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Noetic Renewal and Pedagogy
in Cyril of Alexandria

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for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

2026

Abstract

This thesis argues that noetic discourse is integral to Cyril of Alexandria's pro-Nicene theology and to his formation of Christian perception and practice. Across his exegetical, polemical, and pastoral writings, Cyril consistently relies on the antithesis of knowledge and ignorance not as a discrete theory of cognition, but as a pedagogical and theological means of ordering how God is known within the economy of salvation. This study shows that Cyril's Christology supplies an integrative logic by which sacramental, exegetical, and pedagogical dimensions of knowing are coordinated, presenting theological understanding as participation in Christ, within which conceptual reflection is ordered and sustained.

Knowledge of God is mediated through the Incarnate Son, established in the sacramental life of the Church, anticipated through Israel's scriptural forms, and pedagogically exemplified through Abraham's formation. Within this framework, distinctions concerning the mediation, regulation, boundaries, and cultivation of the knowledge of God advance Cyril's pro-Nicene commitments while also shaping his exegetical method. They also inform his rhetorical practice, including the pedagogical and diagnostic use of polemic to train perception and to discern disordered knowing and practice. By situating Cyril's noetic language within his theological aims, this thesis demonstrates that questions of knowing function throughout his work as a formative logic coordinating Christological confession, sacramental practice, scriptural interpretation, and the Christian life as it is expressed in virtue.

Declaration

This thesis is the product of my own work and does not include work that has been presented in any form for a degree at this or any other university. All quotations from, and references to, the work of persons other than myself have been properly acknowledged throughout.

Statement of Copyright

The copyright of this thesis rests with the author. No quotation from it should be published in any format, including electronic and the Internet, without the author's prior written consent. All information derived from this thesis must be acknowledged appropriately.

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Abbreviations

ACO	Acta Concillorum Oecumenicorum
AF	The Apostolic Fathers, ed. and trans. J. B. Lightfoot (Macmillan, 1891).
ANF	Ante-Nicene Fathers
CCSG	Corpus Christianorum, Series Graeca (Brepols, 1970–)
CPG	Clavis Patrum Graecorum, ed. by M. Geerard, 5 vols. (Brepols, 1974–2003)
CUAP	Catholic University of America Press
CUP	Cambridge University Press
FOC	Fathers of the Church
GCS	Die griechischen christlichen Schriftsteller der ersten Jahrhunderte
IJSCC	International Journal for the Study of the Christian Church
IJST	International Journal of Systematic Theology
JECS	Journal of Early Christian Studies
JEH	Journal of Ecclesiastical History
JETS	Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society
JTS	The Journal of Theological Studies
LCL	Loeb Classical Library
LFC	A Library of the Fathers of the Holy Catholic Church
LNPF	A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers
LSJ	Liddell, Scott, Jones, A Greek-English Lexicon (Oxford, 1843; 9 th ed. 1940)
LXX	Septuagint
NPNF	Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers
OECT	Oxford Early Christian Texts
OSHT	Oxford Studies in Historical Theology
OUP	Oxford University Press
PG	Patrologiae Cursus Completus: Series Graeca, ed. J.-P. Migne, 161 vols. (1857-86)
PGL	G. W. H. Lampe, A Patristic Greek Lexicon (Oxford, 1961)
PL	Patrologiae Cursus Completus: Series Latina ed. J.-P. Migne , 221 vols. (1844-64)
ProEccl	Pro Ecclesia
SJTh	Scottish Journal of Theology
SC	Sources Chrétiennes
STPatr	Studia Patristica
SVSP	St. Vladimir's Seminary Press
SVTQ	St. Vladimir's Theological Quarterly
TLG	Thesaurus Linguae Graecae
TS	Theological Studies
VCSup	Supplements to Vigilae Christianae

Introduction

Those who are in sins, and worship the creature rather than the Creator, have their heart in some way ugly and their understanding (διάωσιαν) exceedingly unsightly...but when they welcome [faith] in Christ, they are mentally transformed (μεταπλάττονται νοητῶς) to His divine and excellent beauty...God the Father wishes, therefore, to mold to Him [Christ] those who believe, to mold them by understanding (συνέσει), that is by His own Wisdom, divine I mean, and to make them conformed to Him through sanctification in the Spirit...¹

As this passage indicates, for Cyril of Alexandria, knowledge of God is inseparable from conformity to Christ. To be ‘mentally transformed’ (μεταπλάττονται νοητῶς) is not to undergo a purely cognitive improvement, but to be reshaped in perception, worship, and virtue through participation in the Son by the Holy Spirit.² Knowledge belongs to the divine pedagogy by which believers are molded into Christ’s likeness, such that right apprehension of divine reality is inseparable from ecclesial practice and moral formation.

