following way:

We as human beings confront a brute, concrete reality that existed before the evolution of conscious life. Into this undefined being, what we call consciousness introduces significance, differentiation, form, meaning, and our own purposes. Through our bodies we can use this universe, but there is nothing there that could properly be said to be responsive to us – only indifferent.⁶⁵

Barnes’ description echoes Gardner’s description of an atheist consciousness where Sartre is interpreted as saying that consciousness is ‘not itself being but is the source of all determination’.⁶⁶ Scholars reading Sartre employ nothingness as the predominant motif to explain the atheistic consciousness. Nothingness describes the prior existence of the things of nature to which the sense-perceptual self comes and experiences as an other.

The atheist consciousness of a Sartrean ontology, insofar as it has the sense-perceptual self stand independent and unaffected by the world in which it exists, stands in contrast to Merleau-Ponty’s ontology which starts with the shared existence of the conscious self and the things of nature. Merleau-Ponty’s starting point is the mutually inhering relationship of body and things of

⁶³ I follow Sebastian Gardner who uses this term to describe Sartre’s concept of nothingness. Gardner, Sebastian. 2009. *Sartre’s Being and Nothingness: A Reader’s Guide*. New York: Continuum International Publishing Group., 15.

⁶⁴ Gardner, *Sartre’s Being and Nothingness*., 15.

⁶⁵ Barnes, Hazel, E. 2006. ‘Sartre’s Ontology: The Revealing and Making of Being’. In *The Cambridge Companion to Sartre*, edited by Christina Howells, 13–38. Cambridge University Press. <https://www.cambridge.org/core/books/cambridge-companion-to-sartre/6835C24449652C88885C412FDECB74E6>., 14.

⁶⁶ Barnes, ‘Sartre’s Ontology’., 14.

nature expressed in Husserl's theory of double sensation. For Merleau-Ponty, it is not only that the perceiving self stands in relation to the things of nature but also that the pre-reflexive consciousness mediates between these two entities. A pre-reflexive consciousness mediates the space between subject and object, between a person's existence in the world as a body (things of nature) and as a consciousness (as subjective reflective self). Unlike the things of nature that are indifferent to the atheist consciousness, the pre-reflexive self lives in the world and experiences it before any prior conceptualisation takes place.⁶⁷

The difference in approach between Sartre and Merleau-Ponty, lies with the place and function of reflexivity in the theorising of the two contemporaries. Whereas there is the 'possibility of a plurality of subjects' in Sartre's ontology, there is the possibility for 'an intersubjective world' in Merleau-Ponty's ontology.⁶⁸ The difference lies with what Merleau-Ponty terms 'flesh', a term used to describe the continuum of existence between the body and the things of nature. One reads in *Visible and Invisible* (1968):

...the presence of the world is precisely the presence of its flesh to my flesh, that "I am of the world" and that I am not it...One forgets that this frontal being before us – whether we posit it, whether it posits itself within us qua being posited – is second by principle, is cut upon a horizon which is not nothing, and which for its part is not by virtue of composition.⁶⁹

A fundamental reciprocity exists between a person's embodied existence and the world. Here, Merleau-Ponty's ontology of the flesh is distinctive for its fluid rendering of existence. There is no faculty of consciousness which has primacy over existence in general; subject and object are entirely intertwined and inform one another mutually.

The focus in a Merleau-Pontian phenomenology of perception falls on subjectivity and materiality and the spontaneous reciprocal relation between these two entities. This means that the subjective and objective faculties are borne from the same being, shares its being and has its being perpetually overlap.⁷⁰ A reciprocity reigns between the conscious engagement of a person in the

⁶⁷ Whitford, 'Merleau-Ponty's Critique of Sartre's Philosophy', 308.

⁶⁸ Whitford, 'Merleau-Ponty's Critique', 313.

⁶⁹ Merleau-Ponty, Maurice. 1968. *The Visible and the Invisible*. Edited by Claude Lefort. Translated by Alphonso Lingis. Evanston: Northwestern University Press., 139.

⁷⁰ Boccali, Renato. 2014. 'The Incarnation of Life: The Phenomenology of Birth in Henry and Merleau-Ponty'. In *Embodiment: Phenomenological, Religious and Deconstructive Views on Living and Dying*, 49–63. Surrey: Ashgate., 59.

world, and the world's response to such engagement. The body cannot, therefore, alienate itself through its consciousness from the world in which it exists. The body informs and performs the consciousness as much as the consciousness informs and performs the body. Martin Dillon argues, '[t]hus, the lived body, as a phenomenon, includes both the immanent agency of my conscious life and the transcendence of worldly objects.'⁷¹

The brief sketch of Husserl and Sartre as two prominent figures in the development of Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology solicits preliminary observations. In the first instance, consciousness cannot be a pre-determined category of thinking that mediates the relation between agent and world. This is so because consciousness radically limits the freedom of both the agent and the world. Merleau-Ponty's *Phenomenology of Perception* resists a distinction between consciousness and nature and opens the relation up between the body and the world. Perception arises, in this instance, from the freedom of the agent and the thing of nature as they exist in reciprocal relation. A person's interactions with the world and the consequent content of perception that arise therefrom is, therefore, existential. The world is no longer a correlate of consciousness and the agent can, therefore, be shaped as much by the things of nature as her or his engagement therewith. In the second instance, the mind, soul, psyche, and spirit cannot superimpose itself on that which is being perceived. Rather, the motility of persons as embodied and responsive agents determines the production of perceptual knowledge. The role of synaesthesia and kinaesthesia is central, for reciprocity occurs precisely in the embodied engagements of a sense-perceptual self with the world. A Husserlian transcendental consciousness thesis is, in this instance, in conflict with Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology of perception. In the third instance, our perceptions of the world are not mediated by an unresponsive abyss but determined by the fact that one cannot abstract one's existence into various capacities of consciousness. To dislodge consciousness from its embodied context, is to lose sight of the intertwined nature of perception.

Toward an Ontology of the Flesh

Husserl's transcendental phenomenology gave Merleau-Ponty the theory of double sensation. The thesis that consciousness and things of nature interact in a way that suggests their influence on

⁷¹ Dillon, *Merleau-Ponty's Ontology.*, 143.

another. Husserl's transcendental phenomenology culminated in a dual-aspect ontology that ascribed to consciousness and things of nature two disparate modes of existence. Both Merleau-Ponty and Sartre viewed a dual-aspect ontology as having shortcomings, and whereas Sartre developed an ontology of nothingness, Merleau-Ponty developed an ontology of the flesh. An ontology of the flesh builds on a set of lectures Merleau-Ponty presented on the seventeenth-century philosopher and theologian, Nicholas Malebranche. Merleau-Ponty developed these lectures approximately ten years (1947-8) prior to his final work, *The Visible and Invisible*, which began to give an account of a person's relation to the world both as intimately part of that world, and of being shaped by that world.

One term Merleau-Ponty uses to describe the relation of sense-perceptual self (or sentient being) to things of nature (or sensible) is that of 'dehiscence'. Loosely translated as divergence, dehiscence describes the relationship between the sense-perceptual self and the things of nature in complementary and not mutually exclusive terms. The term signals Merleau-Ponty's attempt to construct an ontology that holds the shared elements of sentient and sensible, and those aspects of existence which distinguish them, together.⁷² The holding together of the unity and alterity of sentient and sensible which dehiscence describes is best illustrated with the example Merleau-Ponty uses, touch. Two facets of touch are distinguishable, one can either touch (active) or be touched (passive). The difference between active and passive is not only the difference in agency but also the difference in expression of the one agent in relation to an other.⁷³

By expressing the shared element, agency, both facets of touch exist as actions done in relation to another. This shared relation, termed convergence, marks the possibility for subjectivity to take place.⁷⁴ With the convergence of these two modes of touching, or of the relation of sentient to sensible and vice versa, a manner of existing is established which recognises the place and role of similarity and difference in the articulation of the sense-perceptual self. The possibility of sentient and sensible to affect and transform another, is the fullest expression of dehiscence. It is

⁷² Evans, Fred, and Leonard Lawlor. 2000. 'The Value of Flesh: Merleau-Ponty's Philosophy and the Modernism/Postmodernism Debate'. In *Chiasms: Merleau-Ponty's Notion of Flesh*, 1–20. Albany: State University of New York Press., 10.

⁷³ Reynolds, Jack. n.d. 'Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1908-1961)'. In *Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy: A Peer-Reviewed Academic Resource*. Accessed 13 May 2019. <https://www.iep.utm.edu/merleau/>.

⁷⁴ Reynolds, Jack. n.d. 'Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1908-1961)'.

not only that sentient and sensible stand in relation to another, but that their presences converge and thereby establishes a middle ground by which knowledge may be attained through the corporeality of existence. The middle ground is one that Merleau-Ponty later terms flesh.

The development of the concept of flesh in Merleau-Ponty's theorising one may trace back to the sensuous theology of Nicholas Malebranche. In the *Cambridge Companion to Merleau-Ponty*, Judith Butler shows how Malebranche's sensuous theology understood 'the order of ideal intelligibility' to be 'disclosed through sentient experience'.⁷⁵ Unlike the Cartesian way where things of nature are only revealed when a mind engages with it, Malebranche's sensuous theology has things of nature reveal themselves in its own right. The logic of a sensuous theology one may map in the words of Thomas Lennon who writes:

...when I open my eyes, for example, and *look at* a tree by the roadside, what I actually *see* is something in the mind of God. The idea in the mind of God is the exemplar after which the tree was created, with the necessary result that the tree resembles the idea. By knowing the idea we are thus able to know the material things.⁷⁶

With the origin of the things of nature in the mind of God, objects simultaneously signify those ideas and incarnate such ideas through their materiality.⁷⁷ Such things mediate between sense-perceptions and that which originates transcendently (in the mind of God).⁷⁸ Malebranche's metaphysics makes two important shifts. It affirms that things of nature exist in their own right

⁷⁵ Butler, Judith. 2005. 'Merleau-Ponty and the Touch of Malebranche'. In *The Cambridge Companion to Merleau-Ponty*, edited by Taylor Carmen and Mark Hansen, 181–205. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press., 184. I take the unconventional route of focussing on Malebranche's influence on Merleau-Ponty whereas other interpretations of his lectures focus more on the place of Maine de Biran in Merleau-Ponty's thinking. As an example, Orion Edgar, follows the former cue. See Edgar, *Things Seen and Unseen.*, 37.

⁷⁶ Lennon, Thomas. 1997. 'Introduction'. In *The Search after Truth*, vi–xxiii. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press., xi.

⁷⁷ Chapter four makes this Augustinian logic central to its consideration of the relationship between words and the incarnate Word. Carol Harrison's reading of Augustine's Christological interpretation of Scripture makes headway. See Harrison, Carol. 2019. *On Music, Sense, Affect and Voice*. London: Bloomsbury Academic., Harrison, Carol. 2018. 'Confused Voices: Sound and Sense in the Late (Wild) Augustine'. Pusey House, Oxford: Oxford University Press., 1–20. Harrison, Carol. 2018. 'Sound and Silence in Augustine's Christological Exegesis'. Pusey House, Oxford: University of Oxford., 1-19.

⁷⁸ Butler, Judith. 2015. *Senses of the Subject*. New York: Fordham University Press., 38.

prior to any sense-perceptual engagement therewith and ascribes to the body (with its sense-perceptual engagements with the things of nature) the role of articulating what such things reveal.

A prime example of that which the embodied self reveals, is love. Love exists prior to the body and the things of nature. It is worth quoting Butler in full as she explains the dynamic of sentient and sensible in terms of love:

It is not only that I cannot feel anything but what touches me, but that I cannot love without first being loved, cannot see without being seen, and that in some fundamental way, the act of seeing and loving are made possible by – and are coextensive with – being seen and being loved...So to love God is to have God continuously impress his love upon us, and the very moment in which we act, in which we are positioned as subjects of action, is the same moment in which we are undergoing another love, and without this simultaneous and double movement, there can be no love.⁷⁹

Expressed in the example of love is a sensuous theology that advances the logic implicit to Merleau-Ponty's concept of dehiscence. On the one hand, agencies converge between being active and passive, and on the other hand, the presence of another sentient or sensible makes possible the expression of love. The relationship between sentient and sensible is, finally, not marked by the mastery of the one over the other, neither of the disappearance of the one at the presence of the other, but of the simultaneous presence of sentient and sensible without negation or conflation.⁸⁰

Malebranche's intelligibility of divine ideas thesis structures the logic of the relationship between sentient and sensible in terms of their mutually transforming effect on another. By emphasising their shared corporeality, both sense-perceptual self and thing of nature intertwine. In doing so, argues Butler, 'Malebranche offers Merleau-Ponty the opportunity to consider how the body in its impressionability presupposes a prior set of impressions that act on the body and form the basis for sentience, feeling, cognition, and the beginnings of agency itself.'⁸¹ The centrality of the body in parsing the relationship between sentient and sensible, places the sense-perceptual self relationally to itself as body and as thing of nature.⁸² The body is, in this rendering, a '*sensible for*

⁷⁹ Butler, 2005. 'Merleau-Ponty and the Touch of Malebranche', 198.

⁸⁰ Butler, 2005., 'Merleau-Ponty and the Touch of Malebranche', 194.

⁸¹ Butler, 'Merleau-Ponty and the Touch of Malebranche', 185.

⁸² The logic of convergence, and of the body's relational existence to things of nature as it relates to Malebranche's sensuous theology is heard in Merleau-Ponty's reading of the body: 'The body unites us directly with the things through its own ontogenesis, by welding to one another the two

itself⁸³ and an ‘*exemplar sensible*’⁸⁴ by which the invisible is made visible. With the centrality of sense-perceptual experience to knowledge, the perceiving self is oriented to the world in a network of perceptual permeability.⁸⁵ The term that describes this perceptual permeability in the work of Merleau-Ponty, is flesh.

Merleau-Ponty introduces the term flesh as a way of constructing a conceptual framework by which he expresses the relationship between the sentient and sensible.⁸⁶ Flesh is the incarnate subject which is identified with the Word in Malebranche’s sensuous theology.⁸⁷ Since Merleau-Ponty is sceptical of any rendition of transcendence that suggest a flight from the immanent and material, flesh becomes the term he uses to describe the converging relationship between sentient and sensible.⁸⁸ A concession follows, that flesh is not stated in respect to a pre-established body or materiality but is rather that which is birthed from the intertwining of the sentient and sensible.

outlines of which it is made, its two laps: the sensible mass it is and the mass of the sensible wherein it is born by segregation and upon which, as seer, it remains open. It is the body and it alone, because it is a two-dimensional being, that can bring us to the things themselves, which are themselves not flat beings but beings in depth, inaccessible to a subject that would survey them from above, open to him alone that, if it be possible, would coexist with them in the same world.’ See Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and Invisible*, 136.

⁸³ Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and Invisible*., 135.

⁸⁴ Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and Invisible*., 135.

⁸⁵ Merleau-Ponty, Maurice. 2001. *The Incarnate Subject: Malebranche, Biran, and Bergson on the Union of Body and Soul*. Edited by Andrew Bjellard and Patrick Burke. Translated by Paul Milan. New York: Humanity Books., 41.

⁸⁶ Priest, Stephen. 1998. *Merleau-Ponty*. London: Routledge., 10.

⁸⁷ Landes, Donald. 2015. ‘Expressive Bodies: Merleau-Ponty and Nancy on Painting and Ontology’. *Research in Phenomenology*, no. 45: 369–85., 385. Judith Butler explains, ‘For Malebranche, the proposition is not a direct inference, but a manifestation of the divine “word” as it makes itself present in experience itself. And although Malebranche separates the “pure” thought of God from its sensuous manifestations, there is no sensuous manifestation that is not derivable from God and does not, in some way, indicate divine presence and activity...’. Butler, 2005. ‘Merleau-Ponty and the Touch of Malebranche’., 183.

⁸⁸ Andreas Nordlander explains: ‘...meaning descends from the immutable realm of ideas and becomes incarnate in flesh, as the invisible of the visible. This is what motivates Merleau-Ponty’s interest in the Christian idea of incarnation, but also what causes him to oppose the idea of incarnation to that of transcendence. He is not interested in something that would transcend the world, which he thinks can only motivate a rejection of this world here and now – its bodies, its innate meaning, even its goodness.’ See Nordlander, *Figuring Flesh in Creation*, 242.

Flesh designates the ontological continuity that exists ‘between humans and other beings’.⁸⁹ In *Spell of the Sensuous*, David Abram depicts flesh as ‘the mysterious tissue or matrix that underlies and gives rise to both the perceiver and the perceived as interdependent aspects of its own spontaneous activity’.⁹⁰ As Butler notes, ‘[f]lesh is not my flesh or yours, but neither is it some third thing’.⁹¹ Instead, flesh is both sentient and sensible, ‘[i]t dominates, in other words, by coming apart: the flesh is that which is always coming apart and then back upon itself, but that for which no coincidence with itself is possible’.⁹² Flesh is thus a principle of incarnation which enables both the sentient and the sensible (and vice versa) to be in relationship with another – ‘I am truly given to myself’ but also truly given to the perceptual other.⁹³

Flesh signals a key moment in Merleau-Ponty’s ontology because it overcomes the mind-body or reason-experience bifurcation by positing a fundamental unity between these aspects of embodied existence. On the one hand, sense-perception informs our knowing and on the other hand, what is known is governed by the embodied interactions with the world.⁹⁴ Of importance is the fact that for Merleau-Ponty, our engagements with the world bring into existence (makes incarnate) that which is given prior to sense perception and manifest when engaged therewith.⁹⁵ Merleau-Ponty’s conceptualisation of embodied knowing situates the body and its perceptions in continuity with that which it perceives.

The body is a sensible sentient and so also is the world. There is no gap, no ontological priority, and no prioritisation of the subject over the object. Instead, the reciprocal relation between the body and its engagements with the world lends itself to a communicative immediacy. Unlike a Cartesian legacy, there is in Merleau-Ponty’s ontology of the flesh no dualism between body and mind or experience and reason. Merleau-Ponty breaks away from the philosophical legacy and the consequent attempts to overcome this dualism by conceptualising a transcendental consciousness

⁸⁹ Bannon, Bryan. 2011. ‘Flesh and Nature: Understanding Merleau-Ponty’s Relational Ontology’. *Research in Phenomenology*, no. 41: 327–57., 330.

⁹⁰ Abram, David. 1996. *The Spell of the Sensuous*. New York: Vintage., 66.

⁹¹ Butler, ‘Merleau-Ponty and the Touch of Malebranche’., 196.

⁹² Butler, ‘Merleau-Ponty and the Touch of Malebranche’., 196.

⁹³ Merleau-Ponty, *The Incarnate Subject*., 41.

⁹⁴ George Lakoff and Mark Johnson engage in a similar discourse when they argue that embodied existence informs every aspect of our knowing and consequent perceptions and linguistic norms. For further information see Lakoff, George, and Mark Johnson. 1999. *Philosophy in the Flesh: The Embodied Mind and Its Challenge to Western Thought*. New York: Basic Books.

⁹⁵ See Nordlander, *Figuring Flesh in Creation*., 242.

and its intentionality. Instead, his ontology of the flesh illustrates how sentient and sensible are perpetually informed by their interactions with another, how knowing is informed by experience, and how experience governs knowing.

Flesh does not then exist as a pre-determined entity superimposed on the things of nature. Flesh, instead, makes incarnate the invisible in the visible by founding sense-perception in the body and its engagements with the world. Merleau-Ponty's ontology advances a logic of ontological performances, the representation and incarnation of the invisible in the realm of the perceptual and embodied. These ontological performances bring into communion the flesh of the world and perpetually make incarnate that which grounds existence, namely being. *The Intertwining*, Merleau-Ponty's last unfinished chapter, gestures to the relational dialectic between body and world, visible and invisible, flesh and being.

Merleau-Ponty's ontology of the flesh gives a normatively different framework for expressing the relationship between sentient and sensible. It was the sensuous theology of Nicholas Malebranche who, by reading Augustine and Descartes, sought to merge the body, God's divine ideas, and a Cartesian epistemology, with another.⁹⁶ Malebranche's metaphysics established two fundamental perspectives. First, that a givenness precedes the things of nature. Things of nature are manifestations of ideas in the mind of God and make visible that which is given prior and invisible. Second, coming to know that which is prior cannot occur without acknowledging the place of the body and its experiential acquisition of that which is invisible or given. While Malebranche ascribes to the Word the role of mediating between the sentient and sensible, Merleau-Ponty is sceptical of that which seems distinct and removed from the immanent and material. Traces of Malebranche's metaphysics are found in the relationship of the visible to the invisible in Merleau-Ponty's ontology.

The concept of divergence or dehiscence plays a central role in Merleau-Ponty's ontology of the flesh. It registers both sentient and sensible as agents and exists actively and passively in the presence of another. These entities are never negated or collapsed in the presence of the other, rather they converge in a manner that allows for union and alterity. Here, the term flesh is central insofar as it establishes a new vocabulary with which to speak of the body not as an intentional consciousness, neither as a subject exerted over an object, but as a non-coercive and open entity

⁹⁶ Schmaltz, Tad. 2017. 'Nicolas Malebranche'. In *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*.

existing in relation to another. It is an order of engagement by which the I never enjoys primacy over the world in which it functions. It must thus, in its being ‘naturally oriented toward the world’, be ignorant of itself.⁹⁷

With the primacy of the shared corporeality between sentient and sensible Merleau-Ponty, through Malebranche, offers a different rendition to the perceived binary of the things of nature and of a sense-perceptual self. In Husserl’s phenomenology, a dual-aspect ontology describes the relationship between sense-perception and things of nature, where consciousness exerts itself over the things of nature. Sartre’s ontology of nothingness expresses the indeterminate relationship between subjective self and the things of nature. With an ontology of nothingness, the things of nature stand ambiguous to the sense-perceptual self. The primacy of consciousness and the subjective self in Husserl and Sartre stands in contrast to Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenology of perception and ontology of the flesh.

Towards a Christian Flesh

A reading of Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenology of perception finds its culmination in an ontology of the flesh. Based on a reading of his lectures on Nicholas Malebranche, and his progression from Husserlian phenomenology and Sartrean existentialism, flesh circumscribes two things; the continuum of being that exists between self and other, and embodied existence as the necessary condition of possibility for perception. With the recognition that being itself is invisible yet simultaneously the condition of possibility for embodied existence, a Merleau-Pontian flesh designates two facets of a singular reality.

The integrative rendering of existence is fruitful for the theological investigation of the flesh, because the Christian flesh always stands in relation to another that is both divine and created. Where the perceptual other in Merleau-Ponty’s ontology restricts itself to the realm of the immanent, one need not exclude the register of the divine in a Christian conception of the flesh. The flesh of Christ in the incarnation is the embodiment of the divine in the created order and continues to be the condition of possibility for the perception of the divine. Instead of introducing a dualistic structure where the flesh of Christ and the flesh of persons exist competitively, flesh

⁹⁷ Merleau-Ponty, *The Incarnate Subject.*, 41.

may be rendered in a complementary way. The incarnation, affirms the materiality of existence as the mode by which to perceive self, created other and divine.

The question which immediately arises however, is whether Merleau-Ponty's ontology of the flesh with its skepticism of transcendence can contribute to a theology of the flesh? Can Merleau-Ponty's theorising resonate with that which is confessed within the Christian tradition? Ola Sigurdson in *Heavenly Bodies: Incarnation, the Gaze, and Embodiment in Christian Theology* responds to this question when he writes:

In modern times transcendence has come to stand for something that is "far away". A transcendent God, according to this way of understanding transcendence, is not a God who is worthy of humanity, because we need a God who is "near" us. If transcendence means that something is remote this is correct, but if transcendence could be understood as "difference," it is hardly the opposite of presence or immanence.⁹⁸

Sigurdson's proposal that one read transcendence as difference as opposed to distance is instructive. It curtails a rendering of the invisible as that which is detached and removed from the embodied and concrete. Transcendence does not translate, in other words, as the invisible detached from the realm of the visible, but as the ground of the visible. Sigurdson continues, '[t]ranscendence is not the downfall of the human, but rather her consummation, and this is an important insight'.⁹⁹ The simultaneity does not amount to a zero-sum game, rather, it ascribes to embodied existence the dimension of gesturing, performing, and instantiating the divine.

A Merleau-Pontian phenomenology centers on the intertwining of the visible and the invisible, the former is the manifest expression of the latter, and the latter is the ground of possibility of the former. Ola Sigurdson echoes this aspect when he writes, 'Maurice Merleau-Ponty has argued that the invisible, as a condition for our being able to experience the visible, is not something absolutely invisible, but rather "the invisible of this world, that which inhabits the world"'.¹⁰⁰ In this sense, the invisible is grounded in the immanent. Bearing in mind that transcendence need not denote distance as much as difference, transcendence and immanence are

⁹⁸ Sigurdson, Ola. 2016. *Heavenly Bodies. Incarnation, the Gaze, and Embodiment in Christian Theology*. Michigan: Eerdmans., 271.

⁹⁹ Sigurdson, *Heavenly Bodies.*, 273.

¹⁰⁰ Sigurdson, *Heavenly Bodies.*, 272.

not mutually exclusive but complementary. The realm of the invisible, instead of being bereft of its presence by the transcendent, is instead brought into relief by the transcendent.

The centrality of the visible and invisible to Merleau-Ponty's flesh is equally central to a theology of the flesh. In the affirmation of presence as difference, whether it be the immanent or transcendent, both stand in a state of relation to another. Flesh speaks of a simultaneity of presences, of the self to itself and to another, whether it be created or divine. To use the term flesh is to hold together two aspects of existence, the invisible and the visible as well as the transcendent and immanent. With the said rendering, it is fruitful to employ flesh in the construction of a theology of the flesh because the Word becomes *flesh* at the incarnation. To employ the term flesh within the Christian theological context, is also an act of recognition, that Christ incarnate assumed no other mode of existence than the affective and embodied.

Merleau-Ponty's ontology of the flesh, in its recovery of the body for Western philosophy, presents itself especially for the retrieval of the body and its learning in the context of Christian theology. For an ontology of the flesh presents itself relationally and participatorially. Flesh exists at the intersection of relationality and participation insofar as it is the ground of perception, and the shared existence which constitutes perception. Flesh orders the sense-perceptual self relationally to that which is other than itself. According to the logic of an ontology of the flesh, a sense-perceptual self can never stand removed from the realities in which that person exists. It shapes and is shaped by those sensible elements which present itself for consideration.

Within a discipline such as theology which persistently seeks to express itself in embodied terms, articulating the body in relation to self, things of nature, and the divine is central, not only in its constituting of the Christian flesh, but also in establishing the role that sense-perception has in transforming the Christian flesh. Brought back to the critique of the negated Christian flesh, Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology of double sensation and ontology of the flesh shows all bodies as being open to one another and as being shaped by that other. With the openness with which the sense-perceptual self stands in relation to both that which is immanent and transcendent, the next aspect to be considered is whether the Christian flesh interpreted as matter and Spirit, of body and soul, and of earthly and heavenly, opposes the integrated and holistic rendering of the flesh we have discussed thus far.

Chapter 2

Towards a Positive Account of Pauline Flesh

Part of the problematic of a diminished Christian flesh is the fact that the term itself has not fared well in modern theologies. Feminist theology, especially, lodges its critique by emphasising the part that Paul has to play. According to this line of critique, the Pauline legacy is riddled with binaries and dualisms. There are the binaries of body and soul, of matter and Spirit, and of earthly and heavenly. Each binary constructs its own way of speaking of the relationship between material and immaterial in mutually exclusive ways. Romans 8:6-8 warrants such mutually exclusive language when it reads:

For to set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace. For the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God, for it does not submit to God's law; indeed, it cannot. Those who are in the flesh cannot please God.¹⁰¹

To exist in the flesh is to exist in opposition to the Spirit, this is what a first glance at Romans 8:6-8 seems to say. In this instance, flesh denotes a myriad of vices – lust, desire, gluttony, immorality – all of which are associated with sin.

This correlation between flesh and sin has been widely accepted. Georg Werner Kümmel, however, distances himself from such a reading when he writes, '[t]his connection with sin has often been understood as if Paul regarded man as sinful simply because of his attachment to material things. That is undoubtedly wrong'.¹⁰² Like Kümmel, recent scholarship in Pauline studies suggests that the traditional correlation of Paul's flesh as a sinful flesh is due to various factors including the misinterpretation of the time, context and social-location in which Paul writes. On the one hand, such misinterpretation loses a truly Pauline anthropology insofar as it perpetuates a failed correlation between sin and flesh. On the other hand, the misinterpretation of Paul's flesh as a demonised and thereby negated flesh, falsely keeps alive the notion that the Christian Scriptures propagate escapist mentalities.

¹⁰¹ Unless stated otherwise, all quotations of the Bible are taken from the English Standard Version. *ESV Study Bible*. 2012. Crossway.

¹⁰² Kümmel, Werner Georg. 2018. 'Man in the New Testament'. In *T & T Clark Reader in Theological Anthropology*, edited by Marc Cortez and Michael P. Jensen, 20–24. London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark., 20.

Alongside other New Testament scholars, Susan Eastman is doing important work in retrieving Paul's anthropology for today. In *Paul and the Person: Reframing Paul's Anthropology*, Eastman speaks of 'Paul's person', a term denoting a multi-layered structure of personhood which is determined by various socio-ethical and philosophical influences. The absence of contemporary formulations of Paul's person is due, Eastman suggests, to the relative lack of studies in Paul's anthropology.¹⁰³ The lack includes 'a theological aversion to anthropocentric approaches to Pauline theology' and 'a wariness of reductionist readings of Paul'.¹⁰⁴ Attending to Paul's person as Eastman does,¹⁰⁵ also means attending to the role that the Word, the Spirit, and the flesh plays in Paul's writings. The book of Romans, especially, is densely populated with the language of flesh, body, and Spirit.

At the intersection of Word, Spirit, and flesh, three anxieties arise. First, a penal substitution reading of the Cross in Paul leads, as Tom Wright suggests, to the idea that existence in the flesh needs to be vindicated by Christ's death.¹⁰⁶ With this model, Christ suffers for the sake of the sins committed in the flesh, a logic which strengthens the thesis that the body and its engagements with the world is inherently sinful and as such, needs correction. Second, that Paul's description of the Spirit as life and flesh as death sets their functioning in mutually exclusive terms. The choice between life or death readily becomes the choice for the spiritual over the material. The error inherent to this proposed mutually exclusive relationship Eastman suggests, is one which relates to the construction of sin and its place in Paul's soteriology.¹⁰⁷ The question at hand becomes whether one should read sin in Paul's person as being inherent to the flesh. The final anxiety, described by Grant Macaskill, relates to an anthropocentric reading of Paul's theology of

¹⁰³ Eastman, Susan Grove. 2017. *Paul and the Person: Reframing Paul's Anthropology*. Michigan: Eerdmans.

¹⁰⁴ Eastman, *Paul and the Person.*, 1.

¹⁰⁵ I take the cue from Eastman when using this term. All future uses are made in recognition of her research published in *Paul and the Person: Reframing Paul's Anthropology*. See Eastman, *Paul and the Person.*, pp. 85-104.

¹⁰⁶ Wright, Tom. 2017. *The Day the Revolution Began: Rethinking the Meaning of Jesus' Crucifixion*. London: SPCK., pp. 286-7.

¹⁰⁷ Eastman, Susan Grove. 2018. 'Oneself in Another: Participation and the Spirit in Romans 8'. In *'In Christ' in Paul: Explorations in Paul's Theology of Union and Participation.*, edited by Michael J. Thate, Kevin J. Vanhoozer, and Constantine R. Campbell, 103–26. Michigan: Eerdmans., 8.

the Cross. An anthropocentric reading casts the Cross as the moment of reconciliation between human and divine but leaves indeterminate the status of the created order.¹⁰⁸

Addressing these anxieties requires a multi-faceted approach. First, the Cross should be re-interpreted within the greater salvific drama of God's vocational covenant with Israel.¹⁰⁹ Second, one must establish the function of the Spirit in Paul's theology of the Cross. Here, the governing question is whether the Cross inaugurates a new dispensation which is marked by the competition of matter and Spirit, and whether the Spirit nullifies the place of the body in a vision of God's new kingdom.¹¹⁰ Third, one must bring the thematic of a royal priesthood in Paul into focus.¹¹¹ By addressing the above three anxieties, the focus falls on the relationship of human to divine. Since Paul is the normative starting point for a theological investigation of the flesh, the interplay of Word, Spirit and flesh is integral in this pursuit.

Establishing the interrelationship of the aforementioned can be done by revisiting each occurrence of flesh and body in Paul's writings. This task, however, has already been done and points the way forward. Another approach wishes to understand the potentiality of these terms as it relates to Paul's person. The latter approach best describes the intention of this chapter and situates the task within Paul's theology of the Cross and its relation to Word, Spirit and flesh. Three New Testament scholars prominent for their contributions to this thematic are Eastman, Macaskill and Wright. This chapter borrows from their theorising in its conceptualisation of a Pauline flesh as one finds it in the book of Romans.

Establishing the Terrain

Two terms at the center of Paul's much contested anthropology are *sōma* (body) and *sarx* (flesh). For Susan Eastman and Ola Sigurdson, reading Paul's theology of the body, and retrieving it for today, means reviewing Paul's use of these terms. In their respective constructions of Paul's

¹⁰⁸ Grant Macaskill re-reads the place of pneumatology in Paul and as such makes headway into the re-evaluation of Paul's soteriology. See Macaskill, Grant. 2018. 'Incarnational Ontology and the Theology of Participation in Paul'. In *'In Christ' in Paul: Explorations in Paul's Theology of Union and Participation*, 87–102. Michigan: Eerdmans.

¹⁰⁹ Wright, *The Day the Revolution Began.*, 263-294.

¹¹⁰ Wright, *The Day the Revolution Began.*, 277.

¹¹¹ Here, a reading of the Epistle to the Romans will show, the relationship between persons and God in Paul is encompassing and points to a grander salvific narrative cast in terms of Israel's messianic expectation.

anthropology, both Eastman and Sigurdson find in Paul a comprehensive and complex constellation of uses for flesh and body. Because Paul's writings span several epistles, one finds different meanings for flesh and body as is determined by the context in which Paul writes, and the matters being discussed. It is to be expected, therefore, that Paul should receive so much attention, for his epistles not only vary in context and emphasis but also in the articulation of the self.

For Eastman and Sigurdson, *sōma* in Paul describes the ways in which a person is structured individually but always in relation to another. The prevailing presence of the other in the constitution of the self, places the body within the social and communal contexts of existence.¹¹² *Sōma* has the potentiality of being relationally ordered to another, and to participate in more extensive matrices of relation. Ola Sigurdson suggests '[s]ōma designates the person in her relationship to God, sin, or neighbour. It is in *sōma* that the person's faith is lived out and in which she serves God'.¹¹³ Each relational matrix in which a body participates is fluid, and can be ordered both to the created order and the divine – it can exist in relation to the immanent and transcendent.¹¹⁴ While the body is constituted by the matrices of relation in which it exists, its subjectivity and autonomy must not be lost.¹¹⁵ 'There is no freestanding "self" in Paul's cosmos,' Eastman suggests, 'nor is there a neutral environment within which human beings may act out their personal lives...'¹¹⁶ The body is therefore, 'an aspect of a person's whole character in those relationships that she stands in'.¹¹⁷ Both Eastman and Sigurdson find in Paul a construction of the body as open, as being intertwined with the created order, and as partaking in God's revelation through their embodied existence.

When reading *sōma* as that which is particular to an autonomous subjective self who is relationally ordered to self, created and divine, *sarx* assumes a different role in Paul's writings. It is this term that has received a lot of attention when wanting to critique the Christian flesh because

¹¹² Sigurdson, Ola. 2016. *Heavenly Bodies. Incarnation, the Gaze, and Embodiment in Christian Theology*. Michigan: Eerdmans., 371.

¹¹³ Sigurdson, *Heavenly Bodies.*, 371.

¹¹⁴ For Eastman's exposition of Paul's relational ontology see Eastman, Susan G. 2018. 'Bodies, Agency, and the Relational Self: A Pauline Approach to the Goals and Use of Psychiatric Drugs'. *Christian Bioethics* 24 (3): 288–301.

¹¹⁵ Eastman, *Paul and the Person.*, 160.

¹¹⁶ Eastman, *Paul and the Person.*, 160.

¹¹⁷ Sigurdson, *Heavenly Bodies.*, 374.

it is the aspect of embodied existence most associated with the desires and affections which make up who a person is. *Sarx* receives a lot of attention in Paul's writing because it is often discussed in relation to sin. Notably, the proximity of *sarx* and sin in Paul's writings has led interpreters, in some instances, to conflate their meaning. With the centrality that affections and desires have in orientating a person, and with their tendency to be expressed independently from the body, flesh has been interpreted as that aspect of embodied existence which can exert itself autonomously from, for example, the soul.

Sarx like *sōma*, Eastman suggests, is characterised by the fact that it is open to factors of influence.¹¹⁸ The difference between the two lies with the place that *sarx* occupies in Paul's writings. *Sarx* circumscribes the powers and affections of a person which is expressed relationally through the body. The occurrence of *sarx* in Galatians and Romans, Eastman writes, 'suggest a pattern of talking about persons in which the self is never on its own but always socially and cosmically constructed in relationship to external realities that operate internally as well'.¹¹⁹ *Sarx* is thus the 'register' by which a subjective self perceives the world, and by such perceptions, engages with the world in which it exists.

Is sinfulness inherent to Paul's flesh? According to Eastman and Sigurdson, it is not. It is, however, constantly shaped by the relations in which it stands, and can be ordered either to that which brings life or that which brings death. Coming to terms with *sarx* and *sōma* in Paul does not mean differentiating between that which is inherently good or evil, it means locating a person within their network of relations and establishing how such a network influences the articulation of the self. Paul's person describes both the realms of the affective and of the social. Here, flesh describes the thoughts, habits and desires of a singular being, and body the terms by which a person engages collectively.

Taken together, flesh and body constitute two dimensions of a singular, autonomous self. A self, whose body and flesh do not act independently, but in unison, at the influence of the social and communal contexts in which it functions. In this openness, Paul's person has various resonances with Merleau-Ponty's flesh. Both Paul and Merleau-Ponty's persons are relationally ordered to the existence of another, whether the things of nature in phenomenological terms or the

¹¹⁸ Eastman, *Paul and the Person.*, 8.

¹¹⁹ Eastman, *Paul and the Person.*, 8.

created order in theological terms. And, both map a person's existing in the 'mimetic spectrum between absolute difference and equivalence'.¹²⁰

The similarities between Paul and Merleau-Ponty point to the fact that, like a Merleau-Pontian flesh, the Christian flesh is an integrated flesh. The difference between the phenomenological and biblical articulation of the flesh lies in the objectives of the said approaches. Such is the case, shows Sigurdson, when he maps the concern of phenomenology at the hand of Descartes' legacy, and the concern of biblical texts as that of being a resource for a theology of the body. Sigurdson writes:

...in contrast with the phenomenological investigation of the body, in the biblical texts it is not a matter of discovering the transcendental structures of the body, but about how it is included in an existential drama of salvation, which can also cast new light on the understanding of its transcendental structures. The body is in other words already involved in ethical, psychological, and theological conflicts.¹²¹

The difference in renditions of the body lies in that biblical texts are not ordered by a Cartesian logic. Instead, they seek to account for persons as they are said to relate to the divine. Sigurdson's identification of two modes of approach is helpful because it shows that biblical texts do not concern themselves with the dualisms of mind and body that are associated with Descartes.¹²² It also shows that the presence of such dualisms in Christian theology is symptomatic of an anachronistic reading of modern philosophical problems into ancient biblical texts.

While the starting point for phenomenology is the interrelationship of consciousness and thing of nature, the starting point for biblical texts is God's embrace of persons and the communication thereof within the created order. Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology does not task itself, therefore, with accounting for the presence of the divine, especially when transcendence denotes distance instead of difference as Ola Sigurdson has shown.¹²³ A Christian ontology of the flesh, however, in its affirmation of the place of the transcendent in the embodied engagements of persons, does have this task of accounting for existence in the flesh in the presence of God.

¹²⁰ Eastman, *Paul and the Person.*, 145.

¹²¹ Sigurdson, *Heavenly Bodies.*, 364.

¹²² Sigurdson, *Heavenly Bodies.*, 365.

¹²³ One may recall Chapter 1 where transcendence has been defined as difference and not distance. This is a helpful way of articulating the relationship of a transcendent God to the immanent and material world. See Sigurdson, *Heavenly Bodies.*, 273.

With the acceptance that God is the source and foundation of all that is, the question arises as to the nature of God's presence in the created order. In terms of Paul's relational matrix, one may ask how the flesh is ordered by God, and whether there is an instance in the Christian tradition that holds human and divine together.

We have conceded thus far that Paul's person is one who is relationally ordered by the presence of another. Because one can only truly be ordered to another through the materiality of one's existence, flesh and body become registers of perception. In Merleau-Ponty, perception is mediated by the order of things. In Paul, perception is mediated by both the order of things, and the presence of the divine. Paul's person thus exists within the created order as an independent sense-perceptual self who, through its embodied engagements with the created order, comes to know the invisible. At stake here is the question of divine intelligibility.

Describing the relation that persons bear to the divine and how God reveals Godself to persons, is a task associated with theological anthropology. When describing phenomenology and theological anthropology alongside one another, the intent is not to cast them as mutually exclusive, to the contrary, it is to show the centrality of experience as a register of embodied perception and it serves to show the centrality of perception to the conception of self in relation to the divine. Both disciplines acknowledge experience as an individual and collective relational matrix in which perception takes place. Both pay attention to the self and the set of practices and beliefs that govern those interactions.

Reading Paul's Person in the Book of Romans

Having schematically laid out *sarx* and *sōma* as that which is structured by the affective, social and communal matrices of relation in which Paul's person stands, the next step is to establish how such relation is articulated at the hand of the Word who became flesh, and of the Spirit's mediation thereof. In few instances of Paul's writings do Word, Spirit and flesh intersect as they do in the book of Romans. In Paul's letter to the Romans, his theology of the Cross holds together the relationship of flesh to body, of flesh to Cross, and of flesh to Spirit.

Unlike his other epistles, which address the church of a particular region, Paul's letter to the Romans addresses many small faith gatherings. Its purpose is to secure good credit with the gatherings and to present the logic of a new dispensation, or law, in Christ. Themes throughout include, Jewish laws, the law of grace, the new dispensation which Christ brings, life under this

new dispensation, the place of the Jewish nation, and a description of Christ-like conduct. Structurally, the letter divides into four sections: 1-4, 5-8, 9-11, and 12-16.

In Romans 1:1-4, Paul identifies himself as a continuer of the work already begun by the prophets.¹²⁴ At key moments, the prophets signaled God's presence to the Israelites. In continuation of their work, Paul shows to the Romans the ways in which God's presence manifests to them. The starting point is the created order, which by its very existence testifies to its Creator. That God reveals Godself through the created order is a fact Malebranche also accepts in his construction of a sensuous theology. For Malebranche, to look upon the created order is to see God's divine ideas made visible to perception. The logic Malebranche draws on is characteristically Pauline. Romans 1:20 reads:

For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made...¹²⁵

There is in no uncertain terms a correlation between the created order and God's general revelation. Not only does the created order reveal God generally but such revelation is also manifest to the senses.

The correlation between God's revelation in the created order and its visibility to the senses extends to become the criteria of perception for distinguishing the wise and foolish. Those who fail to see God in the created order, Romans 1:20b shows, are fools. The possibility of persons to either succeed or fail in perceiving God establishes a parallel between the senses and the role of perception in coming to know God. For where the created order reveals God in order that persons may come to see and know God, a failure to see is a failure of the senses to ascend to their divine source. While the senses in themselves can perceive God's revelation, the matrix of relation by which the senses are ordered can cause them to either succeed or fail in perceiving the divine.

¹²⁴ Beverly Roberts Gaventa explains, 'Despite the fact (or perhaps *because*) he is an outsider to these congregations, Paul identifies himself not in terms of what we might consider customary biographical information (his family, place of origin, education), but in terms of God's action in the gospel.' See Gaventa, Beverly Roberts. 2011. 'Paul and the Roman Believers'. In *The Blackwell Companion to Paul*, edited by Stephen Westerholm, 93–107. Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell., 97.

¹²⁵ Romans 1:20

Since Paul exhorted the faith gatherings in Romans to attune their senses to their Maker in order that they may truly live, having their senses inclined to that which is not God, leads to idolatry.¹²⁶

Idolatry as the sense-perceptual failure to attune the senses to the divine, arises in Romans where the grander narrative of Israel serves as example. To the Israelites were given ‘the oracles of God’,¹²⁷ the divine revelation of God’s presence to the people of Israel, and to the reign which God sought to establish on earth.¹²⁸ Obedience to the Law of Moses meant being ordered by the law, and in being ordered by the law, to have the senses oriented to God’s covenant with Israel. Paul expresses the failure of perception under the Law of Moses in terms of a paradox, ‘[f]or I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate’ (Romans 7:15). The conflicting experience of wanting to do a thing but acting otherwise brings into relief the thematic of sin in Paul’s writing.