Cyril’s concerns for the believer’s mind (νοῦς), understanding (σύνεσις), and knowledge (γνῶσις) permeate his exegetical and theological writings. Although well-acquainted with philosophical frameworks, he does not isolate any as discrete topics of inquiry. As a result, modern scholarship has often approached questions of knowledge in Cyril indirectly, either by locating them in his Alexandrian predecessors or by treating them as subordinate to other doctrinal concerns, particularly Christology and Trinitarian theology. It is

¹ Cyril of Alexandria. *Commentarius in Isaiam* in PG, vol. 70 (J.-P. Migne, 1864), cols. 9–1413. *Comm. Is. on Is.* 53.10–11 (PG 70, 1189–92); idem, almost identical thought in *Comm. Is. on Is* 26.1 (PG 70, 585–92), *Commentary on Isaiah*, trans. Robert C. Hill, vol. 2. (Holy Cross Orthodox Press, 2009), p. 231.

² Among the secondary sources that proved helpful in orienting me on the Greek patristic usage of ‘mind’ and ‘heart’ in connection with understanding, though most overlook Cyril. See Antoine Guillaumont, *Les sens des noms du cœur dans l’antiquité*, 29 (Études Carmélitaines), 1950; Kallistos Ware, ‘The Soul in Greek Christianity’, in *From Soul to Self*, ed. M. James C. Crabbe (Routledge, 1999), pp. 49–69; and David Bradshaw, ‘The Mind and the Heart in the Christian East and West’, *Faith and Philosophy: Journal of Christian Philosophers*, 26 (2009), 576–598 doi10.5840/faithphil200926558; A.N. Williams, *Divine Sense: The Intellect in Patristic Theology* (CUP, 2007), and Nathan Jacobs, ‘The Revelation of God, East and West: Contrasting Special Revelation in Western Modernity with the Ancient Christian East’ in *Open Theology*, 3 (2017), 1–15 doi.org/10.1515/ophth-2017-0001. Cf. *First Letter to Succensus*, §7, in Eduard Schwartz, *Concilium Universale Ephesenum*, ACO 1.1.6 (De Gruyter, 1928), 151–57; trans. *The Cambridge Edition of Early Christian Writings* (CUP, 2022), 731–39; For patristic sources on the use of *epinoia* and *noesis*, see § 5.2.a. n. 522.

likely that these references, frequently embedded within polemical or exegetical contexts, have been overlooked or treated as secondary to more explicitly doctrinal concerns.³

This study, therefore, treats noetic (or ‘epistemic’) language as structurally integral to Cyril’s theology, functioning as one of the means by which he orders Christological confession, sacramental participation, scriptural interpretation, and moral formation.⁴ For Cyril, knowledge of God is a reality conditioned by participation in Christ and formed within the Incarnational economy. Christ is therefore not only the revealer of divine truth but its content: the one in whom God is known and through whom knowing becomes possible.

Building on scholarship that has emphasized participation and Christological anthropology in Cyril, this study extends that work by showing how participation operates as a soteriological, ontological, epistemic, and pedagogical principle within his theology. Divine knowledge is mediated, regulated, delimited, received, and cultivated within the Church through ordered practices that form perception and judgment. This study, therefore, discloses what can be seen as a ‘participatory pedagogy’ in which incorporation into Christ precedes formation, and ecclesial practices operate within participation to train perception and judgment. Within this framework, Scripture, sacrament, and ecclesial pedagogy function as integral means by which the Church learns, inhabits, and safeguards the truth of Christ.

³ The Hypatia riot stained his reputation, although not proven he ordered it, Hypatia’s murder in 415 by a Christian mob in Alexandria later defined his reputation. Ancient sources such as *Socrates Scholasticus*, *Historia Ecclesiastica*, 7.15 cite tensions between Cyril and t Orestes, which led later historians to treat Cyril as culpable, or at least complicit. Edward Gibbon’s *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* made Hypatia’s death emblematic of ‘clerical barbarity’, influencing nineteenth and twentieth-century scholarship. Cyril was often omitted from early modern patristic reference works. The nineteenth-century *ANF* and *NPNF* offered little of Cyril’s corpus, leaving out major exegetical works and much of his Christological and sacramental theology. Edward Gibbon, *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, ed. by David Womersley, 3 vols (Penguin, 1994). Fortunately, Cyril has been the source of renewed interest, particularly in the latter half of the twentieth century.

⁴ For what is meant by ‘pro-Nicene’, Lewis Ayres responded to general usage of the term by adding clarity to the late fourth-century Trinitarian consensus supporting Nicaea’s propositions, marked by three core principles: the unity of divine operation, the Son’s eternal generation within the shared divine essence, and the ineffability of God’s essence. Lewis Ayres, *Nicæa and Its Legacy: An Approach to Fourth-Century Trinitarian Theology* (OUP, 2004), pp. 6-7. Beeley’s concerns regarding Ayres’ technical language and framing of fourth century continuity concede that his own subject, Gregory of Nazianzus, stands in continuity with the Nicene tradition. Christopher A. Beeley, *Gregory of Nazianzus on the Trinity and the Knowledge of God: In Your Light We Shall See Light*, OSHT (OUP 2008), pp. 9-11 and n. 27.

My guiding question is how Cyril orders the conditions under which God is known, misrecognized, and safeguarded as known across sacrament, Scripture, rhetoric, and formation. This thesis shows that the noetic language operative in Cyril's writings functions integratively within his pro-Nicene theology, not as a systematic theory of knowledge but as a means of ordering how divine truth is mediated, received, and preserved within the Church and the life of faith. The polemical language examined in this study, though often harsh and normatively charged, belongs historically to the Church's formative practice, where it delineates boundaries of recognition and trains perception rather than functioning as settled doctrine or, as elsewhere, rhetorical excess.

The argument unfolds along three interlocking claims. First, knowledge of God is Christologically conditioned insofar as the Incarnate Son is both the revealer and the content of revelation. Second, the divine economy functions pedagogically through Israel and its material mediations, training perception and forming the faithful by means of sacramental and scriptural practices. Third, Abraham emerges as a culminating pedagogical analogue whose formation reflects the Church's own noetic and moral progression within the economy.

Although Scripture presents the divine economy in chronological sequence, Cyril's spiritual interpretation is not confined to a linear or sequential order. Conceiving salvation history as structured by the Incarnation, he portrays revelation as a set of concentric layers where successive realities lie within one another, drawing his audience more deeply into the mystery of Christ. With Christ as the foundation, I show that the sacraments, Israel, and Abraham serve as 'noetic sites' where divine realities are mediated through humanly accessible forms, guiding rational creatures from ignorance to participation in the life of God. Knowing is enacted ecclesially through participation in Christ's life, mediated by Scripture and sacrament, and given expression in virtue. In these settings, the distinctions Cyril draws concerning divine knowledge both secure pro-Nicene commitments and form the habits of

perception by which Christ is rightly known, thereby revealing noetic language to function integratively rather than as a secondary motif in his theology.

This study is primarily an exercise in historical theology, attending to Cyril's use of language, rhetoric, and exegetical form insofar as these clarify the theological logic by which knowledge, participation, and formation are ordered within the divine economy.

Method and Structure

The thesis proceeds by tracing three interlocking movements within Cyril's theology. It begins by establishing that knowledge of God is Christologically conditioned, grounded in the Incarnate Son as both revealer and content of revelation. It then shows how this Christological condition is pedagogically enacted within the divine economy through Scripture, sacramental practice, and Israel, thereby training perception and forming the faithful. Finally, it reads Abraham as a culminating analogue within this economy, whose narrated formation recapitulates the Church's own noetic and moral progression. To develop this argument, I undertake close readings of selected works, attending to Cyril's use of noetic vocabulary and rhetorical strategies to trace how knowledge, ignorance, and formation function within his theology.⁵ The order of the chapters reflects a noetic trajectory within the divine economy, moving from Christological foundations to sacramental participation, to Israel as formative grammar, to ignorance as noetic pathology, and finally to Abraham as a culminating analogue of pedagogical progression.

Throughout the dissertation, I refer to what may be described as a recurring 'noetic tension' in Cyril's method, namely the antithesis of knowledge and ignorance as it operates within his exegesis. This is not a term Cyril himself uses, nor a formal method he articulates, but a descriptive shorthand for the way epistemic contrast operates across his exegesis and

⁵ Most references in this study are to Cyril's *Commentary on John*, *Commentary on Isaiah*, *Glaphyra on the Pentateuch*, *Against Julian*, and *De Adoratione*, with full bibliographic details given at first citation.

theological writings to identify misrecognition and to clarify the conditions under which God is rightly known in Christ.

Chapter One establishes Cyril's Christology as the epistemic condition of theological knowledge. I ask how Cyril grounds the believer's knowledge of divine reality on the basis of Christ's identity as the life-giving Son. I answer by tracing Cyril's pro-Nicene account of the Son as eternally consubstantial with the Father, who, by becoming incarnate on behalf of sinful humanity, imparts incorruptible life. I examine Cyril's later refinements in his articulation of the hypostatic union to show how human beings become capable of participation in Christ's sonship by grace, which he possesses by nature. I also place Cyril in dialogue with Athanasius in order to clarify the distinct contours of their respective physicalist soteriologies. The chapter concludes by introducing nourishment as a governing metaphor for noetic formation, in which Christ feeds the mind and the body, enabling believers to perceive divine realities and preparing the way for the discussion of sacramental participation in the following chapter.

Chapter Two turns to the sacramental life of the Church as the concrete enactment of Cyril's participatory Christology. It examines how the sacraments function as loci of divine knowing and habituation to the Christian life, and how Cyril employs noetic emphases to shape his Christological and Trinitarian formulations. I argue that for Cyril, baptism and the Eucharist not only effect incorporation and union with Christ and with one another but also serve as noetic sites that disclose divine knowledge through corporeal and spiritual means. I show how Cyril highlights the communicant's noetic distinctions and obligations in order to reinforce his theological priorities, establishing that Christ's real presence in the sacraments both grounds and necessitates correct theological reasoning and ethical responsibility. The chapter demonstrates that sacramental knowledge is experiential, conceptual, affective, and communal, and that these dimensions are consistently ordered toward conformity to Christ amid the realities of spiritual opposition.