Sin in Romans 1-8, according to Eastman, takes on a ‘spiral structure...in which three repetitive, overlapping narratives progressively expand the cast of characters and then intensify the personal and emotional effects of Paul’s rhetoric’.¹²⁹ The three accounts are that of sin as that which humans do (1:18-5:12), sin as an ‘agent acting in human history’ (5:12-7:7) and finally, sin as that which thwarts the life which should have been resultant from the law (7:7-25).¹³⁰ All three point to the fact that sin can affect the senses and influence the ways in which persons are ordered to self, other, and God. In Wright’s reading of sin in Paul, two further dimensions are mentioned:

In Romans 5 Paul moves quietly from talking about “sins,” plural, to “Sin,” singular. In 5:12 he talks of “sin” entering the world, bringing death in its train. “Sin” is being treated as an active power, more than simply the sum total of all human wrongdoing. This accords, of course, with the analysis I have given earlier of how “sin” is actually the result of idolatry, in which humans hand over their God-given powers to other “forces,” which then enslave them.¹³¹

¹²⁶ Romans 1-3 provides the logic of perception where idolatry is the misapprehension of the divine in the things of nature. Wright hones in on this logic in *The Day the Revolution Began*, pp. 75-80.

¹²⁷ Romans 3:2

¹²⁸ Wright, *The Day the Revolution Began*., 285.

¹²⁹ Eastman, *Paul and the Person*., 110-111.

¹³⁰ Eastman, *Paul and the Person*., 110-111.

¹³¹ Wright, *The Day the Revolution Began*., 279-280.

Whereas sin results when the self is not aligned with God's purposes revealed in nature and the law, sin also acts independently, thwarting the purposes set out for the law by God. The shift from 'sins' to 'Sin' in Romans is suggestive because it points to the need for a new law or dispensation.¹³²

While the Israelites had the Law of Moses, the paradox, as Paul suggests, is that persons could not attain to it fully.¹³³ Paul articulates a new law in his reading of the role and the place of the Cross in Israel's salvation history. Here, Abraham serves as a forerunner and as a paradigmatic example of the life which is to come when God's revelation is fully grasped through faith. Through his faith, Abraham's senses and affections were oriented to God and directed to instantiate God's presence and reign on earth.¹³⁴ Abraham was accredited as righteous because he believed the law to be the evidence of God's reconciliatory plan between Godself and persons, and between persons and the created order. His faith ordered his senses to perceive the unfolding of God's plan for the created order.¹³⁵ A plan that takes the very embodied engagements of persons to be the means by which God's vision is to be realised on earth.

In Romans, a logic is established by which God's revelation manifests to the senses through the created order and the Law of Moses. The logic places the flesh central to God's revelation, for the flesh is the very means by which God is perceived and known. It cannot be, therefore, that the flesh is denigrated or subservient to faith, or the believing self. The logic of perception which arises from a reading of Romans suggests the exact opposite, that the senses are alive to God's revelation and that, by being ordered through faith, can perceive such revelation. Whereas Romans 1-4 starts with God's general revelation in the created order and moves to the Law of Moses, Romans 5 following develops a new dispensation inaugurated by Word, Spirit, and flesh.

As the rest of this chapter will show, one need not understand this dispensation in a supersessionist way. Christ does not nullify the Law of Moses by superseding it. Rather, through the Cross, Christ fulfils, and continues to fulfil, the requirement under the Law of Moses that sin

¹³² Wright, *The Day the Revolution Began.*, pp. 279-80.

¹³³ Wright, *The Day the Revolution Began.*, pp. 276-294.

¹³⁴ Gaventa, Beverly Roberts. 2011. 'Paul and the Roman Believers'. In *The Blackwell Companion to Paul*, edited by Stephen Westerholm, 93-107. Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell., 98.

¹³⁵ Romans 2:28-29 reads: 'For no one is a Jew who is merely one outwardly, nor is circumcision outward and physical. But a Jew is one inwardly, and circumcision is a matter of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the letter. His praise is not from man but from God.'

be made right through reconciliation. In Christ and by the Spirit, persons thus exist in a new, or Christo-centric, dispensation

A new dispensation in Christ: Word, Spirit and Flesh

The nature of God's intelligibility shifts with the incarnation, for Christ is the fullest expression of God's presence to the created order. Whereas the general revelation of nature served as a norm by which the sense-perceptual self would come to perceive God's presence, and the Law of Moses served as a means by which the senses would be ordered to God's vision of a new kingdom, the incarnation is the particular and embodied revelation of God who orders the senses to its fount. Reading the book of Romans as primarily concerning the incarnation, however, would be to read Paul's thinking partially.

The Cross plays a prominent part in the book of Romans. The Cross, Macaskill explains, is the moment where Israel's salvific history and the Christ event converge. He writes:

While adoption is the substance of the eschatological gift, it is also listed as a privilege of Israel in Rom 9:4, and the proximity of that statement cannot be a matter of coincidence. The Christ gift is presented in terms that explicitly correspond to the story of Israel. This is not simplistically to locate the Christ event within a salvation history in which Israel played a preparatory role: rather, it is to consider the adoption of Israel as itself belonging to the reality of divine presence constituted by the Christ event.¹³⁶

The Cross is the paradigm by which the story of the Jews and Gentiles come together, and expresses the covenant between God and Israel under the thematic of adoption.¹³⁷ It is significant that one read the Cross as God's continued presence to Israel because it establishes the Christ gift as a progression on God's revelation to Israel.

Within Israel's narrative, the Cross is the particular and embodied revelation of God's presence to persons. Paul explains, '[b]ut now we are released from the law, having died to that which held us captive, so that we serve in the new way of the Spirit and not in the old way of the written code' (Romans 7:6). Whereas the Law of Moses ordered the senses to God's revelatory

¹³⁶ Macaskill, 'Incarnational Ontology', 99.

¹³⁷ Macaskill, 'Incarnational Ontology', pp. 96 – 7.

presence, the Cross ushers in a new dispensation by which the senses are oriented to their fount by the Son and the Spirit.¹³⁸

When brought into relation with perception, a contrast exists between the Law of Moses and the Cross.¹³⁹ The former highlights the inability of the senses to attain to God fully and the latter has the Spirit order the senses. Romans 8:10 – 11 reads:

But if Christ is in you, although the body is dead because of sin, the Spirit is life because of righteousness. If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit who dwells in you.

The relationship of the sense-perceptual self to the divine rests on the simultaneous affirmation of the Son and the Spirit. It is the Son who reconciles persons to God through their adoption and it is the Spirit who actualises such an adoption.

Darren Sarisky calls, what I have termed a simultaneity of presences, dynamic participation in Paul.¹⁴⁰ With dynamic participation the Son and Spirit *together* establish salvation and eternal communion with God.¹⁴¹ Both Son and Spirit thus fulfil a role in Paul's soteriology. Whereas the Son liberates, the Spirit establishes a participatory relationship between human and divine.

¹³⁸ 'Paul's pneumatology never stands on its own', notes Ralph Del Colle, '[i]ndeed he can speak of the Spirit directly and with the confidence of one who knew the Spirit's guidance and agency in his life (Acts 16:6-10)'. Del Colle, Ralph. 2011. 'Christian Theology: The Spirit'. In *The Blackwell Companion to Paul*, edited by Stephen Westerholm, 561–74. Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell. In Afrikaans, one may describe the law of grace as a new dispensation. I prefer this designation because it amplifies the work of the Spirit. The Afrikaans reads, 'Net so, my broers, het ook julle deur julle verbintenis met die liggaam van Christus, wat die wet betref, gesterf om aan iemand anders te behoort, naamlik aan die Een wat uit die dood opgewek is, om vir God vrug te kan dra. Toe ons nog in ons sondige aard vasgevang was, het die sondige hartstogte wat deur die wet kom, in ons ledemate gewerk om vrug te dra vir die dood. Maar aangesien ons gesterf het, is ons nou vrygestel van die wet waarin ons vasgevang was, sodat ons diensbaar kan wees in die nuwe bedeling van die Gees en nie in die ou bedeling van die letter van die wet nie.' Romans 7:4-6. *Nuwe Testament en Psalms: 'n Direkte Vertaling*. 2014. Cape Town: Bybelgenootskap van Suid-Afrika.

¹³⁹ Romans 8:4-8

¹⁴⁰ Sarisky's reading of participation in Augustine (based on Paul) will be presented in Chapter four. For further reading see Sarisky, Darren. 2018. 'Augustine and Participation: Some Reflections on His Exegesis of Romans'. In *In Christ in Paul: Explorations in Paul's Theology of Union and Participation.*, edited by Michael J. Thate, Kevin J. Vanhoozer, and Constantine R. Campbell, 357–98. Michigan: Eerdmans.

¹⁴¹ Sarisky, 'Augustine and Participation', 364.

Eastman concurs with Sarisky that the Son liberates persons by ‘his full solidarity with condemned humanity, even to the point of crucifixion as a condemned criminal’.¹⁴² The Spirit then fulfills the participatory logic of Paul soteriology when the Spirit ‘brings that liberation to fruitful experience through indwelling the new community that lives “in Christ”’.¹⁴³ The simultaneous activity of Son and Spirit marks the Cross as the inauguration of the law of grace. The law of grace inducts the sense-perceptual self into the corporeal grammar of the Cross, a grammar which conveys the suffering of Christ in terms resonant with the suffering of Paul’s persons and the created order.

Romans 8, in particular, registers the corporeal grammar of the Cross in terms of groaning.¹⁴⁴ In the first instance, Christ’s cry of dereliction echoes the groaning of the created order.¹⁴⁵ In the second instance, the Spirit is present to such groaning. Between the groaning of persons and the groaning of Christ on the Cross, the Spirit carries both human and divine.¹⁴⁶ In the Spirit’s presence to the Son and the sense-perceptual self, the Spirit is cast in Trinitarian context.¹⁴⁷

¹⁴² Eastman, ‘Oneself in Another’, 107.

¹⁴³ Eastman, ‘Oneself in Another’, 107.

¹⁴⁴ This is not to promote an adoptionist agenda. The Son is not made divine by the Spirit at his baptism, and the Spirit does not act in the stead of Jesus on the Cross. Habets, Myk. 2016. ‘Spirit Christology: The Future of Christology?’ In *Third Article Theology: A Pneumatological Dogmatics*, edited by Myk Habets, 207–32. Minneapolis: Fortress., 214. See also Macaskill, Grant. 2018. ‘Incarnational Ontology’, 88.

¹⁴⁵ Romans 8:27

¹⁴⁶ ‘What began with his conception and baptism through the Spirit now ends in his passion through the Spirit. The Spirit that led Jesus into the wilderness is still beside him now in this time of trial and temptation’. Habets, ‘Spirit Christology’, 211. ‘This surely is an inner-divine communication in which we bodily - indeed vocally - participate. It seems possible therefore that the earlier shared witness of the Spirit with “our spirit” expressed in the communal, public cry to God as “Father,” is also such an inner-divine and yet also embodied human communication. In both instances, through the Spirit human beings are co-participants in an inter-personal communication between Spirit and God. We participate in a divine-human speech-act’. Eastman, ‘Oneself in Another’, 114-5. Also see Coffey, David. 2016. ‘The Method of Third Article Theology’. In *Third Article Theology: A Pneumatological Dogmatics*, edited by Myk Habets, 21–38. Minneapolis: Fortress., pp. 25-31.

¹⁴⁷ See Romans 8:26-30. Wright similarly argues, ‘So what if it were true after all? What if the Creator, all along, had made the world out of overflowing, generous love, so that the overflowing, self-sacrificial love of the Son going to the Cross was indeed the accurate and precise self-expression of the love of God for a world radically out of joint? Would it not then make sense to say that, just as the wordless groanings of the Spirit in Romans 8:26-27 are part of what it means to be God – to be both present in the depths of the world’s pain and transcendent over it but searching all hearts – so the cry of dereliction was itself part of what it meant to be God, to be the God of generous love?’ Wright, *The Day the Revolution Began.*, 293.

The Spirit makes God known to persons, and communicates the life of persons within the Trinity. The plural use of ‘our spirit’ in Romans 8:16 lends to this reading when it states, ‘[t]he Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God’.¹⁴⁸ Likewise, God is present to persons through the Spirit, Romans 8:26 reads, ‘for we do not know what to pray for as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words’. The Spirit thus communicates the needs of persons to the Trinity and ministers to persons.

In the said formulations, the relationship between Son and Spirit is integral to the correspondence which exists between the flesh and the Spirit. Where Christ’s crucifixion establishes a radical communion between self and Son, the Spirit actualises the union between Son and Paul’s person. It would be wrong at this stage to suggest that the Spirit’s work is *ad extra* as though the Son accomplishes it all. To the contrary, it is by the Spirit that the law of grace is realised in the believer, it is by the Spirit that life in the flesh becomes life in Christ, and it is through the Spirit that the self already partakes of the resurrection body.

Rather than placing flesh and Spirit in a competitive relationship to another, Paul’s language of flesh and Spirit points to the salutary effect that the Son and the Spirit has on the senses.¹⁴⁹ In the first instance, the Spirit pours out the love communicated through the Cross in the hearts of believers (Romans 5:5). In the second instance, it is by the Spirit’s activity in persons that their flesh can partake of Christ’s flesh.¹⁵⁰ To live according to the Spirit is, therefore, to live as a sense-perceptual self whose engagements with the created order are defined by the Spirit’s communication of God’s presence to the senses. Having the Spirit order the senses does not annihilate the agentic self but perfects it so that it may truly see and know its divine origin.¹⁵¹ Here, flesh and Spirit are cast in embodied terms. On the one hand, the senses are the primary mode by which persons perceive the created order. On the other hand, the Spirit perpetually reveals God’s presence to the senses in the materiality of existence. A convergence takes place in Romans 8:16 between the Spirit who communicates divine truths to persons and the flesh through which such truths are communicated.

¹⁴⁸ Romans 8:16

¹⁴⁹ Sigurdson, *Heavenly Bodies.*, 373.

¹⁵⁰ Ayres, Lewis. 2011. ‘Augustine’. In *The Blackwell Companion to Paul*, edited by Stephen Westerholm, 345–60. Oxford: Blackwell., 354.

¹⁵¹ Romans 8:16

To read Paul's use of flesh and Spirit in dualistic terms is to misinterpret the role that the senses have in perceiving God incarnate, and the place of the Son and Spirit in bringing persons into union with God.¹⁵² Neither the work of the Son nor the work of the Spirit diminishes the place of the sense-perceptual self in relation to the divine. The relationship of flesh to Spirit in Paul is not one of matter versus Spirit but of matter and Spirit. The shift in articulation makes all the difference since such language now points to the new relational matrix which the Cross inaugurates and which the Spirit instantiates in the lives of Paul's person. When Paul speaks about life under the law of grace, Spirit and flesh are constantly held together.¹⁵³ It may thus be helpful, as Wright suggests to read the relationship of matter and Spirit, as Messiah and Spirit.¹⁵⁴

By articulating Paul's theology of the Cross as Messiah and Spirit, the intersection of Word, Spirit, and flesh may be extended to the collective existence of persons. The Spirit establishes a union between persons, between the sense-perceptual self and Christ, and between persons (as a unified collective) and Christ. Here, Christ is the head and advocate for the community of persons, and the Spirit is the mediator of the relations between community and Christ. Robert Jewett similarly finds that 'Paul's language "reflects a collective type of charismatic mysticism in which God's Spirit was thought to enter and energise the community as well as each member"'.¹⁵⁵ Persons under the law of grace find themselves continuously shaped by the Spirit's communication through the materiality of their existence.

Notably, when the new body of believers dwell in Christ under the law of grace, Christ communes with each individually and communally. It follows that if unity exists between the Spirit who indwells each person, and therefore indwells persons as a collective entity, the body of Christ shares a graced existence established through the Cross. According to this logic, the Spirit indwells persons and so makes Christ present and known to them. Christ, in turn, manifests a new communal mode of being, one to which persons are continuously assimilated.¹⁵⁶ The rendering of the Son and

¹⁵² Ola Sigurdson is equally of the opinion that Paul's language of flesh and Spirit does not entrench a substance dualism. See Sigurdson, *Heavenly Bodies.*, 373.

¹⁵³ Del Colle, 'Christian Theology: The Spirit', 562.

¹⁵⁴ Wright, *The Day the Revolution Began.*, 277.

¹⁵⁵ Robert Jewett, *Romans: A Commentary* (Hermeneia; Minneapolis: Fortress, 2007), 490-1. In Eastman, Susan Grove. 2018. 'Oneself in Another', 112.

¹⁵⁶ Eastman, 'Oneself in Another', 113.

the Spirit's presence to persons both individually and collectively renders the body of Christ cosmically.¹⁵⁷

The conceptualisation of the body of Christ as that which holds individuals and communities in being through the Son and the Spirit in Paul, is one which extends to the created order. The cosmology of the Cross pertains, therefore, first to the relation of Christ to persons, and second to the created order. Just as Romans 8 casts the Spirit as bearing the groans of persons, the same chapter also casts the Spirit as bearing the groans of the created order. Romans 8:22 reads, '[f]or we know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now'. Wright interprets Paul's words as pertaining to the task that the Cross has in reconciling persons to God, and the task that the Cross has in reconciling persons to the created order – '[t]he work of the Cross is not designed to rescue humans *from* creation, but to rescue them *for* creation'.¹⁵⁸ He continues:

Paul does not say that Jesus dies "so that we can go to heaven" ...For Paul, exactly in line with Revelation and other early writings, the result of Jesus's achievement is a *new creation*, a new heaven-and-earth world in which humans can resume their genuinely human vocation as the "kingdom of priests," the "royal priesthood."¹⁵⁹

Paul's theology of the Cross is the restoration of both persons and the created order as a vision of the new creation that Son and Spirit inaugurate. This vision of reconciliation is not an escapist

¹⁵⁷ According to Eastman, the cosmic rendering of the body of Christ is normatively different to the cosmologies Paul would have been exposed to during the time of his writing. Paul's person is one who is both corporeally grounded and influenced by the network of relations in which they exist. The latter is referred to by scholars as an openness to be cosmologically ordered. During Paul's time of writing, he would have been exposed to several cosmologies. One of these was Stoicism. Stoic cosmology saw the material world as being infused by the divine. Here, 'the divine Logos is on a continuum with and immanent in everything'. There is no human ascent or divine descent in this instance. Instead, a 'person is already participating in this God-saturated world, already has the spark of divine reason implanted within'. To participate in this world, is therefore 'a matter of enacting what is truest about oneself in the givenness of a rationally ordered world'. Unlike a stoic cosmology, Paul's intertwining of flesh and Spirit is unique for its emphasis on Christ's assimilation to the human condition, and the Spirit's transformation of that condition. See Eastman, *Paul and the Person.*, 142.

¹⁵⁸ Wright, *The Day the Revolution Began.*, 290.

¹⁵⁹ Wright, *The Day the Revolution Began.*, 267-8.

reconciliation, as Tom Wright argues,¹⁶⁰ where the status of the created order is left indeterminate. Instead, the created order is placed within the reconciliatory logic of flesh and Spirit

To consider the interrelationship of Word, Spirit and flesh in Paul is to consider his soteriology.¹⁶¹ In Romans, a Pauline soteriology develops at the hand of Christ's crucifixion,¹⁶² the inauguration of the law of the Spirit who gives life, and the graced manifestation of a new creational order. The messianic rule which comes about as a result of the Son's death and resurrection, and the Spirit's carrying of the human disposition, has God both immanent and transcendent to the created order. Considering the grand narrative of Romans, Paul's soteriology unfolds less along the traditionally assumed line of penal substitution than a Messianic and priestly line.¹⁶³ With the latter, the emphasis falls on the restoration of human persons in order that they may, as was intended at creation, establish God's perfect reign on earth. Romans 1-8 advances a Trinitarian logic of the Cross by which it places Christ central to Israel's history.¹⁶⁴

Scholars reading Paul's theology of the Cross within a Christ-gift paradigm, correlate the Spirit's indwelling of persons under the law of grace with the indwelling of God's presence in Exodus 29:45-46. In Exodus 29:45-46 God declares God's intention to dwell amongst the Israelites. Macaskill suggests:

...divine presence is specifically associated with covenant. The nation of Israel has a special status, one that demarcates it from all other nations, one that is reflected in the Passover celebrations, and is now understood in relation to the Christ gift.¹⁶⁵

Here, the emphasis lies in God's desire to be amongst a community of persons relationally ordered to Him. Christ who is the Passover lamb once and for all establishes the possibility for community

¹⁶⁰ Wright, *The Day the Revolution Began.*, 299-327.

¹⁶¹ Wright, *The Day the Revolution Began.*, 271.

¹⁶² Grant Macaskill notes that it would be erroneous to place the incarnation central to Paul's thinking, Paul focuses rather on the Cross and its salvific and unificatory function. See Macaskill, 'Incarnational Ontology' 87-102.

¹⁶³ Macaskill, 'Incarnational Ontology'., 93.

¹⁶⁴ So, Tom Wright argues: 'Ultimately we have to choose between a proto-trinitarian framework for understanding Paul's view of Jesus' death and a quasi-pagan one...Romans brings us back sharply to the former. Even when theologians and preachers have seen this danger and have insisted that what was achieved on the Cross was the direct result of the Father's love, when the goal is Platonized ("going to heaven") and the human role is moralized ("good and bad behaviour"), the structure of the implicit story will still run in the wrong direction. Wright, *The Day the Revolution Began.*, 289.

¹⁶⁵ Macaskill, 'Incarnational Ontology'., 93.

and the indwelling of the Spirit in persons. This new relational existence, the work of Macaskill, Eastman and Wright suggest is a new-found paradigm of filiation through the Cross.

When the Cross is read as the simultaneous activity of the Son and the Spirit, new paradigms of filiation are rendered in Paul.¹⁶⁶ First, the incarnation is the ground of possibility for union with Christ. Christ's assumption of flesh establishes the equality of relations between human and divine by assuming that which he intended to heal. Following scholars who read Paul's soteriology as a commentary on Israel's messianic narration, Christ's death and resurrection then bridges the ontological gap between human and divine. Second, the Cross orients the senses to its fount through the law of grace by the Spirit. In the Spirit, the senses partake in the new paradigm of filiation which the Cross inaugurates. Existence under the Law of Moses is now the selfsame existence under the law of grace.

With Paul's rendering of the flesh a graced exchange takes place between life in the flesh and life in the Spirit. Paul's purpose is to communicate God's presence in the lived and embodied existence of persons. Christ is the perfection of flesh under the law of grace, and the Spirit makes communion between Christ and persons possible. The Spirit furthermore intercedes for persons in groans that are beyond words. Whereas it is the same Spirit who lives in each believing person and the body of Christ, the Spirit remains present to each person then and now. Notably, Paul's soteriology unfolds as an embodied and sustained rendering of an already graced community in the present realm of existence. It is the case for those first recipients of Paul's letter in Rome, as it is for churches reading Romans 1-8 today.

There are two elements to Paul's soteriology, life in the flesh, and life in Christ by the Spirit. Whereas one may mistakenly think that these two realms exist in opposition to each other in a quasi-cosmic battle, this reading of Romans shows otherwise. The occurrences of flesh and Spirit denote, a reading of Romans 1-8 suggests, two paradigms of filiation. Whereas Romans 1-4 concerned itself with unrighteousness as a result of a misplaced paradigm of filiation, Romans 5-8 sketches existence through the logic of grace. With the pneumatologically laden Romans 8, Paul's theology of the Cross is one characterised by a Trinitarian paradigm of filiation.¹⁶⁷

¹⁶⁶ Paul predicates 'Jesus as God's *own* Son (Rom. 8:3. 32), the firstborn, or only, son. The rest of humanity possesses, in light of this one, the status of adopted children; they have received the Spirit of sonship.' Van der Kooi, Cornelis. 2018. *The Incredibly Benevolent Force: The Holy Spirit in Reformed Theology and Spirituality*. Michigan: Eerdmans., 63.

¹⁶⁷ Wright, *The Day the Revolution Began.*, 276-94.

Flesh and the Cross in Paul

From a reading of Romans, the flesh is understandably central to Paul. It is central to God's revelation to persons through the created order and the Law of Moses, it is central to the incarnation and the Cross, and it is central to a new dispensation under the law of grace. With the centrality of the flesh to Paul's theology, the senses are perpetually implicated in the grammar that the Cross establishes. The Cross, as a progression in God's revelation within Israel's history, establishes a new corporeal grammar by which persons are to relate to God.

In its semantics of groaning, the Cross orders the senses to their fount through the Son and the Spirit. Reading the relationship of the senses to the Cross, as Eastman, Macaskill and Wright suggest, must be done in relation to Israel's covenantal relationship with God. When abstracting the Cross from Israel's history, it loses its unique articulation of the sense-perceptual self in relation to God. As the moment where God avails to the senses a participative norm by which to know God and be known by God in bodily terms, the Cross instantiates God's continued initiative to commune with persons.

To read the flesh as occasioning the Cross would be to misinterpret the reconciliatory role of the Cross in Paul's vision of God's new kingdom. Flesh and body in Paul, denotes more than mere matter. Flesh circumscribes the affective dimension of a person's existence. It speaks to how the sense-perceptual self has their senses oriented to the Cross through the Son and by the Spirit. Without the senses, a sense-perceptual self cannot perceive the Cross as the particular revelation of God nor can it be ordered to the divine. Likewise, the body is central to Paul's theology. It, like the flesh, is open to be ordered by another. In the book of Romans, that other is the Trinity revealed through the Son and ministered to persons by the Spirit.

The Cross establishes Christ's cosmic body, whereby persons exist both in relation to God and to others. The reconciliatory relationship between God and persons extends, as a reading of Romans 8 shows, to the created order. The new kingdom of God inaugurated through the law of grace includes the flourishing of the created order. Paul's theology of the Cross does not leave the created order indeterminate, instead it places the created order within the reconciliatory logic of flesh and Spirit, and flesh and creation. Paul's theology of the Cross gives persons the task of establishing God's new kingdom on earth.

This then is the logic of the Messiah and Spirit: the senses are oriented to God's grand vision for the created order through Christ who is the fulfilment of the law and the final reconciliation between God, persons, and the created order. By the Spirit, the flesh of Paul's person is united with Christ's flesh, establishing a new paradigm of filiation which orders and transforms the senses. From the outset of the Christian narrative, the Spirit is present: The Spirit is manifest at creation when life is breathed into all that is.¹⁶⁸ The Spirit is present to the prophets, and those who ensured the continuance of the Davidic line. The Spirit is present to Mary at the annunciation. The Spirit confirms the messianic vocation of the Son at his baptism. And, the Spirit is present to Christ's call of dereliction, and the Spirit is given to all at Pentecost. Paul's person, through Christ, is the final revelation of God's vision for a new kingdom established in the present. As the perfection of the *imago dei* through Christ, Paul's person manifests God's presence on earth, and so becomes, in his or her own right, evidence of God's reconciliatory vision in Christ.

Paul's theology of the Cross, in its transformation of the sense-perceptual self's existence in relation to the divine, establishes a corporeal ontology. Insofar as it is the Spirit who makes God immanent to persons, it is also the Spirit who makes persons immanent to God. To be immanent to God is to be grounded in Christ by the Spirit who perpetually upholds such relations. This qualification is important because it resists any conflation of God and person in Paul's theology of the Cross. Paul's theology is suggestive because it provides a paradigm of filiation where persons are distinctive and yet assimilated to a cosmic reality greater than themselves. In Paul's cosmological re-ordering of the flesh, the Word and Spirit together establish a logic of union and participation. In doing so, it renders the self open not only to the realm of the immanent but also to the realm of the transcendent.

Several conclusions may now follow: Regarding the critique that Paul advances body negating sentiments and a dualistic rendering of existence, Paul's unique soteriology provides the answer. Paul's soteriology rests on the doctrine of participation where persons partake in Christ who is the second person of the Trinity. By existing in Christ, the existence of the sense-perceptual self is rendered in sacramental terms. The sense-perceptual self has God immanent to their existence. As to the relationship of the phenomenal flesh to the flesh of Scripture, the two terms

¹⁶⁸ Studebaker Jr., John A. 2016. 'Theology Proper: The Lordship of the Holy Spirit'. In *Third Article Theology: A Pneumatological Dogmatics*, edited by Myk Habets, 55–76. Minneapolis: Fortress., 66.

vary in their scope and meaning. We may recall Sigurdson's suggestion that the flesh of Scripture describes the relationship of the sense-perceptual self to the God who is both transcendent and immanent to human existence. Here, transcendence denotes difference rather than distance.¹⁶⁹

To be in the flesh, Paul argues, is to be cosmically ordered to another. To be in the body of Christ, Paul further argues, is to be cosmically ordered to the Word and the Spirit. Here, the immanent and transcendent converge in the person of Jesus and in the working of the Spirit. The body of Christ has the Spirit immanent to it in every way. It is the Spirit who establishes an ontological continuum between self and other persons, and between self and divine. It is also through the Spirit that persons may come better to know God's will. The body of Christ is, therefore, an immanent and transcendental body. This rendering of the flesh need not oppose the flesh of phenomenology, as Sigurdson has comprehensively explained.¹⁷⁰

To map Paul's theological anthropology is not for the faint of heart, not least because his corpus spans at least eight Epistles and is exhaustively interpreted by scholars. The body within Christian discourses is hotly debated and is widely blamed for negative renderings of embodied existence. This chapter attempted to participate within the debate on life in the flesh as Paul frames it. It started with a reading of Paul's somatology in terms of flesh and body. *Sarx* and *sōma* were shown to function within a complex cosmology that straddles the line between sin and grace. Next, we identified Romans as an Epistle which holds together the realms of experience and a robust Trinitarian theology. Romans 1-8 presented itself especially as a framework for reading Paul's theological anthropology along the lines of Christology, pneumatology, and soteriology. The final section focused on the relations between flesh and Spirit in a Trinitarian context and established a contemporary discourse.

¹⁶⁹ Sigurdson, *Heavenly Bodies.*, 273.

¹⁷⁰ Sigurdson goes into great depth when explaining the similarities and differences between the flesh of Scripture and the flesh of phenomenology. Sigurdson, *Heavenly Bodies.*, 363-6.

Chapter 3

Athanasius and God Incarnate

Without the absolute affirmation that Christ was both human and divine, the flesh of the sense-perceptual self cannot partake in Christ's divine economy. A reading of Paul's person in the book of Romans has disclosed a rich discussion on the nature of embodied existence in the presence of God. The Cross forms a central part in a Pauline reading of the flesh since it is through the Cross and by the Spirit that a new paradigm of filiation is brought to bear. Paul's characteristic use of *sarx* and *sōma* delineates the realms of the affective and relational as the modes by which the self is ordered to the human and the divine. Such re-ordering can occur through the Son and the Spirit, who together conform the self to the divine.

We have found in Chapter two that Paul's anthropology is not riddled with dualisms, and that one can retrieve in Romans a positive account of flesh and body. In order for us to see what implication a positive Pauline anthropology has for a Christian ontology of the flesh, we need to establish next the part that the incarnation plays. For it is specifically Christ's perfect union of human and divine that is key to an embodied and participatorial anthropology.

The language of union depends on two doctrinal affirmations: the absolute divinity and humanity of the incarnate Son, and the absolute equality of the Spirit to the Father and the Son. Within the conciliar debates of the early church, few were as determined to argue for the Son's divinity and the Spirit's equality than Athanasius of Alexandria. Athanasius' writings develop a doctrine of the Son and the Spirit which renders the life of the Trinity manifest to the sense-perceptual self. Uniquely articulated in his dictum, 'God became human in order that [hu]man could become God',¹⁷¹ Athanasius' writings provide a unique grammar which maps the life of the sense-perceptual self in relation to the divine.

¹⁷¹ I take the occurrence of 'man' in the text to mean human insofar as Athanasius employs no hierarchy of male or female in his writings. Furthermore, the use of 'man' is a generic term in his texts referring to the collective. For these reasons, 'human' is an appropriate (and characteristically modern) substitute. Athanasius of Alexandria. n.d. 'Orationes Contra Arianos: Four Discourses against the Arians.' In *NPNF2-04. Athanasius: Select Works and Letters*, translated by Philip Schaff. Christian Classics Ethereal Library. Accessed 10 February 2017. <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/schaff/npnf204.html>, §9, 827-8.

One of the well known writings of Athanasius is *On the Incarnation*, a text that expounds the incarnation as God's visible-making through the materiality of existence. The incarnation thereby gives to persons a corporeal grammar by which to perceive the divine. Here, the Spirit conforms the sense-perceptual self to the Christo-centric grammar of the incarnation. This grammar of the incarnation finds its truest expression through the Spirit. By holding the Son and Spirit together, Athanasius is deeply Pauline in his thinking. To Athanasius, it is the Spirit who conforms us to Christ; it is the Spirit who gives us life; it is the Spirit according to whom we live; it is the Spirit who makes us children of God, and finally, it is the Spirit who is co-eternal and indivisible from the Father and Son. To be incorporated into Christ's economy is to have one's existence shaped by the Spirit.

In the Son's economy, and the Spirit's mediation of that economy, the sense-perceptual self exists within the life of Trinity. One finds a logic of perception advancing in this simultaneous affirmation of Son and Spirit as the Spirit continuously transforms and enlivens the senses. With such a transformation, the sense-perceptual self incrementally grows toward God through its enactment of its Christo-centric existence. The implication of the sense-perceptual self and the divine in Athanasius' writings sets the stage for a theory of perception constituted by the Son and the Spirit. In its affirmation of the humanity and divinity of Christ communicated to persons by the Spirit, Athanasius' writings present themselves especially for consideration in the construction of a Christian ontology of the flesh. This is because his writings avail a theological framework of perception that renders new insights for a reading of Merleau-Ponty's ontology of the flesh.

Whereas Merleau-Ponty's ontology of the flesh establishes the sense-perceptual self as one who is inextricably interwoven with the things of nature, Paul's writings register the Cross as the predominant framework by which the sense-perceptual self is ordered to the divine. Athanasius' writings take us further by developing a key component of a Christian ontology of the flesh, a grammar of perception informed by the Son and the Spirit. It is integral to establish the place of the Son and the Spirit to perception because perception is constantly defined at the hand of new embodied realities, and new modes of engaging with the world.

Athanasius' writings have received renewed interest in contemporary scholarship. In *God, Sexuality, and the Self: An Essay 'On the Trinity'*, Sarah Coakley focusses on Athanasius'

pneumatology and the transformative presence of the Spirit to persons.¹⁷² To her, a re-reading of Athanasius' *Letters to Serapion concerning the Holy Spirit* suggests a progression in the father's thinking from a predominantly Christo-centric discourse in *On the Incarnation* to a more pneumatology-centred articulation of the self in relation to the divine. The development avails, as Coakley shows, a language by which the Spirit is constantly present to the self.¹⁷³ As yet under-emphasised, but explicit through contemporary theorising, is the role that the Spirit plays in giving shape to perception. Athanasius' *Letters to Serapion concerning the Holy Spirit* provides new avenues for thinking through the Spirit and the embodied existence of the sense-perceptual self.

Divine and Human: The Foundations of a Christian Ontology of the Flesh

That God becomes human in order that persons may know God more intimately, presents itself especially for consideration. The place of the flesh in a Christian ontology, *On the Incarnation* reads, starts with the doctrine of creation *ex nihilo* (out of nothing), where God brings into existence all that is by His Word. While it is the Word that was spoken at creation, by whom all things are moved and through whom creation receives their being, it is the Father and the Spirit who together enable the Word's creative role.¹⁷⁴ Athanasius explains, '[t]he immanence, or intimate presence and unceasing agency of God in nature, does not belong to the Word as distinct from the Father, but to the Father in and through the Word, in a word to God as *God*'.¹⁷⁵ That the Word is spoken as the 'let us make' of Genesis 1:26ff, suggests the intimate communion which exists within the Trinity.

The nature of God's bringing into existence all that is by his Word is characteristically done so *ex nihilo*. The 'out of nothing' is instructive for the differentiation it makes between creation and Creator. Creation brings two aspects into relation with another, the immaterial Word

¹⁷² Coakley, Sarah. 2013. *God, Sexuality, and the Self: An Essay on the Trinity*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. See also Coakley, Sarah. 2015. *The New Asceticism: Sexuality, Gender and the Quest for God*. London: Bloomsbury.

¹⁷³ Coakley, *God, Sexuality, and the Self.*, pp. 132-141.

¹⁷⁴ Athanasius of Alexandria. 2011. *On the Incarnation: Saint Athanasius*. Translated by John Behr. Popular Patristics Series 44B. New York: St Vladimir's Seminary Press., §1., pp. 49-50.

¹⁷⁵ Athanasius of Alexandria. n.d. 'Dei Incarnatione: On the Incarnation'. In *NPNF2-04. Athanasius: Select Works and Letters*, edited by Philip Schaff. Vol. 4. Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, II. Michigan: Christian Classics Ethereal Library., 226.

who is outside the bounds of time and the created order which exists in materiality and time. *On the Incarnation* reads:

From it [creation] we know that, because there is a Mind behind the universe, it did not originate itself; because God is infinite, not finite, it was not made from pre-existent matter, but out of nothing and out of non-existence absolute and utter God brought it into being through the Word.¹⁷⁶

Creation is an intentional act whereby God brings all that is into being. God is hereby immanent to the created order and yet transcendent to it. Existence in the materiality of the flesh thus marks two moments, the first where God brings into existence from non-existence, and the second when such existence receives the image of God. This ontological differentiation between creature and Creator is instructive because it places the Word central to the mediation of the sense-perceptual self and the divine.

The incarnation is the expression of God's mediation of the ontological gap between creature and Creator in the Second person of the Trinity. In this regard, Athanasius writes:

Existing in a human body, to which He Himself give life, He is still Source of life to all the universe, present in every part of it, yet outside the whole; and He is revealed both through the works of His body and through His activity in the world...At one and the same time this is the wonder, as Man He was living a human life, and as Word He was sustaining the life of the universe, and as Son He was in constant union with the Father.¹⁷⁷

In the passage above, there are two ways of reading the existence of the created order considering the Word: in the beginning when the Word brings flesh into existence, and in the incarnation when the Word brings this flesh into eternal communion with God. The two manners of reading the incarnation simultaneously affirms God's intention to commune with the created order, and to have Christ as the condition of its possibility. Athanasius confirms, 'He, indeed, assumed humanity that we might become God. He manifested Himself by means of a body in order that we might perceive the Mind of the unseen Father.'¹⁷⁸ Christ's assumption of flesh thus brings persons into eternal communion with God. In doing so, the sense-perceptual self receives the Word's corporeal grammar through which to know God and be known by God.

¹⁷⁶ Athanasius. *On the Incarnation*. §1, 3.

¹⁷⁷ Athanasius, 'Dei Incarnatione', §17.,19.

¹⁷⁸ Athanasius, 'Dei Incarnatione', 69.

Christ can provide a corporeal grammar to persons because he knew all facets of this embodied existence intimately. Notably, Athanasius places emphasis on Christ's own sense-perceptual existence when he writes:

The Saviour had not a body without a soul, nor without perception, nor without a mind, for neither was it possible that, when the Lord become Man for us, His body should be without a mind; nor was it body only, but soul also that attained salvation in the Word Himself and being truly Son of God, He, the same, became also *firstborn among many brethren*... It was the same who spat corporeally as Man, but Divinely, as Son of God, opened the eyes of the man born blind, who suffered in flesh, as Peter said, but Divinely opened the tombs and raised up the dead.¹⁷⁹

One finds this emphatic emphasis on the bodily nature of Christ's existence in the context of his debate with Arius.¹⁸⁰ It was important for Athanasius to lay claim to this materiality because, without the unequivocal acceptance that God became human in order that humans may partake in God, the incarnation becomes meaningless.

The incarnation changes everything with respect to the place of the sense-perceptual self in relation to the divine. In the first instance, the incarnation is the image of the Creator presented to sense-perception. With the revelation of God in human form, humans perceive God with the same register of perception with which Christ perceived the world. The Christ who cried, laughed, and got angered is the same Christ who knows our cries, laughter, and anger. Through his earthly life, Christ knows every aspect of the affective self intimately. With this rendering, God is not a disinterested or distant divine, but immanent and present to the self in all its facets. In the second instance, the incarnation sets up a continuum between the God who creates in the image of the

¹⁷⁹ Athanasius of Alexandria. 1881. 'Treatise I: The "Tome" to Those at Antioch'. In *The Later Treatises of S. Athanasius*, 3–16. Oxford: Oxford University Press., §7, 11-2.

¹⁸⁰ This reading diverges drastically from the assertion that Athanasius prioritises divine assumption over embodied existence in the argument that Christ's human existence functions as a secondary tool to – in assistance of – the divine. In defense of Christ's absolute humanity and divinity, David Gwynn writes: 'However, Athanasius still preferred to hold *hypostasis* and *ousia* as synonyms. He did not have the benefit of the Cappadocian redefinition of hypostasis, which in turn made possible the understanding of the Incarnation at the Council of Chalcedon in 451 as the hypostatic union of two natures in one person. Nor was he as adept as his great successor Cyril of Alexandria in his attribution of the properties of each of Christ's two nature to the other through the communication of idioms'. See Gwynn, David M. *Athanasius of Alexandria: Bishop, Theologian, Ascetic, Father*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012., 103.

divine and the person who is that image. Insofar as the incarnation makes visible the invisible and transcendent God, persons may know God through the words, thoughts, and actions of the Word incarnate. The Word who thus acts as revelation also acts as promise, for knowing God in bodily terms and being known by God in bodily terms evidences a relational continuum between self and God.

The relational continuum that the incarnation establishes is one that starts with persons in Genesis 1:26ff as made in the image of God and follows in their being conformed to their Maker in the incarnation. The place of the sense-perceptual self in the doctrines of creation *ex nihilo* and the incarnation, a reading of Athanasius' writings show, is central to God's divine economy. Here, Creation is the first 'act' in God's creational plan, and the incarnation, the second. During both acts, persons are inaugurated into God's presence. Whereas persons participate in God's creative presence as creation, they also partake of the Word's embodied revelation in the incarnation. A person's relation to God should, accordingly, be interpreted from the standpoint of a God whose Trinitarian speech brings into existence all that is.

Both the Word and persons are central to the doctrine of creation *ex nihilo*, for persons are created as sense-perceptual beings in order that they may know their Creator. By perceiving the created order which manifests God's presence to creation, persons attune their senses to God, and in doing so orientate their senses to the divine. As beings created in the image of God, persons too witness to God's presence manifest through their very existence.

Mixing Metaphors: The Annunciation and Virgin Birth as Second Creation Narrative

Two grammars of perception which are pertinent to a reading of creation *ex nihilo* and the incarnation are the annunciation and the virgin birth. For, '*existing in the form of God, [Christ] took the form of a servant, and was born Man, of Mary, according to the flesh, for our sakes*', describes Athanasius.¹⁸¹ One can read the incarnation through the annunciation and virgin birth as a second creation narrative. Where it is the Father who brings into existence all that is, the Son by whom creation is spoken into being, and the Spirit through whom form is given to chaos,¹⁸² the

¹⁸¹ Athanasius expounds the implication of divine assumption *ex Maria* in 'Treatise I: The "Tome" to Those at Antioch', §7, 11-12.

¹⁸² Tanner, Kathryn. *Christ the Key*. Current Issues in Theology. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010., 20-1.

Trinity's creative activity is equally present in the incarnation. The virgin birth underscores Christ's entering of the world in the flesh of existence by the Holy Spirit who acts as the enabler of the divine exchange between God and mother. With the Spirit's mediation of God's presence at the annunciation, the virgin birth is the pivotal point at which flesh is united with the Second person of the Trinity.

Two parallel narratives arise: at creation, where the Spirit broods over chaos and life springs forth and at the incarnation, where the Spirit indwells creation (the flesh of Mary) and the eternal, immutable, Word is born. The logic of creation in Genesis gets inverted with this reading of the virgin birth. Whereas God first brings into being that which is ontologically distinct from Godself – the created order – in creation *ex nihilo*, God then brings into being that which is ontologically at one with Godself – the Word – in the incarnation. Likewise, whereas creation *ex nihilo* is God's bringing into being out of nothing, the incarnation is God's gracing of the womb of Mary with the divine. In both instances, the place of the Spirit is central to this inversion, for without the Spirit hovering over creation, life would not have come forth. Without the Spirit's impartation, therefore, the incarnation would not have occurred in the way it did.¹⁸³

Mary bears the eternal and immutable Word in the flesh because of God's Trinitarian activity in her. With the inverted creational account, the emphasis falls on God's initiative to articulate the relational existence of persons to God once more through the Word who takes on the materiality of existence. Here, persons are relationally ordered to God first, through the Word who is their condition of possibility and second, through the incarnate Son in whom and through whom persons are united with God. A second creation narrative arises, in this instance, insofar as persons take part in God's self-revelation through the Word. Whereas creation *ex nihilo* has persons taking part in God's revelatory presence within the created order, the incarnation has persons taking part in the Word who orders them relationally to the Trinity.