Chapters Three and Four are closely related due to their treatment of Israel and together address the two sides of Cyril’s ‘noetic tension’ between knowledge and ignorance. **Chapter Three**, ‘Knowledge of God and the Law: Noetic Formation in Israel’s Worship’, presents Israel in a predominantly constructive register, as a formative grammar of knowing. I ask how Cyril characterizes knowledge in light of the ‘kindling of knowledge’ associated with Israel’s establishment within the divine economy. I begin by tracing his theological anthropology, particularly the relationship between created knowledge of God, postlapsarian implications, and Israel’s partial knowledge via the Mosaic Law. I then examine how Cyril’s noetic language shapes his interpretation of Israel’s worship, priesthood, and sacrificial elements, showing how these material forms function pedagogically to shape readers’ understanding of ecclesial mediation and regulation of knowledge *as well as* to prefigure the revelation of Christ. In this way, Israel’s worship both conceals and prepares for the Incarnational paradigm that governs the Church’s doctrinal and pedagogical readings, which in turn inform sacramental participation.

In contrast, **Chapter Four**, ‘Shaping the Christological Remedy of Noetic Ignorance’, This chapter examines how Cyril interprets Israel’s failure to recognize Christ as a diagnostic case within the economy of salvation. I argue that Cyril treats Israel’s history of misrecognition as revealing the conditions under which perception is formed or distorted, thereby disclosing both the depth of unbelief and the necessity of its Christological remedy. The chapter situates his views within the tradition and analyzes how his exegetical strategies, rhetorical antitheses, and polemical intensity function formatively within his theology. I show that Cyril’s polemic often follows a discernible pattern: identifying the source of misrecognition, diagnosing its effects within ecclesial and interpretive practice, and setting forth its remedy in Christ. In this way, polemic functions constructively, advancing Nicene priorities while training the perception of the faithful.

Finally, **Chapter Five**, ‘The Pedagogy of Progression in Abraham’s Formation,’ presents Abraham as the culminating exemplar of the thesis. I argue that Cyril shapes his interpretation of Abraham’s life to articulate his theological priorities and, implicitly, to model noetic and pedagogical progress in the Christian life. First, by framing Abraham as the recipient of the pre-Incarnate Son’s direct revelation, Cyril has the flexibility to articulate core Trinitarian Christological and Trinitarian formulations, showing how right theological understanding is bound to the unfolding economy. Second, the chapter traces Abraham’s conceptual progression and includes a focused discussion of ineffability through the patristic distinction between *noesis* and *epinoia*. Third, though not stated explicitly, Abraham is presented as an analogous locus of noetic and pedagogical progress, where knowledge of Christ matures in concert with faith and virtue. The chapter is divided into three parts to trace Abraham’s growth in divine knowledge—conceptual, experiential, and moral—mediated through material elements, covenantal actions, and testing, each framed by Cyril’s pro-Nicene commitments.

The Christological Ground of Knowing

Introduction

This chapter shows how Cyril of Alexandria presents Christ not only as the content of divine truth, but as its very epistemic condition: the one in and through whom knowledge becomes possible. For Cyril, this knowledge is not reducible to cognitive ability but is participatory, effected by the Spirit through union with Christ, whose life-giving flesh and renewing Spirit can transform the believer’s mind. I argue that Cyril presents Christ as both the agent and object of divine knowledge, and that this knowledge becomes accessible through the believer’s transformation in Christ by the Spirit. To understand this framework, one must first recognize that for Cyril, the union of the divine and human in Christ is the starting point for understanding everything else: the divine economy, the voice of Scripture, the life of the Church, the believer’s spiritual growth, and the restoration of the human condition. Because human knowledge is marred by sin, it is prone to error and easily misled. It requires restoration, and that remedy is found in participation in the incarnate Logos. For Cyril, the noetic renewal that Paul speaks of is a reality brought about only because the divine Word has taken on human nature and, in doing so, elevated its noetic capacities.

By beginning with Cyril’s understanding of the Incarnation within the broader trajectory of patristic thought—particularly in relation to the controversies with Nestorius and Cyril’s mature articulation of the hypostatic union—I examine how that union is both ontological and determinative for how God is known. The chapter further draws attention to Cyril’s engagement with the Pauline theme of the renewal of the mind, showing how noetic

transformation is grounded in union with Christ and directed toward increasing conformity to the divine life.⁶

By the end of the chapter, the reader will have a coherent account of how Cyril's Christology governs the conditions under which God is known, along with the theological rationale for why baptism and the Eucharist, discussed in the next chapter, are crucial to his vision.