The incarnation articulates a Christo-centric anthropology as the Word by whom life is brought into existence, the Spirit who gives shape to chaos/void, and the Father who initiates such

¹⁸³ Stated in terms of the *telos* of creation: Maximus the Confessor employs a definition that helps to clarify the potentiality of *nihil*. Nihil characterises that which cannot exist in itself and for itself. Contrary to *nihil*, when the Word creates, he gives to creation a *telos* 'that for the sake of which all things are, though itself for the sake of nothing.' Thunberg, Lars. 1965. *Microcosm and Mediator: The Theological Anthropology of Maximus the Confessor*. Lund: C.W.K. Gleerup., 52. Taken from PG 91, 1072 C.

creative activity in order that persons may perceive God in terms of their own sense-perceptual existence. As to the challenge posed by contemporary scholarship regarding the necessity of the incarnation through the virgin birth (especially since virginal births are a popular trope in pagan mythologies for women who had conceived by ‘unsavoury’ means);¹⁸⁴ the virgin birth recasts Genesis 1-3 as God’s loving embrace. It is an embrace which graces the flesh of humanity with the potentiality to participate in God through the Word by the Spirit. The creational inversion, as I have called it, gives Christianity a language and imaginative landscape by which to understand the *telos* of the flesh. It is a salutary rendering because the virgin birth and the incarnation set the body center stage in the salvific relation of self to the divine.¹⁸⁵

Our re-reading of the incarnation as a creational inversion emphasises the relationship between the Spirit and flesh in Athanasius’ writings. A reading of *Works on the Spirit* casts the Holy Spirit as the person of the Trinity who mediates the union of Christ’s flesh with that of the sense-perceptual self’s flesh. Athanasius invokes 1 Corinthians 2:10-12 when he writes regarding the Spirit, ‘we have not received the spirit of the world, but the Spirit that comes from God, that we might know the gifts bestowed on us by God’.¹⁸⁶ The Holy Spirit actualises existence in the flesh because of the Spirit’s indivisibility with the Trinity. The Holy Spirit transforms the status of persons in Christ. Athanasius shows when he writes, ‘[c]reatures are from nothing, whereas the Spirit is from God’.¹⁸⁷ Regarding the created order’s existence: ‘[c]reatures receive life, whereas the Spirit gives life’.¹⁸⁸ In its origin: ‘[t]he Father creates all things through the Word in

¹⁸⁴ Artman-Partock, Tali. 2017. *Grotesque Bodies, Divine Words: On the Body in Religious Texts*. University of Cambridge.

¹⁸⁵ Further engaging with the debate as to whether the virginal birth and incarnation *really* happened historically, is a discourse beyond the scope of this chapter. What may be noted at this point, is the weight which the virginal birth bears in the description of the hypostatic union: ‘Hypostatic union means that God the Word, that is one hypostasis from the three hypostases of the divinity, was not united to a previously existent man...but in a womb of the holy Virgin fashioned for himself from her in his own hypostasis flesh ensouled by a rational and intelligent soul, which is human nature.’ See Riches, Aaron. 2016. *Ecce Homo: On the Divine Unity of Christ*. Michigan: Eerdmans., 119. The prominence of the virgin birth in Justinian’s definition, Athanasius parallels in *On the Incarnation* and his *Contra Arianos*.

¹⁸⁶ Athanasius invokes 1 Corinthians 2.10-12 in his defence of the role of the Holy Spirit in communicating within the Trinity as well as to creation. See Athanasius, *Works on the Spirit*, §1.6.8, 62.

¹⁸⁷ Athanasius, *Works on the Spirit*, §1.22.1, 87.

¹⁸⁸ Athanasius, *Works on the Spirit*, §1.23.2, 89.

the Spirit'.¹⁸⁹ In its communion with God: '[w]e participate in God through the Spirit',¹⁹⁰ and in creation's bearing of God's image: '[t]he Spirit is the Image of the Son'.¹⁹¹ The Holy Spirit is the divine agent who is eternally God and perpetually working in the sense-perceptual self.

Premised on the role of the Holy Spirit at the annunciation, the virgin birth reconfigures the Genesis account. By the Spirit, the created order comes to partake in Christ's divine reality and through the Spirit's agency, the flesh of the created order is held in the Son.¹⁹² This relationship between Spirit, Son, and persons, is circular and reciprocal in its nature. On the one hand, there is the *exitus* – God's speech goes forth by way of the Holy Spirit who is coeternal with the Word. On the other hand, there is the *reditus* – creation exists by the renewing agency of the Holy Spirit. Persons thus exist in the Word by the Spirit's agency and therefore also partake eternally 'in God's divine nature'.¹⁹³

Regarding the circular matrix of relations between God and the created order, Athanasius' letter to Adelphius is striking. He writes: '[w]herefore He is very God, existing one in essence with the very Father; while other beings, to whom He said, 'I said ye are Gods,''¹⁹⁴ had this grace from the Father, only by participation of the Word, through the Spirit.¹⁹⁵ A reading of *Works on the Spirit* establishes the Spirit as the One who communicates between persons and God, as the One who actualises existence in the flesh, and as the One who alters the way that the senses come to perceive the divine. Flesh and Spirit hereby continuously intertwine and determines the corporeal grammar by which God is known to persons. It is by way, therefore, of both the virgin and the Spirit that a discourse on the flesh develops.

¹⁸⁹ Athanasius, *Works on the Spirit*, §1.24.5, 91.

¹⁹⁰ Athanasius, *Works on the Spirit*, §1.24.1, 90.

¹⁹¹ Athanasius, *Works on the Spirit*, §1.24.7, 91.

¹⁹² 'De Decretis: Defence of the Nicene Definition' *NPNF2 - 04. Athanasius: Select Works and Letters*, edited by Philip Schaff, Vol. 4. Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, II. Michigan: Christian Classics Ethereal Library, n.d. §13, 506.

¹⁹³ Athanasius of Alexandria. 'Treatise V: Letter to Adelphius'. In *Later Treatises of S. Athanasius*, 61–71. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1881. §5, 65-6.

¹⁹⁴ Athanasius quotes John 14.9 here.

¹⁹⁵ Athanasius of Alexandria. n.d. 'Orationes Contra Arianos: Four Discourses against the Arians.' In *NPNF2-04. Athanasius: Select Works and Letters*, translated by Philip Schaff. Christian Classics Ethereal Library. Accessed 10 February 2017. <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/schaff/npnf204.html>, §9, 827-8.

Although the incarnation is predominantly associated with the Word who becomes flesh, Athanasius' pneumatology casts the incarnation as a Trinitarian creative act. The Father and Spirit are equally present to the act of creation which takes place at the annunciation and the virgin birth and are therefore also present to persons in the Word. In his defense of the Nicene definition, Athanasius writes:

But as we, by receiving the Spirit, do not lose our own proper substance, so the Lord, when made man for us, and bearing a body, was no less God; for He was not lessened by the envelopment of the body, but rather deified it and rendered it immortal.¹⁹⁶

With the embodied continuum of the Word, the Word's incarnation instantiates the ultimate second creation narrative whereby creation *ex nihilo* becomes creation *ex Verbi*. The former sets the Trinity as the condition of possibility for the created order, and the latter shows the Word to be the condition of possibility for participation in the divine. The incarnation is, therefore, an act of re-creation by which the created order (embodied existence, in particular) exists *ex Verbi*.

The incarnation evidences God's intention to be in relation with the created order in the Word who becomes flesh for creation. The incarnation thus places equal emphasis on the integrity of embodied existence and the centrality of that existence as the paradigm of filiation with the divine. Our reading of the incarnation, in its imaginative re-narration through the immaculate birth and Holy Spirit, frames a new relational matrix by which persons partake in the divine economy. Two distinctive moments arise at this intersection of creation *ex nihilo* and creation *ex Verbi*, that of the Word by whom persons are brought into being, and that of the Word who is the condition of possibility for their union in Christ.

Creation understood as that moment where God speaks life into existence establishes the incarnation as the eternal perpetuation of life in the flesh of Christ. The propensity for life which results from existence in the Word whose flesh becomes our own, shows communion with God as being the *telos* of creation. In his Festal letters, Athanasius expands:

¹⁹⁶ Athanasius, 'De Decretis', §13, 506.

For the Word is near, Who is all things on our behalf, even our Lord Jesus Christ, Who, having promised that His habitation with us should be perpetual, in virtue thereof cried, saying, ‘Lo, I am with you all the days of the world.’¹⁹⁷

We find here that the incarnation initiates a movement from nothingness to relational existence.¹⁹⁸ If Christ is Life, then persons as bearers and partakers of life are connatural (not coessential) with the Word. Connaturality does not equate to a direct parallelism between the Trinity’s being and created being. It implies instead, that persons are created *by* the Logos and not *from* the Logos.¹⁹⁹

What motivation is there for framing the incarnation as creation *ex Verbi*? The answer is twofold: first, it expounds Athanasius’ thematic preference for reading creation *ex nihilo* and second, it shows his unwavering conviction that the body is central to his theocentric anthropology. In no way does Athanasius eschew the body, for it ‘speaks of God’s self-revelation as *true* revelation and yet as *veiled* revelation’.²⁰⁰ Creation *ex Verbi* underlines the centrality of the body as divine self-disclosure while refusing an a-somatic understanding of existence. Athanasius does not seek to liberate the body from itself in discourses of the soul but to confirm the body as a prerequisite of existence.²⁰¹

A reading of the incarnation as creation *ex Verbi* provides the doctrinal foundation for the consideration of the flesh as on the one hand, the sense-perceptual self who engages with the created order affectively and on the other hand, the aspect of existence which is founded in Christ. The flesh which arises as the result of God’s utterance at creation is the same flesh which the Word assumes when establishing eternal communion.²⁰² The word ‘flesh’ thus denotes on the one hand,

¹⁹⁷ Athanasius of Alexandria. ‘Festal Letters: Letter XIV’. In *NPNF2 - 04. Athanasius: Select Works and Letters*, edited by Philip Schaff, Vol. 4. Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, II. Michigan: Christian Classics Ethereal Library, n.d., §1, 1318.

¹⁹⁸ Athanasius of Alexandria. ‘Treatise III: The Epistle to the African Bishops’. In *The Later Treatises of S. Athanasius*, 23–44. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1881. §5, 32-3.

¹⁹⁹ Athanasius of Alexandria. ‘The Epistle to the African Bishops’, §7, 35-6.

²⁰⁰ Pettersen, Alvyn. 1990. *Athanasius and the Human Body*. Bristol: The Bristol Press., 6.

²⁰¹ Pettersen, *Athanasius and the Human Body*, 82.

²⁰² What Athanasius is known for, is his refusal of duality, confusion, or denial in the union of Word and flesh in ‘nature and reality’. Instead, Christ’s ‘divinity and humanity are “so related” that the humanity of Jesus “is” only insofar as it is “in the mode of existence of the eternal Word of God”’. As such, Christ’s assumption of the flesh affirms creation’s belonging to the Trinity. Aaron Riches draws here from Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, I/2, *The Doctrine of the Word of God*, trans. G. T. Thompson and Harold Knight, ed. G. W. Bromley and T. F. Torrance (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1956), pp. 13-165. See Riches, *Ecce Homo*, 107.

the locus of the created order's existence and on the other hand, the nature of its existence in the Word.

What arises in our mixing of creation metaphors is a theology of the flesh distinctive to an Athanasian Christo-centric anthropology. Here, the en-flesh-ment of the Word is the condition of possibility for embodied existence to be participative in God's economy. Christ's assumption of human nature speaks, not only of the dignified existence of humanity but also of its newfound identity in the Word.

Creation *ex Verbi* describes the ways in which the image is conformed to its Maker, and in being conformed, how the image participates in a reality greater than itself. The nature of the flesh changes when the incarnation is seen to be the event whereby there is the actual transformation of the sense-perceptual self. The sense-perceptual self is transformed into the likeness of the Word and has the Spirit perpetually present to itself. The Spirit ministers to the sense-perceptual self, rendering their existence revelatory. Existence in the Word by the Spirit renders the sense-perceptual self in union with God, participating as sign and symbol of God's sustained desire to be in communion with persons.

The Corporeal Grammar of the Cross

In the previous section, our discourse on the flesh culminated with a rendering of embodied existence as salutary. With a salutary existence, Christ's flesh is the means of salvation for the sense-perceptual self. This describes the fact that the incarnation as creation *ex Verbi*, assigns to existence in the flesh a new ontological status. The incarnation describes not only the act whereby Christ assumes the materiality of existence, it also describes the rest of Christ's existence as sense-perceptual self – his ministry, death, resurrection, transfiguration, and ascension.

The Cross adds a further dimension to our creation *ex Verbi* analogy, Christ's identification with the materiality of existence and its propensity to return to dust. According to Athanasius' letter to Epictetus, the Cross is that moment where Christ conforms himself to the death which marks existence in the flesh.²⁰³ In relation to a theology of creation *ex nihilo* and creation *ex Verbi*,

²⁰³ Athanasius of Alexandria. 'Treatise IV: Letter to Epictetus'. In *The Later Treatises of S. Athanasius*, 45–60. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1881. §6, 53.

the Cross brings a redemptive reading of embodied existence to the fore.²⁰⁴ Athanasius accordingly writes:

For what the human body of the Word was suffering, this the Word, being present with it, referred to Himself, that we might be enabled to partake of the Godhead of the Word... And the incorporeal One Himself was present in the passible body, and the body had in itself the impassible Word, who was abolishing the infirmities of the body itself. And this He was doing, and thus it came to pass, in order that He, receiving what was ours, and offering it up in sacrifice, might abolish it, and thereafter might clothe us with what was His, and cause the Apostle to say, *This corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality* [1 Cor. 15:53].

It is both Christ's existence as passible body and metaphysical Word which founds the equality between human and divine. In the first instance, the Cross sanctifies the flesh. It does so by restoring the flesh to the fullness of being prescribed by the *Imago Dei*.²⁰⁵ The restoration takes place when the human and divine converge 'perfectly with the eternal will of the Father and are realized in the *pro nobis* the Son accomplishes in perfect freedom'.²⁰⁶ In the second instance, the Cross justifies the flesh through the reconciliatory work of the Son and the Spirit. When Christ assumed flesh, he sanctified and graced humanity by transforming the human nature He assumed.

With the sanctification and justification of the flesh, a Christo-centric anthropology arises consisting of two movements: assumption and predication. With the former, Christ's assumption of the flesh secures kinship²⁰⁷ with the created order. With the latter, that kinship becomes the condition of possibility for communion with the divine. This Christo-centric anthropology one finds in Athanasius' writings rests on the Word's agency in setting up relation first, between

²⁰⁴ 'On the salutary appearing of Christ, and against Apollinaris', see Athanasius of Alexandria. *Later Treatises of S. Athanasius*. A library of Fathers of the Holy Catholic Church. Oxford: Parker & Co., 1881., §2, 117.

²⁰⁵ Bouter, *Athanasius van Alexandrië en zijn uitleg van de Psalmen.*, 261-2.

²⁰⁶ Riches, *Ecce Homo*, 110.

²⁰⁷ I follow Janet Soskice's articulation of the relationship between human and divine in terms of kinship. See Soskice, Janet M. 2007. *The Kindness of God: Metaphor, Gender and Religious Language*. Oxford: OUP.

persons, and second between human and divine.²⁰⁸ The Word's simultaneous presence to persons and to the Trinity underscores a relational ontology.

A relational ontology affirms that, by the Cross, a person's ontological status is re-cast in terms of their subsistence in the Word's economy. Such an ontology rests on the notion that the Trinity, prior to creation, existed as three persons in perfect unity. Once the creational act was completed and the Word assumed flesh, there was a perfect unity between the flesh of the created order and Christ. Within our embodied existence, a relational ontology translates as God's divine self-disclosure and communication of divine attributes through the life of the Son and the ministry of the Spirit. In the first instance, existence is situated in the Word's ordering of creation and the manifestation thereof in the working of creation. In the second instance, humanity's corporeality (flesh) is founded upon the Word's flesh. We cannot, therefore, properly articulate the Cross without insisting that God assumed on the one hand, the flesh of existence and on the other, the burden of that existence.²⁰⁹

The imagery of Christ's assumption of the flesh of existence Athanasius expounds on in his *Defence of Dionysius* where he uses Eucharistic language to describe Christ's relation to persons. He writes:

For like as the husbandman is not the vine, so He that came in the body was not the Father but the Word; and the Word having come to be in the Vine was called the Vine, because of His bodily kinship with the branches, namely ourselves.²¹⁰

The semantics of feeding present to the above passage, Athanasius further articulates in the logic of participation that the Eucharist establishes. Athanasius explains, 'He by His living Word

²⁰⁸ Davis, Stephen, J. 2008. *Coptic Christology in Practice: Incarnation and Divine Participation in Late Antique and Medieval Egypt*. Oxford Early Christian Studies. Oxford: Oxford University Press., 24.

²⁰⁹ My translation of Peter Bouter's exposition on Athanasius' reading of the Psalms. 'Bij Ps. 94,3 verbindt Athanasius schlemming en verlossing: omdat Christus de Schepper van de mens is heft Hij de mensheid lief en is gekomen om haar te verlossen. Ook na die zondeval onderhoudt God Zijn schepping door Zijn zorg en voorzienigheid zodat de gehele gang van de natuur een vrucht is van Gods wijsheid en macht die voor de mens een verwijzing is naar God als 'de bouwmeester' van hemel en aarde'. Bouter, *Athanasius van Alexandrië en zijn uitleg van de Psalmen.*, 261-2.

²¹⁰ Athanasius of Alexandria, 'De Sententia Dionysii: Defense of Dionysius'. In *NPNF2 – 04. Athanasius: Select Works and Letters*, edited by Philip Schaff, Vol. 4. Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, II. Michigan: Christian Classics Ethereal Library, n.d., §12, 548.

quickeneth all men, and gives Him to be food and life to the saints; as the Lord declares, ‘I am the bread of life’.²¹¹

To illustrate the ways in which Christ’s body is the participative norm for the created order, one may consider the visual representation of John 6:46 in the 1469 painting by Friedrich Herlin titled *Der Eucharistische Schmerzensmann* (The Eucharistic Man of Sorrows) which hangs in the Stadtmuseum Nördlingen, Germany.²¹² It depicts Christ standing in a Cross-like position with grape vines and wheat growing from his feet illustrating, through the semantics of feeding, how persons are held in Christ’s being. The semantics of feeding visually unfolds as a communicant kneels in expectation of being nourished. The communicant represents not only the observed, but also the observer, to whom Christ gazes.

Photo of *Der Eucharistische Schmerzensmann* removed for copyright reasons. Copyright holder is the Stadtmuseum Nördlingen, Germany.

The filiation that the Eucharistic Man of Sorrow portrays, one reads in the *Orationes Contra Arianos* where Athanasius writes:

Because of us then He asked for glory, and the words occur, ‘took’ and ‘gave’ and ‘highly exalted’, that we might take, and to us might be given, and we might be exalted in Him; as also for us He sanctifies Himself, that we might be sanctified in Him.²¹³

The symbolism evokes two modes of feeding: in life through the Word’s upholding of it, and in faith, in Christ’s nourishing persons through the Eucharist. The Cross physically re-enacted in the Eucharist, is the perpetual assumption of life re-created in the Word. By giving his body, Christ sustains and upholds the life that is perpetually granted to those who partake in him. Klaus Krüger

²¹¹ Athanasius of Alexandria. ‘Festal Letters: Letters VII’. In *NPNF2 - 04. Athanasius: Select Works and Letters*, edited by Philip Schaff, Vol. 4. Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, II. Michigan: Christian Classics Ethereal Library, n.d., §4, 1284.

²¹² Hancock, Bannon. 2014. ‘The Scandal of Sacramentality’. 2014. <https://brannonhancock.com/2014/05/17/the-scandal-of-sacramentality-now-available/>.

²¹³ Athanasius of Alexandria. n.d. ‘*Orationes Contra Arianos: Four Discourses against the Arians.*’ In *NPNF2-04. Athanasius: Select Works and Letters*, translated by Philip Schaff. Christian Classics Ethereal Library. Accessed 10 February 2017. <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/schaff/npnf204.html>. §48, 720.

better explains the dynamic at play when he affirms that that which ‘cannot be represented...infuses the image in the way that the ineffable...enters language; and that just as the invisible pervades what is visible, so too the inaudible reverberates in what is heard’.²¹⁴ As with the sacraments then, the flesh of Christ mediates the cosmic body that is the church. It does so more concretely in the ritualistic consumption of the Eucharist.²¹⁵

The relationship between the Cross and Eucharistic feeding gives shape to what we have described as a relational ontology in Athanasius’ writings. This ontology arises where Christ’s giving is one’s receiving and one’s receiving is partaking not only of Christ, but of the greater cosmic body of Christ. Within the realm of embodied existence then, a relational ontology translates to God’s divine self-disclosure and communication of divine attributes in the everydayness of life. In the first instance, existence is situated in the Word’s ordering of creation and the manifestation thereof in the working of creation. In the second instance, humanity’s corporeality (flesh) is founded in the Word’s flesh. Here, Christ is both incarnate and the principle of life. He is ‘the very temple of Life’.²¹⁶ Christ is the temple, also, of the body of Christ, the cosmic matrix of graced relations in which persons exist. The body of Christ, which is the church, renders this cosmic constellation sacramentally insofar as the church belongs to the Word whose body is the communal body.²¹⁷

The incarnation and the Cross serve both as a realistic transformation of creation and as a sacramental transformation. In the former, embodied existence is transformed and deified by the Word’s ontological restoration of its existence. In the latter, embodied existence gestures to the divine as the origin of its existence, and it partakes in that existence sacramentally through the

²¹⁴ Krüger, Klaus. 2015. ‘Mute Mysteries of the Divine Logos: On the Pictorial Poetics of Incarnation’. In *Image and Incarnation: The Early Modern Doctrine of the Pictorial Image*, edited by Walter S. Melion and Lee P. Wandel, 39:76–108. *Intersections: Interdisciplinary Studies in Early Modern Culture*. Leiden: Brill., 82. The quote is taken from Krüger’s formulation of a sermon by Bernardino de Siena which was delivered at Florence in approximately 1425. It is said considering a visual depiction of the Annunciation by Antonello de Messina, *Virgin Annunciate* (ca. 1475-76), 77.

²¹⁵ This echoes the many ways in which Catherine of Siena understood her relationship with Christ; her everyday existence was an active partaking in Christ’s body and a partaking of Christ’s body.

²¹⁶ Athanasius, *Orationes Contra Arianos.*, pp. 26, 42. There is thus a further dimension to Athanasius’ theological consideration of existence in the flesh. It is situated within a redemptive reading of Christ’s existence, where the passion is central to the redemption of existence in the flesh. Athanasius, *On the Incarnation.*, 48.

²¹⁷ Pettersen, *Athanasius and the Human Body.*, 45.

church's practices.²¹⁸ Based on the imagery of Eucharistic feeding, one may make a parallel analogy in terms of life: Christ is Life and he gives this Life to persons with the incarnation, Cross and resurrection. When Christ graces persons with the Life which He is, persons become partakers in a Life that surpasses its current existence. The very fact, therefore, of being able to commune with God through the Word establishes life as sacramental. A being that is *unto* God – a being *for* God²¹⁹ – where humanity and creation show forth God's creative agency and craftsmanship. Persons partake Eucharistically in this life as a gesture to the new Life which is celebrated in Christ. Within the logic of sacramentality lies the logic of revelation.

Revelation and the Sense-Perceptual Self

According to the doctrine of creation *ex nihilo*, the whole created order bears the image of God through the original creative act, 'let us make [hu]man...according to our image' (Genesis 1:26). The incarnation, Cross, and resurrection adds a further dimension. The sense-perceptual self exists in Christ and bears the likeness of the Second person of the Trinity. *On the Incarnation* reads:

...He has made all things out of nothing by His own Word, Jesus Christ our Lord...He gave them a further gift, and He did not barely create man, as He did all the irrational creatures on the earth, but made them after His own image, giving them a portion even of the power of His own Word; so that having as it were a kind of reflexion of the Word, and being made rational, they might be able to abide ever in blessedness, living the true life which belongs to the saints in paradise.²²⁰

In the passage above, a corollary exists between the Word who is 'God's lavish bounty of being'²²¹ and the Word who founds such existence in terms of the *Imago Dei*. Being created in God's image describes God's desire to be in communion with persons, and to found such communion through embodied existence. The bestowal of God's image on persons who receive their being through the

²¹⁸ While I understand Athanasius's theological anthropology to be both sacramental and realistic, Stephen Davis has articulated his disagreement with such conceptualizations of Athanasius's anthropology. See footnote 67, *Coptic Christology in Practice*, 14.

²¹⁹ Petterson, *Athanasius and the Human Body.*, 103.

²²⁰ Athanasius, 'Dei Incarnatione', §3., 262.

²²¹ Athanasius, 'Dei Incarnatione'. , 226.

Word places the materiality of existence central to God's plan for the created order.²²² Existing in the flesh here marks the *telos* of persons.²²³

For Mark Baddeley, that God creates persons in his image is a key signifier of the prominent place that the sense-perceptual self has in God's creative plan. This is the case, especially as it relates to Athanasius' writings. Baddeley explains, '[f]rom this...Athanasius deduces that God does not create people in order that they might obey the commands he gives them...Instead, God created people simply so that they will exist as human beings.'²²⁴ Baddeley describes the logic present to Athanasius' interpretation of Genesis 1-3 when he writes:

Human existence is for God an end in itself, not a means to an end. Only once this primary end is realised are human beings then under a secondary obligation to perform whatever the Word commands them to do...²²⁵

Existing as one who lives as an embodied and sense-perceptual self within the created order is God's meaning for persons. God creates in God's image so that the sense-perceptual self may perceive the divine and attune the senses to its fount.

There is a revelatory logic to the relationship of image and Maker, Alvyn Pettersen explains, '[i]n principle, therefore, the created order is a manifestation of the Logos, realized in and through each individual who is made in the rational image of God'.²²⁶ If the sense-perceptual self bears witness to God's creative activity by being made in the image of God,²²⁷ then the senses reflect their Maker, and in doing so, conform to the Word. Athanasius unpacks this dialectic when he writes:

But let them learn that he whose likeness to God has not been produced by virtue and the act of willing has also freedom of changing his will; but not so is the Word, unless indeed His likeness to the Father is so far from being essential, that it is but partial and analogous to the human. Now, this is what belongs to us, who are brought into being, and whose

²²² In what follows flesh describes that aspect of existence which is uniquely registered by persons in terms of their sense-perceptions.

²²³ Baddeley, Mark. 2015. 'An Exploration of Athanasius' Strategies for Reading Genesis 1-3'. *Phronema* 30 (1): 115-36., 131.

²²⁴ Baddeley, 'An Exploration of Athanasius'. , 131 ff.

²²⁵ Baddeley, 'An Exploration of Athanasius'. , 131.

²²⁶ Pettersen, *Athanasius and the Human Body.*, 85.

²²⁷ Anatolios, Khaled. 'The Witness of Athanasius at the (Hoped-for) Nicene Council of 2025'. *Pro Ecclesia* XXV, no. 2 (2016): 222-36., 226.

nature is created. For we too, although we are not able to become like to God in essence, yet imitate Him as we are improved by virtue; a privilege, too, which has been granted us by the Lord...²²⁸

The created order in the doctrine of creation *ex nihilo* witnesses to God's creative activity in the world and partakes of God's creational presence. An embodied continuum is required, however, by which the sense-perceptual self can attain to the Word and partake of that particular and embodied revelation of God. Alvyn Petterson writes: '[f]or both in his incarnate life and in his existing transcendentally beyond death, the body of the Logos is recognised as the *prior necessity* for the Christians' corporate existence, as its source and origin'.²²⁹

Because humanity has lost its ability to live in the fullness intended at creation, it only partially reveals God's being. As a result, sin may be depicted as an assault on the senses; it is the moment where creation suffers amnesia²³⁰ and becomes deaf, blind and numb to God's revelation within the flesh of creation.²³¹ John of Damascus helpfully describes the logic in the following way:

For we see images in created things intimating to us dimly reflections of the divine; as when we say that there is an image of the holy Trinity, which is beyond and beginning, in

²²⁸ Athanasius of Alexandria. 'The Epistle to the African Bishops', §7., 35-6.

²²⁹ Petterson, *Athanasius and the Human Body*, 45.

²³⁰ To the claim that Christ's assumption of the flesh implied his assumption of sin Athanasius scoffs, for the capability to sin is one of the will which influences the flesh. Schaff elaborates in the words of Athanasius: 'Wherefore, saith he, 'the Son of God came to destroy the works of the devil;' what works? That nature, which God made sinless, and the devil biased to the transgression of God's command and the finding out of sin which is death, did God the Word raise again, so as to be secure from the devil's bias and the finding out of sin'. *Orationes Contra Arianos*, §43, 713-14, cf. footnote 2064. Interestingly, in his tenth festal letter, Athanasius describes virtue as being philanthropic and sin as being misanthropic; an interesting categorization of sin – sin is therefore life negating and inherently oriented against humanity. See Athanasius of Alexandria. 'Festal Letters: Letters X'. In *NPNF2 - 04. Athanasius: Select Works and Letters*, edited by Philip Schaff, Vol. 4. Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, II. Michigan: Christian Classics Ethereal Library, n.d., §4, 1293. Athanasius continues, in his XIII'th festal letter, to call God philanthropic. See Festal Letters: Letters X'. In *NPNF2 - 04. Athanasius: Select Works and Letters*, edited by Philip Schaff, Vol. 4. Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, II. Michigan: Christian Classics Ethereal Library, n.d., 14, 1313.

²³¹ Athanasius of Alexandria. 'Contra Gentiles: Against the Heathen'. In *NPNF2-04. Athanasius: Select Works and Letters*, Vol. 4. Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, II. Michigan: Christian Classics Ethereal Library, n.d., §41, 240-1.

the sun, its light and its ray, or in a fountain welling up and the stream flowing out and the flood, or in our intellect and reason and spirit, or a rose, its flower and its fragrance.²³²

Athanasius has a similar approach when he describes the right contemplation of the world as the contemplation of the ‘Word who framed it’.²³³ In our contemplation of the world, we contemplate God’s workmanship. As God’s workmanship ourselves, Christ renews our image through our union with him.

To illustrate the logic of the *Imago Dei* and how Christ renews our image, Athanasius recalls Egyptian burial portraits like those we know from Fayyūm.²³⁴ These burial portraits are naturalistic paintings painted on wood that are attached to coffins. Over time, however, the image painted on the wood fades. In Athanasius’ discussion of the burial portraits, the logic of the *Imago Dei* is such: likened to the fading image of the burial portrait, the flesh is limited in its ability to reveal God. The Word, however, by being hypostatically unified in divinity and humanity, renews life in the flesh and makes communion possible. The Word, therefore, perpetually renews the fading image that is embodied existence. The preservation of both the image and the wood makes Athanasius’ corporeal understanding of the incarnation explicit: ‘the body is understood to be not only the bearer of the soul, but also the indispensable setting for the soul’s (and its own) renewal’.²³⁵

Contrary to the burial portraits which image the deceased, Athanasius’ analogy ascribes to embodied existence a revelatory logic. As agents who are renewed by the Word who is God, embodied existence has the potential of making known, or manifest, the Word’s imprint in the very embodied nature of their existence. Understood in this way, life itself manifests the gift of everlasting communion with God, inaugurated in the present and fulfilled in that which is to come. This existence in the Word is sacramental because it proclaims God’s sustained presence to the world.

Remaining with the analogy of art, the role of the flesh in informing sense-perception serves as a mark and imprint of God’s communion with creation. Life in the flesh is salutary because it both gestures to the divine and bespeaks God’s presence in the embodied present. Peter

²³² St John of Damascus. *Three Treatises on the Divine Images*. Translated by Andrew Louth. Popular Patristics Series 4. New York: St Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 2003.

²³³ Athanasius, *Contra Arianos*, §11., 680.

²³⁴ Davis, *Coptic Christology in Practice.*, 17.

²³⁵ Davis, *Coptic Christology in Practice.*, 17.

Bouter advances a similar logic when he sees in Athanasius' anthropology, the preservation of embodied existence. He remarks that, instead of there being 'a flight from materialism', there 'is the sanctification of matter, of which Christ's bodily resurrection is symbolic'.²³⁶ As a result, creation is the graced space where life unfolds as the arena of God's presence. On the one hand, it is the instrument of perception and on the other hand, it is one locus for perceiving God.

That persons are created for the sake of themselves, and that such persons are created by the Word, expresses a relational logic of the doctrine of creation. Persons are made according to the image of God which anchors their embodied existence within God's divine economy. In *On the Incarnation*, the materiality of existence is described as good, and as existing in accordance with God's vision for the created order. For God to create according to God's image further establishes that persons are created as communal and relational entities. To exist as the image of God, is therefore to exist as a person who is made for existence in the flesh and constituted by that existence in relational terms. That God is present to the created order means that the Word is the condition of possibility for existence in the flesh.

Word, Spirit, and Perception

Athanasius' doctrine of the Son and the Spirit advances a unique grammar of perception. The life of the sense-perceptual self is transformed by the new existence it receives through the Son's divine economy and the Spirit's ministry. Both Word and Spirit hereby attune the senses to the God in whom and through whom the sense-perceptual self has its existence. To have one's senses attuned to the divine in this manner is the *telos* of perception.

In Athanasius' writings, one finds a logic of perception advancing that has its own soteriology unfolding. In the first instance, the sense-perceptual self is created according to the image of the divine. The image pertains to the ontological union which is established through the incarnation as much as it does to the senses. In the second instance, the existence of the sense-perceptual self is constantly defined by its desire to be ordered to its fount and so to be attuned to the divine. Being ordered to the divine is characterised by the sense-perceptual self's incremental growing toward the divine. Within this realm, both the corporeal and experiential exists as perceptual categories by which union in the divine is expressed. In the final instance, the Spirit is

²³⁶ This is my translation of Bouter. Bouter, *Athanasius van Alexandrië.*, 88.

the means by which the senses are incrementally transfigured to perceive within their own embodied existence the creative presence of God.

The logic of perception rendered through the Son and the Spirit, casts the body and its perceptions as salutary. That is to say, existence in the flesh is governed by the Son's indwelling presence and the Spirit's transformation of the self. What Athanasius does for a Christian ontology of the flesh, is establish a grammar of perception which is governed by the logic of the life of the Trinity. The flesh is central herein since the Trinity is present to creation *ex nihilo*, incarnation, and the Cross. Formulating such presence in corporeal terms hints at an incarnational logic of the flesh. One which must be founded in the life of the Trinity and expressed in terms of the words, thoughts, and deeds that usher from the sense-perceptual self.

Chapter 4

Augustine and the Logic of the Word Incarnate

‘In him we live and move and have our being’, these words of the apostle Paul echo in Athanasius’ theology of the incarnation.²³⁷ The incarnation avails to the sense-perceptual self, Paul and Athanasius’ writings show, a corporeal grammar by which to perceive God who is transcendent. For Athanasius, the incarnation is that occasion where God’s assumption of the materiality of existence changes the ways persons may perceive God in bodily terms. The logic of the incarnation thus presents a new mode of existence in the flesh through the Word and by the Spirit.

We learned in Athanasius’ writings how persons perceive God through the materiality of their existence. What has been left unsaid, however, is how such perception translates into the thoughts, words, and deeds of the sense-perceptual self. This further dimension suggests that each individual with their particularity and unique perception of divine presence can express the Word’s presence anew. In doing so, the sense-perceptual self may make God known in bodily terms. How the sense-perceptual self is said to do so is the question which concerns us next.

Like Athanasius, Augustine reads the incarnation as the affirmation of God’s presence to persons, and like Athanasius, Augustine is influenced by Paul’s writings.²³⁸ That persons live and move and have their being in Christ, is pivotal to Augustine’s consideration of how the Word is present to Christians in their bodily circumstance. Because of the Pauline influence in Augustine, a similar set of questions regarding the status of the body concerns his writings. Consonant with the critique Paul receives, Augustine faces the critique that his focus on the Fall and sin inhibits a proper reading of the body in theology. The criticism against Augustine is that the body in his writings is an ‘anxious body’, one weary of the materiality of existence in which and by which it exists in the presence of God.

And yet as a rhetorician, Augustine would have been keenly aware of his embodied existence. He would have known that speech, the primary means by which a rhetorician persuades,

²³⁷ Acts 17:28

²³⁸ Tarcisius Van Bavel expands on the Pauline influence in Augustine in terms of the *Totus Christus*. See Van Bavel, Tarcisius. 1998. ‘The “Christus Totus” Idea: A Forgotten Aspect of Augustine’s Spirituality’. In *Studies in Patristic Christology*, edited by Thomas Finan and Vincent Twomey, 84–94. Portland: Four Courts Press.

is an entirely embodied activity. Speech is characterised by vocalisation, requires that each breath be perfectly coordinated with words, and that each consequent gesture be done with the body's willing. Words, through the lens of the rhetorician, are not abstract renderings but embodied activities, intimately linked with the expressive mannerisms of the body. When words are embodied activities, the content of such words are connected with the form in which they are expressed. Insofar as words carry meaning, the ways in which they are expressed by the sense-perceptual self give unique and particular form to the content of speech. Between the form and content of speech, new possibilities are rendered for thinking through theological writing.

Words play a particularly important role within the Christian tradition, so Augustine's Christological interpretation of Scripture suggests. On the one hand, words are immanent and embodied, and on the other hand, words refer to that which is transcendent. The interplay of immanent and transcendent suggests the nature of God's revelation in Scripture. The incarnation establishes the correlation between words and Word. That the living Word finds expression through the words of Scripture is one aspect for consideration. Another aspect for consideration is that the selfsame living Word is expressed in the incarnation. With the relationship of metaphysical Word to incarnate Christ, words bring into relief God's continued presence to persons through their own words, thoughts, and deeds.

Establishing the ways in which words, as embodied actions, can manifest the presence of the divine, can be done by reading Augustine's Christological interpretation of Scripture and the incarnation. Contemporary scholars whose theorising adds to a reading of the incarnate Word in Augustine are Carol Harrison and Janet Soskice. Carol Harrison's set of lectures, 'Confused Voices: Sound and Sense in the late (Wild) Augustine'²³⁹ and 'Sound and Silence in Augustine's Christological Exegesis'²⁴⁰, develops the concept of speech as the intersection of sign and symbol. Signs and symbols have two things in common, they make manifest that which is invisible, and they make immanent that which is transcendent. Janet Soskice in 'Aquinas and Augustine on Creation and God as "Eternal Being"' and *The Kindness of God*, highlights how words exist in relation to the living Word, and how to consider such expressions relationally. In poetry, Malcolm

²³⁹ Harrison, Carol. 2018. 'Confused Voices: Sound and Sense in the Late (Wild) Augustine'. Pusey House, Oxford: Oxford University Press., 1-20.

²⁴⁰ Harrison, Carol. 2018. 'Sound and Silence in Augustine's Christological Exegesis'. Pusey House, Oxford: University of Oxford., 1-19.

Guite's *Faith, Hope and Poetry: Theology and the Poetic Imagination* and Trevor Hart's 'Through the Arts: Hearing, Seeing and Touching the Truth' are prime examples of how words can signal to the Word incarnate.

Establishing words as embodied actions, as having a divine referent, and as making visible divine presence through the particularity of existence, is central to a Christian ontology of the flesh. The motivations for outlining these three dimensions lies with a reading of the Christian flesh as that which has the Word present to it and as that which manifests such presence through sense-perception. An incarnational reading of embodied existence builds on the three tenets of a Christian ontology of the flesh established thus far: first, that the sense-perceptual self is open and ordered by the existence of another. Second, that the flesh is an integrated entity which exists in the Word by the Spirit. Finally, that the incarnation is the affirmation of the absolute humanity and divinity of Christ. Augustine's writings add to a Christian ontology of the flesh by indicating how the Word is incarnate to persons through their thoughts, words and deeds.

Augustine and the Incarnate Word

The relationship of the living Word to words begins with a reading of speech in the creation narrative. The doctrine of creation *ex nihilo*, Janet Soskice suggests, is less about 'the beginning of time or the origins of the universe so much as with the recognition that "all that is" comes from God [and] has its being in relation to God'.²⁴¹ This is the point Augustine makes when the existence of persons appear as evidence of a God who brought all that is, into being. *Confessions* accordingly reads, "[w]e exist", they tell us, 'because we were made. And this is proof that we did not make ourselves. For to make ourselves, we should have had to exist before our existence began'.²⁴² The doctrine of creation *ex nihilo* asserts that all that exists, exists as a result of '[t]he Trinity, one God, of whom are all things, through whom are all things, in whom are all things.'²⁴³

While the existence of creation evidences a Creator, speech also witnesses to the created order which came into being by way of God's speech. The correlation is made in *Confessions*

²⁴¹ Soskice, Janet M. 2014. 'Aquinas and Augustine on Creation and God as "Eternal Being"'. *New Blackfriars* 95 (1056): 190–207., 202.

²⁴² Augustine. 1961. *Confessions*. Translated by R. S Coffin. London: Penguin Books., Book XI, 256.

²⁴³ Augustine. n.d. *On Christian Doctrine, in Four Books*. Christian Classics Ethereal Library. Grand Rapids, Michigan., I, 5, 16.

Book XI, when Augustine writes, ‘[i]t must be therefore be that *you spoke and they were made*. In your Word alone you created them’.²⁴⁴ The first word to be spoken according to the doctrine of creation *ex nihilo*, is the Word by whom all that is, is brought into existence.²⁴⁵ God’s initial address, ‘let us make [hu]man in our image’ in Genesis 1:26 attests to this.²⁴⁶ That creatures exist, is witness to God’s creative act; that persons speak and express themselves through words, witnesses to God’s creative act through the living Word. Unlike human speech, the Word that was spoken at creation, is the silent, eternal, and immutable.²⁴⁷ This Word brought creation into being, and this Word is the condition of possibility of all human speech.

The Word who was spoken at the beginning of time, is also the Word who manifests himself in time, so Soskice suggests in her reading of Augustine’s sermon on Psalm 121 which interprets Exodus 3:14. According to Soskice’s reading, the immutable Word and Christ incarnate are the selfsame person. Christ is the pre-existent Word spoken at creation,²⁴⁸ and the Word in whom and by whom everything is uttered eternally as ‘God with us’.²⁴⁹ ‘We are perhaps shocked’ Soskice appropriately notes, ‘but why so?’ She continues, ‘it is entirely biblical to see Christ as Creator, to see him identified as the Word through whom all things came into being (John 1, echoing Genesis 1)’.²⁵⁰ This then, is the second aspect of the doctrine of creation *ex nihilo*: the pre-existent Word in whom all that is, finds its existence, is the selfsame Word who was revealed as Christ incarnate. The Word who was conceived by the Holy Ghost and born of the virgin Mary so that the sense-perceptual self may know God not only by the fact that he or she exist but also by the fact that they are expressive and speaking beings.

Establishing the correlation between the silent, immutable Word and Christ incarnate is important for the part that it plays in the reading of words as signs. A distinction exists between things and signs. Whereas the former is easily translated as objects which signify nothing more or less than themselves, the latter is more encompassing. *On Christian Doctrine* reads, ‘[n]o one uses words except as signs of something else; and hence may be understood what I call signs: those

²⁴⁴ Augustine, *Confessions*, XI, 6, 258.

²⁴⁵ Augustine, *Confessions*., XI, 6. 258.

²⁴⁶ Please see footnote 171 of Chapter 3.

²⁴⁷ Augustine, *Confessions*, XI, 7. 259.

²⁴⁸ Soskice, ‘Aquinas and Augustine’., 202-4.

²⁴⁹ Augustine, *Confessions*, XI, 7. 259

²⁵⁰ Soskice, ‘Aquinas and Augustine’., 203.

things, to wit, which are used to indicate something else'.²⁵¹ Signs thus signify by way of existing both as objects in their own right, and as inhabiting the referential spaces to which they gesture. Augustine uses the example of objects in Israel's covenantal relationship with God. Moses' staff, Jacob's stone pillow, and Abraham's ram are all objects, but when used to refer to God's activity, become signs.²⁵² When an object signifies divine activity, its divine referent transforms its meaning.²⁵³

The same logic goes to show for words that have the Word as their referent. Since words can act as a sign of the living Word who is transcendent to persons, it is necessary to establish how something can be universally present to a person without inhabiting the realm of the material. Words which have the invisible or divine as referent, Augustine calls 'spiritual thoughts'.²⁵⁴ Sermon 341 reads:

But you, staying here, see the same thing in your mind as he does, though he is staying so far away, and the whole of it shines on you, the whole of it is seen by him; because things that are divine and immaterial are whole everywhere.²⁵⁵

Spiritual thoughts are invisible and yet ever-present to persons wherever they are grasped. When spiritual thoughts are understood, they are comprehended in their entirety because their referent is the eternal, immutable and transcendent Word. How spiritual thoughts are said to do so is a matter which pertains to the relationship of the Word to Christ incarnate.

Establishing how something can be universally present to a person without inhabiting the realm of the material necessitates a reading of the pre-existent Word and Christ incarnate. In *Confessions* Book XI, the relationship is articulated in terms of the Word being spoken at creation and the incarnation when it reads:

The eternal reason is your Word, who is also the Beginning, because he also speaks to us. So he tells us in the Gospel by word of mouth. Your Word, the Beginning, made himself audible to the bodily ears of men, so that they should believe in him and, by looking for

²⁵¹ Augustine, *On Christian Doctrine.*, I., 2., 13.

²⁵² Augustine, *On Christian Doctrine.*, I., 2., 13.

²⁵³ Augustine, *On Christian Doctrine.*, I, 4, 15.

²⁵⁴ Augustine. 1995. 'Sermon 341 - On the Three Ways of Understanding Christ in Scripture: Against the Arians'. In *Sermons III/10 (341-400) on Liturgical Seasons.*, edited by John E. Rotelle, translated by Edmund Hill, 19–30. The Works of Saint Augustine: A Translation for the 21st Century. New York: New City Press., 20.

²⁵⁵ Augustine, 'Sermon 341', 20.

him within themselves, should find him in the eternal Truth, where the one good Master teaches all who listen to him.²⁵⁶

Only insofar as the Son mediates the truth of God's existence in time and does so in a manner that may be known by human persons, can human persons fathom the infinite and incorporeal Word. For the senses cannot attain to the immutable Word who was spoken at creation but can, as Soskice suggests, attain to the God who is God for us.²⁵⁷

Christ incarnate who came as God for and with us, establishes a corporeal grammar by which the transcendental may be made known in bodily terms. On *Christian Doctrine* translates the incarnation as a moment where God is made manifest to the senses. It reads:

And though He is everywhere present to the inner eye when it is sound and clear, He condescended to make Himself manifest to the outward eye of those whose inward sight is weak and dim.²⁵⁸

The life of Christ establishes the embodied parameters by which persons perceive God. It is the case first, because 'all created things, invisible and visible alike' are made in the 'immutable Word'²⁵⁹ and second, because the selfsame Word who indwells all that is, simultaneously revealed himself in the flesh. The incarnation inaugurates a new perceptual framework to which a person's affective powers may be attuned. By attuning the senses to the divine, the words of the sense-perceptual self become expressive of the Word's indwelling presence.

The words of Scripture, Augustine's own reflections show, present words as they are transformed in the face of the divine. Through the indwelling presence of the Word, the words of Scripture sign to the invisible and transcendent God to whom the senses are attuned.²⁶⁰ Augustine's reflection in Book XIII of the *Confessions* expresses the dynamic:

You answered me, for you are my God and your voice can speak aloud in the voice of my spirit, piercing your servant's deafness. 'Man, O man', your voice rang out, 'What my Scripture says, I say. But the Scripture speaks in time, whereas time does not affect my

²⁵⁶ Augustine. *Confessions.*, XI. 9., 259-60.

²⁵⁷ Soskice, 'Aquinas and Augustine', 203.

²⁵⁸ Augustine, *On Christian Doctrine.*, I, 11, 22.

²⁵⁹ Augustine, *Confessions.*, XII, 24., 300.

²⁶⁰ Augustine. 1995. *Sermons: III/10 (341-400) on Liturgical Seasons.* Edited by John E. Rotelle. Translated by Edmund Hill. The Works of Saint Augustine: A Translation for the 21st Century. New York: New City Press., 341.1., 20.

word, which stands for ever, equal with me in eternity. The things which you see by my Spirit, I see, just as I speak the words which you speak by my Spirit. But while you speak those words in time, it is not in time that I speak them.²⁶¹

Words of Scripture attest to God's presence to persons who, through their words, give voice to God in time. By giving words to God's presence in time, words become incarnational through the fact that they make visible the invisible and give form to the transcendental. This is because the Word communicates divine truths to persons by the mediation of the Spirit.

In her set of lectures, Carol Harrison finds a similar incarnational logic in Augustine's writings. She describes the logic by reading the words *verbum* and *vox* as two registers of perception in Augustine's Christological interpretation of Scripture. One example in Augustine's writings where *verbum* and *vox* come into play is Book XIII of the *Confessions* where Augustine says, '[f]or a while I draw a breath of fragrance when my soul melts within me and I cry out in joy, confessing your glory, like a man exultant at a feast'.²⁶² Two moments make up Augustine's experience: the moment where he draws his breath in and has his soul melt within him – *verbum*, and the moment when he cries out, confessing God's glory – *vox*.

Verbum translates as 'word'. It describes the internal thought or concept which a person apprehends but cannot express in words. It is the truth that 'drops' into the sense-perceptual self because of the Spirit's illumination. *Vox* describes the inarticulate cry of Augustine, and his articulate confession of God's glory, as that of giving 'voice' to something. *Vox* thus circumscribes the articulate and inarticulate sounds that issue forth because of Augustine's comprehension of the Word. Both *verbum* and *vox* instantiate the sense-perceptual self's responsiveness to the Word's presence to them. The example of John the Baptist provides a similar case. His cries of the coming Messiah began when he received 'word' of the Messiah and continued when he proclaimed the Messiah's coming in the desert. John the Baptist is prominent because it is his voice which rang out in the desert proclaiming the coming of the Messiah. It was this uttering, both prophetic and realised, which availed to those persons who were to receive Christ, a context within which to receive Him, and a language with which to articulate Christ's divinity.²⁶³

²⁶¹ Augustine, *Confessions.*, xiii. 29. 341.

²⁶² Augustine. *Confessions.*, XIII.14., 320-1.

²⁶³ Harrison, 'Confused Voices', 4.

The postures of speech present to Augustine and John the Baptist, are significant for the fact that they were uttered as an expression of the Word's presence to them. Harrison explains:

The voice, then – whether confused or articulate – whether it is John the Evangelists' belch, the *jubilus* of the Psalmist, the cry of John the Baptist or an articulate human word – is an inchoate cry until it responds to and converts toward the creating and redeeming Word of God.²⁶⁴

It is not, as Harrison shows, that the Word is present to the speech of persons alone, but that such speech is transformed in nature because they have a divine referent.²⁶⁵ At stake on the one hand, is the 'gestural' nature of words – that the sound which comes forth, whether inchoate or intelligible, gives voice to the invisible. At stake on the other hand, is the sacramental nature of words. Here, words refer to that which is transcendent to itself, while simultaneously making visible, or immanent, the divine to which it refers.²⁶⁶

The gestural posture of speech, which is transitory and unintelligible in its uttering, and the sacramental posture of speech, which is open and grasping,²⁶⁷ are both characterised by the fact that the sense-perceptual self is the means by which the invisible is made visible. Although they are seemingly abstract, words are embodied actions which, through voice and speech, give form to the Word. It is important that a correlation be made between the corporeality of speech and the incorporeality of the Word since the doctrine of the incarnation suggests that Christ is present to persons as an embodied and sense-perceptual being. Augustine is keenly aware of the incarnational role his words assume when he, in *Confessions* book XII, likens his speaking with that of Moses'.

Enacted in *Confessions* book XII, Augustine finds himself mimicking, repeating and performing the very same act as Moses, of receiving the Word of God and using human words to describe and 'clothe' the immutable, unchanging and invisible God.²⁶⁸ Augustine's words, like those of Moses, have a divine referent whose presence is immanent to them. The words of Augustine and Moses are incarnational insofar as the immutable Word provides the substance of their speech. For Moses and John the Baptist, as for Augustine, the inspiration of speech comes

²⁶⁴ Harrison, 'Confused Voices', 12.

²⁶⁵ Harrison, 'Confused Voices', 5.

²⁶⁶ Harrison, 'Sound and Silence', 19.

²⁶⁷ Harrison, 'Confused Voices', 2.

²⁶⁸ Augustine, *Confessions.*, XII. 32., 309.

from the pre-existent Word who was incarnate as Christ, and now is the head of the body of Christ. Harrison explains, ‘Augustine’s basic point...is that something only exists when it receives form and that for human beings this only happens when we turn towards our Creator’.²⁶⁹ When speech is turned toward its Maker, it is transformed and, in being transformed, reaches beyond itself to the invisible and transcendent.

Speech, in a reading of Augustine’s writings, is an entirely embodied activity. The sense-perceptual self, in its response to the Word who manifests his presence to persons, utters either that which is incomprehensible or that which is intelligible in response to such presence. When words and speech are uttered in response to the Word’s presence, they make visible, or give shape to, the invisible. Because, as Harrison has shown, these sounds and words uttered have no ordinary referent, the Word transforms their scope and meaning. The very words of persons function sacramentally where they make known divine presence and have the divine present to them. The two postures of speech in Augustine as Harrison has identified them, make headway in describing how words can sign to the divine.

Augustine’s Christological interpretation of Scripture affirms that the pre-existent Word is the selfsame Word who assumed the materiality of existence and is attested to in the words of Scripture. The words of Scripture, the logic of signs suggests, gesture to the living Word. The words of Scripture also gesture to the Word, who is its source and origin, both as pre-existent Word and as incarnate Christ. Following the logic of the pre-existent immutable Word through whom creation receives its existence and in whose incarnation the materiality of existence is transformed, the Word establishes a new mode of existence for the sense-perceptual self. Christ’s holding together of persons and Creator graces the sense-perceptual self with the ability to make known God’s presence in bodily terms. The incarnation of Christ perfects the relationship between the sense-perceptual self and the divine and establishes the sense-perceptual self as a sign of God’s indwelling presence.

A reading of the doctrine of creation *ex nihilo*, through the Christological interpretation of Scripture, shows the incarnation to grace the sense-perceptual self with a corporeal grammar by which to know God. God’s indwelling presence was manifest to those persons who recorded the words of Scripture. Their words not only attest to God incarnate but also to God’s continued

²⁶⁹ Harrison, ‘Confused Voices’., 12.

presence to persons through word, thought and deed. By articulating the continued presence of the Word to the speech of persons, the sense-perceptual self has the potential of making visible the presence of the Word. Each sense-perceptual self has their senses uniquely oriented by the indwelling presence of the Word, and as such, expresses the divine in a myriad of new and embodied ways, which give to the sense-perceptual self the status of being a sign of God's indwelling presence.

The Sense-perceptual Self as Sign

Augustine's Christological interpretation of Scripture puts forward a logic of the incarnation with which the sense-perceptual self may find new ways of unveiling the invisible Word. While the incarnation transforms the nature and status of words as signs, the incarnation also transforms the status of persons from whose speech words flow forth. This is because the incarnation, according to Augustine's Homily on John 1:1-11, speaks of Christ's immanence not only to the words of persons but also to their lived and embodied realities. Paul's Damascus road experience arguably sets out the logic in the clearest way.²⁷⁰ On the road to Damascus, Jesus asks Paul "Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?"²⁷¹ Notably, here Jesus identifies the collective with himself. Christ identifies those groups of people whom Paul was persecuting as his very own self.

According to the patristics scholar, Tarcisius van Bavel, the account recorded in Acts 9:4 influenced Augustine deeply. Van Bavel writes, "[i]t is beyond any doubt that Augustine bases his idea of the *Christus totus*, the whole Christ, on the texts of Paul'.²⁷² Augustine's Homily on 1 John 1:1-11, does two things: it explains Christ's presence to persons at the hand of the incarnation – '...because "the Word was made flesh, and dwelt in us"²⁷³ – and it articulates the mystical incorporation of persons into the body of Christ – '[t]o that flesh the Church is joined, and so there

²⁷⁰ Augustine. n.d. *St Augustine: Homilies on the Gospel of John; Homilies on the First Epistle of John; Soliloquies*. Edited by Philip Shaff. Christian Classics Ethereal Library NPNF1-07. Michigan: Grand Rapids., Acts 9:4, Tractate XXI Chapter V. 20-22.

²⁷¹ Augustine, *Homilies on the Gospel of John.*, V.20-23, 7., 226.

²⁷² Primary examples of Paul's writing are Romans 6 where the life, death and resurrection of Christ is said to be the life, death and resurrection of all those who believe in Christ; and 1 Corinthians 12:12-27 and Romans 12:4-6 where the body of Christ is depicted as a diverse but unified collection of persons in Christ. In these texts enough is said to conclude that Paul's reference to Christ as the head of the Church is more than a comparison, or analogy, it is instead a description of reality. See Van Bavel, 'The "Christus Totus" Idea', 85.

²⁷³ Augustine. *Homilies on the Gospel of John.*, Homily I. 1 John I. 1-11, 2., 784.

is made the whole Christ, Head and body'.²⁷⁴ *On Christian Doctrine* accordingly reads, 'this is our highest reward, that we should fully enjoy Him, and that all who enjoy Him should enjoy one another in Him'.²⁷⁵ One may conclude from Paul's Damascus road experience that in the incarnation, death and resurrection of Christ, Christ's body becomes a sign of a new body. Augustine's writings on this mystical body of Christ is also known as the doctrine of the *Totus Christus* – the whole Christ.

With Christ's incorporation of the collective in his body, the body of Christ becomes sacramental. The body of Christ not only refers to something divinely other than itself, it also embodies Christ's presence. This is the argument behind Peter's apostolic charge, Augustine notes, '[f]or if in Peter's case there were no sacramental symbol of the Church, the Lord would not have said to him, "I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven: whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven..."'²⁷⁶ The church, as a sign and sacrament of the Word incarnate, has Christ's presence immanent to it. Augustine notes, '[f]or the Church is His body, as the apostle's teaching shows us; and it is even called His spouse'.²⁷⁷

The body of Christ is a dynamic reality for it describes not only the union that exists between Christ and his body but also the union that exists between members of the body. Paul is cited, once more, in *On Christian Doctrine* when Augustine writes:

But when you have joy of a man in God, it is God rather than man that you enjoy. For you enjoy Him by whom you are made happy, and you rejoice to have come to Him in whose presence you place your hope of joy. And accordingly, Paul says to Philemon, "Yea, brother, let me have joy of thee in the Lord." For if he had not added "in the Lord," but had only said, "Let me have joy of thee," he would have implied that he fixed his hope of happiness upon him...²⁷⁸

²⁷⁴ Augustine, *Homilies on the Gospel of John*, Homily I. 1 John I. 1-11, 2., 784.

²⁷⁵ Augustine, *On Christian Doctrine*, II, 32., 44.

²⁷⁶ Augustine, *Homilies on the Gospel of John*, Tractate L, Chapter XI. 55-57; XII, 12., 468

²⁷⁷ Augustine, *On Christian Doctrine*, II, 16., 27.

²⁷⁸ Augustine, *On Christian Doctrine*, II, 33., 45.

Christ is the foundation of the union which exists between persons and is the source which binds the members of the body together. But so also is the body to its head, shows Van Bavel, the body is the fullness and realisation of Christ.²⁷⁹

The term ‘corporate’, Van Bavel clarifies, suggests the concept of mutual inherence, of the individual in the collective and collective in the individual.²⁸⁰ With this rendering to act as an individual is to act as and for the collective. Likewise, to act as collective is to act as and for the individual. Van Bavel continues:

Since the moment Jesus left this world, He needs our hands to reach out to the destitute, He needs our eyes to see the needs of the world, He needs our ears to listen to the misery of others, He needs our feet to go to persons to whom nobody goes.²⁸¹

The body of Christ is a dynamic corporate body that makes visible Christ’s presence in the corporeality of existence. The status of the *Totus Christus*, is one of equality with the Son.²⁸² It is the very concrete embodiment of Christ on earth. It is Christ’s presence, not as a spiritual body – this is the future and heavenly disposition,²⁸³ but as the corporeal and physical material body. There is no flight from the material to the spiritual, only the absolute affirmation that it is in and through the body that persons realise Christ in everyday life.

Whereas the created order signs to its Creator, the *Totus Christus* has its Creator immanent to its existence. The status of the sense-perceptual self transforms when the Word inhabits it. By

²⁷⁹ It is Van Bavel’s contention that when Paul wrote of the body of Christ in its collective sense, he ‘is influenced by the idea of corporate personality in ancient Israel’. Van Bavel, ‘The “Christus Totus” Idea’, 86

²⁸⁰ A similar logic goes in Susan Eastman’s reading of Paul’s person as a network of relations. Eastman, Susan G. 2017. *Paul and the Person: Reframing Paul’s Anthropology*. Michigan: Eerdmans.

²⁸¹ Van Bavel, ‘The “Christus Totus” Idea’, 86.

²⁸² For when we come to Him, we come to the Father also, because through an equal an equal is known; and the Holy Spirit binds, and as it were seals us, so that we are able to rest permanently in the supreme and unchangeable God’. Augustine, *On Christian Doctrine*, II, 34., 46.

²⁸³ It is important to note that even in heaven, the embodied nature of existence is not ‘cast’. Instead, heavenly bodies will be animated by the Spirit. Augustine writes: ‘And just as the soul should, after it has put away and destroyed by repentance its former habits, is created anew after a better pattern, so we must hope and believe that the body, after that death which we all owe as a debt contracted through sin, shall at the resurrection be changed into a better form...And thus the body, being the source of no uneasiness because it can feel no want, shall be animated by a spirit perfectly pure and happy, and shall enjoy unbroken peace’. Augustine, *On Christian Doctrine*, II, 19., 30.

unveiling the Word in the everydayness of life, the body as individual and collective entity, exists sacramentally. The body of Christ is thus the sacramental existence of the Word, for it finds its origin in the pre-existent Word spoken at creation, it finds its salvation in the incarnate Son who perfectly holds together the human and divine, and it finds its culmination in the *Totus Christus* where Christ is the bridegroom and the church the bride.

When Christ indwells persons, and persons partake of His revelatory presence, an incarnational logic arises. The doctrine of participation in Augustine's writings, best describes his logic. In Darren Sarisky's analysis of Augustine's interpretation of Paul, he finds two modes of participation: ontological and dynamic. Ontological participation is grounded in the doctrine of creation *ex nihilo* and describes God's continued presence in the created order. Here, God is present to all that exists, while simultaneously being ontologically distinct. Darren Sarisky explains, '[o]ntological participation points to the asymmetrical dependence that exists between God and all else: everything depends on God, while God depends in no way on anything'.²⁸⁴ Whereas ontological participation pertains to the relationship of created to Creator, the second mode of participation pertains to the sense-perceptual self's partaking of God's revelation. Soteriology proper, dynamic participation considers how persons partake of God's revelation as the Word incarnate. Sarisky explains:

Because of the human person's status as a member of the created world, entirely dependent on God, the holiness or Christ-likeness that a human being demonstrates is precisely a derived virtue. It exists in the person, but it does so as a function of divine grace. The dynamic aspect of human participation in God accentuates human existence in time: humans are mutable beings, who can change as time passes, and they ought to progress in their participation in God as their lives unfold.²⁸⁵

When persons thus participate in the Word dynamically, the incarnate Word defines their engagements and orders their existence. This is due, one must be reminded, to the fact that the incarnation is an entirely Trinitarian act. Each person of the Trinity has a unique role in actualising the union which the Word establishes between the sense-perceptual self and God. Augustine

²⁸⁴ Sarisky, Darren. 2018. 'Augustine and Participation: Some Reflections on His Exegesis of Romans'. In *In Christ in Paul: Explorations in Paul's Theology of Union and Participation.*, edited by Michael J. Thate, Kevin J. Vanhoozer, and Constantine R. Campbell, 357–98. Michigan: Eerdmans., 364.

²⁸⁵ Sarisky, 'Augustine and Participation', 364.

writes, ‘there is no separation of operations; there is no dissimilarity of substance; but there is one Father who is God, one Son who is God, one Holy Spirit who is God’.²⁸⁶ The inseparability of the Trinity translates the incarnation as the Triune act by which God is revealed to persons through the Son by the mediation of the Spirit.

To affirm the presence of God to persons by Word and the Spirit is to affirm the mediation between God and human. In the doctrine of the Fall, the sense-perceptual self and its potential to embody the Word is inhibited by the presence of sin. Sin mars, so to speak, the embodied manifestation of God’s presence to persons. The effect which sin has on persons is shown in *On Christian Doctrine*:

We have wandered far from God; and if we wish to return to our Father’s home, this world must be used, not enjoyed, that so the invisible things of God may be clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, - that is, that by means of what is material and temporary we may lay hold upon that which is spiritual and eternal.²⁸⁷

The world which so concerns Augustine is the world as it relates to the sense-perceptual self whose senses are disordered by sin. When existing as one whose life is not characterised by the life and death of Christ, the senses seek and desire that which can only satisfy them temporarily. For the sense-perceptual self continuously longs for her or his Creator who equally yearns to have the sense-perceptual self oriented to Godself.

Augustine enlists the language of yearning himself when he famously says, ‘you made us for yourself and our hearts find no peace until they rest in you’.²⁸⁸ In the doctrine of the Fall, the logic of yearning and of finding rest is articulated in the doctrine of grace. Where sin mars the believing self’s postures of speech, grace re-narrates and orients the senses of the believing self to the Word who defines their ontological status. Grace shapes the existence of each sense-perceptual self, for ‘if human beings are created from nothing, their very existence and continuance in being

²⁸⁶ Augustine. 1958. *Saint Augustine: Sermons on the Liturgical Seasons*. Translated by Sister Mary Sarah Muldowney. Vol. 38. The Fathers of the Church: A New Translation. Washington: The Catholic University of America Press., 140.

²⁸⁷ While the created order is recognisably restricted in its showing forth, the passage cited above does not advance an escapist logic: the world should not be cast for the sake of the spiritual. The apparent contrast shows, instead, that insofar as creatures are made to signal to their Creator, the restriction lies in that they *are* not the Creator, and so cannot perfectly reveal the Creator. See Augustine, *On Christian Doctrine*., I, 4, 15.

²⁸⁸ Augustine, *Confession*., 21.

is a work of creating and continually sustaining grace'.²⁸⁹ Grace has a liberating effect, it enacts the divine proclamation that the realm of the corporeal is the realm in which faith, hope and love is lived and expressed. Grace permeates this existence, for grace transforms speech into the salutary witnessing of the Word incarnate through the mediation of the Spirit. Each person accordingly has the choice to live their existence as one who is ordered by the Spirit's inspiration and orientation, and to live a life which makes visible the truth revealed by the invisible God.

The Fall, with its prominent role in the contemporary reception of Augustine's theology, has a role to play, but the Fall is not the defining characteristic of the Christian existence. Instead, the divine inworking of grace elevates the status of embodied existence to that of the realm of the revelatory logic of the Word, where persons participate in God's divine economy through their union with the Son and working of the Holy Spirit. The role that the Spirit plays in the life of the sense-perceptual self Augustine delineates in his *Sermons on the Liturgical Seasons* which reads:

...twice, too, did He [Christ] give the Holy Spirit. He gave one Spirit, and He alone gave; He gave unto unity and yet He gave twice. In the first place, after He rose again He said to His disciplines: 'Receive the Holy Spirit,' [John 20.22] and He breathed upon them... Later, promising to send the Holy Spirit, He said: 'You shall receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you' [Acts 1.8]'...²⁹⁰

It is through the ministry of the Spirit that the sense-perceptual self can perceive God's presence and articulate such a presence in their own bodily terms.²⁹¹ It is through the Holy Spirit that God is embodied in a myriad of ways: in history – 'in our individual histories and in that of our world',²⁹² and as the One through whom we experience delight in the presence of God as restored human beings.²⁹³

²⁸⁹ Harrison, Carol. 2006. *Rethinking Augustine's Early Theology: An Argument for Continuity*. Oxford University Press: Oxford Scholarship Online., 99.

²⁹⁰ Augustine. *Sermons on the Liturgical Seasons.*, 415.

²⁹¹ The revelation of such a triune act, exists in the form of love. Love, Book XV of *On the Trinity* reads, is the ultimate expression of the Triune God. It is that which exists as the result of the union of the Trinity, and it is the revelation of the outpouring of the Spirit to persons. See Augustine. 2012. *On the Trinity*. Edited by Paul A. Böer. Translated by Arthur W. Haddan and William Shedd G. T. Veritatis Splendor Publications., XV.17.27.517.

²⁹² Soskice, Janet M. 2007. *The Kindness of God: Metaphor, Gender and Religious Language*. Oxford: OUP., 33.

²⁹³ Harrison, Carol. 2006. *Rethinking Augustine's Early Theology: An Argument for Continuity*. Oxford University Press: Oxford Scholarship Online., 74.

In the Holy Spirit's unity with the Godhead, and in the Spirit's evocation of love and desire in persons, the sense-perceptual self can express the divine presence affectively.²⁹⁴ The Spirit fulfils at least two roles in the life of the sense-perceptual self: the Spirit acts as enabler, conforming persons to God; and the Spirit acts as agent, transfiguring persons. In the transfiguration of the believing self, the utterances which flow because of that transfiguration, act as a witness of God who is invisible and incorporeal, and yet present to persons. When embodying the ineffable God, whether in terms of love or in terms of varying postures of speech, the role that the Holy Spirit plays in configuring the witness of each individual gives to that witness a characteristically incarnational character.

In the doctrine of the *Totus Christus*, Christ is the condition of possibility for speech to be incarnational. It is not that the words which the sense-perceptual self utters are divine in themselves, but that words, when uttered in response to the living Word, give expression to God's presence in them. The sense-perceptual self exists as a member of the body in union with Christ. All incarnational speech must, therefore, be grounded in the incarnation and the *Totus Christus*. The body of Christ, with Christ *pantocrator* as head, can bring forth the immutable Word in its finite articulations of Christ's presence only where its speech is signified by its divine referent.

At the heart of the *Totus Christus* lies the doctrine of participation, which finally grounds the sense-perceptual self in the Word, who is its condition of possibility. When persons exist in union with Christ, they partake of Christ's revelation and have their senses ordered to the Spirit's mediation of that revelation. Each sense-perceptual self uniquely expresses the presence of the Word whose incarnation provides a new corporeal grammar with which to understand the relationship of self to God. It is noteworthy that the unique expression of the Word's presence to persons manifests through the sense-perceptual self. Expressing the divine in the flesh incorporates the particular embodied existence of each person and brings that existence to its perfection. While the very nature of perception is transformed, it is done in a manner that advances the integrity of the sense-perpetual self.

²⁹⁴ Harrison, 'Sound and Silence', 4.

Enlisting Christian Poets: The Word Incarnate

The sense-perceptual self exists both as a sign and as a sacrament of God's presence. The incarnation accounts for the sacramental nature of words, as does the Spirit's provision of a new corporeal grammar by which the sense-perceptual self exists in relation to the divine. How the sense-perceptual self daily makes manifest the presence of God is the question which next concerns us, for without an account which explicitly incorporates the body in its rendering, the potentiality of the flesh remains in abstraction. Next to be considered then, are the ways in which the Word's presence is manifest to persons through their embodied expression of the Word. At the intersection of living Word and embodied description are the words of the poet.

Two contemporary Christian poets who reflect theologically on the incarnational nature of poetry are Malcolm Guite and Trevor Hart. In *Faith, Hope and Poetry: Theology and the Poetic Imagination*, Guite describes the modes by which the sense-perceptual self registers the divine. The first mode is apprehension. Apprehension falls within the imagination's capacity to give meaning to the invisible and silent – to give conceptual boundaries to meaning and clothe the invisible in the visible. Apprehension here parallels *verbum* in Harrison's analysis of Augustine's writings. It is the sigh which Augustine utters when he becomes aware of God's divine indwelling to his senses.

The second mode by which the poet registers the Word is through comprehension. Comprehension functions within the realm of reason, giving coherence to the shapes that the imagination apprehends. Guite explains:

What imagination does here is to discern that the outer shapes or forms are in fact pregnant with meaning, to realise that things unknown can be made known by being embodied, not in mere copies of nature, but through imitations of nature, so that the things between heaven and earth presented to our senses are so re-presented in the poet's art that they 'body forth' the invisible, that they turn into shape, and so into comprehensibility, truth and experience that would otherwise have been either inaccessible or only accessible once and for a fleeting moment – apprehendable perhaps, but also irretrievable.²⁹⁵

The act of giving shape to the invisible Word expresses the place of *vox* in Augustine's writings. When words clothe the invisible Word, they body forth God's divine presence.

²⁹⁵ Guite, Malcolm. 2010. *Faith, Hope and Poetry: Theology and the Poetic Imagination*. Ashgate Studies in Theology, Imagination and the Arts. Farnham: Ashgate., 59.

When defining these two modes of knowing the divine in this way, neither reason nor the imaginative will enjoys precedence. Instead, the two are mutually inhering and dependent on another. In the simultaneous enactment of the imagination and reason, a conceptual performance takes place which has as its referent the divine Word made incarnate. In both instances, the metaphysical Word grounds all speech in the divine, and the incarnate Son, concretises such speech in the realm of the corporeal. The two modes of perception simultaneously perform the grasping of the presence of the Word and the articulation of that presence in terms resonant with the particularity of a person's existence. In both instances, the Spirit communicates to persons the divine truths made manifest by their existence in the body of Christ and as the body of Christ.

That the sense-perceptual self apprehends and comprehends the Word, is integral to its unique embodied expression of the Word. The imagination cannot but be grounded in the materiality of its existence. The sense-perceptual self thus gives shape to the invisible through its own unique corporeal grammar as it is registered by the imagination. One Scottish poet who was adamant about the embodied nature of speech as it pertains to God, was Edwin Muir. Muir is referenced by Guite for the critique that Muir renders of theological speech which has lost sight of the incarnate God. Edwin Muir writes in his *Incarnate One*:

...How could our race betray
The Image, and the Incarnate One unmake
Who chose this form and fashion for our sake?

The Word made flesh here is made word again
A word made word in flourish and arrogant crook.
See there King Calvin with his iron pen,
And God three angry letters in a book,
And there the logical hook
On which the Mystery is impaled and bent
Into an ideological argument.

...The merry and the sad, theorist, lover, all
Invisibly will fall:
Abstract calamity, save for those who can

Build their cold empire on the abstract man...²⁹⁶

The absolute centrality of corporeality to the incarnational structure of words is present to Muir's critique of 'abstract calamity'. According to his critique, words stripped of the corporeal grammar with which the sense-perceptual self registers the divine does injustice to the revelatory logic of the incarnation.

The alternative to abstract calamity, Muir's *Incarnate One* further shows, are words where the invisible and embodied mutually inhere. This, Trevor Hart shows in 'Through the Arts: Hearing, Seeing and Touching the Truth', is the crux of the incarnation, that the incarnation gives persons the framework by which to express God incarnate in their own bodily terms. Hart writes:

...the same Word which was formerly spoken to humankind in order to evoke response has now finally itself become human and, as it were, incorporates to itself within itself, becoming the one human in whose life a fitting response and correspondence to God's speaking may be seen...²⁹⁷

Hart's quote indicates that the embodied speech which ushers forth from the sense-perceptual self is a fitting articulation of the indwelling presence of the Word, for the incarnation shows embodied existence to be the very place where God manifests himself.

The incarnate Word establishes a continuum by which God and sense-perceptual self meet each other in the person of Christ. While it may be claimed that the senses may fail and misapprehend the divine, the Word who was incarnate now mediates the senses by being their condition of possibility. In the first instance, the immutable Word gives the created order the grounds for expressing God's creative activity in the here and now.²⁹⁸ In the second instance, it is God incarnate who graces the sense-perceptual self with the corporeal grammar by which to register the Word's presence to persons. With each utterance the sense-perceptual self makes, its words manifest the participatory relationship it enjoys in the Word who is the head of the body of Christ. The incarnation accounts for the potential that the sense-perceptual self has in showing

²⁹⁶ Muir in Guite, *Faith, Hope and Poetry.*, 29.

²⁹⁷ Hart, Trevor. 2001. 'Through the Arts: Hearing, Seeing and Touching the Truth'. In *Beholding the Glory: Incarnation through the Arts*, edited by Jeremy Begbie, 1–26. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic., 16-17.

²⁹⁸ Soskice, 'Aquinas and Augustine', 196.

forth God's creative presence in persons, and the Spirit accounts for the ways in which the sense are oriented to God.

The embodied renderings of the incarnate Word, Guite and Hart suggest, are at the center of the words of the Christian poet. The words of the poet, Muir's critique shows, also pertain to speech which has the divine as its referent. Insofar as Muir lodges his critique against theology in abstraction, his promoting of embodied speech is suggestive because it points to the prominence of the body in apprehending and comprehending the Word in ways which make anew Christ incarnate today.

The Incarnate and Performative Word

The incarnate Word in Augustine's Christological interpretation of Scripture sets the logic for the embodied perception of God. One understands such perception to mean both the transformation of the sense-perceptual self at the hand of the incarnate Word, and the incorporating of a new corporeal grammar by which to perceive the divine. Words, Carol Harrison and Malcolm Guite have shown, are the primary ways in which such an embodied dynamic is manifest in Augustine's writings. In the first instance, words signify. They sign to that which is other than themselves while simultaneously inhabiting the realm of the signified. Words are, therefore, particularly suited to describe the relationship of words to the Word who indwells the sense-perceptual self. In the second instance, words are embodied articulations of the sense-perceptual self. Although they seemingly exist as abstract and removed, words find their unique expression through the particular lived realities of a sense-perceptual self. Insofar as words are the articulations of persons who relate to the world in embodied ways, they too carry within themselves a unique embodied register of perception.

Words of Scripture, Augustine's Christological interpretation of Scripture show, are a collection of embodied articulations capturing the indwelling presence of God. Scripture evidences God's sustained activity in the lives of persons. This is the logic first, of the doctrine of creation *ex nihilo* and second, of the incarnation. When God was born to this world as a human, a whole new order of perception was brought into being. It is characterised by the life of Christ and the corporeal grammar which his death, resurrection and ascension provides to the sense-perceptual self. The incarnation, we must remember, is the moment where existence in the flesh is transfigured at the hand of Christ's existence in the flesh. The sense-perceptual self exists in Christ's corporeal

grammar as though it were their own. In fact, the flesh of Christ *is* the flesh of the sense-perceptual self insofar as Christ's life is the new corporeal grammar in which the sense-perceptual self participates. For in Christ, persons not only perceive God in sense-perceptual terms, they are incorporated into Christ's personhood by the ministry of the Spirit.

The intimate union between the life of persons and the life of Christ rests on the doctrine of participation inherent to Augustine's writings. When persons participate in Christ, their words are sacramental – their words make incarnate the indwelling presence of the Word to the sense-perceptual self. A distinction should be made at this point between words spoken in general, and words which are oriented to God. Words spoken in general do not have a divine referent and as such do not advance an incarnational logic. Words that are spoken in response to God do have a divine referent and make visible the presence of the Word. The latter form of speaking, the example of John the Baptist in Harrison's analysis shows, is a particular posture of speech. It is a worshipful posture where the senses are attuned to the divine and exists as a response to the divine whether in incomprehensible utterances, or in comprehensible words. In this instance, words are not only made in response to God but also evidence the responsive sense-perceptual self whose existence is unified with the Word.

Because speech which responds to God is restricted in its ability to express the God who is Creator of all that is, a Christo-centric aesthetic grounds all speech in Christ incarnate. The body of Christ has its existence formed by the incarnate life of Christ, by the ministry of the Holy Spirit, and by the Father's holding all that is in being. Here, the *Totus Christus* plays a significant part in establishing an aesthetic of the life of Christ. The Christo-centric aesthetic of the body shapes the manners in which speech bodies forth the communicative Word. Insofar as the corporeal grammar of Christ founds a Christo-centric aesthetic, the expression of the body of Christ manifests differently in different contexts.

The words of the Christian poets, Guite and Hart's writings suggest, is one expression of the relationship between God as communicative Word and the expression thereof through a Christo-centric corporeal grammar. The words of the poet apprehend and comprehend God's presence and express such presence in terms of the sense-perceptual self's unique embodied register of perception. The mode by which the poet thus speaks of the divine is a speech which is grounded in the body. The poet is not isolated in his or her uniquely embodied manner of speaking. The rhetorician, as Augustine shows, similarly exists at the intersection of speech and living Word.

Because speech which responds to God is necessarily situated in the body and founded by the Word, the incarnational logic of words to Word may also be termed performative.

Another way of putting the incarnational logic, and this is key, is the concept of performance. The poetic voice performs the unity of the visible and invisible, central to the lives of persons as existent in the body of Christ. Such performance expresses itself anew in the lives of persons. It is the case with the poet, as it is with the mystic whose speech presents itself as an embodied uttering forth of the Word whose presence is manifest to the self through the particularity of their own existence. In this instance, the sense-perceptual self incorporates her or his own existence into the articulation of the Word.

The act of performance functions as the moment where the sacramental existence of persons expresses anew the relationship between human and divine. With the aforesaid in mind, our next two chapters turn to two examples of performative speech that are deeply informed by a Christo-centric corporeal grammar but express that grammar in two diverse and unique ways. These two figures are Julian of Norwich whose register of perception is feminine, and Dante Alighieri whose poetic imagery describes the various states of relationship between self, other and divine.

Chapter 5

Julian and the Passion

In Augustine's writings, the logic of the incarnate Word is instructive for a Christian ontology of the flesh because words make visible the invisible and are incarnational. The Christological interpretation of Scripture, the doctrine of participation, and the doctrine of the *totus Christus* are three modes by which the Word is present to the lives of persons in their everyday and embodied existence. From the words of the rhetorician and the poet arises a uniquely embodied perception of the divine where words make visible the invisible. Central to this register is a theologically informed imagination that yearns to have the senses attuned to the divine, so the Christian poets shows as they enlist a grammar of perception unique to their context and time. Augustine's quintessential refrain, 'you made us for yourself and our hearts find no peace until they rest in you', here serves as testament.²⁹⁹

We find in Augustine's writings then a logic of the incarnate Word that sidesteps any anxiety surrounding the role of the body in the perception and articulation of the divine. For it is through the very bodily modes of expression such as speech, that the invisible is made visible in Augustine's writings. It is the case with speech, as with other sense-perceptual engagements, that the senses register the divine in a grammar that is conceptually closest to their own embodied circumstance. A medieval mystic whose speech is similarly clothed in her own corporeal grammar, is Julian of Norwich. Her unique feminine grammar of perception constantly transforms her theological imagination by rendering, for example, God as her Carer, Lover and Maker.³⁰⁰

Whereas Augustine uses words as a paradigm of perception, Julian goes a step further; she provides the words with which she registers Christ's presence to her. With this differentiation in the manners of speaking between Augustine and Julian, we transition in our conceptualisation of a Christian ontology from words as they make God incarnate, to words as they perform this incarnational presence. The performative in Julian's writings, anchors abstraction in the very visceral register of the Cross. Christ's blood, its drying, dripping, and Christ's discoloration, all become part of Christ's Trinitarian address to her.

²⁹⁹ Augustine. 1961. *Confessions*. Translated by R. S Coffin. London: Penguin Books., 21.

³⁰⁰ Julian of Norwich, Julian of. 2015. *Julian of Norwich. Revelations of Divine Love*. Translated by Barry Windeatt. Oxford World's Classics. Oxford: Oxford University Press., 56.

Julian's near-death experience precipitates her visceral visions of Christ on the Cross. On her deathbed, she receives the words of the priest who administers her last right to her, saying: '[d]aughter, I have brought you the image of your Saviour. Look at it and take comfort from it, in reverence of him who died for you and me'.³⁰¹ From her gazing, she receives sixteen 'shewings' or visions. She first captures these showings in a short text and then meditates upon them over the course of twenty years in what becomes her long text. When the meaning of each vision drops in her understanding, Julian gives words to Christ's address of her thereby providing a unique script for her revelations.

With Julian's unique register of perception, a lens is given to the ways in which the sense-perceptual self performs the corporeal grammar of the Cross. Notably, Julian provides a uniquely embodied register for the Love which the Cross communicates to her. Of significance for this study is the correlation between the content of the meaning of the Cross and the form in which it presents itself.³⁰² As an example of performative speech, Julian's *Revelations of Divine Love* holds within its nexus the perception of the divine relayed through the grammar of experience.

Julian's own context of experience is that of suffering. The bubonic plague killed countless people and during this period, the loss of loved ones and neighbour was commonplace. Even though Julian did not die from the bubonic plague, her own near-death experience warrants a grammar which incorporates loss and suffering. As one who lived in a convent and had anchoritic duties, it is very likely that Julian would have been exposed to the suffering of others, and in her duties of praying and reading Scripture, would have sought a means by which to make the Cross pertinent to those to whom she was ministering. Both her suffering and that of Christ's, places the Cross central to her writings. We thus find in Julian a reading of the Cross shaped by her own grammar of suffering.

At the intersection of the embodied and theological, the flesh is the perceptual norm with which the self engages with the world. The flesh, a reading of Paul shows, encompasses the purpose and the plan of the Cross. The Cross brings the self into union with the divine through the

³⁰¹ Julian of Norwich, *Revelations of Divine Love.*, 4.

³⁰² In Janet Soskice's comparison of Julian and Augustine's speech and writing, she showcases the importance that paying attention to form and content in theological writing has. See Soskice, Janet. 2007. *The Kindness of God: Metaphor, Gender and Religious Language*. Oxford: OUP., pp. 134 – 35.

Second Person of the Trinity. Without the absolute humanity and divinity of Christ, the sense-perceptual self is left unchanged by the incarnation as an act of re-creation. The life of Christ provides the corporeal grammar by which the sense-perceptual self comes to know itself truly as made in the image of God. When the Word and the Spirit align the senses, they are systematically attuned to the divine. In their registering of God's presence, the senses make known through word, thought, and deed, the indwelling presence of the divine. Julian goes one step further by reading the life of Christ on the Cross in terms of her own embodied circumstance.

The schemata of Julian's life construct a uniquely feminine grammar of perception which not only registers divine presence but appropriates and performs such presence in a reading of the Cross as Trinitarian speech. Julian's writings act as the gateway for a Christian ontology of the flesh from where the expression of the divine through a corporeal and visual grammar occurs in a theologically coherent manner.

The Corporeal Grammar of the Cross

Between Christ's bleeding, discolouring, and drying flesh and his intimate address to her, Julian's writings constantly hold together the sensory and theological. Julian's visions of the Cross advance a unique grammar of perception. This is because, Denys Turner suggests, '[t]he Cross is the embodiment of her theological epistemology as such; for Julian theological knowledge is cruciform, and the tensions between love and death that meet in the Cross are exactly replicated in the conflicted experience of her even-christen'.³⁰³ The Cross is both Julian's topos and method.³⁰⁴ As topos, Christ's suffering on the Cross resonates with the loss Julian was exposed to. As method, the Cross in Julian's writings is the truest expression of God's love and compassion for her. Julian's unique grammar of perception thus starts with her own embodied existence and moves toward the Cross as it finds articulation through her understanding.

The ways in which Julian perceives the Cross is inseparable from the grammar she uses to articulate the revelations she has of Christ's love. The Cross occasions two moments for Julian, a moment of reconciliation between self and divine, and a moment whereby the senses are conformed to the meaning of the Cross. Chapter 27 of *Revelations of Divine Love* reads:

³⁰³ Turner, Denys. 2011. *Julian of Norwich, Theologian*. London: Yale University Press., 22.

³⁰⁴ Turner, *Julian of Norwich.*, 22.

That same humbling which was revealed in his Passion was revealed again here in this compassion, in which there are two ways of understanding our Lord's meaning. One was the bliss to which we are brought, in which he wants us to rejoice. The other is for comfort in our suffering; for he wants us to know that it will all be turned to glory and advantage by virtue of his Passion, and to know that we do not suffer alone but with him, and to see in him our foundation, and to see that his pains and his self-abnegation so far surpass all that we may suffer that it cannot be fully comprehended.³⁰⁵

In Julian's writings, the Cross is both an event and an articulation of God's being. It articulates God's compassion with Julian, and it expresses the Love which orders her affections. As an event, the Cross enacts the suffering and loss that Julian experiences. As an expression of God's being, the Cross articulates God's initiative to know Julian in her suffering and to do so in Christ's very embodied existence. The simultaneous affirmation of being and event establishes Cross as that place where the sense-perceptual self finds its truest expression of the union which Christ brings.