Structure

This chapter proceeds in four sections, each of which builds toward an integrated account of how Cyril's Christology governs and is articulated through noetic language in his theological formulations. I begin the first section by laying the Christological foundation, examining his account of the incorruptibility of the divine nature and the *telos* of humanity. These themes are crucial for understanding why incorruptibility is central to Cyril's soteriology and how it conditions his vision of human participation in the divine life. In the same section, I turn to the vivifying flesh of the Incarnate Word, structured around the questions of *who* possesses life in himself and *how* we are to understand that life becoming operative through his flesh. Particular attention is given to the role of Christ's flesh in overcoming death and the devil's deception, which is a key element in Cyril's account of noetic restoration through the Incarnation. I will highlight Cyril's mature Christology, especially as articulated in his anti-Nestorian works. Particular attention will be given to his insistence that the Word and the flesh form a single subject, and that this union is the basis for both salvation and knowledge.

In the second section, I compare Cyril with his predecessor, Athanasius, in their respective approaches to physicalist soteriology. This comparison clarifies both their continuity and divergence and establishes the Christological conditions under which epistemic

⁶ Cf. Rom. 12.2; Eph., 4.23. All biblical quotations are taken from the New Revised Standard Version (NRSV), unless otherwise noted.

implications are meaningful. This lays the groundwork for the next chapter's discussion of Cyril's sacramental theology, especially the union accomplished between Christ and the faithful through the Spirit, and the union among believers.

In the third section, I examine Cyril's view of deification, which develops along three interconnected dimensions of union in Christ: spiritual, ontological, and moral. It explores the noetic consequences of that union and shows how Cyril develops an understanding of the renewed mind that is inseparable from Christ's incarnate presence and the work of the Spirit. This is particularly clear in moral transformation, which, for Cyril, directly relates to the believer's practice of virtue in cooperation with divine grace. Participation in the divine life is therefore mediated by the Spirit and manifested in the believer's lived conformity to Christ.

The final subsection examines Cyril's understanding of spiritual nourishment, which, while it is explicitly linked to the Eucharist, is offered through the person of Christ himself and his Word. This leads to the next chapter's discussion on the sacraments.

1.1.a. Telos, In corruption, and Vivified Flesh

Across the spectrum of Hellenistic, Jewish, and patristic tradition, 'life' is regarded as a defining attribute of divinity, expressed in the deity's ability to bestow life as the highest good upon created beings.⁷ For the Alexandrian Fathers, life is an essential divine attribute. Among them, Cyril stands out for his repeated references to 'life' to express not only natural existence but, more importantly, the divine and incorruptible life communicated through the Incarnation.⁸

⁷ Plato attributes movement, life, and purpose to the highest, timelessly immortal deity (*Timaeus*), while Aristotle grounds divinity in pure mind (*nous*), whose activity is eternal life. (*Metaphysics*). Stoics describe the *Logos spermatikos* as a portion of the universal Logos within humans, with *pneuma* imparting form and purpose to matter. Diogenes Laertius, (*Lives of Eminent Philosophers*) and Heraclitus (*On Nature*). Plotinus (*Enneads*) identifies 'the One' as the absolutely simple first principle. Plato, *The Timaeus of Plato*, trans. R.D. Archer-Hind (MacMillan, 1888), pp. 90-4; Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, vol. II, ed. by W.D. Ross, (OUP, 1924), Book XI, §7, 1064a-b; Diogenes Laertius, *Lives of Eminent Philosophers*, vol. II, trans. by Robert D. Hicks (Heinemann, 1925), Bk. VII §44-90; Heraclitus, *On Nature*, ed. G. T. W. Patrick. (N. Murray, 1889); Plotinus, *The Enneads*, Book I, §6, ed. Lloyd P. Gerson (CUP, 2017), 91-103.

⁸ Cyril shows the Son and Spirit as mediating incorruptible life through the sacraments.

For Cyril, the highest good and end of all creation is glorifying God.⁹ Distinct from the rest of creation, man is uniquely created as a rational being to reflect God's will and attributes such as wisdom, will, and love.¹⁰ To know God, then, is also to glorify him; as understanding deepens, the more one loves and glorifies him. Dratsellas agrees and adds a key point I reiterate throughout this thesis: that Cyril is not referring to mere intellectual knowledge:

This knowledge is...a real new Life in which man obtains all the blessings and Grace of God. Thus, desiring this end in God, man desires his blessedness and happiness because nothing is good and happy except as far as it participates in the beatitude of God.¹¹

The union of blessedness, holiness, and goodness seems to encapsulate the *telos* behind humanity's creation in the divine image. Cyril affirms, 'God created man in His image... so that he may live in happiness and holiness.'¹² This *telos* is inseparable from human fulfilment, joy, and the love of God, an idea that undergirds Cyril's emphasis on correct knowledge and the virtuous life, which he regards as a natural expression of this God-glorifying good.

Because incorruption lies at the heart of Cyril's link between salvation, creation, and re-creation, it is featured in his sacramental theology. This is especially evident in the Eucharistic mystery where the life-giving and incorruptible flesh of the incarnate Son is offered to the Church, serving as both the means and the sign of humanity's ongoing transformation in Christian knowledge of truth, virtue, and its God-glorifying *telos*. As I will show in my discussions on the sacraments, Cyril's views on *telos* and union also highlight the economy's incremental and progressive pedagogical character.