In its enactment of life and death, and of suffering and salvation, the Cross exists in Julian's writings as a paradox. Paradox expresses the tension between God's bountiful expression of love and desire to be in communion with her through the Cross. The tensions expressed in the Cross are not necessarily relieved because paradox plays a prominent role in Julian's unique perceptual grammar of the Cross. The unresolved paradox of the Cross and its visceral depictions is characteristic of what literary scholars call the aesthetics of the grotesque. The category of the grotesque can be interpreted theologically, Ola Sigurdson shows, in his reading of the literary scholar Wolfgang Kayser, and philosopher Mikhail Bakhtin.³⁰⁶

Kayser theorises the grotesque from the standpoint of the period of Romanticism to Modernity and defines the term as that which evokes the sense of alienation and estrangement. Bakhtin theorises the grotesque from the period of the Middle-Ages to the Renaissance and finds the grotesque to be of the liberative order.³⁰⁷ The latter expression is fecund for a theological

³⁰⁵ Julian of Norwich, *Revelations of Divine Love.*, 76.

³⁰⁶ Sigurdson, Ola. 2016. *Heavenly Bodies: Incarnation, Gaze and Embodiment in Christian Theology*. Michigan: Eerdmans., see chapter 11.

³⁰⁷ Sigurdson, when mapping the two proponents writes, 'According to Kayser the essential features of the grotesque is instead the alienating, the horrible, and the inhumane, and therefore states that "[t]he grotesque is the estranged world". Here, our world is transformed into the alien world...For Bakhtin the grotesque stands for something renewing and liberating, as in the following quotation about the function of the "carnival-grotesque form": to consecrate inventive

discourse since a liberative reading of the Cross breaks away from various orders of things.³⁰⁸ Julian's own understanding of the Cross also breaks away from the order of things since her register of the Cross casts Christ's suffering in terms of delight, awe, and reverence.

The centrality of paradox, of the abandonment of the order of things, and of the visceral register of Julian's showings, points to a unique corporeal grammar of the Cross. One which seeks to meditate on the meaning of the Cross for the sake of articulating Christ's unique address to her. Julian wishes to understand the meaning of the Cross for herself, this is clearly seen in her desire to inhabit the circumstance of the Cross. She writes:

It seemed to me I wished that I had been there at that time with Mary Magdalene and with those who were lovers of Christ, so that I might have seen in the flesh our Lord's Passion which he suffered for me, and so that I could have suffered with him as others did who loved him.³⁰⁹

Julian's desire is significant because it articulates an embodied reading of the Cross where the sense-perceptual self provides the grammar by which to read the truth enacted by the Passion. Julian gives to the Passion her own meaning based on the understanding she receives from the visions she has of Christ.

Two registers of perception are central to Julian's request, the embodied and that which develops in her understanding. When Julian states, '[a]t the same time as I saw this bodily vision, our Lord showed me spiritually in a vision how he loves us',³¹⁰ the realm of the sensory and the spiritual are held together. Also described as the relationship between flesh and spirit, this double register of perception provides a new framework for thinking through Julian's visions as an embodied act. On the one hand, shows Alexandra Barrat, Julian's register of perception may be articulated as an almost 'scientific detachment' when observing the wounds of Christ. On the other

freedom, to permit the combination of a variety of different elements and their rapprochement, to liberate from the prevailing point of view of the world, from conventions and established trust, from clichés, from all that is humdrum and universally accepted. This carnival spirit offers the change to have a new outlook on the world, to realize the relative nature of all that exists, and to enter a completely new order of things.'" Wolfgang Kayser, *The Grottesque in Art and Literature*, 1957, and Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, 1968, quoted by Sigurdson, *Heavenly Bodies.*, 449-500.

³⁰⁸ Sigurdson, *Heavenly Bodies.*, 449-500

³⁰⁹ Julian of Norwich, *Revelations of Divine Love.*, 3.

³¹⁰ Julian of Norwich, *Revelations of Divine Love.*, 6.

hand, writes Marion Glasscoe, Julian's understanding of the Cross resembles a psychologically aware account of the suffering of Christ.

Writing on the former, Alexandra Barrat notes how Julian 'does not dwell on Christ's 'pains' for their own sake. Rather, they act as a frame for other revelations or 'ghostly sights', even while the 'bodily sight' in all its varieties continues'.³¹¹ Instead of reading the Cross for the sake of its brutality, the realism with which Julian accounts for the body of Christ serves as an occasion to let 'Christ's Passion speak for itself'.³¹² Writing on the latter, Marion Glasscoe identifies Julian's psychological rendering of Christ's in the following terms:

Her understanding of the Incarnation is not expressed in the intellectual albeit imaginative terms of Hilton, but experienced as a catalyst which transfigures everyday experiences. Julian uses the language and assumption of medieval theology but her text is shaped by literary means to convey creatively her psychological understanding of the realities such a theology seeks to discover.³¹³

Julian's psychological approach to the Cross emphasises Christ's conformity to her own bodily realities and vice versa. With such a reading, Christ is not a disinterested divine, but a God who is intimately present to her own embodied realities.

Julian's embodied response to the Cross maps a new corporeal grammar. Such a grammar expresses itself first, when the sense-perceptual self identifies with the Passion narrative and second, in the personalisation of the Cross. Julian's unique perception finds its expression in the words that she ascribes to Christ. Although Julian never explicitly states that she intends to give Christ *her* words, the words which Christ speaks are those which occur at the hand of Julian's embodied perception of Christ made known to her. The dual register, of the sensory and the spiritual together establishes an embodied manner of speaking about God. Julian performs, so to speak, her understanding of the Passion by assigning to her visions a script unique to her time, context, and social location. By doing so, Julian's visions illustrate an awareness that God intends to commune with her, and that she should thereby continuously be conformed to the Love which the Cross reveals.

³¹¹ Barrat, Alexandra. 'Stabant Matres Dolorosae: Women as Readers and Writers of Passion Prayers, Meditations and Visions'. In *The Broken Body. Passion Devotion in Late-Medieval Culture.*, edited by A. A. MacDonald, 55–71. Groningen: Egbert Forsten, 1998., 68.

³¹² Barrat, 'Stabant Matres Dolorosae', 68.

³¹³ Glasscoe, Marion. 1993. *English Medieval Mystics. Games of Faith.* London: Longman., 222.

The scheme of reading the Cross whereby Christ's flesh is discussed in minutiae, and the suffering of Christ is rendered in terms of Julian's unique existential framework, makes subtle changes to the theology of the Passion. In the first instance, Julian's emphasis lies not with Christ's suffering but with Christ's compassion with her own suffering. In the second instance, the detailed register of Christ's wounds refuses any glossing over, Christ's wounds are the point of the Cross, especially since the Church will grow from Christ's side. Although death evidences the Cross, the Cross is also the birth of a new place. When Julian thus rejoices in Christ, she rejoices in the intimate nature of Christ's address of her. The address is the ultimate expression of Love perceived through her own corporeality.

Julian's parable of the Cross

To make sense of Julian's unique grammar of perception, one needs to consider the place of soteriology in her reading of the Cross. Julian's writings express her embodied theology in the vision of the Lord and Servant which she receives and meditates upon for some twenty years. The parable captures a conversation within the Trinity cast in terms of Christ who speaks to the Father. The conversation reads:

And then he [Christ] sprang forward very readily at the Father's will, and at once he fell very low into the Virgin's womb, having no regard to himself nor to his cruel pains...And so I saw the Son standing, expressing what he meant, 'Look, my dear Father, I am standing before you in Adam's tunic, all ready to start off and to run. I wish to be upon earth to do what is to your glory when it is your will to send me. How long am I to remain longing for this?'³¹⁴

Three things are noteworthy in the parable: Christ's falling into the virgin's womb, Christ who stands before God as human, and Christ's intense desire to bring to fulfilment God's plan for the created order. First, Christ's falling into the virgin's womb suggests God's initiative to meet persons in terms resonant with their own existence, the incarnation. The vision that Christ has for persons is one that embraces the materiality of their existence. Second, that Christ is clothed in 'Adam's tunic' anchors the incarnation in the created order. Christ's embrace is a comprehensive embrace which incorporates persons into his economy. The created order is then the realm in which

³¹⁴ Windeatt, *Julian of Norwich.*, 113.

such incorporation is manifest. Finally, Christ's intense longing to do what is to God's glory, sets the logic of the Cross up in terms of God's sustained desire to be in communion with persons.

That Christ is 'all ready to start off and run' is a significant metaphor because running metaphorically denotes the Fall. Per illustration, Adam eagerly seeks to please God, but in his earnestness, falls. Christ also runs, but instead of falling, he transforms Adam's tunic. The metaphor is one of salvation, Julian however renders it differently. Adam's falling is cast in terms of his eagerness to please God. The falling of the servant, or the sin of the servant, is one borne from the desire to do that which is to the glory of God. The account is instructive because it casts the sense-perceptual self as one who is attuned to God's creative presence in the created order. The senses yearn to be in relation with the divine, and so in its grasping, orients itself to that which is made by the Maker and not the Maker itself. Christ, however, restores the potential of the senses by assuming Adam's tunic and thereby ordering them to God.

Julian's parable of the Lord and Servant casts Adam's relation to Christ differently than, for example, Anselm's *Cur Deus Homo*. *Cur Deus Homo* renders sin as the articulation of the ontological disjuncture between God and self. In this instance, Christ repairs the fracture by being an atoning sacrifice on the Cross.³¹⁵ In *Revelations of Divine Love*, however, sin is the result of the failure of the senses to be wholly attuned to God.³¹⁶ Caroline Walker Bynum similarly shows, 'Julian saw sin as a necessary (if painful) part of being human and that her theory of union with God did not involve "stages" the soul "passed beyond" but, rather, a continuity of self, a becoming fully human with Jesus'.³¹⁷ The difference between Anselm and Julian's approach lies in their different emphases of the Cross. Whereas Anselm speaks of atonement and reconciliation, Julian speaks of equality and union.

Grace Jantzen finds an interesting contrast between Julian's and Anselm's soteriology. Jantzen suggests that Anselm's model is one of atonement whereas Julian's model is one of

³¹⁵ Nuth, Joan M. 1992. 'Two Medieval Soteriologies: Anselm of Canterbury and Julian of Norwich' 53 (4): 611-45., 616.

³¹⁶ Frances Beer notes, however, that to speak of sin in Julian's soteriology seems like a contradiction in terms. See Beer, Frances. *Women and Mystical Experience in the Middle Ages*. Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 1992., 142.

³¹⁷ Bynum, Caroline Walker. *Holy Feast and Holy Fast. The Religious Significance of Food to Medieval Women*. London: University of California Press, 1987., 289-90.

restoration. In line with a sense-perceptual rendering of sin described thus far, Jantzen formulates sin as it occurs in Julian's writings as fragmentation. Jantzen writes:

The blame, rather, is part of our own confusion, our self-blame, the unproductive sense of guilt and worthlessness which make us feel that we are utterly unlovable even – or especially – in the sight of God, and that he could not possibly love and want us. It is this blame and self-loathing which Jesus has taken upon himself, coming to show us his endless love and the endless love of the Father to us, so that we find dignity and worth and integration in that love of his.³¹⁸

Sin as self-fragmentation, as Jantzen articulates it, is a manner of existing in the world which is characterised by an amnesia, a forgetfulness that persons are created in the image of God, and that their existence is made to witness to God who is their Maker.

Considering a medieval reading of the lower and higher parts of the soul, the lower part which is the sensory being of the embodied soul, loses its feeling – so to speak – for the divine presence in a person's life.³¹⁹ Sin is perceptual failure, a failure to know and love God as originally intended for the created order. Humanity still has its sensory being founded in the Word, but its condition has been altered. Implicit to this assertion is an ontological and existential statement: ontologically, sin has no place in the divine economy because it cannot exist as an entity that originates in God and similarly, has no place in the union that exists between the self and God. Existentially, the loss of the senses' ability to perceive God's eternal delight, evokes a disorientating blow to the sensory being – sin comes as an immense trauma to the human imagination.³²⁰ Understood in this manner, sin is not the ontological estrangement from God

³¹⁸ Jantzen, Grace. 2000. *Julian of Norwich. Mystic and Theologian*. New Edition. London: SPCK., 198-9.

³¹⁹ Bynum, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast.*, 289-90.

³²⁰ When delineating the blame that humanity carries Grace Jantzen writes: 'The blame, rather, is part of our own confusion, our self-blame, the unproductive sense of guilt and worthlessness which make us feel that we are utterly unlovable even – or especially – in the sight of God, and that he could not possibly love and want us. It is this blame and self-loathing which Jesus has taken upon himself, coming to show us his endless love and the endless love of the Father to us, so that we find dignity and worth and integration in that love of his.' Jantzen, *Julian of Norwich.*, 198-9. Similarly, Margaret Palliser echoes the existential rendering when she finds a distinction in the *Revelations of Divine Love* between sin in its own right, and the effects it has on persons. She continues, 'Julian concludes that sin has real significance historically, but not ultimately: however sin may distort the image of God in us on the historical plane, ontologically we are still *capax dei*'.

rather, it is the continued perceptual failure to see God's work in creation and the embodied self. In terms of the agency of humanity, sin is the failure of the embodied self to actualise itself as being made in God's image and likeness. With this loss, the Second person of the Trinity restores the senses through His corporeal grammar. The interrelationship of the sense-perceptual self, the revelatory presence of God, and the attuning of the senses to the divine, is a rendition of salvation which is unique to Julian's embodied theology. A sense-perceptual approach to sin shows the Cross to be the moment where the Second Person perfects the senses. Likewise, persons are known by their eagerness to be attuned to God rather than by some inherent sinfulness.

The articulation of sin as that which is inherent to persons vis-à-vis a rendering of sin as sense-perceptual failure has significant implications for an embodied theology. In its deepest sense, the loss of self and the abandonment of the order of things – as seen in the grotesque Cross of Christ, informs the way in which Julian sees the embodied self in relation to the divine. Sin is when the sensory being suffers from perceptual failure and is unable to see God in the everydayness of life. The senses are both blind and dumb to God's presence in the here and now. The embodied self fumbles about, so to speak, trying to grasp what it cannot comprehend. So, the 'blinds' are never so truly lifted than when persons see themselves as Julian does in Christ.

Rendering sin as sense-perceptual failure is one seen in Paul's letter to the Romans, and in Athanasius' logic of the incarnation. The parallels are important because they place Julian's sense-perceptual rendering of sin and the Cross in terms of the apostles and the theology of the early church. Here, Julian herself illustrates the transformation which occurs when the senses are attuned to the divine by the Word. Her restorative reading of the Cross illustrates how her senses are ordered to the divine and thereby reads the Cross in a manner which is closest to her own existence.

A restorative model of the Cross sees the self as one whose self-fragmentation is transformed in the face of the Servant who is God. The sense-perceptual self has its senses entirely re-ordered by the Cross and the logic of Love which it expresses. Both its paradoxical and grotesque register enacts a de-establishment of the order of things. A restorative model of the Cross thus gives to the Passion a different entry point. This is so, argues Kerrie Hide, 'because it concentrates on God's gracious love for human beings expressed in Christ, a love that ceaselessly

Palliser, Margaret Ann. 1992. *Christ, Our Mother of Mercy: Divine Mercy and Compassion in the Theology of the Shewings of Julian of Norwich*. Berlin: Walter de Gruyter., 96.

works to restore humankind to perfect union with God'.³²¹ Here, the sense-perceptual failure of persons is narrated as an expansive event which implicates both created and divine.³²² For the created order to falter or lose sight of its Maker requires a divine response of Love, and greater love had no other person than the love which Christ bore on the Cross.³²³

The Cross not only expresses a vision of the restoration of the sense-perceptual self, it also sees such restoration as the incorporation of the self into Christ's being. This union expressed through the Cross as the restoration of the senses, Brant Pelphrey terms an ontology of oneing. According to Pelphrey, an ontology of oneing is the only means by which the self can truly be restored through the Cross. By first assuming the nature of the flesh and then restoring it, the Cross restores the loss of condition ascribed to the Fall. With the incarnation prior to the Cross follows the logic that Christ's assumption of the materiality of existence initiates the bringing to perfection of persons through the Cross.³²⁴ The interplay, it may be argued, emphasises the centrality of the Passion of Christ in bringing the sense-perceptual self in alignment with its *telos* – union with God and the sense-perceptual living-out thereof.³²⁵ An ontology of oneing finds its expression in the Cross, for the Cross is the moment where the Second Person of the Trinity establishes the eternal union of persons with God through Christ. Julian writes concerning the union she is to have with Christ in the following way:

³²¹ Hide, Kerrie. 'The Parable of the Lord and the Servant: A Soteriology for Our Times'. *Pacifica* 10, no. 1 (February 1997): 53–69., 56.

³²² As Stacy Obenhaus shows in 'The Doctrine of Creation in Julian of Norwich's Showings', if God is Love, and the coming into being of the created order, is an act of love, then the created order continues to be 'the object of God's continuing attention'. See Obenhaus, Stacy R. 2005. 'The Doctrine of Creation in Julian of Norwich's Showings'. *The Downside Review* 123 (433): 235–51., 236.

³²³ John 15:13

³²⁴ The movement from Cross, to incarnation, to creation, echoes the soteriology present to Athanasius of Alexandria's theological anthropology.

³²⁵ Pelphrey places Julian's ontology of oneing in direct opposition to what he believes to be the Protestant narrative of at-one-ment. Whereas the latter describes an attitude on behalf of both God and humanity which justifies a rhetoric of condemnation and necessitated death by way of the Cross, the former speaks of an orthodox inclined reading of participation in God's being by way of the Second Person. Pelphrey, Brant. 2012. *Lo, How I Love Thee!* Edited by Julia Bolton Holloway. Spring Deer Studio., 52.

And furthermore he will we wit, that this dear worthy soul was previously knot to him in the making: Which knot is so subtle and so mighty, that it is oned into God. In which oning it is made endlesly holy.³²⁶

The logic of oneing in the *Revelations of Divine Love* describes Christ as the primordial source of Julian's embodied existence. According to Julian's medieval understanding of the soul and the sensory, the substantial union of the soul is knit into the being of the Maker and the fabric of the Trinity.³²⁷ It is a soul whose higher being is eternally part of the Trinity and whose sensory being perpetually undergoes perfection the face of Christ's crucified countenance. It is, the soul of humanity subsumed in the Second Person's being. Christ not only carries humanity but forms it and gives to the self his very own substance. Julian's register of union constructs the sense-perceptual self as an integrated being whose existence is continuously informed by Christ's inspiration thereof. Julian's writings thus advance a body-centred reading of the Cross expressed in terms of her longing to be made one with Christ.

When sin is understood to be the sense-perceptual failure to recognise God's presence in the created order, the Cross re-articulates this presence through the registers of paradox and the grotesque. The prominence of the Cross to the senses means that Christ's life clothes the embodied self with a new reading of the flesh; one which reads the Cross not for the prevalence of suffering, but for God's compassion with self-fragmentation. Insofar as persons have their being in Christ, the Cross reconciles the senses to its fount.³²⁸ The restorative model of the Cross focuses less on a proposed ontological disjuncture between human and divine, and more on the potential of persons to know God in the bodily terms of their existence. The Cross establishes relation between self and divine and affirms a participatory existence in the already and every day. The Love expressed by the Passion thus orientates human longing and desire to its fount,³²⁹ the Trinity.

³²⁶ Julian of Norwich. 'Revelations of Divine Love'. In *The Early Modern Englishwoman: A Facsimile Library of Essential Works*, edited by Betty S. Travitsky and Anne L. Prescott, Vol. 3. Printed Writings, 1500-1640: Part 4 1. Aldeshot: Ashgate, 2007.

³²⁷ Julian of Norwich. 1978. *A Book of Showings to the anchoress Julian of Norwich*. Edited by Edmund College and James Walsh. Vol. 1 & 2. Belgium: Universal Press., 560.

³²⁸ For while the soul enjoys a pre-existence in God since the moment of creation, the sensory dimension of the embodied self is only united with God at the incarnation and Christ's eventual passion. See Obenhaus, 'The Doctrine of Creation', 241.

³²⁹ On the notion of longing and desire, I have an appreciation for Sarah Coakley's ruminations on the Cross and how it evokes the transformation of desire. Describing the excess which I have argued is present in the grotesqueness of the Cross writes, the 'act of *ecstasis* is itself an essentially

The Cross as Trinitarian speech

An ontology of oneing establishes the Cross as the moment where Christ's embrace restores the sense-perceptual self. Christ's assumption of the flesh and Christ's bearing of the created order as the Second Person of the Trinity restores the sense-perceptual self. At various moments in *Revelations of Divine Love*, Christ speaks in Trinitarian terms. Chapter 59 of the Long Text reads:

'It is I', that is to say: 'It is I: the power and the goodness of fatherhood. It is I: the wisdom and the kindness of motherhood. It is I: the light- and the grace which is all blessed love. It is I: the Trinity. It is I: the unity I am the supreme goodness of all manner of things. It is I who makes you to love. It is I who makes you to long. It is I: the endless fulfilment of all true desires'.³³⁰

The 'I' which Christ refers to is a singular and yet collective communicative event. Christ's 'I' is the 'I' of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, Trinity in unity. Each of Christ's utterances expresses a different state of relation. When Christ speaks to Julian, Christ's speech is the speech of the Trinity, and when Christ appears to Julian, He appears as the Trinity. Both the Cross and Christ's speech enacts the activity of the Trinity in the created order.

The 'It is I' speech of Christ ushers forth in a manner reminiscent of God's speech in the burning bush in Exodus 3:1-17, and Christ's 'I am' saying in John 14. Whether Julian makes this connection in her own understanding of Christ words, she does not say. It is important to remember though that this encounter establishes the fundamental truth that God subtends all. In Exodus as in John, these sayings stand out for their characterisation of God as the One who founds all that is, and the One in whom and by whom all that is continues to have its being. In the same Chapter 59 of the Long Text, Christ's speech continues:

And he showed all this most blessedly with this meaning, - 'See, I am God. See I am in everything. See, I do everything. See, I never lift my hands from my works, nor ever shall, without end. See, I guide everything to the end to which I ordained it from without

divine act available only in the mystical body: in it I participate in the eternal exchange of love between Father and Son [and Holy Spirit] which breaks every hold on my resentment and bitterness'. See Coakley, Sarah. *The Cross and The Transformation of Desire: Meditations for Holy Week on the Drama of Love and Betrayal*. 128. Cambridge: Grove Books Limited, 2014., 19.

³³⁰ Julian of Norwich, *Revelations of Divine Love*., 128.

beginning by the same power, wisdom, and love with which I made it. How should anything be amiss?³³¹

Christ's Triadic language points to God's continued activity within the created order. Just like Christ's speech, God's activity is rendered according to the Trinity's activity in the created order. The various states of relation expressed in Christ's utterances, translates to the manifold ways in which God's presence is immanent to the created order as power, wisdom and love. Christ's Triadic language thus founds Julian's visions and places the Cross central to God's encompassing vision for the created order.

The encompassing vision of the Trinity, *Revelations of Divine Love* reminds us, is always situated in the Cross. The Cross anchors all speech and all visions in the materiality of Christ's existence. The Cross gives a corporeal grammar to the creative activity of the Trinity within the realm of the sense-perceptual. Chapter 24 reads:

And with this our good Lord said most blessedly, 'Look how I loved you', as if he had said, 'My darling, look and see your Lord, your God, who is your maker and your endless joy. My darling, look and see your own brother, your sovereign. My child, look and see your Lord God, your creator and your endless joy. See what delight and bliss I have in your salvation, and for my love rejoice with me now.'³³²

The same Word who brought creation into being is Christ on the Cross. As a sense-perceptual self, Christ articulates the meaning of the Cross as God's immeasurable act of love. When Christ invites Julian to perceive his countenance on the Cross, she understands love to be its purpose. Christ speaks to Julian as the Second Person of the Trinity but does so by using three different states of relation – as Lord, God, and Brother.

Christ's speech becomes an event characterised by Julian's perception of the Father, who creates and sustains all that is, of the Son who re-narrates the materiality of our existence, and of the Spirit who perfects persons through grace.³³³ Christ's utterance of love followed by the identification of 'Lord, God and Brother' symbolically reiterates the Trinitarian speech in terms that resonate with Julian's embodied and theological imagination. Julian recalls: '[a]nd as long as

³³¹ Julian of Norwich, *Revelations of Divine Love.*, 56.

³³² Julian of Norwich, *Revelations of Divine Love.*, 72.

³³³ Pelphrey, Brant. 1982. *Love Was His Meaning: The Theology and Mysticism of Julian of Norwich.* Austria: Institut Für Anglistik und Amerikanistik Universität Salzburg., 131.

we are in this life...our Lord God touches us tenderly and blessedly calls us, saying in our soul, 'Let me be your whole love, previous child. Attend to me...' ³³⁴ That Christ meets Julian in her own embodied terms, suggests that the God who founds all that is, is the fount of her desire.

Julian echoes the characteristically Augustinian register when she writes, '[f]or until I am of one substance with him I can never have complete rest nor true happiness; that is to say, until I am so joined to him that there is no created thing between my God and me.' ³³⁵ Julian's restlessness speaks of the desire of the sense-perceptual self to be in union with her Maker and to rest in Christ. This rest comes when the grammar of the Cross becomes the grammar of the senses. It is for this reason that Julian can truly find rest in Christ whom she names in corporeal terms as Maker, Carer and Lover. She finds rest because the corporeal grammar of the Cross transforms and perfects her senses. The perfection of the senses comes as a disruption, however, because the God whom she meets is beyond comprehension.

When wishing to understand Christ's words, Julian recalls, '[t]he number of words transcended my wits and all my understanding, and all my power, for they are the most exalted, as it seems to me, for I cannot tell what they comprehend'. ³³⁶ Christ's very own words alters the corporeal grammar of the sense-perceptual self. Christ's 'I' also becomes the 'I' of Julian. Julian meets Christ both in the face of the Cross and as the One who bears the created order. The resulting encounter between self and divine, interrupts the order of things.

Christ's 'It is I' sayings causes a loss of the sense-perceptual self in the single yet Trinitarian 'I' of Christ. The incomprehensibility of Christ's iterations so confounds the senses that it abandons itself. It is, however, not a total loss of the self because, in the face of the Second Person, the self rediscovers itself in the face of the Cross. The Cross clothes the imagination in an aesthetic which holds the grammar of the self in union with the Cross's grammar. The consequent re-discovery assigns an entirely different status to the self, a glorified status which finds its ultimate expression in union with the Second Person. With the loss of self in the face of Christ and the simultaneous revealing of a glorified self comes a paradoxical exchange. It is an exchange that denotes both loss and gain: the loss of self, relating to the blindness of the sensory being to behold God, and the gaining of self, of the glorified existence which life in Christ establishes. The

³³⁴ Julian of Norwich, *Revelations of Divine Love.*, 56.

³³⁵ Julian of Norwich, *Revelations of Divine Love.*, 45.

³³⁶ Julian of Norwich, *Revelations of Divine Love.*, 74.

exchange between loss and gain evokes an initial internal transformation and a gradual and final eternal transfiguration of the self. In the face of Christ, persons truly come to know themselves as they exist in Christ which is the perfecting of the senses.

Julian's revelations communicate a theology which at its heart, seeks to appropriate both the truth that God loves and cares for her, and the bearing that such truth has on her embodied existence. The Cross framed and continues to frame the human condition – not as sinners, but as persons whose senses yearn to be made one with the fount of their desire. Found paradoxically in the face of suffering and loss, the Cross communicates to Julian that God intends the embodied self to become part of God's very own being through Christ's death and resurrection. The Cross overcomes the fracture between human and divine not through violence but through love, in order that the senses may once again truly see the love which defines and orders their being.

Since the purpose of the Cross is the restoration of the senses, its union with Christ establishes a new grammar which orders the senses. This grammar is the grammar of the Trinity, and of a person's union with Christ. Such 'oneing' has the senses reoriented to Christ in Christ's assumption, healing, and perfection of the sense-perceptual self. The initially abstract and incomprehensible 'It is I' of Christ, becomes the new corporeal grammar by which Julian is to understand the meaning of the Cross. This is because, the *Revelations of Divine Love* shows, the Cross is a Trinitarian act. The Cross is part of God's encompassing vision for the created order, one which has the sense attuned to its fount. In Julian's naming of Christ in various ways, she gives a unique and embodied grammar to the Second Person of the Trinity. We may call this grammar, in its deployment of a sense-perceptual register for Julian's encounter with God, an embodied mode of articulating theology.

An Embodied Articulation of the Cross

The clearest articulation of Christ's embodied response to Julian is the grammar of the Cross. Christ's Trinitarian speech addresses Julian in intimate terms. With each utterance, Julian understands a different state of relation to be expressed. The image of mothering is one prominent to Julian's understanding.³³⁷ In a rather long excerpt, which is worth quoting in full, the logic of Christ's assumption becomes the logic of Christ as mother. Chapter 58 reads:

³³⁷ It is traditionally considered that Julian's usage of the Motherhood of Christ is focused in Chapters 59-63. An intensification of Christ as mother usage occurs in Chapters 52, 54, 58-60, 63-

Just as God – the blessed Trinity who is everlasting being – is eternal from without beginning, so it was his eternal purpose to create mankind, whose fair nature was first assigned to his own son, the Second Person of the Trinity. And when he so wished, by full agreement of the whole Trinity, he created us all at once; and in creating us he joined and united us to himself, a union through which we are kept as pure and noble as we were created...And so in our making, God almighty is our loving father by nature; and God all wisdom is our loving mother by nature, together with the love and goodness of the Holy Spirit, which is all one God, one Lord.³³⁸

Julian uses a feminine register of perception for Christ who is her Maker and the One who sustains her being. The use of mothering metaphors to describe the nature of Christ's relationship to Julian is a characteristically visceral register by which to name God. This register provides Julian with an embodied framework by which to understand the salutary existence that Christ establishes in persons. The self, created through the Word and held in being by the incarnation, is an entirely sensory being. Julian recalls, 'I saw that the same beloved Second Person who is our mother in our substantial being has become our mother in our sensory being; for we are twofold by God's making, that is to say, in substance and sensor being'.³³⁹ Christ's incarnation thus grounds the sensory being, or sense-perceptual self, in the Second Person of the Trinity.

The appropriation of mothering language when reading the Cross in *Revelations of Divine Love* suggests two things: Julian may have had a female audience to whom she attended, and she radically reconceived Christ's address in light of the medieval passion tradition.³⁴⁰ The significance of the dual awareness lies in the reworking of the Cross in terms of the schemata of life. By embracing language that liberates rather than constrains, Julian's feminising speech created a semantics of belonging which was conceptually closer to the experience of those who

4. It is noteworthy that the intensification takes place post-chapter fifty-one as the parable warrants a parallel reading of Christ and humanity.

³³⁸ Julian of Norwich, *Revelations of Divine Love*., 126.

³³⁹ Julian of Norwich, *Revelations of Divine Love*., 127.

³⁴⁰ 'For in reading Julian one becomes aware that late-medieval Passion devotion ran a serious danger of becoming a dead-end, with too narrow a penitential focus. It aimed exclusively at generating emotion, by fair means or foul, in order to stimulate repentance and confession. Only Julian of all these Middle English writers succeeds in breaking out of this restrictive mind-set.' See Barrat, '*Stabant Matres Dolorosae*', 70.

identified as mothers and, once upon a time, as children. The strategy is akin to the psychological dimensions of Julian's approach which Glasscoe highlights.

The success of the maternal language lies in its establishment of an entirely different aesthetic of the Cross; one where Julian's being is woven into the 'fabric' of Christ's being.³⁴¹ That Julian conceives the substance of the embodied self as so entirely wound up in Christ's being, speaks to another image which finds its unique expression in Julian's reading of the Cross. The imagery finds particular meaning in Chapter 24 when Julian writes:

Then with a glad expression our Lord looked into his side and gazed, rejoicing; and with his dear gaze he led his creature's understanding through the same wound into his side within. And then he revealed a beautiful and delightful place, large enough for all mankind that will be saved to rest there in peace and in love.³⁴²

During Julian's time of writing, the wound of Christ was a prominent devotional theme.³⁴³ It served as an illustration of Christ's compassion for humanity on the Cross. It also, and this is key, served as the new dwelling place for the sense-perceptual self. Christ's wound was thus blessed, Julian perceives, because it was 'open and rejoice[d] to heal' persons.³⁴⁴

Unlike the characteristic depictions of Christ's wound as that which gapes at a worshipper, Julian paradoxically understands bliss, delight, and joy to be implied by Christ's wound. The wound which marks the punctuation of Christ's death through the piercing of his side with a spear. The water and blood which flows from Christ's side evokes the register of the sacramental, since Christ's wound becomes the birthplace of the Church. Here, imagery of birth is prevalent when Christ's wound has blood and water spilling from it. The blood and water point not only to that

³⁴¹ When examining the potentialities of Julian's feminizing speech, Denise Baker discovers in Julian a theology of the asexual soul: Julian modifies the ontology and anthropology implied by this Augustinian commonplace into an original theory of an androgynous God who creates the soul in an asexual image. Humans, both male and female, can know themselves by knowing God because, as children of God the Father and Jesus the Mother, and siblings of Christ, all individuals, regardless of their sex, have the potential for participating in the divine nature'. See Baker, Denise Nowakowski. *Julian of Norwich's Showings: From Vision to Book*. New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1994., 113.

³⁴² Julian of Norwich, *Revelations of Divine Love*., 71-2.

³⁴³ 'The side-wound was conventionally understood as offering a refuge for the sinner and, as a token of Christ's love, the wound is a pervasive devotional theme'. Julian of Norwich, *Revelations of Divine Love*., 188-9.

³⁴⁴ Julian of Norwich, *Revelations of Divine Love*., 133.

which is now regarded as being symbolic for baptism and Eucharist, it also speaks of the divine transmittance of love and life that takes place because of the intimate connection between the Second Person's incarnation and the sensory being of humanity. Pictured as the connection between a foetus and its mother, Christ is the lifeline upon which humanity draws its ontological status. Stated in modern parlance, the undistinguishable shared life between mother and child – their shared DNA – depicts the new status that humanity has in Christ.

According to Julian, the wound of Christ is a 'delectable place' in the sense that it is the place where God's comprehensive plan for the self is expressed in corporeal and feminine terms.³⁴⁵ Julian's 'sweet beholding' and her interaction with Christ on the plain of the delectable and joyous constructs a corporeal grammar which constantly overturns the order of Christ's suffering.³⁴⁶ Julian masterfully re-narrates the Cross so that it is an expression of God's divine hospitality.³⁴⁷ The vision of Christ's incarnation founds persons in Christ prior to creation, and one that continues to have persons founded in Christ. The nature of Christ's relationship to persons is, according to Julian, one reminiscent of mothering. Throughout Julian's shewings, the metaphors of birthing, feeding, nurturing, and sustaining are employed in relation to Christ. For, writes Julian, 'our Saviour is our true mother, in whom we are endlessly born, and out of whom we shall never come to birth...'³⁴⁸ Conceptualised as a moment of transformation, Christ goes beyond surrogacy to the place where his mothering evokes an actual transfiguration in the embodied self. The transfiguration expresses itself in the new ways in which the senses engages with the grammar of the Cross. In Julian's visions, her feminine register of perception illustrates a sense-perceptual faith rooted in the embodied now.

A new Theological Aesthetic

³⁴⁵ Julian of Norwich, *Revelations of Divine Love*, 133.

³⁴⁶ Julian of Norwich, *Revelations of Divine Love*, 133.

³⁴⁷ Remarking on the prominence of the sacred heart tradition amongst female anchorites in the 1300's, Kristen McQuinn suggests that the interplay between the wound and heart of Christ are integral to a feminized rendering of God's interaction with humanity. This is so because images of 'blood, penetration and enclosure' resonates closely with their own anatomical realities; the 'inclusion of such feminized images allows the female recluse...to relate to the Wounded Side by recalling her own feminine experience through the emphasis on the humanity of Christ and his Passion' See McQuinn, "'Crepe into That Blessed Syde": Enclosure Imagery in Aelred of Rievaulx's *de Institutione Inclusarum*', 95-6.

³⁴⁸ Julian of Norwich, *Revelations of Divine Love*, 126.

Julian's feminine speech renders a unique aesthetic borne from her perception of Christ in terms that are resonant with her own embodied existence. Significantly, Julian's visions come to her both in visceral and spiritual terms. Christ's Trinitarian speech and the various stages of his bleeding, Julian interprets at the hand of her own embodied circumstance.

In a reading of the Cross a new aesthetic arises when the sense-perceptual self attunes its senses to the restorative vision which the Cross expresses. If sin describes perceptual failure, the failure of the senses to perceive God's revelatory presence in the life of Christ, then realising one's true existence in Christ and having this new existence inform one's engagements, characterises perceptual faith. Here, Julian is a primary example of perceptual faith in that her reading of the Cross focuses on the restoration which the Cross brings. She gives shape to this restorative vision by naming Christ's Trinitarian relation as Mother, Brother, and Maker.³⁴⁹ Julian thus provides her own embodied circumstance as the grammar for her vision of Christ.

Coming to terms with the unique aesthetic Julian advances is one which, like Julian's progression in understanding, requires the love and grace of God. In Julian's writings, the Cross of Christ serves as a visual aid whereby the sensory being sees itself in relation to the divine. The eventual apprehending of God amidst perceptual failures is the work of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit makes the Trinity known to the senses and so lays the foundation for the gradual transformation and eventual perfection of perception. This trusting orientation toward God culminates when God is seen not as a dis-embodied and abstract entity, but as a very embodied Saviour who stands in close relation to persons and the created order. As the senses gradually become cruciform, it takes up a perspective of the self within the life of the Trinity.

Julian's perceptual faith expresses the transformational logic of the Cross from the outset. The three wounds of contrition, compassion, and a purposeful longing which she invokes suggests the desire to perceive Christ in bodily terms. For Julian to have meditated upon her revelations over the course of twenty years shows a keen desire to have her whole being, her imagination, her reason, and her corporeality, attuned to God. In the eventual transformation that takes place when perceptual faith comes to its fullest, the embodied self transcends its own perceptual failures and enacts what it was made for, participation in the abounding Love of the Trinity.

³⁴⁹ Julian of Norwich, *Revelations of Divine Love.*, 56.

The central tenet arising from *Revelations of Divine Love* as it pertains to perceptual faith, is that once the Cross orders the senses, the senses come to their fullest. The logic pertains to the senses as much as it does to the enactment of the meaning of the Cross. Chapter 87 provides a helpful account when Julian articulates a threefold working of the virtues which she perceives from the Cross. Julian writes, ‘the first is charity uncreated; the second is charity created; the third is charity given’ and ‘[c]harity uncreated is God; charity created is our soul in God; charity given is virtue’.³⁵⁰ In this example of charity, Julian expresses God’s being in terms that the self can perceive and enact. A participative logic arises where the practicing of those virtues known to describe God’s being, transforms the senses and by transforming the senses, gives to the self a new manner of existing in the world. What establishes the transformation of the embodied self, is the fact that the practiced virtues are a way of returning God’s loving embrace. When virtues are enacted and thereby display the senses’ orientation to God, the sense-perceptual self embodies and performs the new existence it has in Christ.

To illustrate the logic of perceptual faith at play, one might imagine oneself taking a step back as though Julian’s first-hand experience is observable from a distance. Once the reader takes a step back and becomes the first-person narrator, a distinctive perspective of Julian may be observed. The reader witnesses how Julian’s exchange systematically evokes a change in her countenance. Imagined while being bedridden, Julian’s face, when meeting her maker, gradually transitions from weariness to delight; from existential anxiety to love, light, and life. Expressed in terms of the thematic of transfiguration, Julian’s countenance becomes the countenance of Christ when she inclines her senses to the transformative image of Christ.

The reader next imagines Julian staring into the wound of Christ. What she discovers, is her very self enfolded in Christ where humanity is seated. When Julian stares into the wound of Christ, she discovers her soul. Stated in unambiguous terms, Julian equates the revelation of Christ’s ‘interior’ as the revelation of her very own soul:

And thus I saw full surely that it is redyer to us and more esy to come to [th]e knowyng of god then to know oure owne soule. For oure soule is so depe growndyd in god and / so

³⁵⁰ Julian of Norwich, *Revelations of Divine Love*., 163.

endlessly tresoryd that we may nott come to the knowyng ther of tylle we haue furst knowing of god, which is the maker to whome it is onyd.³⁵¹

The knowledge Julian gains of herself through Christ makes explicit the meaning of the Cross. Divine *caritas* permeates Christ's wound and subsumes the sensory so that it transfigures into the likeness of Christ. In this respect, the Cross acts as an earthly beatific vision. The cross emulates the Trinity and captures the sensory being thereby foreshadowing heavenly beatification. For Julian, transfiguration does not take place in the face of the penitential and violent but rather in the face of God's eternal embrace expressed through love. As a salve to embodied existence, the varying countenances Julian perceives of Christ's suffering, speaks of the gradual transformation of the self in the journey to beatification. She understands each occasion of the Cross as speaking to the embodied self and of Trinitarian intention.

Julian's unconventional way of registering Christ's speech illustrates the fecund possibilities that arise when sense-perceptual self perceives God in its own terms. As has been explored in the Trinitarian iterations of Christ, Julian's perception is grounded in the Word who is both human and divine, and who's belonging to the Trinity brings the sense-perceptual self in union with God. Julian's articulation of the Cross in terms of Christ's wound opens a new grammar, where the wound of Christ becomes the very occasion by which humanity speaks of its participation in God's being.³⁵²

Julian's Cruciform and Self-Involving Speech

Julian's visions provide an entirely new reading of the Cross. Sparked by the unique circumstance in which she writes, the Cross functions as a new aesthetic with which Julian may read her embodiment in relation to the divine. Julian's visions start with the Cross as the absolute

³⁵¹ I have chosen to quote Julian's theological reflection upon Christ's wound in its Old English style because it depicts the centrality of the thematic of oneing in Julian's thinking. Julian of Norwich. *A Book of Showings.*, 571.

³⁵² In her reading of *Revelations of Divine Love*, Frances Beer argues that Julian may have been aware of two theological trajectories propounded by the early church fathers. Of whom, notably, 'the idea that the divine nature included a feminine aspect, and with the use of the maternal metaphor to express the relation between the feminine aspect of the godhead and the soul.'... 'the idea that the divine nature included a feminine aspect, and with the use of the maternal metaphor to express the relation between the feminine aspect of the godhead and the soul.' Julian's integration of such doctrines with her own bodyliness shows, in the second instance, a sensitivity to the multi-textured nature of embodied existence and the need of every individual to conceptualise their own existence in terms of God's being. See Beer, *Women and Mystical Experience.*, 151-3.

expression of God's Love. From the Cross a vision ensues which promotes the restoration of the sense-perceptual self. Such restoration is held in the Word who is Julian's mother since creation; Christ incarnate who is her mother in fleshly nature, and the mother of her new existence. At every stage of Julian's reading of the Cross, the schemata of her life constantly informs the imagery, symbolism, and metaphor Julian uses to understand the meaning of the Cross.

The exchange between self and Christ is mutually transforming. In the first instance, when Julian has her visions, she is reminded of the Christ who meets her in her own flesh. The visceral nature of her visions, the clarity with which Christ's Trinitarian speech is uttered in filial imagery, and the visual depiction of Christ as Servant, as Maker, and as Lover, all point to the fact that the Word who meets Julian meets her in her own bodily terms. Just as Christ meets her in her own terms, Julian likewise registers her existence in terms which can only be founded in Christ's divinity and humanity. Her reading of the Cross is suggestive of a soteriology premised on an ontology of oneing. This restorative model finds expression in the union between Julian and Christ as symbolic of God's comprehensive vision for the created order.

The register of desire is integral to the corporeal grammar of the Cross which arises from a reading of *Revelations of Divine Love*. Desire is the foundation of Julian's aesthetic. The three wounds which she receives arise from her desire to know Christ in her own bodily terms. Christ responds in her visions through his loving embrace embodied on the Cross. Julian's desire is met in the Cross, where grotesque and paradoxical disrupts the order of things. Just as the corporeal grammar of the Cross meets Julian in terms of her own embodied circumstance, the aesthetics of the Cross addresses each sense-perceptual self uniquely.

Julian's reading of the Cross serves as an example of how the reader can meet Christ in terms that are resonant with their own embodied context. Her account is fruitful, and this is key, because Julian's visions illustrates how the self may engage with the Cross sense-perceptually. This does not mean that her grammar of suffering is the focal point, rather, it is a directive for the transformation which is to occur when persons interpret the meaning of the Cross. The value of *Revelations of Divine Love* lies not in its direct application but in its visual depiction of the internal transformation which occurs when the self meets Christ on the Cross. Julian embodies this transfiguration in the ways that her writings provide a logic of the Cross which re-interprets the self and restores the senses to the point where they are at one with God.

The logic of perception in Julian's writings, I have formulated as sense-perceptual failure and faith. Whereas perceptual failure describes the inability of the senses to see itself truly in the divine, perceptual faith describes the attuning of the senses to the divine. The Word and the Spirit are the means through whom failure moves to faith. When the sense-perceptual self finds itself grounded in the Cross, it undergoes a transformation best described as the gradual growing toward God. With each incremental growing-toward God, a new articulation of self and divine finds expression. One sees this transfiguration especially in Julian's feminine speech and embodied imagery for Christ's presence to her. The liberty Julian has to understand the Cross in her uniquely feminine register of perception is one illustrative of an embodied manner of doing theology.