⁹ *Comm. Is. on Is.* 45.18-19 (PG 70, 977); Cyril of Alexandria, *Commentarius in Joannem*, in PG, ed. J.-P. Migne, vols. 73–75 (1857–1860). *Comm. Jo. on Jo.* 1.11 (PG 73, 152).

¹⁰ Cyril of Alexandria, *Contra Iulianum (c. Iul.)* (PG 76, 504–1058), Book 7 (76, 861); idem, *Commentarius in xii Prophetas (Osee–Aggaeus) (Comm. XII Prop.)*, on Hos. 16.8 (PG 71, 413).

¹¹ Constantine Dratsellas, 'Man in his Original State and in the State of Sin, According to Cyril of Alexandria', *Theologia* 41 (1970) p. 446.

¹² *Comm. Jo. on Jo.* 1.9 (PG 73, 76); cf. *Glaphyra in Genesim*, in PG, ed. J.-P Migne, vol. 69, cols. 9–209, *Glaph.* in Gen on 1.26-27 (PG 69, 13-16).

The relational orientation between God and man is not a static possession, but a living communion grounded in recreation in Christ. As human beings are ordered more fully toward their *telos*, the fruits of this communion are increasingly manifest.¹³ I will discuss sanctification at length in the next chapter, but for present purposes, it is sufficient to note that this blessedness and union with God are contingent on participation in Christ, who is the fullness of the knowledge of God. Although sanctification is a gift received through faith, participation in the sacraments offers the faithful ongoing spiritual and corporeal renewal and cleansing.¹⁴ Union with Christ, therefore, involves a continuous interplay between divine initiative and human response.¹⁵ Because the heart of man is expressed through the physicality of his body, in Cyril's eschatology, the soul is expressed through its embodiment.¹⁶ The body plays a vital role in humanity's *telos* throughout Cyril's theology, especially in the Eucharistic liturgy, where Christ both teaches and imparts eternal realities through his flesh. At the same time, Cyril shows that the senses of the faithful (seeing, touching, tasting, and contemplating) should be actively engaged to stimulate both perception and experience, through which the faithful are moved to respond in faith and obedience.

It is vital to my argument to trace how Cyril envisions the Son's flesh being instrumentalized in the re-creation of humanity both physically and spiritually.¹⁷ How does

¹³ Dratsellas, *Man in his Original State*, p. 447.

¹⁴ Keating, *Appropriation*, p. 10, n. 14, for Cyril's use of 'sanctification' is equivalent to 'divinization' (θεοποιέω/θεοποίησις).

¹⁵ Wagdy Samir, 'St. Cyril of Alexandria on the Eucharistic Context of Humankind's Union with the Divine in the 'Commentary on John', in *The Impact of Jesus of Nazareth: Historical, Theological, and Pastoral Perspectives*, vol. II, part II, ed. by Peter G. Bolt and James R. Harrison, *Social and Pastoral Studies* (SCD Press, 2021), pp. 199-226, at p. 199.

¹⁶ The body-soul relationship is a favored analogy of Cyril's for the union of natures, in which he views the flesh as good, unlike Origen's view of it as a form of punishment: *Comm. Jo. on Jn 1.9* (PG 73, 161-164). Scholarship has widely refuted the claim that Cyril neglects Christ's body-soul composition. His account of the instrumentality of the flesh in the Incarnation and benefits conveyed through the Eucharist is not sufficient to make him a *Logos-Sarx* advocate. See A.D. Litke, 'The 'Organon Concept' in the Christology of Cyril of Alexandria', *STPatr*, vol. 22 (Peeters, 2017), pp. 207-14. For further discussion of the body-soul analogy, see §1.1.b., n. 36.

¹⁷ ElRaheb Kyrillos Elmacari, *The Body of Christ: Cyril of Alexandria and Yves Congar on the Church* (unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Durham, 2024), p. 168.

Cyril shows, following the union of natures, that the Son's flesh is the means by which incorruptible life is communicated, enabling human participation and growth in the knowledge of God? How is this life-giving capacity communicated to humanity to understand divine truth? Gebremedhin comments on Cyril's view of man's restoration, 'it is dependent on *who* does the vivifying, and on *how* we understand the relationship between His divine and human natures.'¹⁸

I follow his suggestion to probe '*who*', and then '*how we understand*'. First, I investigate Cyril's conceptions of the incorruptible nature of the One *who* does the vivifying. He echoes Athanasius, who, when contending with Arius and his followers, sought to demonstrate that salvation is inseparable from the identity of Christ, arguing for the inextricable link between the Person of the Son and his redemptive mission.¹⁹ Cyril writes, 'Since the Word was God, immortal and incorruptible...'²⁰

The Son not only gifts creation by calling it into being, but once it has come into being, he also holds it together through himself...he becomes life to those things that exist so that once they have come into being, they may remain and be preserved...since he himself is *life by nature* he grants being, life and motion in many ways to all that exists.²¹

Here, Cyril first establishes that the Son is life-giving because he is life by nature, possessing the fullness of divine attributes to grant life and to speak it into being. Drawing together references from Genesis 1 and Colossians 1, he aims to rebut heretical views about the divinity of Christ by affirming that it is the Son who spoke creation into existence and is

¹⁸ Gebredmenhin, *Life-Giving Blessing*, p. 27. Italics mine.

¹⁹ Ibid., 27. Maurice F. Wiles observes that Cyril's *Commentary on John* presents nuanced arguments to defend the Son's divinity, humanity, and unity—arguments that 'intimately connected with a concern about soteriology.' Maurice F. Wiles, *The Spiritual Gospel: The Interpretation of the Fourth Gospel in the Early Church* (CUP, 1960) 147–84. Cyril echoes Irenaeus famous dictum, 'God became man that man might become God.' (*Adversus haereses* V.1 [PG 7, 1120]); and Gregory of Nazianzus: 'What is not assumed is not healed.' (Ep. 101.4-7 [PG 37, 181C–184A]); trans. in *The Later Christian Fathers: A Selection from the Writings of the Fathers from St. Cyril of Jerusalem to St. Leo the Great*, ed. Henry Scowcroft Bettenson (OUP, 1970).

²⁰ *Comm. Jo.* on Jo. 6.38 (PG 73, 560).

²¹ Ibid., on Jo. 1.4 (PG 73, 73; Pusey I, 75). Cyril of Alexandria, *Sancti Patris Nostri Cyrilli Archiepiscopi Alexandrini in D. Joannis Evangelium: Accedunt Fragmenta Varia Necnon Tractatus ad Tiberium Diaconum Duo*, 3 vols in 5, ed. Philip E. Pusey (Clarendon Press, 1872–82). Pusey's Oxford edition is cited parenthetically where relevant, and when secondary scholarship uses his pagination.

the same one who continues to sustain all things in himself. Cyril's soteriology motivated his concerns regarding the Arianism of Athanasius' era, claiming that the Word, as begotten of the Father, must necessarily receive life as something external through participation.

Second, in addition to the Incarnate Son's life-giving properties, Cyril underscores Scripture's assertion that all things, visible and invisible, were made by the Son, authenticating the Son's eternal existence and divine nature ($\theta\epsilon\alpha\varphi\sigma\iota\varsigma$).²² The Son exists in the same divine substance as the Father and the Spirit, while each subsists in his own hypostasis.²³ He created everything in a state of incorruption and sealed humanity with the divine image through the Spirit's breath of life.²⁴ Thus the Father makes all things through, for, and by the Son, who is truly God, 'the Only-Begotten...creator and craftsman by nature', through whom, 'everything came to be and without him nothing came into being.'²⁵

Having considered *who* is united in the Incarnation, I now turn to Cyril's account of *how* the ineffable can nonetheless be believed and interpreted, so that his readers may understand how fallen humanity can share in the Son's sinless humanity and attain to the knowledge of God. Cyril does not attempt to explain the mystery of the union, but rather Nicaea's propositional and theological coherence to reinforce his readers' faith. This same caution is expressed in his Eucharistic theology, which will be discussed in the next chapter, where he explains that reason cannot proceed through the veil of mystery, but by 'faith that leads to understanding' which is a gift of grace from the Spirit.²⁶

²² With 2 Peter 1:1-4 as the key text, the divine (of God and Christ) is associated with five key qualities: in v.1 divine righteousness or justice ($\delta\kappa\alpha\iota\sigma\upsilon\eta$); in v.3, divine power ($\delta\bar{\nu}\alpha\mu\varsigma$), glory ($\delta\bar{\nu}\xi\alpha$), and excellence or virtue ($\dot{\alpha}\rho\epsilon\tau\eta$); and in v. 4, by contrast with its opposite, divine nature is eternal or incorruptible. The final section of this chapter will offer Cyril's description of the believer who shares in the divine nature. See James Starr, 'Does 2 Peter 1:4 Speak of Deification?' in *Partakers of the Divine Nature: The History and Development of Deification in the Christian Traditions*, ed. by Michael J. Christensen and Jeffrey A. Witung (Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2007), pp. 81-85 for first-century distinctions between 2 Peter and Paul.

²³ *Comm. Jo. on Jo. 1.1* (PG 73, 69).

²⁴ *Ibid.*, on *Jo. 1.32* (PG 73, 284).

²⁵ *Ibid.*, on *Jo. 1.1, 3* (PG, 73, 72, 164), due to inseparable operations.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, on *Jo. 6:69* (Pusey I, 575)

I aim to establish how Cyril frames the integrity of each nature after the union, beginning with the Son's divine nature and then his human nature. Cyril's emphasis on the Son as life-giving undergirds his conception of the divinized flesh actualizing the divine mission, since humanity, enslaved by the devil's deception, could neither save itself nor restore its relationship to the Father.