Julian evidences an embodied theology when she translates Christ's expressions into her own words. Her writings establish a script by which persons meet the divine and by which the Word speaks a language closest to her register of perception. The logic of Christ's speech as that which is clothed in the sense-perceptual self's words, is seen in Augustine's writings too. The difference between the two is that Augustine does not assign to Christ the words that He speaks whereas Julian does. Julian understands Christ's meaning and translates it in words that are closest to her theological imagination.

The visceral imagery of the Cross Julian renders fits into her schemata of life. One example is the metaphor of Christ as mother. To be a mother is a register which may have been closest to Julian's own embodied existence. By constructing a register of perception conceptually closest to such experience, Julian renders new ways of articulating Christ's relationship to her. While Julian asked for her wounds as a manner of experiencing Christ's embodied reality in her bodily terms, her desire is suggestive of one who wishes to understand what Christ must have been going through. This is the psychological dimension of Julian's writings, as Glasscoe has suggested. Julian's desire to know is thus a knowledge that seeks to inhabit, to reiterate, and live Christ's experience.

The above dimensions of Julian's reading of the Cross, falls within the category of the performative. Performative speech is a manner of understanding the Cross laden with the aesthetic. On the one hand, it is the articulation of the restoration which the Cross establishes and on the other hand, it is the creative imagining of the embodied implications of such restoration. Performativity describes the moment when the senses actualise the oneing which is the result of the Cross. Destined for union with Christ in the Trinity, the Cross reminds persons of their true

home and *telos*. Unlike soteriologies which emphasises the ontological chasm between God and humanity, Julian's soteriology has the Cross as a countenance of redemption which compels transformation and transfiguration. The Cross compels the movement toward God as that which is closest to the true condition of humanity in Christ. The countenance of Christ on the Cross bespeaks the glorified state of humanity. Once the sensory being comes to know itself in terms of the Cross, it learns to enact what it was made for, union with Christ.

The Cross in *Revelations of Divine Love*, by articulating the various states of relation between persons and God, enacts a transformative corporeal grammar. In the union of human and divine, a graced exchange takes place where persons are restored and transformed in Christ and by the Spirit. With Julian's gazing on the Cross, the very corporeal way in which Christ meets her is suggestive of the corporeal terms in which she finds salvation. Her perception is one which moves from desolation, reorientation, and liberation in Christ. To all those who are to engage with the Cross, a similar logic pertains.

The soteriology of the *Revelations of Divine Love* expresses restored relations in the already embodied and material realm of existence. Living the corporeal grammar of salvation means living exactly as an embodied person whose orientation to the self, other and divine, is grounded in the Word who gives to the flesh a sacramental existence. The senses, in their performative posture, body forth the liberation which the Cross brings. The freedom which the Cross utters, is the freedom to praise, worship and desire God through the very embodied modes of existing in the world. Having the body express the unity which exists between persons and God, is a matter of the Word and the Spirit's active communion with persons. With the simultaneity of self and God, the body becomes dialogically open, constantly gesturing, and signing to its origin.

Chapter 6

Dante and Performative Words

The relationship that the Cross bears to Julian's embodied theology, is the relationship between form and content as the relationship between the body of the Saviour and the liberation of persons in corporeal terms. The *Revelations of Divine Love* expresses, or performs, this very theological truth in the way that its text uses both evocative imagery and emotive language to convey the liberation of self in the face of the divine. Present to the *Revelations of Divine Love* is the literary and performative enactment of the corporeal grammar which the Cross depicts in its viscerally laden expressions. As we transition from a discussion of Julian's somatic piety and the ways that her writings perform the incarnational presence of the Word, we move to a discussion of the ways in which a text, through its genre and gestural potentiality, gives form to the truths that it conveys.

The relationship between form and content, especially as it relates to theological writing, is poignantly performed in the writings of the medieval poet, Dante Alighieri. Contemporary scholarship recovers Dante and especially *The Divine Comedy (Comedy)* for its theological qualities.³⁵³ His *Comedy* is a landscape of bodies, all slowly and gradually moving toward that which moves their being, namely God. Recent critical work by Dante scholars shows, that while

³⁵³ Montemaggi, Vittorio. 2016. *Reading Dante's Commedia as Theology: Divinity Realized in Human Encounter*. Oxford: Oxford University Press., Treherne, Matthew. 2010. 'Liturgical Personhood: Creation, Penitence, and Praise in the Commedia'. In *Dante's Commedia: Theology as Poetry*, edited by Vittorio Montemaggi and Matthew Treherne, 131–60. Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press., Montemaggi, Vittorio, and Matthew Treherne. 2010. 'Introduction: Dante, Poetry, Theology'. In *Dante's Commedia: Theology as Poetry*, edited by Vittorio Montemaggi and Matthew Treherne, 1–13. Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press., Turner, Denys. 2010. 'How to Do Things with Words: Poetry as Sacrament in Dante's Commedia'. In *Dante's Commedia: Theology as Poetry*, edited by Vittorio Montemaggi, 286–307. Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press., Davies, Oliver. 2010. 'Dante's Commedia and the Body of Christ'. In *Dante's Commedia: Theology as Poetry*, edited by Vittorio Montemaggi and Matthew Treherne, 161–79. Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press., Hawkins, Peter S. 2010. 'All Smiles: Poetry and Theology in Dante's Commedia'. In *Dante's Commedia. Theology as Poetry*, edited by Vittorio Montemaggi and Matthew Treherne, 36–59. University of Notre Dame: Notre Dame Press., Took, John. 2006. 'Dante's Incarnationalism: An Essay in Theological Wisdom'. *Italian Studies* 61 (1): 1–17., Nayar, Sheila J. 2014. *Dante's Sacred Poem: Flesh and the Centrality of the Eucharist to the Divine Comedy*. London: Bloomsbury Academic., Took, John. 2004. 'Towards a Life of Dante: Ontological Anxiety and the Salvific Function of the Word'. *Italian Studies* LIX (1): 1–16., Montemaggi, Vittorio. 2016. *Reading Dante's Commedia as Theology: Divinity Realized in Human Encounter*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

his great poem is technically not theology, it is theological throughout. Significant for our purposes is the fact that the *Comedy* is all about bodies – the bodies of those Dante the pilgrim encounters, Dante the author (and by implication our own), and finally the body of Christ in *Paradiso*. His *Commedia*, no less than Julian’s *Showings*, is an essay in Christian anthropology. It is the performance of embodied theology where the body becomes the perceptual register for the presence of the divine. Although the *Comedy* is different in its character, genre, and form from Julian’s writings, its drive to bring the reader in to the dynamics of embodiment and salvation, is the same.

Reading Dante’s *Comedy* means exploring the intimate relationship between the form and content of theological writing as it relates to the incarnation. Throughout *Inferno*, *Purgatorio* and *Paradiso*, one finds bodies in various orders of perception, from grotesque apprehensions, to reconciling figures, to beatific relations. The choice to read Dante thus lies therein that the *Comedy* has theological themes pertinent to its formulations while expressing those terms through the words, gestures, and movements of the bodies in the *Comedy*. When speaking of bodies in Dante’s *Comedy*, one bears in mind that it is a narration of the afterlife. The bodies of the *Comedy* are aerial bodies, spirited beings whose existence marks the same grammar of perception as material bodies in life.³⁵⁴ Aside from Dante the author, vis-à-vis Dante the pilgrim who finds himself in the *Comedy*, all the aerial bodies express themselves in an embodied manner.

Dante wrote the *Comedy* in a complex socio-political context. Florence, the place of Dante’s philosophical, religious and political upbringing, is the very same place that brought him despair. In 1302 he was banished from Florence on charges of corruption. Even though Dante denied the allegations, he was forced into exile for the rest of his life and this shaped his *Commedia*. The imaginative landscapes which the three *cantiche* depict, perpetually draw on Dante’s own experiences of existential desolation, loss and homecoming.³⁵⁵ *Inferno*, for example, depicts in vulgar terms the lust for money and power enacted by the religious and political institutions of the day. Dante’s intention when writing the *Commedia*, however, is not to convey a set of empirically

³⁵⁴ Webb, Heather. 2016. *Dante’s Persons: An Ethics of the Transhuman*. Oxford: Oxford University Press., 17.

³⁵⁵ Took, John. 2004. ‘Towards a Life of Dante: Ontological Anxiety and the Salvific Function of the Word’. *Italian Studies* LIX (1): 1–16., pp. 6-8.

true facts. By poetic orientation and re-narration, Dante the author rather expresses what he observes as being the ‘*la grandezza and la miseria* of the human condition’.³⁵⁶

The centrality of Dante the author’s experiences and its interwoven relationship with what pertains to theology has led certain scholars to investigate the ways in which God and Christ are foregrounded in the *Comedy*.³⁵⁷ More specifically, the question that concerns scholars is how such foregrounding is appropriated theologically. In *Dante’s Commedia: Theology as Poetry*, three interpretative possibilities arise when one reads the *Comedy* in relation to the Word of God.³⁵⁸ Following Vittorio Montemaggi, the possibilities are: First, a liturgical rendering ‘whereby biblical passages and other religious texts are enacted and encountered through meaningful performance’.³⁵⁹ Second, an embodied rendering where themes that pertain to the incarnation, transfiguration and resurrection are parsed in terms of the lived experiences of persons. The final rendering lies in the ‘varied theological implications of the interpretive, ethical, and affective dynamic of the reader’s relationship to the poem’.³⁶⁰

This Chapter falls within the existent theological framework outlined by Vittorio Montemaggi insofar as it attends to the ways in which the body in the *Comedy* narrates the relationship between self and o/Other. The second category with its Christological emphasis, pertains especially to this chapter as the Word of God incarnate becomes the proverbial landscape upon which the various states of relation in the *Comedy* may be understood. The Christological reading of the *Comedy* further investigates whether there is an implicit discourse on the body in

³⁵⁶ Collins, James J. *Dante: Layman, Prophet, Mystic*. New York: Alba House, 1989., 4.

³⁵⁷ A theological reading attends to the ways in which themes pertaining to the divine present themselves in the *Comedy*. Examples of scholars working at the said intersection are Robin Kirkpatrick with his translation of the *Inferno, Purgatoria and Paradiso* (2007), Vittorio Montemaggi’s *Reading Dante’s Commedia as Theology: Divinity Realized in Human Encounter* (2016) and Heather Webb’s *Dante’s Persons: An Ethics of the Transhuman* (2016). John Took’s series of contributions ‘Dante’s Incarnationalism: An Essay in Theological Wisdom’ (2006), ‘Towards a Life of Dante: Ontological Anxiety and the Salvific Function of the Word’ (2004) and, ‘Dante, Augustine and the Drama of Salvation’ (1993), furthermore, serves as catalyst for the embodied reading of the *Comedy* in this chapter.

³⁵⁸ Montemaggi, Vittorio, and Matthew Treherne. 2010. ‘Introduction: Dante, Poetry, Theology’. In *Dante’s Commedia: Theology as Poetry*, edited by Vittorio Montemaggi and Matthew Treherne, 1–13. Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press., 3-4.

³⁵⁹ Montemaggi and Treherne, ‘Introduction’, 3-4

³⁶⁰ Montemaggi and Treherne, ‘Introduction’, 3-4.

Dante the pilgrim's sojourning, and whether one might read the *Comedy* and find therein a pictorial poetics of *Infernal*, *Purgatorial*, and *Paradisal* relations.

Regarding the life of Christ and the simultaneous affirmation of his humanity and divinity, his post-ascension body presents itself for engagement. As Christ now exists in glory alongside God, his personhood epitomises the perfection of relations between self and God, as well as visually representing the future glory to which persons are called. It is Christ's ascended body now seated in glory that strikes the scholar, Oliver Davies, as a motif within the *Comedy*.³⁶¹ More than being a motif, Davies finds echoes of Paul's Damascus road experience in the glorified Christ who is presented as a myriad of persons in the final cantos of *Paradiso*.³⁶² Paul is significant to the *Comedy* because his experience simultaneously speaks of a Christ who is no longer physically present in the sense of Peter's touching of Christ's wounds, but whose presence to Paul is still embodied insofar as Christ's divinity transformed Paul's humanity.³⁶³

The presence of the divine to the body in Paul's theology, one also finds in the role that the smile, as gesture and expression of aerial bodies, play in the *Comedy*.³⁶⁴ The smile is a performative exchange where the invisible is captured in the embodied.³⁶⁵ The logic behind the smile is that it utters that which is ineffable through its embodied nature, visually enacting the poetics of the *Comedy*. The *Comedy* as poetry in its narrational style communicates its content through the symbolics present to its text. The words of the *Comedy* accordingly enact that of which it speaks.³⁶⁶

³⁶¹ Davies, Oliver. 2010. 'Dante's *Commedia* and the Body of Christ'. In *Dante's Commedia: Theology as Poetry*, edited by Vittorio Montemaggi and Matthew Treherne, 161–79. Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press., 175-6.

³⁶² Davies, 'Dante's *Commedia* and the Body of Christ'., 175-6

³⁶³ Davies, 'Dante's *Commedia* and the Body of Christ'., 175-6

³⁶⁴ Turner, Denys. 2010. 'How to Do Things with Words: Poetry as Sacrament in Dante's *Commedia*'. In *Dante's Commedia: Theology as Poetry*, edited by Vittorio Montemaggi, 286–307. Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press., 286 ff.

³⁶⁵ Turner, 'How to Do Things with Words'., 175-6.

³⁶⁶ Denys Turner explains, 'The language of the *Commedia*, precisely as poetic, creates and transforms the realities of interaction of which it speaks – it enacts that of which it speaks. And the character of the sign, which somehow makes to be that which it discloses, is, I argue, "quasi-sacramental" - for, as Thomas Aquinas says, following a tradition through Hugh of St. Victor back to Augustine, it is in the nature of a sacrament that it "efficit quod figurat," it "effects what it signifies"'. Turner, 'How to do things with Words'., 287.

The stylistic play between signified and effected speaks of the relationship which exists between the content and form of theological writing. When reading the *Comedy*, equal attention should be paid to that which is said and to how it is said.³⁶⁷ With the *Comedy's* equally ordered stanzas, its repetitions of threes, its thirty-three cantos (with the exception of *Inferno*), its rhythmic notations and play on symbols, the *Comedy* beautifully illustrates what Dante the author seeks to convey in his poetry.³⁶⁸ Writing not as a Dante specialist, but as one who has come to depend on the translations of others, I find Robin Kirkpatrick's translation of the *Comedy* valuable because it captures the relationship of content and form exceptionally well. Kirkpatrick's translation communicates the expression of beauty present to the *Commedia* and captures the phenomenality of Dante the author's text in a register which places equal emphasis on the sensorial, the gestural, and the embodied.

Postures of the *Comedy*

The words of the poet are reflexive, for without its characteristic intentionality, dialectical openness, and expressivity, it will fail to address its reader in the way it does. The movement between the words of the text and the thoughts of the reader, between things signed and things enacted, brings more voices into conversation. A reading of Denys Turner, Oliver Davies, and Vittorio Montemaggi in *Dante's Commedia: Theology as Poetry* shows that the body is central to the *Comedy*.

A case in point is that of Ugolino whose account in the *Inferno* can be read parallel with the Cross. Ugolino's sons perform in word and deed the silence that followed the Cross. The reader finds her- or himself in the middle, participating in Ugolino's account. When a gesture embodies the theological tenor of a text, it enacts what it signifies, rendering both speech and text performative and quasi-sacramental. With such performativity, readers partake of the truth concerning the Cross of which Dante the author speaks. In Ugolino's instance, his sons' silence and the absence of right relations materially foregrounds the Cross. Here, Ugolino represents not only human others, but also the divine other. Ugolino's account expresses the role that bodies play in parsing the relative absence or presence of relations between self and other, and self and God.

³⁶⁷ Montemaggi, Vittorio. *Reading Dante's Commedia as Theology: Divinity Realized in Human Encounter*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016., 46.

³⁶⁸ Montemaggi, *Reading Dante's Commedia as Theology.*, 46.

In the *Comedy*, the poet's sojourning evokes three different narratival bodies. In *Inferno*, bodies visibly show the extent to which sins committed on earth were body or life negating. Sins committed against the flesh, for example, are actions which refuse the body as that which bears the likeness of God. This refusal of the body as the means by which to know the divine, is also the refusal of a God who is revealed in the body of Christ. If *Infernal* bodies showcase the dual refusal, bodies in *Purgatorio* depict a different state of relation, they gesture to the repairing of relations. Finally, there are those persons Dante the pilgrim meets in *Paradiso* whose bodies express beatific relations through their eyes, their smiles, and the light which shows forth from them.³⁶⁹ With the presences of so many persons and bodies, the *Comedy's* collective address narrates the state of relations between text, reader, and author, through the physicality of embodied existence.

To focus on the body and its physicality as potential communicative key, means taking into account those actions which also constitute embodied engagements.³⁷⁰ Because humans continuously stand in relation to another and can perceive such relationality through their bodies, speech is one posture of the body's engagement with the world.³⁷¹ Bodies as they present themselves are speech creating entities.³⁷² If speech is a manner of a person's standing in relation

³⁶⁹ Matthew Treherne elaborates on this dialectic when he writes: 'The smile of the universe can be related to this union with God in two ways. First, the smile is frequently associated in *Paradiso* with an outpouring of light. Aquinas speaks of "[q]uell' altro fiammeggiare," which "esce del riso / di Grazian" (*Par.* 10.103-4) [The next flame blazes out from Gratian's smile]; the red light of the planet Mars is an "affocato riso" (14.86) [flares of a smile]; in Beatrice's eyes "ardeva un riso" (15.34) [a smile was burning]. To smile, in *Paradiso*, is to reflect light. The smile of the universe is therefore a vision of the universe reflecting God's light/glory back to him in that act of praise. This act of praise is also, however, presented as similar to God's own act of smiling.' Treherne, Matthew. 2010. 'Liturgical Personhood: Creation, Penitence, and Praise in the *Commedia*'. In *Dante's Commedia: Theology as Poetry*, edited by Vittorio Montemaggi and Matthew Treherne, 131-60. Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press., 156.

³⁷⁰ Turner, 'How to Do Things with Words', 291.

³⁷¹ Here, I echo Vittorio Montemaggi when he says: 'The significance of all this for our purposes lies in the fact that for Dante, to be human is not only to be an embodied being endowed with intellect and capable of loving, but also to be a linguistic being: humans are one because of the other... Words are both physical and rational signs, and in this they are emblematic of the ways in which, given their embodiedness, human beings communicate.' See Montemaggi, Vittorio. 2005. "'Nulla Vedere E Amor Mi Costrinse': On Reading Dante's "*Commedia*" as a Theological Poem'. Cambridge: Cambridge University., 68.

³⁷² 'But if actions speak, then verbal utterances are actions too, and so "utter" as actions and just as words uttered. And these conjunctions of performative utterance and uttering performance allow for the analysis of complex interactions between them within speech-act themselves, insofar as we may distinguish within speech-acts between what is said *in* saying the words, and *the meaning that*

to another, then as Oliver Davies shows, speech in the *Commedia* is both the communication and instantiation of the social contexts in which persons stand.³⁷³ In a reading of the *Commedia* where bodies visually depict sins committed on earth and the implicit acceptance or negation of the bodily order of engagement with the world, then speech is the ‘audible’ representation thereof. Speech, accordingly, points to that which is akin and different to itself. In the *Comedy*, speech enacts the state of relations between persons.³⁷⁴ It signs in a very material way to the relational register between Dante the pilgrim and the persons whom he encounters.

In *Inferno*, canto 33, Dante the pilgrim encounters Ugolino and his four sons who by the decree of the archbishop of the time, were cast into the Hunger tower of Pisa where they were left to starve to death.³⁷⁵ Over time, Ugolino’s sons begin to cry out to him, but he falls silent, he gives no answer to his sons’ cries. The account is one of how sons cry out to their father, and how a father’s silence narrates their eventual demise. In an almost deafening way, Ugolino’s absence of speech materially enacts the breakdown of relations between father and sons.³⁷⁶ Silence here enacts that which is manifest but invisible (the absence of right relations) thus simultaneously effecting that to which it gestures.³⁷⁷ The logic of signing and effecting, does not pertain to speech alone, it also pertains to bodies from which speech ushers.³⁷⁸

the action of saying them bears. This is just as true of gestures as it is of verbal speech.’ See Turner, ‘How to do things with Words’, 290-1.

³⁷³ Davies, ‘Dante’s *Commedia* and the Body of Christ’, 165.

³⁷⁴ Davies, ‘Dante’s *Commedia* and the Body of Christ’, 166-7.

³⁷⁵ See Robin Kirkpatrick’s notes: Alighieri, Dante. 2007. *Inferno*. Edited and translated by Robin Kirkpatrick. London: Penguin Group., 442.

³⁷⁶ ‘What the *Inferno* teaches us’ notes Davies, is that ‘the breakdown of language thus signals the collapse of community, leaving only isolated and fractured instances of individual subjectivity’. See Davies, ‘Dante’s *Commedia* and the Body of Christ’, 167.

³⁷⁷ Turner, ‘How to do things with Words’, 301.

³⁷⁸ The dialectic of effecting that which is signified, does not pertain to speech or the absence of speech alone, it also pertains to the bodies from which speech ushers. Such is the case with something as simple as a smile. The smile, current research in Dante studies shows, plays a significant role in that it gestures to something other than itself. Davies explains, ‘The flash of the eyes and the smile are bodily gesture, and thus also maintain the particularity of human identity at the very moment when the body attains its highest semiotic and distinctively nonverbal – which is to say, nondiscursive or “angelic” - expression, itself signifying the light that fills the celestial cosmos and is “l’amor che move il sole e l’altre stelle” (*Par.* 33.145) [the love which moves the sun and the other starts]’. See Davies, ‘Dante’s *Commedia* and the Body of Christ’, 172.

In parallel with this silence which signals the absence of relations, gestures have the potential of speaking of two realities simultaneously: of the state of relations between persons, and of the condition of possibility of such relations. The latter introduces a further theological dimension to a reading of the *Commedia* in terms of the body and its articulation in *Inferno*, *Purgatorio* and *Paradiso*.³⁷⁹ As bodily gestures are made to communicate the ineffable, one's focus also turns to the condition of their possibility. Returning to the example of Ugolino whose sons cry out to him and he falls silent, Vittorio Montemaggi finds a Christological foregrounding in the account. The cry of the sons parallel Christ derelict on the Cross, and the final silence of the sons, echo the silence which follows the death of Christ. Here, the logic of effecting that which is signed, returns.

Ugolino's sons' silence makes manifest the silence which was present to Christ on the Cross, and which now returns to us in the reading of the account. The intent of the theological reading of the *Comedy*, notes Montemaggi, is not to convey any accurate description, but rather:

...one should speak about a text embodying an understanding of theology in which the aim is to invite others to realize that appreciation of truth rests on one's ability to recognize that one's understanding of truth is defined and constantly redefined by one's readiness to respond in love to the will and needs of another. For, as have seen, from a Dantean perspective, human beings may partake in truth itself by shaping their words and deeds according to the dynamics of the Incarnation and Crucifixion of the Word.³⁸⁰

The incarnation enacts the relation that is to be enjoyed between self and God in embodied terms. Christ's assumption of the materiality of existence establishes the flesh as the means by which persons may truly come to know God.

In view of a Christological foregrounding of the bodies in the *Comedy*, Christ's body mitigates any abstraction of human in relation to the divine. The incarnation constantly holds the body's speaking in Christ's divine economy. As Denys Turner shows, '[t]he Word's being made flesh must be the supreme case and archetype of the poetic act itself, of the utterance that

³⁷⁹ '...the relationship between each person and the ground of her or his being might be defined not only in terms of a particular understanding of hylomorphism, but also by an understanding of how the embodied nature of human existence may be at one with the Trinitarian unfolding of divine being and with God's own taking human form. Montemaggi, 'Nulla Vedere', 49-50.

³⁸⁰ Montemaggi, 'Nulla Vedere', 87.

transforms, of the carnality that speaks God, “effecting what it signifies”³⁸¹ Premised on the relation between self and incarnate Word, words in the *Comedy* can enact, gesture and perform past, present and future.

Dante’s *Comedy* presents three different states of relation and three distinctive bodies, the *Infernal*, *Purgatorial* and *Paradisal* bodies. If heavenly bodies depict the perfection of relations between self, other and God, then the bodies of purgatory and hell denote the relative loss of relations amongst persons and the divine. This does not mean that the Word is absent to the bodies of *Inferno*, but that their bodies are incapable of perceiving the divine due to their sense-perceptual failures, and resulting failed relation between self, created other and divine. Bodies are corollaries of relation, the extent to which they are depicted as human or bestial, is the extent to which their actions on earth ravaged relations.

Infernal Bodies, Disordered Love

With the opening lines, ‘[a]t one point midway on our path in life, I came around and found myself now searching through a dark wood, the right way blurred and lost’ (*Inferno*, I. 1-3),³⁸² Dante the author depicts *Inferno* as the epitome of existential anxiety. In a succession of grotesque encounters, *Inferno* visually illustrates how sins committed on earth ravaged relations, thus failing in the Dominical command to love God, self and neighbour. These persons failed, while alive, to act in accordance with the imperative to love. *Inferno* shows in various states how persons either accepted or rejected the fact that embodied existence in all its facets is ordered by love, whether it be the failure to love the self in the case of those who have taken their lives, the failure to adore God in the case of those who blasphemed the goodness of creation or those who failed to love their neighbours by rejecting them.

Heather Webb suggests that the difference between the persons the *Comedy* depicts lies in the extent to which they can recognise that their personhood ‘cannot be taken away; it can only be renounced’.³⁸³ She accordingly reads *persona* in the *Inferno* as that which designates the irrevocable loss of something.³⁸⁴ In the realm of the discordant and grotesque, Dante the pilgrim

³⁸¹ Turner, ‘How to do things with Words’, 304.

³⁸² Kirkpatrick, *Inferno.*, 2.

³⁸³ Webb, *Dante’s Persons.*, 10.

³⁸⁴ Webb, *Dante’s Persons.*, 3.

stands in stark contrast to the rest of the persons of *Inferno*; so Charon's address of Dante shows when he calls, '[a]nd you there! You! Yes, you, the living soul! Get right away from this gang! These are dead' (*Inferno*, III. 88-89).

The logic of relationality finds expression in *Inferno* III. 103-105 when Dante the pilgrim describes those who are entering Hell as, '[t]hey raged, blaspheming God and their own kin, the human race, the place and time, the seed from which they'd sprung, the day that they'd been born'. Heather Webb suggests that the dead rage because they have made 'the double error' of 'first identifying their *persona* solely with their bodies, and, second, believing that those bodies can be irrevocably lost'.³⁸⁵ One concludes that, despite all attempts at estrangement, resurrection is as a part of living as it is of dying.

A correlation exists between the extent to which love ordered persons while alive, and the shape their bodies take in the afterlife. In *Inferno*, where bodies are disformed and grotesque, these persons illustrate the absence of right relations between persons, whether it be between self, other, and God. This depiction forms the spine of the *Comedy*. Illustratively, Dante the author depicts flesh as that which rots, bleeds, festers, peels and most importantly visibly expresses the inward loss and turmoil infernal bodies experience. The body, therefore, not only acts as the expression of desolation, it also acts as the medium through which Dante author and pilgrim narrates the loss of divinely ordered creation.

One might recall the example of Ugolino who is first introduced to the reader in Canto XXXII where he raises his head from the skull which he gnaws on. In Canto XXXIII. 76-8, Dante the pilgrim recalls, 'His words were done. Now, eyes askew, he grabbed once more that miserable skull – his teeth, like any dog's teeth, strong against the bone'. Count Ugolino's story is one of desolation and desperation. Ugolino recalls the moment when he realises his imminent death and the death of his sons:

Listening, I heard the door below locked shut,
Then nailed in place against that dreadful tower.
I looked in their dear faces, spoke no word.
I did not weep. Inward, I turned to stone.
They wept. And then my boy Anselmo spoke:

³⁸⁵ Webb, *Dante's Persons.*, 10.

‘What are you staring at? Father, what’s wrong?’³⁸⁶

The transitions at play in Ugolino’s description are revealing. In the first instance, when Ugolino realises the fate of his sons, instead of turning words into consolations, he refuses speech. In the second instance, instead of inclining his heart to his sons who are dying, he hardens himself. Ugolino’s actions evoke a regression in his paternity and his humanity.

Dante author casts Ugolino’s predicament in bestial terms when Ugolino says, ‘[o]ut of sheer grief, I gnawed on both my hands’ (*Inferno*, XXXIII. 58). His children, misinterpreting his gesture, presume that he is hungry and out of care and affection respond ‘[f]ather, for us the pain would be far less if you would chose to eat us. You, having dressed us in this wretched flesh, ought now to strip it off’ (*Inferno*, XXXIII. 61-3). In the verses that follow, Ugolino does not eat his children. Instead, he listens to their cries but refuses to respond to their existence. Ugolino’s response only comes on the 8th day when he, out of his own need, allows himself to ‘now blind, feel over them, calling on each, now all were dead’ (*Inferno*, XXXIII. 73-4).

Eucharistic symbolism reverberates in Ugolino’s account when interpreted theologically. When Ugolino’s sons cry out to him, their cry echoes Christ’s cry of dereliction on the Cross (*Inferno*, XXXIII. 69). In contrast to Ugolino’s actions which effected estrangement, Christ’s death on the Cross brought restoration to self and other. Here Christ’s body is the Passover body which reconciles persons with God. Unlike Christ, Ugolino’s exchange with his sons is not reconciliatory. He commits a grotesque offense against his own body when he consumes his sons’ flesh. Ugolino eucharistically feeds on his sons, a gesture which mimics the Eucharistic but fails in that it is an illustration of disordered love.

Ugolino’s account serves as an illustration of the centrality of the body to the expression of states of relation. The example of Ugolino visually depicts how the *Comedy* expresses a relational logic. Bodies never exist for themselves; they exist in order to show and express the love which orders their being. When persons misapprehend the command to love self, neighbour and God, their bodies in *Inferno* depict such disordering in grotesque ways. As such, bodies are the visual representation of the goodness of the created order, of which *Inferno* expresses the denial or refusal thereof.

³⁸⁶ Alighieri, *Inferno*. XXXIII. 46-51.

Purgatorial Bodies, Incarnational Gestures

Just as metamorphoses visually communicate the states of relations between persons in *Inferno*, *Purgatorio* has its own visual vocabulary. Bodies in *Purgatorio*, my reading suggests, make visible through gesture the state of relations between self and other. The theme of failed embraces is prominent in *Purgatory*, as persons first seek to embrace Dante the pilgrim but fail, and then acknowledge his presence in the face of their own material absences. This is because the bodies of *Purgatory* are aerial bodies and Dante the pilgrim's is not. Whereas bodies in *Inferno* visually illustrate the refusal of the love which orders existence, bodies in *Purgatorio* illustrate the reparation of relations.

As early as Canto II, the desire for restored relations between self and other is depicted. 'And one drew forward now', Dante the pilgrim recalls, 'to take me in his arms with such great warmth it moved me, so I did the same to him' (*Purgatorio*, II. 76-8). But a failure ensues, '[a]h shadows, empty save in how they look! Three times I locked my hands behind his back. As many times I came back to my breast' (*Purgatorio*, II. 79-81). Dante the pilgrim wishes to reciprocate Casello's embrace but because the bodies in *Purgatory* are aerial, his arms return to him void. The failed embrace signals a key theme in *Purgatory*, persons will attempt to reconcile themselves to Dante the pilgrim, others and the divine. Here Dante the pilgrim's body is the prototypical body. It gestures, perceives, signs and speaks, all with the purpose of incarnating a certain truth: that the journey to participation in the divine, requires the acknowledgement of God as Maker and the restoration of the *Imago Dei* through an embodied response to God and others.

The primary means by which the restoration of relations will be illustrated is through the performance of gestures. Virgil, at the sight of the angel who comes to inaugurate those arriving at the shore of purgatory, for example, instructs Dante the pilgrim, '[f]old your hands in prayer' (*Purgatorio*, II. 29). 'Then, over them, he [the angel] made the holy Cross, at which they flung themselves upon the shore' (*Purgatorio*, II. 49-50). Dante the pilgrim and the angel both gesture in their respective ways, Dante places his hands in the iconic mode of prayer, while the angel makes the sign of the Cross over the purgatorial souls. This invocation of the Cross runs throughout *Purgatory*. Such is the case with Manfred (*Purgatorio*, III.) and Buonconte da Montefeltro (*Purgatorio*, V.) who, in their respective ways, either call upon Mary or invoke the Cross. In both instances, gesture becomes the mode of expressing the dynamic of salvation as the restoration of love between self and God. Even though the reconciliation which they seek will only be perfected

in *Paradiso*, where relations are eternally ordered according to the Love which moves every being, purgatorial bodies incarnate the truth of their existence while they await this transformation.

Manfred invokes the Cross by way of his body³⁸⁷ in *Purgatorio* III. 110 when he perceives Christ's wound, "[l]ook!" he said, and pointed out to a wound high on his chest".³⁸⁸ He continues, "I, broken in my person, had received two mortal wounds and, weeping, gave myself to Him who, freely, cares to pardon us..." (*Purgatorio*, III. 118-20). Echoing Jesus as he pointed out his wounds to doubting Thomas, Manfred invokes Dante the pilgrim's gaze and beckons it toward his wound. The purpose is to show that Manfred, in his state of desolation, called to God and was heard. Recollecting the failed embrace between Casella and Dante in *Purgatorio* II. 79-81, Manfred's imagery of God's embrace presents a stark contrast: "[m]y sins and crimes were horrible to hear. God, though, unendingly is good. His arms enfold and grasp all those who turn to Him" (*Purgatorio*, III. 121-3).

The symbolism of the embrace between Casella and Dante the pilgrim lies in that Casella's gesture signs to his desire to have his relations restored. This restoration echoes the restoration which Manfred and Buonconte experience when they invoke God's love and mercy by recalling the Cross of Christ. God's gesture is one of forgiveness and reconciliation visually performed through the register of an embrace. Here the reconciliation of relations between self and other is also the reconciliation between self and God depicted in embodied form. Casella's embrace, in its hyper-personified form, makes a direct correlation between his body with its redemption-invoking gestures and God's body through the incarnation. The body, with all its imperfections and impurities, is the very same body which the Maker invites into His company. Kirkpatrick affirms when he writes, "[h]ere, as throughout the *Purgatorio*...the presence of Dante in the other world is emblematic of the salvation that is offered to all human beings through the Resurrection".³⁸⁹ Manfred's invocation of God's embrace avails a corporeal speech which, by mimicking or performing imagery resonant with the life of Christ, expresses the restoration of relations.

³⁸⁷ 'Manfred (c. 1232-66) was not only the illegitimate son of the Emperor Frederick II (1194-1250) – whom the thirteenth-century Church frequently referred to as the Anti-Christ – but was himself excommunicated on three separate occasions...' writes Kirkpatrick. See Alighieri, Dante. 2007. *Purgatorio*. Edited and translated by Robin Kirkpatrick. Penguin Classics. London: Penguin Group., 332.

³⁸⁸ (*Purgatorio*, III. 109-12).

³⁸⁹ Kirkpatrick, *Purgatorio*., 344.

Depicted as the moment when bodies respond to their Maker through gesture, Dante the pilgrim's encounter with Manfred and Buonconte signals another truth of the purgatorial flesh: that the *telos* of humanity is to be in eternal communion with God. Two cantos later, this truth is rendered in *Purgatorio* V. 85-129 when Buonconte describes how fatally wounded he is and how he drags himself to a river to die. Moments before he dies, Buonconte utters Mary's name (*Purgatorio*, V. 101) and so is prised from the depths of hell. Exasperated at how such a small gesture can invoke the grace of God, Satan demands, 'You'd prise him from me for one little tear, and carry off his everlasting part?' (*Purgatorio*, V. 106-7).

Buonconte's monologue concludes with a victorious gesture of life over death where his arms are crossed one over the other; making the sign of the Cross. The invocation of the Cross of Christ parallels with Manfred's invocation of imagery of the resurrection body and serves to affirm that '[t]he body that suffers violence is also the body that is redeemed and resurrected by association with the resurrection of Christ after his suffering on the Cross'.³⁹⁰ Manfred and Buonconte illustrate an incarnational logic where gestures manifest the possibility of being reconciled to God by invoking the Cross. Sheila Nayar brings the point home when she writes:

Dante presents us, in fact, with a veritable constellation of allusion that orbit around Christ's dual nature on earth: as human *and* divine son (and Son), as flesh *and* Flesh; or, if we prefer, as two "ontological extremes represented by the Trinity and by the physical body".³⁹¹

Manfred and Buonconte not only gesture to Christ's work in bringing about a reconciliation between God and self, they also performatively re-enact the dynamics of salvation – the human responsiveness to the love of God and God's eternal embrace. In their gesturality, Manfred and Buonconte's bodies sign to Christ's reconciliatory love and the transformation of the self.

Manfred and Buonconte's accounts represent different instances of personhood in the *Comedy*. In the first instance, writes Heather Webb, *persona* can be considered as being 'the nexus of particularity that resides in the union of the body with the soul, or in the way in which the soul

³⁹⁰ Kirkpatrick, *Purgatorio*, 343.

³⁹¹ Nayar, 2014. *Dante's Sacred Poem*, pp. 100. Nayar's quotation of Kirkpatrick may be found in: Kirkpatrick, Robin. 'Canto III: The Sheepfold of the Excommunicates'. In *Lectura Dante: Purgatorio*, edited by Allen Mandelbaum, Anthony Oldcorn, and Charles Ross, 21–38. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008., 30.

animates the body'.³⁹² In the second instance, Webb continues, *persona* can also serve to define the communion between the Trinity. In doing so, it acts as analogue for Christ who, in his dual nature, subsumes both humanity and the divine.³⁹³ The analogous reading of relationality brings to the fore a third dimension of Dante's purgatorial flesh, the represented flesh.³⁹⁴ In this instance, Dante the pilgrim's body offsets by way of poetic narration that which is as yet not revealed in the *Inferno*, and that which is awaited and consummated in *Paradiso*. What Dante the pilgrim embodies, is that salvation is not abstracted from sensory perceptions and gestures. To the contrary, salvation requires the perceptive body to respond to God's eternal goodness.

In canto XX the relation of human and divine finds expression in the words of Statius' (c. 45 – c. 96) when he describes the generation of a foetus in terms of God's constituting presence in the life of a person. The reader inadvertently hears of Statius when a celestial earthquake interrupts Dante and Virgil's conversation (*Purgatorio* XX. 127-141). Each earthquake is accompanied by the exclamation, '*Gloria in excelsis Deo!*' (a cross-reference to the song of the angels at Jesus' birth in Luke 8:20),³⁹⁵ which brings into relief Christ's birth, the incarnation of the Son in whom and through whom persons will be transformed.³⁹⁶ Each earthquake signals the transition of a body from *Purgatory* to *Paradiso*, in this instance, it is Statius who transitions.

Statius' presence on the way with Dante the pilgrim is foregrounded by an existential thirst which Dante experiences. Like the Samaritan woman at the well (*Purgatorio*, XXI. 1-3), Dante likens his thirst to that which Christ quenched in the woman. In answer to Dante's thirst, Statius appears in a quasi-messianic way, as Christ did to the disciples, post-resurrection. What he continues to do, is to explicate the relationship between the heavens and purgatory. The heavens have the unmoved mover as its principle. *Purgatory* can only be moved by the consent of the heavens and, as will be learnt, the conjoining of the intellective will with God's will. Eager to understand what causes the unchangeable purgatorial landscape to change, Virgil fittingly gestures that Statius should speak:

In asking this, he [Virgil] pierced the needle's eye
of all I longed to know. And so my thirst,

³⁹² Webb, *Dante's Persons*, 6.

³⁹³ Webb, *Dante's Persons*, 9.

³⁹⁴ Nayar, *Dante's Sacred Poem*, 113.

³⁹⁵ Kirkpatrick, *Purgatorio.*, 418.

³⁹⁶ Kirkpatrick, *Purgatorio.*, 417.

through hope alone, became less keen in me.
 ‘There’s nothing that this mountain’s holy law
 consents to,’ so the other now began,
 ‘that’s lacking order or irregular.
 This place is free from every kind of change.
 Only what Heaven, of itself, receives
 Can act here as a cause, and nothing else.
 ...
 Tremors strike here when any soul feels pure
 and rises, newly cleansed, to start its climb.
 And that cry follows as the soul ascends.
 The will alone gives proof of purity
 when, wholly free to change its sacred place,
 it aids and sweeps the soul up, willing well.³⁹⁷

Stattius’ response is twofold, that God is the one who destines each will to return to Godself and that each will must acknowledge within themselves the desire to ascent to God. The conjoining of these establishes beatification.

Before Dante and Stattius enter *Paradiso*, they, together with Virgil, encounter Dante’s friend, Forese Donati who suffers from emaciation.³⁹⁸ The question which next concerns Dante the pilgrim, is why purgatorial flesh can experience emaciation. He asks in Canto XXV. 20-1, ‘[w]here there’s no need for nourishment...how can it be that people get so thin?’³⁹⁹ The question is put so simply and yet, Stattius’ resulting monologue delves into the deep mysteries of generation, creation and the inspiration of the intellectual will. In Canto XXV, Stattius makes an extensive

³⁹⁷ *Purgatorio*, XXI. 37-45, 58-63. Kirkpatrick, *Purgatorio*., 197-9.

³⁹⁸ Stattius continues to play a prominent role in *Purgatorio* XXI-XXV. In Canto XXI, Stattius shows how the desire to know and belong is left unsatisfied when in purgatorial flesh. In Canto XXII, Stattius is revealed as the one who will continue with Dante to the Earthly Paradise. In Canto XXIII, Stattius and Virgil accompany Dante as he meets his friend Forese Donati and in Canto XXIV, Stattius gives answer to Dante’s inquiring after the possibility of emaciation in a purgatorial flesh. In Canto XV, Stattius continues with a full-fledged theological rendering of the formation of the human foetus finally depicting him as the theologian on the way.

³⁹⁹ Kirkpatrick, *Purgatorio*, 229.

argument on the origin of the human foetus. With this monologue, he provides a theological account for the origin of humanity by drawing on God's creation.

The development of the human foetus, Statius explains in three phases: generation (*Purgatorio*, XXV. 37-60), the creation of the intellectual soul (*Purgatorio*, XXV. 61-76), and finally how the soul animates the body and the body, in turn, personifies the soul (*Purgatorio*, XXV. 79-108).⁴⁰⁰ Behind all three phases, but most prominently the first and the second, is the uniquely human feature of being constituted both by the workings of nature through biological generation, and the workings of the Maker in the impartation of the intellectual soul.⁴⁰¹ In *Purgatorio* XXV Statius thus discusses two bodies, one body which is given to humanity at birth but which exists because of God who breaths His Spirit into every creature, and one that after death no longer exists corporeally but whose aerial body permits it to experience sense-perceptions.⁴⁰² Heather Webb similarly understands that '[t]he aerial body is a constitutive mechanism for our continued human personhood after death, just as the embryonic body and infused soul are constitutive of our humanity at birth'.⁴⁰³ The twofold generation of persons is suggestive because it places persons central to the created and divine.⁴⁰⁴

It is instructive that Dante the author describes bodies with their smells and profanities as the register by which persons grow toward God. The inclusion is significant for the place that Dante the author gives to the body and its ascent. The perfection of the *Imago Dei* does not translate to the loss of the body but rather its absolute affirmation. The body with its gestures and signs are transformed through love. This transformation performs in bodily terms how purgatorial bodies are transforming bodies, ever growing toward the Love that orders their being. Purgatorial bodies thus register through their sense-perceptions the various ways in which a person is assimilated to God.

Paradisal Flesh: Beatific Relations

⁴⁰⁰ Kirkpatrick, *Purgatorio*, 446.

⁴⁰¹ Kirkpatrick, *Purgatorio*, 450.

⁴⁰² Webb, *Dante's Persons*, 17, 30.

⁴⁰³ Webb, *Dante's Persons*, 17.

⁴⁰⁴ Montemaggi, "Nulla Vedere E Amor Mi Costrinse" ., 50.

Bodies in the *Comedy* are aerial bodies, a literary and theological fiction which, is ‘a constitutive mechanism for our continued human personhood after death’.⁴⁰⁵ Dante the author’s construction of the aerial body enables a person ‘to receive sensation and express their feelings’ and can respond ‘to the longings and other passions affecting the soul’.⁴⁰⁶ While the bodies in the *cantiche* await their resurrection in Christ, each *cantica* depicts these bodies in different states of being. In *Inferno*, bodies are distorted in their depictions, illustrating the refusal and rejection of the Love which orders their being. In *Purgatorio*, bodies gesture and sign to a future reconciliation between self and other and, in *Paradiso*, Love will finally perfect communion by transforming persons into responsive and participatory selves. The possibility of all three *cantiche* to describe a singular type of body is premised on the fact that these fictive aerial bodies enable ‘gestural, postural and affective relation’.⁴⁰⁷

In *Paradiso*, Dante the pilgrim meets a myriad of heavenly beings. The poet’s body and the aerial bodies are not mutually exclusive, to the contrary, each serve to juxtapose the other and thereby produce various modes of being in communion:

Now, Dante is able to contemplate the saints, who for him are not conventionally pious figments of the religious imagination, but nameable individuals whose presence in history, as now in the Empyrean, is itself sacramental in bearing the weight and light of divine reality. Like Beatrice, the saints are mirrors of God’s creative energy.⁴⁰⁸

Those individuals who exist eternally because of God’s sustaining Love, depict the splendour of God in the Empyrean.

In *Paradiso* XXX. 103-29, when Dante the pilgrim enters the Empyrean, he sees the saints who have gone before him displayed: ‘[a]bove that light, and standing round, I saw a thousand tiers or more as mirrorings of those of ours who’ve now returned up there’ (*Paradiso*, III. 112-4). Dante the author captures the imagery when he writes, ‘[i]nto the gold of that now-always rose, which grows from arc to arc, dilates and breathes the scent of praise to always-springtime Sun’

⁴⁰⁵ Webb, *Dante’s Persons.*, 17.

⁴⁰⁶ De Angelis, Simone. ‘*Senatio and Salvatio: “Body” and Soul in the Experience of Dante’s Afterlife*’. In *Dante and the Human Body: Eight Essays*, edited by John C. Barnes and Jennifer Petrie, 89–116. Ireland: Four Courts Press, 2007., 106.

⁴⁰⁷ Webb, *Dante’s Persons.*, 17.

⁴⁰⁸ Alighieri, Dante. 2007. *Paradiso*. Edited and translated by Robin Kirkpatrick. Penguin Classics. London: Penguin Group., 459.

(*Paradiso*, III. 124-6). Depicted in the imagery of a rose which bends and sways to the rays of the sunshine, are the individuals who, petal for petal, make up the rose. With this imagery, Dante the author affirms that, in *Paradiso*, individuality is never lost and, each individual's presence exists within the collective whole.

The intent as Heather Webb suggests is never to 'transcend humanity' but to 'anticipate the final mystery in which God displays to the poet, at the climax of the poem, his own human face'.⁴⁰⁹ Heather Webb similarly continues by describing aerial bodies in *Paradiso* as having:

...the possibility of fully integrating the human person into an ethically grounded copresence with other individuals in a network of relations based on mutual recognition and interpersonal attention that transcends the boundary that separates the living from the dead.⁴¹⁰

The community that Dante the author envisions in the final cantos of *Paradiso* is a community whose existence incarnates love as the logic of communion. Foreseen in *Paradiso*'s rendering of existence is what a 'plenitude of *persona* might look like'.⁴¹¹

One might wonder what the Paradisal flesh looks like. Unlike *Inferno* and *Purgatorio*, Dante the pilgrim's body is no longer the proto-typical body because *Paradiso* communicates perfected relationality. Over the *cantiche*, Dante the pilgrim's body evokes a variety of responses. His body juxtaposes the love which has gone awry in *Inferno*. In *Purgatorio*, Dante's presence evokes the desire of aerial bodies to reconcile with self, other and divine. *Paradiso*, finally, casts Dante the pilgrim's body as not existing for the sake of itself, but for the sake of the revelation of God's glory in a community of worshipers. Despite the glory displayed by the bodies that are in perfect relation with another, Dante perceives it as a whole. He recalls, '[m]y eyes, despite such breadth and altitude, were not confused or blurred but took all in – the kind and sum of this light-heartedness' (*Paradiso*, XXX. 118-20).

One cannot describe the Paradisal flesh by extracting it from a given canto; one needs a synthesis of ideas based on Dante the author's highly abstract and confessional descriptions of existence. One strategy is to focus on various thematic stages in Dante the pilgrim's ascent.⁴¹² By

⁴⁰⁹ Alighieri, *Paradiso.*, xxi.

⁴¹⁰ Webb, *Dante's Persons.*, 26.

⁴¹¹ Webb, *Dante's Persons.*, 31.

⁴¹² Robin Kirkpatrick suggests four major phases in *Paradiso*. I follow Kirkpatrick's identification of cantos, 1-9, 10 to the middle of 22, the end of 22 to the middle of 27 and, the end of 27-33 but

looking at the degrees to which bodies are perceptible, the reader may ascertain Dante the pilgrim's own transfiguration as he draws closer to the Empyrean. For example, *Paradiso* I-IX, depicts Dante's interaction with individuals whose personhood is still recognisable from the resemblance of their bodily features.

As Dante the pilgrim moves on to *Paradiso* Cantos X-XXII, he reaches a second stage where persons appear in their original state. Here Adam and Eve come to the fore, Solomon engages in proto-resurrection dialectics, and the four cardinal virtues are discussed. In Canto XIV, Dante the author will expound on the idea of eternal bodies when he places in the mouth of Solomon, a task of describing resurrected bodies. During this second phase, semblances of humanity are gradually transfigured into geometric figures⁴¹³ who all, in their respective way, refract aspects of Christ's existence. The subtle but gradual changes suggest Dante the pilgrim's own transformation which 'implies not the transcendence of humanity but its transference from one dimension to another'.⁴¹⁴

A third distinguishable stage lies between cantos XXIII and XXIX where bodies exist in their resurrected state. As Dante journeys closer to the Empyrean, he meets aerial bodies who depict the heavenly realms. In all these Cantos, Dante the pilgrim's own being is transformed in a manner that does not negate his bodily existence. This stage shows what it means to be truly human as a redeemed body. It is a highly confessional phase as the apostles Peter, James, and John examine Dante the pilgrim in the three theological virtues. Along with the apostles, there is an increasing invocation of Mary and references to creation as the en-flowering of humanity. The final stage, Cantos XXX-XXXIII, acts as the culmination of Dante the author's progressive delineation of humanity in their perfected state. When Dante the pilgrim sees the heavenly hosts, a sacramental and quasi-liturgical performance takes place. The 'individual creature' is seen to

diverge slightly on the last two phases. A reading of *Paradisal Flesh* requires the navigation of a related but different thematic landscape and therefore cannot be replicated exactly. Kirkpatrick's outline may be found in Kirkpatrick, *Paradiso.*, xxiii.

⁴¹³ 'The souls who appeared in the lower spheres of Paradise still possessed the delicate outline of human faces. Now the figures that Dante meets display themselves as lights, fires, and thunderbolts, all intensely active, all forming patterns – constantly varied from sequence to sequence – of circles, rectangles, illuminated words and rising spirals. Thematically, Dante's concern is with the various forms of moral energy that come to fruition in Paradise.' Kirkpatrick, *Paradiso.*, 367.

⁴¹⁴ Kirkpatrick, *Paradiso.*, 333.

reside ‘not in the minds of other human beings alone but ultimately and most truly in the mind of the creator’.⁴¹⁵

In Canto XXXIII Dante sees the glory of God when he sees the body of Christ incarnate in the church. Kirkpatrick continues:

In Dante’s *Paradiso*, we do not transcend humanity, but anticipate the final mystery in which God displays to the poet, at the climax of the poem, his own human face. Human reason cannot conceive how the divine may be at one with the human. It is, however, the redeeming implications of this mystery that Dante, as a love poet, has set himself to explore the final part of the *Commedia*.⁴¹⁶

The above four stages describe the multi-faceted nature of the Paradisal flesh. It progresses from a redeemed flesh, continues to a transfiguring flesh, becomes a confessional flesh and then finally, a perfected and participatory flesh. The Paradisal flesh undergoes continuous change, its change is progressive and aligned with the increased ability to see truth as the incarnate Word, Jesus Christ. Existing in the truth who is Christ, humanity comprises creative generation and divine inspiration.

The distinguishing factor for proto-resurrected bodies is its re-constructed nature. Evidence hereof can be seen in the change Dante the pilgrim undergoes in Cantos XXIII-XXVI in his explication of faith.⁴¹⁷ The *Paradisal* flesh changes and is re-created at the hand of the confession of faith. In their use of the words God speaks to reveal himself to creation (Logos), the *Paradisal* flesh undergoes an essential transformation and its ‘semblance’ is transfigured. The language for flesh that Dante the author employs in *Paradiso* lays claim to a new-found, divinely actualised, existence. This flesh is not a corruptible and broken flesh but a perfected flesh, one which, in its participation in divine reality, is animated by God’s abounding love.

Co-bodies: Virgil and Beatrice

Virgil and Beatrice illustrate the centrality of the body as a thematic in the *Comedy*. Their presences in the *Paradiso* mark the embodiment of Love which orders being. Together, they fulfil the roles of sage and scribe, not only by the words they speak but also by the signs and gestures

⁴¹⁵ Kirkpatrick, *Paradiso.*, 463.

⁴¹⁶ Kirkpatrick, *Paradiso.*, xxi.

⁴¹⁷ ‘Here, as the focus of attention falls upon Dante as character, the poet also reconstructs his identity around the central truths of his Christian faith – in a way that is comparable to the reconstruction of his Florentine ancestry in *Paradiso* 15-17.’ See Kirkpatrick, *Paradiso.*, 24.

they make. Beatrice herself exists as an exemplar of perfect love⁴¹⁸ and her smile performs such perfected love and, in doing so, she acts as segue into the will's attuning of itself to God.⁴¹⁹ In the co-edited book by Montemaggi and Treherne, *Dante's Commedia: Theology as Poetry* (2010), Peter Hawkins takes a similar line of argument:⁴²⁰

Every smile given, received, or exchanged signifies that someone was there to notice – Dante the character in the poem, who first saw for himself and then told us about his vision. But every smile also asserts the imaginative activity of Dante the poet, draws attention to his sustained act of invention, his bringing into this drama of salvation an expression that over the course of the poem he made into his hallmark.⁴²¹

The significance of Beatrice lies in the truth that she embodies. Beatrice is the example of how we can truly be who we are, to the glory of God. Her existence analogously illustrates the human responsiveness to the divine in its splendour. When Dante the pilgrim gazes at her, she diverts his gaze by directing it to God's glory. Here Dante's gazing at Beatrice is an extension of his response to God just as his gazing was a response to the white rose. Beatrice's beauty symbolises the transformation persons in *Paradiso* undergo when they are brought into eternal communion with God. Such communion transforms the body so that it too reflects God's love and perfect relationality. Beauty thus evidences God's transformation of the self in a manner that is visibly reflected in the body.

In the *Paradiso* beauty acts as a transcendental because it discloses to the human imagination the transformation of the self in the face of the divine. Warren Ginsberg in his book, *Dante's Aesthetics of Being* (1999), notes a similar logic. He writes, 'Dante makes the very relationship that affiliates the activities of the sensible and intellectual souls an analogue of Beatrice, who is both a living woman and the essence of beatitude' and continues, to suggest how Beatrice in her fullest sense is 'a being whose effects only the full articulation of the rational soul can adequately describe, yet whose essence transcends the capacity even of the intellect to

⁴¹⁸ Soskice, Janet Martin. 2018. 'Dante and the Path of the Pilgrim'. 2018.

⁴¹⁹ Montemaggi, 'Nulla Vedere E Amor Mi Constrinse', 91.

⁴²⁰ Hawkins, Peter S. 'All Smiles: Poetry and Theology in Dante's *Commedia*'. In *Dante's Commedia. Theology as Poetry*, edited by Vittorio Montemaggi and Matthew Treherne, 36–59. University of Notre Dame: Notre Dame Press, 2010., 53.

⁴²¹ Hawkins, Peter S. 'All Smiles: Poetry and Theology in Dante's *Commedia*'. In *Dante's Commedia. Theology as Poetry*, edited by Vittorio Montemaggi and Matthew Treherne, 36–59. University of Notre Dame: Notre Dame Press, 2010., 53.

comprehend'.⁴²² Based on the role Beatrice plays in the *Comedy*, beauty is to the senses as revelation is to words, both incarnate the divine. Equally so, Virgil's strategic gestures incline Dante the pilgrim's spiritual eye to the truth that lay before him, and signs to the reader when significant moments in the text arise.

Dante the pilgrim, Beatrice, and Virgil are central figures to the *Comedy* because it is with them that Dante the pilgrim embarks (with the reader) on his existential wayfaring. It is also with their guidance that Dante the pilgrim engages 'horizontally' and 'vertically' with the figures who he meets along the twisting roads to *Paradiso*. It is in Dante the pilgrim's journey to the Empyrean that the incarnation of right relations, as I have suggested thus far, is finally revealed. This is not a question of the presence or absence of materiality but of the alignment of self with God's eternal love. This alignment happens systematically. Accompanied by the pardoning of sins, each person comes closer to seeing God's eternal love and, in return, responds in adoration. Depicted in the final scenes of the Empyrean is a Dante who, with each glimpse of God's astounding light, desires to peer even deeper into the mystery of God's being. What Dante the pilgrim sees when his eyes have become accustomed to the light, is the face of Christ, the light of truth so clearly embellished with that which draws God's affection, humanity.

It is significant that Dante the pilgrim's wayfaring concludes with a glimpse of the divine in human likeness.⁴²³ It confirms a theological reading of the body as a sacramental entity. Dante the author's use of the human image as a way of relating to God echoes the corporeal grammar that pervades the *Comedy*. The grammar upholds Dante the pilgrim's embodied journey and also the continuing embodied journey the reader takes as they imaginatively engage with his ascent. That Dante author and pilgrim sees persons in the reflection of God's splendour, suggests that images are modes by which we come to know and worship God. The implication of such a rendering is that the human image is sacramental in its constant gesturing to its Maker. The fact

⁴²² Ginsberg, *Dante's Aesthetics of Being.*, 9.

⁴²³ It furthermore, says something about Dante's Christian confidence. Kirkpatrick writes, 'The vision he finally receives is a vision of the face of God. This vision defeats understanding of any systematic or general kind precisely because it is a particularity, a singularity, a face which may be loved but cannot be described. There is no attempt here to project some human conception of the divine on to God's unknowable reality. There is, however, the confidence, born of Christian belief, that God, incarnate in Christ, indeed has a human face. This is the ultimate truth and the ultimate mystery'. Kirkpatrick, *Paradiso.*, xl.

that God who is without form reveals Godself as bearing a human face indicates the worth and dignity of the created order.

Dante's Incarnationalism

Dante the pilgrim's flesh maps an incarnational logic, whether it is the distorted flesh of *Inferno*, the gestural bodies of *Purgatorio* or the beatific relations of *Paradiso*. 'At every point', writes John Took, 'the divine, for Dante, is immanent in the human, at work deep within it, reconciling it to itself, and bringing it to its final perfection'.⁴²⁴ The truth underlying this claim is founded on the logic of the Word made flesh. The Word who brought the revelation of the true essence of humanity to creation, who continues to order and sustain creation and who perpetually reveals divine relationality to persons. The Word made flesh in the *Comedy*, is also the Word who is revealed in Dante the author and pilgrim's words. Dante the author's words, Dante the pilgrim's gestures and body incarnates the Love which orders persons.

The *Comedy* expresses the truth of the incarnation in three ways, in reconciliation, participation and literary performance. In reconciliation, the relationship between self, other and divine is restored. Took suggests:

It is, in other words, a discourse at every point taking seriously the indwelling of the Godhead ('And the word became flesh and dwelt among us [...] full of grace and truth') whereby the essential enters into the existential as the leading parameter of human experience of human conditions of time and space, whereby the supra-natural is seen to be at work within the recesses of the natural, and whereby grace is understood to abound in the totality of man's engagement with the world.⁴²⁵

Expressed in this passage is the affirmation that Christ's presence restores humanity to its proper moral and ontological sufficiency.⁴²⁶ Love orders this new existence and reconciles persons so that their perfected relationality participates in God's being. A medieval corporeal ontology founds the constitution of the self on the metaphysical Word who is Christ incarnate. Montemaggi affirms,⁴²⁷

⁴²⁴ Took, John. 'Dante's Incarnationalism: An Essay in Theological Wisdom'. *Italian Studies* 61, no. 1 (2006): 1–17.

⁴²⁵ Took, 'Dante's Incarnationalism', 17.

⁴²⁶ Took, 'Dante's Incarnationalism', 17.

⁴²⁷ Montemaggi, 'Nulla Vedere E Amor Mi Costrinse', 50.

‘they are supreme expression of the ontological unity between truth/divine-being/God and the material unfolding of creation’.⁴²⁸

Dante the author poetically excavates the truth of the incarnation through his own words. Words perform, through a constellation of relations, the truth of the incarnation to every reader who decides to be a co-traveller of Dante the pilgrim and author. Dante the author’s words are formative because they draw the reader in, asking them to take part in the truth which he speaks. According to Heather Webb, Dante tasks the reader to understand his words as being descriptive and formative – avenues by which each person can engage with the *personae* of the *Comedy*. Words, according to Webb, ‘are not descriptive of the objective; they are the very enactment of relation and person-building’.⁴²⁹ The *Comedy* requires every *persona*, whether character or reader, to take for themselves the restoration of love which transfiguration suggests.⁴³⁰

To read the *Comedy* is to enter Dante the author’s world and to take part by way of the imagination and the embodied self. In doing so, the reader becomes a co-traveller and so assimilates that which happens to Dante the pilgrim. Kirkpatrick reads a similar logic in Dante as we have seen in Webb when he writes:

To read a poem by Dante is, in a real sense, to enter into responsible and responsive connection with another ‘person’, body as well as mind. For bodily form occupies a central position in Dante’s philosophical thinking; and words, in belonging as much to the sensuous as to the conceptual sphere, offer an exact analogy to those psychosomatic interrelations of body and rational spirit that constitutes human identity.⁴³¹

Dante the pilgrim’s body encapsulates a constellation of bodies that are most appropriately captured in the words he uses to describe his ascent. In this sense, the interweaving of the sacred and the profane in the *Comedy* is deeply performative when it renders the author and audience responsible for the finding of meaning. The gestures, signs, and symbols in Dante the author’s text draw the reader in, while the readers also, in their own bodily responsiveness, experience the *Comedy* as truly participatory.

⁴²⁸ Montemaggi, ‘Nulla Vedere E Amor Mi Costrinse’., 50.

⁴²⁹ Webb, *Dante’s Persons.*, 29.

⁴³⁰ For, as Webb argues, ‘it is in the work of creating and tending such communities of the living and the dead that we transhumanize and personalize our biological identities’. Webb, *Dante’s Persons.*, 30.

⁴³¹ Kirkpatrick, *Inferno.*, lxxxv.

A similar revelatory logic presents itself in the progressive unveiling of God's being in the final cantos of the *Paradiso*. Here, Dante the pilgrim's eyes, with their gradual adjustment to God's light of glory, increasingly see the body of Christ incarnate. Mary, the mother from whose womb Christ took flesh, 'is the face to which the unknowable God is known to have turned both Creator and as human child' and 'she is the fixed point of reference both for God and for humanity'.⁴³² Her image speaks of the reality that God is most clearly expressed in the embodied existence of those who faithfully serve him. The emphasis on the embodiment and personal encounters that pervade the *Comedy*, I have interpreted as indicating an ontology that places bodies and persons central in the relationship between God and persons.

Tentatively described as a corporeal ontology, Marianne Shapiro suggests that 'Dante argues neither for an idealism that denies matter an independent reality nor for a technical dialectic of matter and form'.⁴³³ Instead, 'he persuades via the truth of experience and feeling in the account of a vision'.⁴³⁴ Dante the author's poetic narration is suggestive of those processes that an individual undergoes when making sense of their reality and, as such, illustrates the body's relation to a particular milieu and the interpretation thereof through a given frame of reference. Throughout the *Comedy*, the body and its degrees of visibility are modes of expressing the states of relation between persons. In *Paradiso*, beatific bodies know God actually. In *Purgatorio*, incarnational bodies yearn for relation and thereby increasingly embody divine intention. Finally, in the *Inferno*, there are those who refused the Love which orders their being, grotesquely depicted in their deformity.

Self-Performative Words

The incarnational logic in the *Comedy* finds expression in the corporeal ontology that words perform. Dante the author uses poetic expression as a means of incarnating the Word. By interweaving a simultaneity and duality of presences into his *Inferno*, *Purgatorio* and *Paradiso*, Dante the author creates a reverberating landscape where bodies become central to the articulation of divine reality.

⁴³² Kirkpatrick, *Paradiso*., 474.

⁴³³ Shapiro, Marianne. *Dante and the Knot of Body and Soul*. London: MacMillian Press, 1998., xi.

⁴³⁴ Shapiro, *Dante and the Knot of Body and Soul*., xi.

The *Inferno*, *Purgatorio* and *Paradiso* map in poetic fashion the journey from existential alienation, desolation and anxiety to existential homecoming.⁴³⁵ In this journey, Dante the pilgrim's body is constantly receptive to the bodies of other persons whether it be the distorted persons of *Inferno* who, sometimes reptile-looking and sometimes inanimate-looking, embody what the loss of self looks like, the self-possessing persons of the *Purgatory* who, by way of their recognition of corporeality express the centrality of the body to relationality, and to the beatific bodies of *Paradiso* who, in their desire to behold the divine, reflect divine intention.

In the depiction of the varying sets of relation, of self to other and divine, the *Comedy* simultaneously holds together the socio-political landscape and the religious imagination from which Dante the author conceives the *Comedy*. The *Commedia* parallels sacred literature insofar as it captures Dante the author and pilgrim's own embodied existence in a register that lays claim to realities that surpass past and future. The landscape Dante the author has created, tasks the reader with the choice of either accepting or rejecting the landscape, spiritual or otherwise. The *Comedy*, by its nature, is spiritually inductive and requires that the reader attend to the body. By attending to the body, we attune ourselves to God and thereby also to the heart of the Dominical command, love of neighbour, self and God.

The body expresses one dimension by which Dante the author maps his existence in relation to God, others and the text. In virtue of the Christological foregrounding in the *Comedy*, bodies give shape to words as they pertain to the divine. Uttering these words in the *Comedy* occurs at the hand of other bodies, and since bodies mark personhood, words are uttered as the expression of the ordering of relations to self, other and divine. The right ordering of relations, *Paradiso* shows, is the embodiment of the Love that Dante the pilgrim perceives in the final cantos of the *Comedy*. The grammar of love implicit to the *Comedy* performs the incarnation insofar as the incarnation is the perfection of the Love that orders persons.

The power of Dante the author's text is that he uses words to gesture to the Word, and to direct the reader to the body. In doing so, he constantly draws into conversation the dialectics of the incarnation and the very embodied, albeit shadowed, existence of persons in the *Commedia*. Dante the author insists on conceptualising Dante the pilgrim's existence at the hand of the

⁴³⁵ John Took's article, 'Towards a life of Dante: Ontological anxiety and the salvific function of the Word', *Italian Studies*, 2004, LIX.1., 1-16 has been particularly helpful for understanding the *Comedy* as a commentary on life's existential quandaries.

heavenly realms and the saints who reside there. In Canto XXXII the reader may be dismayed at the painstaking precision with which Dante the author formulates the heavenly realms. It is as though, for Dante the author, meeting the divine is meeting all those whose existence has been sustained by God's eternal love. It is not that the saints are gods, but that they participate in God's eternal glory by being united in Christ. Having Canto XXXIII conclude with a prayer to Mary and the glory of God, leaves the reader with one remaining image, the exchange between human and divine. Such exchange requires no negation, but absolute affirmation and perfection.

Chapter 7

Synthesising the Body in Theology: Drawing Conclusions

This thesis is written in response to a persistent concern amongst Christian writers, many of them but not all feminists, that the body is somehow lost or diminished in Christian theology. This comes in view of Descartes' philosophy with its prioritisation of mind over body and the legacy it created. When reading Christian thought through this Cartesian lens, theology seemingly harbours its own hierarchisation of that which is spiritual and heavenly over that which is material and earthly. If this is the case, the fear of the loss of the body in Christian theology is not without basis. This thesis suggests, however, that such dualisms are symptomatic of a latent Cartesianism, and that they do not do justice to the complex and intertwined depiction of personhood that one finds in Scripture and the early church writings this thesis engages. We thus respond to this diminished understanding of the body in Christian theology by engaging the resources that we have in historical theology coupled with insights from modern philosophy. We do so in order to construct a Christian ontology of the flesh that challenges a dualistic understanding of personhood.

Any adequate response to a diminished reading of the body within Christian theology should locate the body and its sense-perceptual engagements with the world in relation to the doctrine of creation (creation *ex nihilo*), and the definitive affirmation of this revelation in the embodiment of God in the Son (incarnation). The relationship between revelation and the Word, the seventeenth century theologian and philosopher Nicholas Malebranche expounded in the wake of Cartesianism. Malebranche's metaphysics of the Word and divine intelligibility thesis has captured the imagination of secular philosophers. His sensuous theology, Judith Butler shows, formed part of Merleau-Ponty's early lectures on the nature of perception. Following Butler's account of Malebranche in Merleau-Ponty's lectures, Malebranche's sensuous theology lends to an articulation of the flesh as that which is open and responsive to the world.⁴³⁶ Such openness

⁴³⁶ The latent influence of sensuous theologies of the Malebranchean sort, Judith Butler shows, aids Merleau-Ponty's formulation of the flesh. Butler, Judith. 2005. 'Merleau-Ponty and the Touch of Malebranche'. In *The Cambridge Companion to Merleau-Ponty*, edited by Taylor Carmen and Mark Hansen, 181–205. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press., Butler, Judith. 2015. *Senses of the Subject*. New York: Fordham University Press.

provides new insights into the recovery of the body in theology because the Christian flesh stands open not only to the created order, as Merleau-Ponty suggests, but also to its Creator.

Merleau-Ponty formulates the relationship of creature to Creator in a non-religious register as the relationship of the visible to the invisible. In ‘Merleau-Ponty and the Touch of Malebranche’, Butler uses the example of love to illustrate how the invisible can permeate the visible in a manner that is manifest in an embodied way.⁴³⁷ Butler’s example is a natural starting point for the Christian theologian as well because it illustrates how love can be both an abstract term and an embodied reality.

Love is a register of perception where the invisible is made visible to the senses by calling to mind that which the senses can perceive. The subjective self who engages with the world by way of their senses (the sense-perceptual self) perceives love and so, by way of such sense-perceptual engagement concretises that which is initially abstract or invisible. Here, the sense-perceptual self continuously re-articulates love through their unique particularity. Butler thus cites love as an example because it describes the continuum of existence in which a sense-perceptual self exists both as sentient and sensible. The movement from abstraction to concretisation, a Christian ontology of the flesh will suggest, is incarnational. Christian theology adds a further dimension to Butler’s example by implicating God in the sense-perceptual self’s making visible the invisible.⁴³⁸ Love is, for Christian belief, the expression of the God who is Love, and whose Love orders existence – it is thus intimately tied to both the created order, and the transcendent.

Merleau-Ponty, of course and as we have already seen, was wary of the notion transcendent, seeing it as denoting an ontological chasm impossible to traverse. But as our chapters two to four suggest, any conceptualisation of transcendence as distance instead of difference is problematic for Christian theology, too. Sigurdson’s proposal that transcendence be read as difference instead of distance makes an important shift in the question of the relationship between

⁴³⁷ Butler, Judith. 2005. ‘Merleau-Ponty and the Touch of Malebranche’. In *The Cambridge Companion to Merleau-Ponty*, edited by Taylor Carmen and Mark Hansen, 181–205. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press., 198.

⁴³⁸ I find Harrison’s work instructive here because it shows how Augustine’s words become incarnational when they are ordered to God. When Augustine’s speaks his words, he does so while invoking the divine. This invocation, a pneumatological reading of perception shows, has divine agency present to the incarnational logic. Harrison, Carol. 2018. ‘Confused Voices: Sound and Sense in the Late (Wild) Augustine’. Pusey House, Oxford: Oxford University Press., 1–20.

the sense-perceptual self and the transcendent.⁴³⁹ This shift changes the nature of the concern from a God who is inaccessible to the sense-perceptual self to a God who is accessible in terms that yet need to be explored.

Increasingly during the seventeenth century,⁴⁴⁰ the relationship between the transcendental and its invisible nature led to the prioritisation of that faculty that could apprehend the invisible in abstract terms: that is, the mind. In Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology and ontology, and consonant with modern biology, one finds the solitary hegemony of the mind to be a myth. It is, therefore, impossible for the senses to exist unaffected by the world in which it functions.⁴⁴¹ Since perception is, as Merleau-Ponty has shown, an entirely embodied activity, it concerns the same created flesh from which the self originates.⁴⁴² This flesh, I have argued, is as much part of the Christian story of creation as it is of the incarnation. Both doctrines affirm the intertwining of the flesh of persons with the flesh of creation, and of God's sustained presence in it as Creator.

The intertwining of the flesh of persons with the flesh of the created order suggests not only that God is present to the flesh of persons as Creator, but that senses can perceive such a presence. This reversibility of perception thesis suggests that the senses are key not only in registering the divine presence in the created order but also in establishing an embodied grammar whereby God is revealed, once more, in terms that are as embodied and visual as the incarnate Christ. The question that concerns a Christian ontology of the flesh is not so much the loss of the body, but the loss of a grammar by which to articulate the body's perception of the divine in the flesh of creation. When one has constructed a grammar for such perception, and this is key, one is retrieving the body for theology.

⁴³⁹ Sigurdson, Ola. 2016. *Heavenly Bodies. Incarnation, the Gaze, and Embodiment in Christian Theology*. Michigan: Eerdmans., 271.

⁴⁴⁰ 'Epistemology'. 2020. In *Encyclopædia Britannica*. Encyclopædia Britannica, inc. <https://www.britannica.com/topic/epistemology>.

⁴⁴¹ Chapter one deals extensively with this dynamic. See especially Bryan Bannon's reading of Merleau-Ponty's flesh. Bannon, Bryan. 2011. 'Flesh and Nature: Understanding Merleau-Ponty's Relational Ontology'. *Research in Phenomenology*, no. 41: 327–57., 330.

⁴⁴² Merleau-Ponty's own concern of the loss of the body post-Descartes finds expression in his phenomenology of perception and ontology of the flesh that refuses any disassociation or disaffiliation of the senses with the immanent created order. See Merleau-Ponty, Maurice. 1968. *The Visible and the Invisible*. Edited by Claude Lefort. Translated by Alphonso Lingis. Evanston: Northwestern University Press., pp. 42-43, 188-9. As well as, Merleau-Ponty, Maurice. 2002. *Phenomenology of Perception: An Introduction*. London: Routledge., pp. 406-10.

It is a truism that all knowledge of God depends on the body since our entire existence is as bodies, yet the body is often strangely occluded in the texts of theology. Knowing God means perceiving God, and thereby employing the faculties of the senses to apprehend the divine, sense-perception becomes prerequisite to the expression of divine presence in material terms. One cannot, therefore, retrieve the body in theology without also resourcing language that pertains to God. Resourcing the body means recovering an embodied grammar for perceiving the divine. Experience and reason, a theological grammar of perception shows, have little to do with the dualistic structuring of knowledge acquisition. Rather, experience and reason exist within the same category of embodied knowing circumscribed as perception. At the centre of this singular perceptual continuum is the relationship between sentient and sensible, as the relationship between the sense-perceptual and the world in which God continuously reveals Godself as Creator.⁴⁴³ The critique that a Christian flesh is a dualistic flesh here becomes symptomatic of the attempt at a one-sided retrieval of the body.

Articulating the relationship between creature and Creator and the sense-perceptual register thereof, one may best explain as the body's making visible of the invisible through gesture. Medieval writers, especially, employed a somatic register and thus gesture to express their piety. It is the case for Julian of Norwich as it was for Dante Alighieri. Key theological moments find signification in the way that Julian is lying on her bed nearing what seems to be her death and the way that Christ presents himself to her on the Cross, and in the way that the crossing of arms of a dying soldier in the *Comedy* serves as an invocation of the divine. Two moments that show how texts embody the gestures of bodied beings.

In the writings of Julian and Dante, love is the leitmotif that shapes their perception which, in turn, finds translation in terms of their unique bodily circumstance. Julian and Dante provide in their texts an embodied grammar by which they (and their readers) may perceive God in bodily terms.⁴⁴⁴ For Julian, this culminates as the Love that is the meaning of the Cross. Christ reveals

⁴⁴³ Here, a constant flux and movement exists between self and other so that one's embodied circumstance can never be the embodied circumstance of another. The distinction is significant because, and this is key, affect and perception provides new ways of articulating the presence of the divine in unique corporeal grammars.

⁴⁴⁴ The particularity of existence associated with the self as embodied being enriches a reading of the flesh in Christian theology, for the flesh not only exists as the expressive means of registering divine presence, it also provides the grammar for such perception. Presented as embodied theologies, both writers employ the materiality of existence as the register for their perception.

this love to her through a succession of visions. For Dante, specific persons embody love through their gestures and appearance. Both Julian and Dante's registers of perception employ the materiality of existence as a manner of clothing the invisible, and both registers of perception inevitably also transform the meaning and scope of that which is perceived.

Throughout *Revelations of Divine Love*, Julian's particularity as a female religious woman frames Christ's revelation to her. She 'clothes' Christ's words to her in a grammar that is conceptually closest to her own existence, and thereby renders the Word in her own bodily terms.⁴⁴⁵ The *Comedy*, in turn, illustrates the potentiality of the flesh in expressing divine presence. Each stage of the *Comedy* expresses in bodily terms the relative presence or absence of the love that orders the being of persons. Whereas bodies in *Inferno* express the absence of right relations, *Purgatory* hints at the reconciliation between self and divine when bodies gesture. *Paradiso*, finally, illustrates the perfection of the senses when self and divine are made one. One may, of course, object by saying that Dante's bodies are not in fact bodies but aerial constructions of former bodies. This would be the case but does not seem to inhibit Dante's very visual depiction of the state of persons in *Inferno*, *Purgatorio* and *Paradiso*. Likewise, the *Comedy* is a literary masterpiece borne from a sense-perceptual self who, through various states of perception, clothes the invisible in embodied and arguably religious grammar. That the aspect of the religious is so present to the *Comedy* bears interesting implications for a logic of theological perception in the realm of the secular.⁴⁴⁶

Love finds particular expression in the *Comedy* in the quasi-sacramental gestures of Manfred (*Purgatorio*, III) and Buonconte da Montefeltro (*Purgatorio*, V).⁴⁴⁷ Both persons invoke the Cross when they either point to Christ's wound or form their arms in the shape of the Cross.⁴⁴⁸

⁴⁴⁵ Julian's embodied theology is suggestive because her flesh never becomes an obstacle to her perception of the divine, it is instead the corporeal grammar by which Christ is uniquely made known to her.

⁴⁴⁶ The relationship between the sacred and the secular cannot be explored within this dissertation but hints toward interesting avenues for future study. See Bosch, Robson Rozelle. 2018. 'Carcass and Cross: Discovering the Sacred in the Secular'. *Theology* 121 (4): 252–60.

⁴⁴⁷ See Chapter six, pp. 11-16.

⁴⁴⁸ In the visual nature of Julian's visions and of Dante's depiction of Buonconte and Manfred's invocation of the Cross suggests that the Cross provides the corporeal grammar by which the new life which Christ establishes finds expression in the bodies of persons, and that persons may take part in that reality by creatively establishing their own embodied language by which to speak of this new life. The restoration which the Cross brings is both for a body which finds its truest

In the Christological foregrounding of Manfred and Buonconte, Dante's *Comedy* maps the ways in which Christ's flesh presents a corporeal and theological grammar by which the self can express their existence in relation to the divine. In the *Comedy*, love is the divine attribute that is embodied as an expression of its relative absence or presence in the lives of persons. Persons in *Inferno*, for example, have their bodies depicted in grotesque ways. Their bodies make visible the extent to which their lives were not marked by the love that orders their being. Bodies in *Purgatorio*, in their gestural postures of reconciliation and the invocation of the divine, illustrate the desire to have love order their being. Those in *Paradiso*, finally, visually portray (through the light that surrounds them, and the glory of God in which they are held) the perfect union of the self with the love that orders their being.

Dante the pilgrim's perception is central to the narration of the bodies in the *Comedy* since his body brings theirs into relief. It is Dante the pilgrim's body then that brings the truth that the *Comedy* speaks to fruition. His own perception undergoes a change throughout his sojourning, suggesting not only the transformations of the persons whom Dante the pilgrim meets, but also his own transformation, and of his own growing understanding of the Love that orders his being. In *Paradiso*, when Dante the pilgrim sees God, his vision is transfigured and he truly sees what he describes in the final cantos as a beatific vision. This final vision is of the community of saints, all perfectly ordered to their fount, God. Dante's transfiguration performs the perfection of his senses when they are ordered to God's revelation.

The final cantos of *Paradiso* visually depict the relationship between perceptual failure and faith as Dante the pilgrim's sight undergoes a gradual transformation. His text enacts the new potentiality of a theological grammar of perception. Dante the pilgrim performs, in this instance, by way of visual illustration and poetic speech the movement from estrangement, to restoration and beatification. Significantly, Dante the author does so by bringing other persons into Dante the pilgrim's perceptual continuum. Here, persons such as Beatrice and Virgil uniquely express the truth that the *Comedy* speaks. Dante the pilgrim's embodied responsiveness illustrates how the

meaning in Christ by invoking the grammar of the Cross through its words, gestures and deeds, and for perceiving the self in relation to the Cross as one whose humanity is the goal and purpose of the Cross. Both aspects describe what it means to perceive rightly, to see oneself fully as one relates to the God who meets one as Trinity on the Cross. This God meets persons in their own terms, and as their very own.

senses are all narrated according to a theological grammar. The senses yearn, they seek, and they find by either misapprehending, or apprehending the divine.

Dante the pilgrim's speech, in its visual depiction of the self in relation to other and of the transformation of the self in relation to that other, is performative. It performs the Love that orders being, but also as in the case of Julian of Norwich, the Love which is the meaning of the Cross. A new perceptual potentiality arises in this instance insofar as the senses relate to the world in a manner which presupposes their new existence. Here reason and experience together inform Dante the pilgrim's perception. Through his perception, the truth that pertains to the right ordering of relations and the effect of Love on persons, is made explicit.

Dante and Julian's registers of divine presence reminds one of the sensuous theology found in Malebranche's reading of Descartes and Augustine alongside another. Although their theological agendas and the context in which such agendas arose differed greatly, the presence of a Pauline thematic in the theorising of a sensuous theology is noteworthy. The value of laying claim to the senses, as Merleau-Ponty's own writings suggests, lies in the emphasis of the body as open and responsive to the world in which it exists. When the world is shot through with divine presence, the senses become central to the perception of such presence. Here, the sense-perceptual self is the material condition by which the presence of God is registered.⁴⁴⁹

Concerning Anthropocentrism: Perception and Participation

One persistent concern also rightly shared by those who fear the 'loss of the body' in Christian theology, is an anthropocentrism which makes the Cross and salvation solely the province of human beings and says nothing to the rest of the created order. However, a Christian ontology of the flesh must, of its natural emphasis, speak of the materiality of persons as well as their place and embrace of the rest of the created order. What this embrace might look like, chapters two to four discussed by showing the interconnection of the doctrine of creation *ex nihilo* and the

⁴⁴⁹ This is not to suggest that physical and spiritual senses are at odds with another. Rather, they exist as distinctive modes of a singular responsive attitude to the divine. The senses perceive God in the materiality of existence and have the Word and Spirit translate such perception in terms of God's desire to commune with persons. The physical senses thus perceive God in the materiality of existence and the spiritual senses translate such perception in terms of the Christian narrative. The physical and spiritual senses together provide a grammar for the perception of the divine. See Gavriilyuk, Paul L., and Sarah Coakley, eds. 2012. *The Spiritual Senses: Perceiving God in Western Christianity*. Cambridge New York: Cambridge University Press.

incarnation, and how the Cross advances a vision of creation where the created order may truly flourish. These three dimensions found a theology of the body in that the doctrine of creation *ex nihilo* expresses God's creative presence in the realm of the material, and the place that the created order has in gesturing to this presence. A theology of the Cross, in turn, shows how Christ's assumption of the materiality of existence heals and restores all that is in God's encompassing vision for the created order.

The intertwining of the body and the created order, means that the recovery of the body is a 'setting right': of the relationship between the body and the created order, and thereby a re-affirmation of the place that the body has *within* the world. Recovering the body for theology does not, then, mean that such recovery is done at the expense of the created order, or that persons enjoy precedence over the created order. Instead, the recovery of the body is also the recovery of the created order. Chapter three and four suggests that the writings of the early church fathers confirm such a thesis in their simultaneous emphasis on the human and the created order in a reading of the doctrine of creation.

In their conviction that the created order evidences God's Trinitarian activity in the realm of the material and the embodied, the writings of Athanasius and Augustine place the doctrine of creation at the heart of the created order's 'visible making' of the divine. This theological assertion suggests that the created order cannot exist without God's bringing of it into being and that God, as its Creator, is constantly present to the created order, holding and sustaining it within the life of the Trinity. That the created order exists, and that persons can perceive such an existence, gestures to the God who is indiscriminately present to all. One may object, however, that humans are singled out for their existence as the *imago Dei*. This may be true, but only insofar as the sense-perceptual self can perceive God's presence subjectively and so respond in kind by attuning the senses to the divine. Apart from the subjective response of the sense-perceptual self, persons embody the collective signing forth of God's creative presence.

The materiality with which the subjective self perceives the divine, is the same materiality that constitutes the created order. This materiality of existence that marks humanity and the created order, makes them indistinguishable from one another. Merleau-Ponty uses the concept of intertwining to describe the relationship of self and thing of nature. He does so by using the term flesh and by describing it as an element. An element denotes that fundamental part of existence that is present to all as the basic constituting factor for existence. When Merleau-Ponty thus speaks

of flesh as an element, he recognises the ontological continuum of existence which runs through all.⁴⁵⁰ There is no ontological distinction in Merleau-Ponty's theorising between the things of nature and the flesh of the self.⁴⁵¹ This is important since it relativises the hierarchisation that can occur when humans and created order are considered ontologically.

The ontological continuity between persons and the created order, as we have just affirmed, makes headway because it places the sense-perceptual self and the created order within the same perceptual continuum. The mutually inhering relationship of the self and the created order, one may also refer to as dependence. The sense-perceptual self depends on the created order for its perception of the divine, because the materiality of the created order is the flesh by which we come to perceive God who is Creator of all and Christ on the Cross. This is important because it reminds us that, while the Cross concerns salvation, it also concerns the vision of how creation can come to its fullest. When we thus perceive the created order, and exist in it as sense-perceptual selves, the created order has its own story to tell, one that has its own soteriological unfolding.

Creation and the Cross are thus two distinctive yet Trinitarian instances in the life of the created order.⁴⁵² The very existence of the created order is thus a sign of the communion that is to be enjoyed in the life of the Trinity. Insofar as gesture is the making visible of the invisible through an existent grammar of perception available to the senses, the created order too participates in God's revelation in time. While the doctrine of creation concerns the created order, and the Cross humanity, both attest to the God who chooses the materiality of existence as the means by which creatures are to know their Creator.⁴⁵³ Both creation *ex nihilo* and the Cross make God known in

⁴⁵⁰ Merleau-Ponty, Maurice. 1968. *The Visible and the Invisible*. Edited by Claude Lefort. Translated by Alphonso Lingis. Evanston: Northwestern University Press., 139.

⁴⁵¹ Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible*., 139.

⁴⁵² I draw this conclusion from Chapters two through to five where Augustine's *Confessions*, Athanasius' *On the Incarnation*, and Julian of Norwich's *Revelations of Divine Love*, feature centrally.

⁴⁵³ Soskice addresses the relationship of creature to Creator when she writes, 'Creation is not something that happened to the universe long ago. It is not the distant accomplishment of a distant God. Creation *ex nihilo* underscores the belief that God imparts the being of all created things, visible and invisible. The world is graced in its createdness which is happening all the time. In Christian understanding it is the Word through whom all things are made who redeems and renews all things – hinds and stags drinking from the waters of life – the new creation that embraces in its tendrils the nesting birds, the sheep and the shepherd, he sober bishop at his writings.' See Soskice, Janet Martin. 2013. 'Creation and the Glory of Creatures'. Edited by Janet Martin Soskice. *Creation 'Ex Nihilo' and Modern Theology*, Modern Theology, 29 (2): 172–85., 185.

a manner that suggests God's continued presence to the world, and both depict God's presence in the world to as one of restoration and communion.⁴⁵⁴

A reading of the created order from the doctrine of creation and the Cross suggests that the Trinity founds and sustains the materiality of existence. God's presence to the created order is not removed or distant but intimately present and manifest through the Word and the Spirit. The relationship between Creator and creature is, therefore, such that the senses can perceive God's divine activity in the life of the created order. As a reading of Merleau-Ponty in the wake of Descartes suggests, one must differentiate between the object of one's perception and the ground of such perception. One must take care, especially, when the object of one's perception is the divine. One may, for example, speak of God's immanence in a manner that loses any sense of ontological difference (pantheism). Here, all distinction is lost when the perception of divine presence is registered as the unmediated perception of God. Another reading may interpret the perception of the divine as effecting a change in God's revelation and therefore, a change in the nature of God's presence to the created order (panentheism).

A theological grammar of perception diverges from pantheism and panentheism in two notable ways: First, while God is transcendent to the world, God is always immanent to it through God's Spirit, the Third person of the Trinity who was sent by God in Christ's name.⁴⁵⁵ Through the Spirit, God is immanent to the world in a manner where one's perception of the divine is mediated by the Spirit. The perception of God in the created order becomes the perception of God's agency in the world. Second, God is immanent to the created order but in such a way that God remains unaffected by perception. The sense-perceptual self cannot effect a change in the life of the Trinity by way of its perception and embodied expression of the divine. Instead, the senses employ the corporeal grammar of the person of Christ as a means of interpreting the relationship of self to divine. Both qualifications are significant because perception is a participatory activity founded in the Trinity.

The whole created order takes part in God's revelation albeit in varied but similar ways. This is due to the relationship between creature and Creator, and God's sustained activity in the world. One may speak of this as a general 'making known' of the divine. With this general

⁴⁵⁴ When persons lose sight of their relationship to the created order and of God's presence to the earth's existence, Romans suggests, they order their senses to the creature and not the Creator.

⁴⁵⁵ John 14:26

rendering, there is no intentionality of which to speak. When speaking of a theological grammar of perception, however, one begins to speak of intentionality and the ways in which the self understands their perceptions to relate to the divine. Here, creation and incarnation tell, in their own way, the logic of love that reveals itself daily. What one notices with the introduction of the subjective ‘inclining of the senses’ to the revelation of the divine in the everyday, is the centrality of the body in perceiving the heat of the sun, the aromas of blooming flowers, and the sound of the wind, and understanding this as being part of God’s speaking as Creator in and through the created order.

What it is that God speaks as Creator through creation becomes the grammar of perception. Love, this chapter has suggested thus far, is one such register of perception by which the God who creates in love, through love, and by love (in the words of Julian of Norwich) is the *telos* of perception. This love finds expression, particularly, in the life, death, and resurrection of Christ. Receiving Christ in the context of His temptation in the desert, His baptism, His crucifixion, and His transformation are all instances of the narration of God’s Trinitarian activity. Christ’s incarnation provides a new embodied grammar of the Trinity, while visually enacting the healing, transformation, and perfection that persons are to undergo in Him.⁴⁵⁶ It is at this point that we begin to speak of the incarnation as the re-creation of the sense-perceptual self.

When Christ is the object of perception, an eternal transformation occurs in the sense-perceptual self. The transformation that the senses undergo translates in chapter four’s reading of Athanasius’ writings as creation *ex Verbi*. The sense-perceptual self receives a new status in Christ whereby her or his own perception becomes Christo-form through the ministry of the Spirit. As we have suggested throughout this dissertation, the Spirit is central in the Worded existence that persons assume because the Spirit holds the flesh of persons and the flesh of Christ in the economy of God. Existing in Christ by the Spirit thus means that the senses are continuously renewed according to the Word and the Spirit who informs their engagements with the world.

A reverse-expressive relationship arises between the flesh of persons and the flesh of Christ in that the Word informs perception and embodied perception gives shape to the invisible Word.

⁴⁵⁶ Christ exemplifies what it means to exist as the image and likeness of God, for Christ not only bears the divine image, he also bears the perfection of the image of God in persons. See Baddeley, Mark. 2015. ‘An Exploration of Athanasius’ Strategies for Reading Genesis 1-3’. *Phronema* 30 (1): 115–36., 131.

When Christ informs perception, His life, death and resurrection provides a new vision of the created order. Perceiving the world according to the vision that God has for the created order in Christ, means taking part in a reality that is at once greater than oneself and entirely grounded in the embodied and material.

A substantial part of articulating the body's place in theology is understanding the role that perception has in inaugurating persons aesthetically into the life of the Trinity. Here, Christ becomes the participative norm who orders the senses to the divine in order that they may perceive God's encompassing vision for the created order. Since one exists as perceiving beings, having one's senses ordered to the Word transforms one's own existence. Perceiving Christ through one's own particularity means appropriating this transformation in terms that resonates with one's own existence. Paul puts this succinctly when he describes in 2 Corinthians 3:18 how a person, when beholding the divine image, is continuously transformed into the image of the divine.

While the idea of becoming what one beholds has today been loosed from its original theological moorings, the logic Paul advances is deeply resonant with a reversibility of perception thesis. In the reversibility of perception thesis that Merleau-Ponty advances, persons are always affected by the world in which they exist and cannot bracket their existence. This inability of the self to bracket their existence when perceiving another, and the inevitability of the shaping of the senses through perception, together constitute a grammar of perception where the object of perception shapes the self and vice versa.

To become what one beholds in a phenomenology of perception and ontology of the flesh is to participate, by way of perception, in the world. A correlation exists between perception and participation so that becoming what one beholds presupposes an intimate relationship between the sentient and sensible. In Romans, the participatory logic of perception expresses itself in Paul's exhortation to perceive rightly the One who is in and over all (Ephesians 4:6). Notably, the same person who has been made the figurehead for a negated Christian flesh is the figurehead for the resourcement of a theological grammar of perception.

Chapter two's reading of Paul's theology of the Cross begins with the story of Israel and the law. A reading of the New Testament scholar, Tom Wright has shown that the Law of Moses was the concretisation of God's presence in the life of Israel and required both affection and obedience. As the history of Israel shows, the senses cannot always attune themselves fully to the object of their desire and affection. It was the case then, as it is the case now. In Romans, the Cross

mediates this sense-perceptual failure by providing a new manner of ordering the senses to the divine. In Romans, Christ was the final articulation of God's covenant with Israel, and embodies the new relationship between God, self, and Israel. Christ is the new order of perception because He orders the senses rightly through the Cross.

The incarnation of the Son is the enfleshment of the new participative norm by which each sense-perceptual self may truly come to know the God who brings all that is into being. Christ not only evokes a personal address but supplies the image by which the senses may perceive God's eternal embrace. Christ provides the new grammar of perception because He is co-Creator, whose flesh not only attests to the materiality of existence but also to the God who brings all that is into being. This metaphysical reading of the Word made flesh (expressed in Chapter three) is the new measure of perception in the person of Christ.

Beholding the person of Christ establishes a new participative norm by which the senses are not only attuned to Christ but transformed by the Spirit. A reading of the book of Romans makes headway in its language of Spirit and Messiah, law, and grace, and of the covenantal relationship between God and Israel. These supposed binary markers in Paul, so Susan Eastman, Grant Macaskill, and Tom Wright argue, function centrally in Paul's theology of the Cross. The Cross brings the flesh of persons and the flesh of Christ together in a complementary rather than a competitive way. Reading the flesh in Paul is not a case of choosing Christ's flesh over that of the self, but of its intertwining in the cosmology of the Cross.

The term 'cosmology' is instructive for its narration of the relationship between the self and the created order and the life, death, and resurrection of Christ.⁴⁵⁷ First, the self exists as one whose senses are continuously shaped and informed by the created order and its cosmic ordering. Here, the sense-perceptual self exist as one who is open to the positive and negative influencers that form part of existence.⁴⁵⁸ Navigating these influencers is precarious in a reading of Paul because so many have interpreted him as saying that the flesh is life negating and the spirit is life affirming. The correlation then often leads to the equation of the flesh as death and the spirit as

⁴⁵⁷ I follow Susan Eastman's evaluation of the term Eastman, Susan G. 2017. *Paul and the Person: Reframing Paul's Anthropology*. Michigan: Eerdmans., 49-51.

⁴⁵⁸ Wright's intricate discussion of the Law of Moses, sin, and the new law that Christ embodies delineates the relationship between life affirming and life negating influencers. See Wright, Tom. 2017. *The Day the Revolution Began: Rethinking the Meaning of Jesus' Crucifixion*. London: SPCK., 276-94.

life. Second, the Cross has its own cosmology through the life, death, and resurrection of Christ. In Christ's salvific economy, life describes the new existence that persons enjoy as embodied beings in Christ, and death describes the laying to rest of that which makes the senses blind to God's revelatory presence in the created order. Life and death describe two modes of existence that are always simultaneously present to each sense-perceptual self. Choosing the life which Christ inaugurates, as Wright suggests, is existing as one who is cruciform or Christ-like. Choosing death means choosing to live a life that does not conform to the Cross.

Contrary to the dualism of flesh and spirit as the dualism between death and life which strips the self of agency, the Cross advances the agency of the sense-perceptual self insofar as the senses either take part in the cosmology of the Cross or not. It is not then that Paul advances a logic of life and death or spirit and matter but of Messiah and Spirit where the embodied self constantly lives within the cosmology of the Cross.⁴⁵⁹ Paul's theology of the Cross is characteristic for its encompassing and restorative vision for the created order through the Second Person of the Trinity. In Romans, the Cross is the culmination of God's covenantal relationship with Israel. Christ embodies the old and the new as he takes upon himself the trespasses associated with the inability of the senses to attune to God fully.⁴⁶⁰ Christ's hypostatic union establishes a new order of perception by which persons, through grace, may adore Christ and thereby the Trinity. This new law in Christ is life and light because the Cross reverses a failed logic of perception. Here, Christ's incarnation safeguards against the misapprehension of the divine insofar as Christ founds a person's new manner of relating to God.

Grace orders the senses through the reconciliation Christ establishes on the Cross by sanctifying and justifying the sense-perceptual self and thereby restoring the senses to their original state.⁴⁶¹ First, the Cross heals the senses by restoring them to the fullness of their being. Here the

⁴⁵⁹ Wright, *The Day the Revolution Began.*, 276-94.

⁴⁶⁰ Wright, *The Day the Revolution Began.*, 276-94.

⁴⁶¹ Serene Jones makes the case for a reading of the Cross that starts with God's affirming grace, and then moves to the reconciliation of self with God. Traditionally theologies of the Cross have the order reversed. I prefer Jones' ordering as it supports the restorative reading of the Cross Chapter five advances. See Jones, Serene. 2000. *Feminist Theory and Christian Theology: Cartographies of Grace*. Minneapolis: Fortress., Bosch, Robson Rozelle. 2014. "Flourishing? A Feminist Theological Perspective". *Journal of Gender and Religion in Africa* 20 (2): 133-50., Bosch, Robson Rozelle. 2013. 'Graced, Happy or Virtuous: Three Female Theological Voices on God and Human Flourishing'. Stellenbosch.

imago Dei translates as the union of self and divine so that perception becomes an extension of the perfection of right relations between self and God.⁴⁶² Second, the senses are ordered anew, or reconciled, to their fount who is the object of their perception. In these two instances, Christ is the participative norm through whom the senses perceive their *telos*, the Trinity.

The Trinity has a structural place in Julian of Norwich's *Revelations of Divine Love* where she makes grace central in her restorative reading of the Cross. Grace is the evidence of God's renewal and restoration of the senses because it awakens the senses to the same Love which orders their being and which is the meaning of the Cross. The vision of the Cross as the restoration of the senses, and of the union in the Second Person of the Trinity, can only take place when one reads the Cross as a Trinitarian act.⁴⁶³ Julian of Norwich's writings not only capture this logic in an embodied manner, she also registers Christ's address in Trinitarian language. Each address of Christ, Julian identifies as different states of relation between herself and the persons of the Trinity. Christ's Trinitarian address is, therefore, also a relational address. He is her Lover, Carer, and Maker,⁴⁶⁴ who meets her as God who is Trinity in unity. Significantly, these are all names that are closest to Julian's embodied existence, suggesting the intimate relationship between the senses and the divine.

Reading the Cross as a moment of restoration and oneing bears significant implications for the place of perception in a Christian ontology of the flesh. By starting with the Cross as a vision of Love expressed in Trinitarian address, the senses participate in a narrative which seeks the perfection of the senses. Needing to perceive rightly means seeing truly the God who meets persons in the materiality of their existence as the fulfilment and perfection of their existence. Julian's writings exemplify the homecoming that the senses experience when ordered by the Cross. Perceiving herself in light of the Cross, Julian's expression of the Trinity in terms resonant with her own existence suggests an understanding of the self where the body and its senses are sufficient in capturing her filiation to the divine.⁴⁶⁵

⁴⁶² Bouter, Peter, F. 2001. *Athanasius van Alexandrië en zijn uitleg van de Psalmen*. Zoetermeer: Uitgeverij Boekencentrum., 88.

⁴⁶³ Wright, *The Day the Revolution Began.*, 293.

⁴⁶⁴ Julian of Norwich. 2015. *Julian of Norwich: Revelations of Divine Love*. Translated by Barry Windeatt. Oxford World Classics. Oxford: Oxford University Press., 56.

⁴⁶⁵ See Soskice, Janet. 2007. *The Kindness of God: Metaphor, Gender and Religious Language*. Oxford: OUP.

Julian's visions of Christ on the Cross develop a soteriology of the sense insofar as perceptual failure marks the failure of the self to see its true existence in Christ. In contrast to sense-perceptual failure, sense-perceptual faith describes the senses as they are in Christ. The Cross, in *Revelations of Divine Love*, provides the grammar by which the senses may perpetually be oriented to the divine. Perceiving Christ is thus a salutary act. When Christ is the object of perception, the sense-perceptual self is incorporated into Christ's economy and, is thereby transformed. By having one's perception transformed, one's manner of perceiving the world is rightly ordered to God. Existing in the world as one whose sense-perception is Christo-centric means not only seeing God's encompassing vision for the whole of the created order, but also seeing the place that persons have in realising this vision within the created order. Here, Christ is the new perceptual norm in which persons participate.

The failure to perceive Christ and God's encompassing vision for the created order, Romans equates to idolatry. Traditionally associated with the adoration of images that are not God, the Cross shows the failure to perceive in terms of God's vision for the created order also equates to idolatry. The language of idolatry one finds, intertwines with the language of affect and desire. The senses yearn to adore an image in a manner that it perceptually closest to their own embodied existence. The relationship between image and senses, one reads in the quintessentially Augustinian phrase, 'because you made us for yourself and our hearts find no peace until they rest in you'.⁴⁶⁶ Augustine's restlessness is characteristic for its bodily register. It is Augustine's heart, the metaphoric seat of affect and desires, that yearns to become one with God. In order to appreciate this bodily grammar of union with the divine, one has to consider the relationship between the body and sin in Augustine's writings which has led some scholars to conclude that he is less appreciative of the body than this dissertation has argued so far.

Following Harrison's analysis of affect in Augustine's writings, one may argue that his focus lies not so much with the body, but with the ordering of the senses to the divine. Augustine's anthropology does not cast as long a shadow upon a theology of the body when read from the perspective of a theological grammar of perception. When Augustine emphasises the brokenness of life because of sin, one may interpret it as perceptual failure, the inability of the senses to attune itself to the divine. The place of sin in Augustine's writings, one should read in light of the

⁴⁶⁶ Augustine. 1961. *Confessions*. Translated by R. S Coffin. London: Penguin Books., Book I., 21.

redemptive story of the metaphysical Word. This Word is the God by whom creation comes into being, by whom the human predicament is absolved, and through whom believing persons now exist as the *totus Christus*.

Augustine's anthropology recognises God in the life of the believer with all its capacities and capabilities. It translates as a Trinitarian aesthetics where the truth communicated by the revelation of the Triune God is incarnated in the everydayness of existence. The Holy Spirit, whom Augustine's writings present as the creative and sustaining God present both to Godself and to creation, communicates to persons within the realm of the visible and embodied. It is the Spirit who reveals Godself to the created order in terms resonant with their own existence. In the Spirit's communication with the believing self, their own embodied situatedness becomes the framework by which divine speech is translated within a given context and time.

In a similar way, Athanasius in *On the Incarnation* and *Letters concerning the Holy Spirit* expounds the relationship between self and God in terms of the Word and the Spirit. According to *On the Incarnation*, God creates *ex nihilo* according to God's image. The doctrine of the *imago Dei* suggests that persons are not only created for communion with God, but that their very embodied manner of existence is the means by which they should come to know God.⁴⁶⁷ Knowing God means perceiving God, and thereby employing the faculties of the senses to apprehend God's hand at work in the created order. Christ is the ultimate exemplar to whom persons are conformed. *On the Incarnation* makes special reference to the Egyptian Fayūm portraits as an example of the relationship between persons and the divine. The Word graces persons with existence in Him, and the Spirit continuously conforms the self to its Christo-centric existence.

When expressing the *telos* of perception in the way that I have, one wants to relate these sense-perceptual processes to the Spirit. The Spirit is sometimes side lined in a reading of the Cross, and yet, the Spirit is central in actualising the senses according to its Christo-centric existence. Here, once more, the question is not of spirit verses matter, but Spirit and Messiah. What has thus been in the background until now, I would like to bring to the foreground. A theological grammar of perception rests on the Spirit who, after Christ's death and resurrection, actualises the senses to their fount.

⁴⁶⁷ Baddeley, 'An Exploration of Athanasius' Strategies for Reading Genesis 1-3', 131.

The relationship between the flesh and the Spirit's actualising of the senses rests on the equality that the Spirit has with the Father and the Son. Maintaining the equality of the persons of the Trinity is the only way one can speak of the Spirit's relation to the senses. When one is speaking of the actualisation of the senses, one is speaking of the Spirit's communication of divine truths to persons. The Spirit must be immanent to the life of the Trinity, Romans 8 suggests, otherwise the Spirit's revelation and the utterance thereof by the sense would not have the same condition of possibility.

Romans 8 brings the Spirit in relation to the flesh through the Cross. Two images crystallise in the Cross, the Spirit who holds Christ's groans with that of humanity's, and the Spirit's revelation of such groaning to the Trinity.⁴⁶⁸ The same Spirit who held Christ's humanity and divinity in the hypostatic union, is the Spirit who holds persons in Christ's divine economy. The simultaneous affirmation of the Spirit as God who is present to Christ and to persons is significant for the communicative continuum which the Spirit establishes. Correspondingly, Julian's *Revelations of Divine Love* describes the Spirit's communicative act in terms of the love and goodness that holds all that is into being, and which describes the relations of the Trinity. The Spirit's unity with the Trinity means not only that persons are incorporated into God's economy in the Word and through the Spirit, but also that the Spirit makes the existence of persons present to the life of the Trinity.

In *Letters to Serapion concerning the Holy Spirit* Athanasius shows that the Spirit's immanence to persons occurs in unison with Pentecost (Acts 2:1-31), where Christ sends the Spirit in His stead. At Pentecost, persons responded to the Spirit's presence in an embodied manner by spontaneously speaking in ways which made incarnate God's presence to persons. The account of glossolalia is suggestive, in a reading of a theological grammar of perception, not necessarily because persons spoke in ways that were incomprehensible but that persons were compelled to

⁴⁶⁸ Wright, *The Day the Revolution Began.*, pp. 292-3.

make known (utter) the presence of the divine to their senses.⁴⁶⁹ The necessity to witness reveals the role that the Spirit has in invoking a response from the sense-perceptual self.⁴⁷⁰

The Spirit evokes a response from the sense-perceptual self because the Spirit reveals God's encompassing vision for the created order to persons, and what it means to exist as the *imago Dei*. The Spirit conforms the senses to the grammar of the incarnation and the Cross, and so transforms and enlivens the senses to God's presence in the created order.⁴⁷¹ One sees the responsiveness of the senses to the divine in Augustine's Christological interpretation of Scripture. In *Confessions* book XIII, Augustine recalls the words of Christ, '[t]he things which you see by my Spirit, I see, just as I speak the words which you speak by my Spirit...'⁴⁷² The modes by which the Spirit communicates divine truths to persons Carol Harrison captures in her analysis of *vox* and *verbum* in Augustine's writings, two modes of speaking made in responsiveness to Christ's presence. Both the incoherent and unutterable (*vox*) register of perception and the comprehensible and articulate (*verbum*) register of perception, manifest God's presence to the senses. These modes of speaking suggest the Spirit's actualisation of the senses.

Articulating the Body in Theology

This thesis has taken the challenges that surround the Christian flesh and has shown the body to be present to Christian theology but in ways that need fresh articulation. We can see this in considering some of the debates around of gender specific language for God. Mary Daly's critique that if God is male, male is god⁴⁷³ expresses the concern that a dominant or one-sided depiction of

⁴⁶⁹ Sarah Coakley includes the section, 'The Charismatic Constituency: Embarrassment or Riches', when writing on her investigation of glossolalia in modern Anglicanism. Her findings are suggestive for the interrelationship of affect, perception and the Trinity advanced in this Chapter. See Coakley, Sarah. 2013. *God, Sexuality, and the Self: An Essay on the Trinity*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press., 152-189.

⁴⁷⁰ This necessity to witness bears interesting conclusions when read in light of Harrison's analysis of *vox* and *verbum* in Augustine's Christological interpretation of Scripture.

⁴⁷¹ One finds vivid imagery depicting the role of the Spirit at the annunciation. Read analogically, the Spirit's formation of the Christ child in Mary's womb speaks to the Spirit's actualisation of existence in the flesh. The Spirit enlivens Mary's flesh by awakening in her God's divine intention. In the presence of the divine, the flesh is perpetually transformed according to God's will. It simultaneously announces this will by attesting to God's presence in bodily form.

⁴⁷² Augustine, *Confessions*., xiii. 29. 341.

⁴⁷³ Daly, Mary. 1985. *Beyond God the Father: Towards a Philosophy of Women's Liberation*. Boston: Beacon Press., 19.

God's revelation to the created order can be life negating.⁴⁷⁴ Since this dissertation emphasises perception and the ways in which it informs our knowing, a theological grammar of perception suggests that the masculine representation of God's revelation is one register amongst many.

It may be granted that a masculine register of perception has enjoyed prominence for centuries, but this need not lead to the elimination of embodied language. Instead, we may liken this one-sidedness to idolatry. In chapter two, idolatry was described as sense-perceptual failure; the attuning of the senses to that which is like the Creator but not God. Analogously, one may argue that when one image made in God's likeness is presented as the only means by which the senses may come to know the divine, then that image is an idol. Attuning the senses to the image instead of the Maker is a misapprehension of God, and a misappropriation of the register of perception with which God reveals Godself to persons. But such misappropriation (and the concomitant sin of idolatry) can be levelled against any and all register of perception that seek to assert itself over and against other grammars of perception.

A masculine register of perception, like other registers, shows how persons apprehend God's revelation uniquely in their embodied circumstance according to the cosmos of relations in which they exist. The *Comedy* illustrates this dynamic in the way that his vision of the divine is a vision of the heavenly hosts who all, arranged in the form of a rose, are held in being by God who is Love. Dante the author's register, similar to Julian's register which speaks of God as Mother, Lover, and Brother, shows how God meets all equally and yet diversely.

In the varied registers of perception, concern might arise as to whether a theological grammar of perception universalises God's revelation, i.e. where there is no 'normative' description of God's revelation. With Julian, as with others, it is the young Jewish Nazarene whose unique identity grounds all perception. Christ's incarnation is the particular revelation of God to the created order through the flesh of creation. In Christ, all perception of God is grounded in the love that He articulates through the Spirit. Any weariness of the subjective as theological criteria for the perception of God need not deter us because Christ's hypostatic union ontologically changes the nature of perception in him. Christ's hypostatic union reconciles the ontological distinction between creature and Creator by assuming, healing, and restoring the flesh of persons.

⁴⁷⁴ The sociologist, Brene Brown, does a lot of work on the role that shame has in discourses of exclusion. Shame here becomes the status associated with those who are not represented or visible.

The hallmark of Christ's union with persons is the centrality that the flesh plays both in perceiving Christ and in translating such perception in embodied terms.

The incarnation is the absolute affirmation that God meets us in the flesh of the person of Christ as the God who created *ex nihilo*. A theological grammar of perception indistinguishably holds creation *ex nihilo* and incarnation together because Christ meets persons as their Creator and Saviour.⁴⁷⁵ These doctrinal narratives express God's eternal embrace communicated to and for the sense-perceptual self as the *Imago Dei*. Persons are central to the expression of God's creative agency as the three persons of the Trinity because they exist as the *Imago Dei*. When God creates in God's image, the three persons of the Trinity bring persons into unique relationship with them. Having said this, one should be weary, as Karen Kilby suggests, of instrumentalising the persons of the Trinity.⁴⁷⁶ Here Julian's understanding of the Trinity is profoundly orthodox since her expression of the Trinity expresses itself in the identification of God's relation to her as three diverse yet simultaneous expressions.⁴⁷⁷

In view of Julian's sayings, a theological grammar of perception understands the Triune God as affecting the self in differing ways. The Trinity meets the sense-perceptual self as Creator, Lover, and Sustainer in ways that are resonant with Julian's corporeal grammar and yet distinct in articulation. God brings the flesh of persons (as the created order) into being through God's divine agency. Being made in God's image denotes, in this instance, the subjective expression of the sense-perceptual self in her or his ability to direct his or her agency toward God.⁴⁷⁸ God Incarnate is the One who, through the continuous activity of the Trinity in the person of Christ, is the embodiment of the perfection of the *Imago Dei*. Christ both embodies the vision of the orientation of the sense-perceptual self to the divine, and He provides the corporeal grammar by which the self can attune its senses to the divine. The person of the Trinity who conforms the senses to the

⁴⁷⁵ The flesh of the created order cannot be removed or stripped in the perception of God because it is the very revelation of the God who is Creator and Saviour.

⁴⁷⁶ Kilby, Karen. 2000. 'Perichoresis and Projection: Problems with Social Doctrines of the Trinity'. *New Blackfriars* 81 (956): 432–45., 439.

⁴⁷⁷ Julian of Norwich. 1966. *Divine Revelations*. Translated by Clifton Wolters. Penguin Classics. London: Penguin Group., 128.

⁴⁷⁸ Dominic Robinson expands on the *Imago Dei* and Irenaeus as it relates to a person's turning to God. See Robinson, Dominic. 2015. 'Ecclesial-Narrative Model of the *Imago Dei*'. In *The Ashgate Research Companion to Theological Anthropology*, edited by Joshua R. Farris and Charles Taliaferro, 207–16. London: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group., 209.

divine, and who actualises the ontological union between Christ's personhood and humanity (and thereby the flesh of persons with the flesh of Christ), is the Holy Spirit. The Spirit actualises the existence of the sense-perceptual self insofar as the Spirit constantly orientates the senses to their divine fount.

The exchange of the Trinity with the sense-perceptual self structures the *Imago Dei* as a Trinitarian act. The sense-perceptual self here embodies God's vision of creation and recreation. Not in any anthropocentric way, but in the way that all beings come to their fullest when they express God's intention of communion and love. Existing as the *Imago Dei* thus means existing as God's embodied articulation of the restoration of the flesh that is to come. This restoration finds articulation not as the recovery of that which is lost, but as the gradual transformation, perfection, and beatification of the self through the Love that orders all being. The Trinity hereby becomes the vision of the restoration of self and created order, and therefore also, of the vision of its recreation.⁴⁷⁹

The question of the relationship between subjective perception and God, is a matter that concerns the form and content of perception. All perception proceeds from the standpoint of the God who meets persons first and foremost as 'I am that I am' in Julian of Norwich's words.⁴⁸⁰ This metaphysical register for the divine grounds all perception in the One who is prior to all, in all, and the condition of possibility of all. God who is Trinity in unity is the content of theological perception. When we perceive God's creative activity in the created order, one perceives such creativity first and foremost metaphysically. All consequent embodied articulation of this presence unfolds according to the One God whose being goes unaffected by the grammar of perception with which the self registers such presence.

A grammar of theological perception constantly holds together the metaphysical and visual through the ministry of the Spirit. God is the content of all theological perception and Christ incarnate is the form of such perception. The Third Person of the Trinity, the Spirit, mediates between the content and form of theological perception. Through the Spirit, the life of the Trinity is present to the senses both as the Triune God who transcends all embodied expression, and as the

⁴⁷⁹ The theme of creation and recreation especially as it relates to the Cross is prominent in Wright's *The Day the Revolution Began*.

⁴⁸⁰ Julian of Norwich. 2015. *Julian of Norwich: Revelations of Divine Love*. Translated by Barry Windeatt. Oxford World Classics. Oxford: Oxford University Press., 128.

incarnate One whose presence is made visible through each person's register of perception. The Spirit's mediation of the form and content of a theological grammar of perception safeguards against the misappropriation of the divine in human image.

While the Cross transforms the senses and so affirms the absolute centrality of the body within the soteriological unfolding of the created order, the Spirit graces the senses with the ability to register God's personal address in their own corporeal grammar. Because God's presence to persons and the reception thereof through the senses is immensely personal, each sense-perceptual self responds to God in their own corporeal terms as the purposeful desire to have God immanent to them. A theological grammar of perception desires to articulate God's vision for the created order expressed in the Cross through the senses of the sense-perceptual self. It does so by weaving the grammar of perception together with the grammar of theology. This grammar, as we have been suggesting, is the grammar of creation and incarnation. God assumed the materiality of existence in order that the sense-perceptual self may know God, take part in God, and thereby receive Christ in their own terms.⁴⁸¹

Notably, the writers whose theologies found this thesis' recovery of the body through the reconstruction of a theological grammar of perception, had themselves registered God's revelation sense-perceptually. Paul's Damascus road experience, Augustine's experience of joy and delight, Julian's visions of Christ, and Dante the author and pilgrim's translation of divine truths in terms of the person of Beatrice, all stand as experiences that capture the appearance of the divine in the embodied circumstances of persons. Each account, in its experiential and subjective nature, has a sense-perceptual register of its own grounded in Trinitarian theology. These writers display how the words of their texts, their thoughts, and the recording of their deeds, translates as the close connection between Word, symbol, and performance.

Although we have texts as the only source of reference, and as such have a necessarily textual basis, the writers whom we have been engaging in this dissertation all have a very bodily register of perception. Julian, for example, describes how she is about to collapse before she receives her visions, and how pain moves through her body. A manner of speaking that the reader

⁴⁸¹ Athanasius of Alexandria. n.d. 'Dei Incarnatione: On the Incarnation'. In *NPNF2-04. Athanasius: Select Works and Letters*, edited by Philip Schaff. Vol. 4. Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, II. Michigan: Christian Classics Ethereal Library.

can associate with based on their own awareness of pain. Likewise, Dante poet employs love as the register of perception to express the truth that the *Comedy* speaks.

Julian and Dante are distinguishable from Athanasius and Augustine for the somatic register they employ to convey their meaning. While the contexts of Julian and Dante differ from the bishops, one may be reminded that both Athanasius and Augustine are writing for the liturgical setting. A setting defined by the fact that abstraction finds concretisation through word, symbol, and performance. The relationship between word, symbol, and performance, we may be reminded, is the visual unfolding of the ways in which persons come to know the divine.

Whether the early church fathers or the medieval writers, all knowing originates in bodily experience. No knowledge is innate to persons but instead mystic and bishop drew from their own context as a means of communicating divine truths. One sees this in the way that Athanasius, for example, draws on Egyptian material culture to convey the truth of the incarnation. All experience is, therefore, necessarily bodily experience, and so what a Christian ontology of the flesh opposes is not abstraction but the loss of the body and the body's learning.

One may think here of the ways in which the senses have a unique role in communicating the love that orders existence. The centrality of the bodily thus lies therein that these experiences orients the senses to their fount. We have described this orienting earlier as a homecoming of the senses. Dante the poet visually depicts beatification in the way that Dante the pilgrim's sight undergoes a transformation between *Inferno*, *Purgatorio* and *Paradiso*. Characteristically Dantean is the fact that Dante the pilgrim's vision undergoes a transformation with each encounter he has, whether it be the negated flesh of those in *Inferno*, the striving persons in *Purgatorio*, or his vision of the white rose, and finally of God as persons in perfect communion held in the Love that characterises God's being. In the final cantos of *Paradiso* especially, Dante the pilgrim peers at the glory of God in a manner that suggests a drawing-in and a transformation of the self. The glory that Dante the pilgrim beholds is a glory that is active instead of passive. With each gaze, Dante the pilgrim not only sees, but also has his senses conformed, and thereby irrevocably changed by his sight of the divine. Here God's glory is the grammar for the soteriological unfolding from perceptual failure, to the restoration of the senses, to perceptual faith and participation. Dante the pilgrim hereby bodily performs (makes visual through enactment and representation), the self who meets the *telos* of its perception.

The communion of persons in the final cantos of *Paradiso* visually performs the homecoming of the senses in vivid and bodily terms. This performative posture that Dante the pilgrim's perception takes, enacts the shift that occurs within a theological grammar of perception. Vittorio Montemaggi names this dynamic in the *Comedy* Christological foregrounding. Here the soteriological unfolding of the sense-perceptual self occurs alongside the bodily representation of God's revelation. In today's terms, one might think of Handel's *Messiah* and the ways in which it takes the message of Christ and translates it in audible terms. Music and the role that it has in making audible (visible) the invisible is but one example of what may be termed an incarnational performance.

Incarnational performances are participative in nature. One may liken these performances in liturgical context to the sacraments and the way that sacraments instantiate God's presence. Here the liturgical space is the symbolic representation of the body of Christ that is the church. And, just as the sense-perceptual self makes visible the invisible in liturgical context, persons take this sacramental showing forth in non-liturgical contexts too. Incarnational performances thus extend the liturgical space by instantiating God's presence in the ordinary and non-religious. This extension is significant because echoes the communion for which persons are created in the Genesis account.

Drawing Conclusion for a Christian Ontology of the Flesh

There are several reasons to suggest that the body has been placed in the background in Christian theology. This thesis, by focussing on Scripture and its interpretation thereof by a select group of writers, suggests that the Christian tradition is unduly credited with body-negating sentiments. On the contrary, the doctrines of creation *ex nihilo* and incarnation are doctrines that pertain to the body (and bodies) as the expression of the relation between human and divine. By articulating the significance of these doctrines for the body and its sense-perceptual engagements, this thesis suggests that the body is and has always been unmistakably central to God's vision for the communion of creature and Creator. The fact that the writers whom this thesis engages with all display intricately interwoven understandings of creation *ex nihilo*, the incarnation, and the Trinity, suggests that the body is not lost to their writings either.

In both the Bible and its interpretation over the centuries of Christian thought, the body is central. The 'how' as to the ways in which the body is central to such writings becomes clear when

one reads the presence of the body in terms of the sense-perceptual registers that an author employs to convey the meaning of a text. By reading those theologians that employ the bodily registers for their understanding of the human-divine relationship, this thesis places itself within the context of an already existent body-employing community of writers. If there is a loss of which to speak in view of these authors, it is a loss that came after their writing, and in a manner that one might not anticipate.

On reflection, one finds that what is lacking is not the bodily in the texts of the early church and medieval writers that we have been reading, but a grammar with which to articulate the body's learning (sensing) of God's revelation. We thus find in contemporary discourses the pernicious tendency to attribute a negative conception of the flesh to (amongst others) Paul and Augustine. There is an enormously underdeveloped field of inquiry when it comes articulating the perceptual registers that persons employ to communicate divine presence. This thesis tries to respond to this gap by constructing a framework with which to read the theological grammars of perception pertinent to the writings we have been engaging. Ways that, as chapter four suggests, can give new modes of speaking of God's presence in time and space. By constructing a theological grammar of perception, this thesis also then tries to recover those writers for contemporary theologians, such as feminist theologians, who may have relegated them to the dust heap as body-negators.

The choice to read Augustine and Paul who are both often credited with spiritualising the body, is to show that, even when read in relation to those themes that one traditionally associates with body-negating sentiments (sin, guilt, shame, etc.) the body is absolutely central to their articulation of the relationship between human and divine. When one understands the body to be an entity that is first, constituted by the network of relations in which persons exists and second, by the fact that it always exists as a creature in relation to the Creator, the body cannot be dislocated from the self in a manner that would suggest its bracketing. We have suggested, therefore, that what concerns the recovery of the body is not the refusal of abstraction but the retrieval of a neglected manner of understanding the body's presence to Scripture, doctrine, and the writings of certain thinkers.

If there is a loss of the body of which to speak, it is the short-lived loss of a grammar for the body's learning in the presence of the divine. Such a loss is one that defines Christian theology in response to Descartes' philosophy. And yet, the body was recovered for Western philosophy by way of Merleau-Ponty's reading of, amongst others, a certain strand of sensuous theology. By

enlisting Merleau-Ponty's philosophy, we find that what needs recovery is not the body but a grammar for the body's learning. An unexpected but valuable outcome is the framework that Merleau-Ponty gives to a conception of the self in terms that, albeit different in register, accords with the cosmic relational matrix that Scripture describes.

The similarities between Merleau-Ponty's conception of the self and that which we find in a reading of Paul is particularly helpful in reframing the loss of the body as the neglect of a grammar of perception. Our reading, by reframing the language of the body's reception of the divine through a myriad of sense-perceptual processes, thus moves beyond the task of recovery to that of reconstruction. We could have, of course, concluded with the recovery of the body in theology but that would not have been as satisfactory as further presenting new ways in which to formulate the body's knowing. We continue then to indicate sense-perceptual failure as the cause behind the *perceived* loss of the body. The term 'sense-perceptual failure' here describes how persons fail to perceive the body's presence to theology through a lack of vocabulary, and a misperception of the ways in which the body articulates itself in a text. Sense-perceptual failure, like the other terms this thesis constructs, gestures to a greater soteriological rendering of the self in relation to the divine.

Insofar as the senses pertain to the reading of theological texts (exemplified in the ways that this study has tried to 'find' the body), the senses also play a significant part in physically enacting the state of relation between human and divine. By focussing on those registers of perception the writers employed, one finds a unique narration of the senses' journey from failure, to faith, to homecoming. We mapped this movement in a unique and innovative way in terms of the body's manners of speaking 'God with us'. Here, the body's showing forth of the revelation of God in the materiality of existence makes visible the invisible. One quickly finds, however, that describing this bodily 'God with us' gets inhibited by the anxiety surrounding the ontologically different in Western philosophy.

Once we reintroduce the transcendent as a category of perception, we begin to uncover the significant contribution this study makes. A Christian ontology of the flesh seeks to articulate the ways in which the body can perceive the divine in a register that is consistent with the materiality of their existence. This materiality is founded in and through the God who is invisible and yet entirely immanent to persons. Learning to recognise the immanence of God through the corporeal grammar of the Son and the ministry of the Spirit, means that one is undergoing a sense-perceptual

transformation. This transformation of the senses characterises a uniquely somatic unfolding of the body that is founded in God's vision for creation and recreation. A Christian ontology of the flesh maps this unfolding soteriologically as that moment when the sense-perceptual self has their senses ordered to the divine.

When the senses are ordered to the divine, the life of the sense-perceptual self becomes interwoven with the narrative of God's revelation to persons through creation, incarnation, and Cross. We call this the homecoming of the senses; that moment when the sense-perceptual self begins to understand their life in relation to God's revelation in the created order as the expression of God's desire to commune with persons. By being present to the created order, God's revelation becomes a deeply participative reality which persons partake of daily. It is striking that the theologians we have been reading capture this participatory existence in the ways that their gestures, gazes, sounds, and writings visually enact their homecoming.

In their making visible of the invisible, the writers who we have been reading perform what we may understand as the vision of God's new creation. Homecoming here denotes two fundamental sense-perceptual processes, the orientation of the senses to their divine fount, and the senses' perception of such divine presence in the materiality of existence. Grammars of oneing, of joy and of beatification all register the transformation of the self in the presence of the divine. This transformation one may also frame as an incarnational performance – that moment when a sense-perceptual self understands the status that they have in Christ through the Spirit, and articulates this status in embodied terms.

While we have framed incarnational performances in terms of the registers our select group of writers employ, we may also find such performances in the everyday. One grammar of perception that strikes me, is that of art. Art is a particularly effective mechanism of calling to mind the varied articulations of God's revelation to the created order. These articulations are characteristic for the ways in which they foreground an aspect of God's revelation to the created order. In past publications, I have tended to focus on the ways in which the Cross is a popular mode of expression especially because the Cross speaks to all equally.⁴⁸²

⁴⁸² One such grammar cruciform grammar of perception the feminist theologian Serene Jones employs. I explore this register in Robson, Rozelle. 2014. "Flourishing? A Feminist Theological Perspective". *Journal of Gender and Religion in Africa* 20 (2): 133–50.

The Russian performance artist, Pyotr Pavlensky, incorporates a similar register in the dialectics of the Cross that are present to his commentary on those injustices he perceives.⁴⁸³ I find Pavlensky's perceptual register of the Cross interesting in the way that he uses an explicitly religious register for his performance in a secular context.⁴⁸⁴ Whether Pavlensky himself is religious or not, he does not say – the key to his performance is that he incorporates the theological as a means of describing what is askew in the world. Without him necessarily intending, Pavlensky foregrounds the Cross and the ways in which the Cross renders an alternative vision of love to that which is at the order of the day.

Photo of Carcass removed for copyright reasons. Copyright holder is Maxim Zmeev.

(Carcass by Pyotr Pavlensky, 2013.)⁴⁸⁵

What Pavlensky does within the Russian landscape, the Ethiopian Orthodox artist Aïda Muluneh does within the African landscape. While Aïda Muluneh has been internationally acclaimed for her art, her art incorporates a grammar of perception that is particularly African in its coding. This is because in Africa, Muluneh describes, the making of art is an act of praise

⁴⁸³ See Robson Bosch, Rozelle. 2018. 'Carcass and Cross: Discovering the Sacred in the Secular'. *Theology* 121 (4): 252–60.

⁴⁸⁴ Robson Bosch, 'Carcass and Cross', 3, 7.

⁴⁸⁵ J. B. Platt, 'The Body Politic', *The Calvert Journal*, <<https://www.calvertjournal.com/opinion/show/3365/pyotr-pavlensky-protest-art-living-pain-sculpture>> (accessed 12 August 2016). Photograph by Maxim Zmeev.

expressed in response to the divine.⁴⁸⁶ Based on my construction of a Christian ontology of the flesh, I interpret her responsiveness in making art as an act of love made to the God who creates all that is by His abounding love. The prominence of bodily subjects in Muluneh's art is, furthermore, instructive for the ways that the body is always to the fore when the sense-perceptual self has their senses attuned to the divine.

One particular series of photographs, her Series 99 (nine-nine), engages with the *Comedy's Inferno* xx and reinterprets it within an African aesthetic framework. Here, once more, what Dante the author captures in word, symbol, and gesture, Muluneh performs through her depiction of the processors in *Inferno* xx.⁴⁸⁷ Her interpretation of the *Comedy* is an act of embodiment, and since the topic that concerns such embodiment is the love that grounds all existence, Muluneh's Series 99 shows how a theological grammar of perception is universal to all, but yet expressed in very particular registers defined by the cosmos of relations in which that particular artist exists.

Photo of Series 99/ Part Two removed for copyright reasons. Copyright holder is Aïda Muluneh.

(Aïda Muluneh, Series 99/Part Two, 2013)⁴⁸⁸

Pyotr Pavlensky shows how performances with a theological foregrounding can make visible the invisible in the realms of the religious and non-religious. Aïda Muluneh frames devotion as a posture of existence which expresses divine presence through the making of art. Both Pyotr

⁴⁸⁶ Muluneh, Aïda. 2019. In Conversation with Aïda Muluneh on Series 99 and an Eastern Orthodox Aesthetic Interview by Rozelle Robson Bosch. Skype.

⁴⁸⁷ Robson Bosch, Rozelle. 2019. 'Bodies, Theology and Dante's *Divine Comedy*: Engaging Dante and Aïda Muluneh', *Stellenbosch Theological Journal*. Forthcoming.

⁴⁸⁸ Muluneh, Aïda. 2013. 'The 99 Series'. 2013. <https://www.aidamuluneh.com/the-99-series-1/?fbclid=IwAR2ugOS-mprG2JTGHALzN1vzxKa8qEEF9ni6cI818kGsKYc65O1Xy0FMxpc>.

and Muluneh participate in that which is invisible and yet manifestly immanent to their grammars of perception. These are two ways in which what we have expressed as a Christian ontology of the flesh finds expression in the life of persons. Art, through flesh, can expound Scripture.

The artists that I have mentioned in this final reflection show how present the body is in the expression of self, other, and divine. The challenge that their art leaves with us is whether we are willing to re-engage the senses and to orient them to the divine. When we are willing to do so, we may once more receive God's address in personal and embodied terms. Here we need not fear the absence or diminishment of the body as it is the very grammar by which God's revelation is made incarnate. By inclining the senses to the divine, one might find God already and always tabernacling amongst us.

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