Second, for fallen humanity to be redeemed and come to the knowledge of God's truth, it is necessary to demonstrate Cyril's argument that Christ's flesh remains life-giving after the union, and, in light of its soteriological implications, include his account of Christ's single subjectivity:

He is, after all, life by nature, since he was begotten of the living Father. And his holy body too is no less life-giving, since it is in some way brought together and ineffably united with the Word who gives life to all. Therefore, it is counted as his, and it is considered to be one with him. He is indivisible after the incarnation...that is because the body is not of the same substance as the Word of God. But they are one by that coming together and ineffable concurrence.²⁷

Cyril is clear that in the Incarnation the Son personally unites human nature to himself, taking on a new mode of existence as a mortal man, yet without confusion or mixture between the natures.²⁸ The same Son who is consubstantial with the Father is the one who is born of the Virgin, possessing his own flesh in a 'mysterious and inexpressible' union, one that preserves the distinction of natures, even as it affirms their inseparable unity.²⁹

²⁷ Ibid., on Jo. 6.27-28 (73.529-30)

²⁸ Cyril's doctrine of the *communication idiomatum* denotes the union of persons, making it possible to state that 'the Son of God died' without compromising the Son's divine impassibility—a central point of contention with Nestorius. God made human nature his own without ceasing to be God. For Cyril, the union of the natures is ineffable (ἀπόρρητος) and surpasses the mind (ὑπέρ νοῦ). Pope Leo, *Epistola XXVIII, Tomus ad Flavianum*, in T.A. Lacey *Appellatio Flaviani*, (SPCK, 1903). See John Meyendorff, *Christ in Eastern Christian Thought* (SVSP, 1975), p. 25. J.N.D. Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines* (Harpers & Row, 1978), 337-38. John J. O'Keefe, 'Impassible Suffering? Divine Passion and Fifth-Century Christology', *TS*, 58 (1997), 39-60. *The Theology of St. Cyril of Alexandria: A Critical Appreciation*, ed. by Thomas G. Weinandy and Daniel A. Keating (T&T Clark, 2003), pp. 28-34.

²⁹ Cyril of Alexandria, *Adversus Nestorium (Adv. Nes.)* (PG 76, 9–146), 2.4 (PG 76, 855-88). On the distinction between Cyril's formula ὑποστάσει μιᾶς σεσαρκωμένη and μία φύσις, see Lionel Wickham, *Select Letters of St. Cyril of Alexandria* (Clarendon, 1983), p. 25 n. 6, p. 41 n. 16; and Thomas Weinandy, *The Christological Controversy: The Making of a New Theology* (T&T Clark, 1989), pp. 41–42.

Therefore, Christ has given his own body for the life of all, and through it he makes life dwell in us again. I will explain how he does this as I am able. Since the life-giving Word of God has taken up residence in the flesh (σαρκί), he has transformed (μετεσκεύασεν) it so that it has his own (ἴδιον) good attribute, that is, life. And since, in an ineffable mode of union, he has completely come together with it, he has rendered it life-giving (ζωοποιὸν ἀπέδειξε), just as he himself is by nature. For this reason, the body of Christ (σῶμα Χριστοῦ) gives life to those who participate in it. His body drives out death when that body enters those who are dying, and it removes decay since it is fully pregnant with the Word who destroys decay.³⁰

I now turn from the divine nature to Christ's human nature to follow Cyril's argument that Christ's flesh remains life-giving after the assumption of his humanity. This flesh is the Son's own body (ἴδιον σῶμα) and becomes the instrument of salvation.³¹ For Cyril, the ontological, soteriological, and sacramental implications of Christ's flesh are such that salvation must come through participation in, and reception of, his body. While the union of natures remains ineffable, Cyril, following Athanasius, provides a rationale for how this union transforms Christ's flesh. Before the Nestorian controversy, Cyril did not speak in terms of 'two natures' (φύσεις) in the way the post-Chalcedonian tradition later would. Instead, he relied on verbs such as 'to dwell' (σκηνώω) or 'to inhabit' (ένοικέω) to describe the union of natures, making clear that the *Logos* does not merely dwell in or assume a pre-existing human being but effects a real and substantial union with the flesh.³² After the controversy erupted, however, he set aside this earlier idiom in favor of stronger terminology, most notably 'union according to hypostasis' (ένωσις καθ' ὑπόστασιν), to better articulate more precisely that the Word and the assumed humanity exist in an unconfused yet indivisible unity. If Christ were not the Word

³⁰ *Comm. Jo. on Jo.. 4.2* (PG 73, 565; Pusey I. 520). Cyril of Alexandria, *Commentary on the Gospel of St. John*, trans. by David R. Maxwell, vol. I, Ancient Christian Texts (InterVarsity Press, 2013), p. 232.

³¹ Cyril uses the adjectives ίδιος and οἰκεῖος interchangeably, but uses the former more frequently, likely due to Athanasius's influence. *Gebredmenhin. Life-Giving Blessing*, p. 45 n. 36.

³² Cyril also favors 'assume' (λαμβάνω), seen in his argument against the Nestorian idea of separation between the divine and human natures by emphasizing that the Word personally assumed (προσέλαβεν) a full humanity (body and rational soul) into hypostatic union. Cyril of Alexandria, *Epistola II ad Nestorium*, in *Ad. Nes.*, II (CPG 5248); and idem, *Epistola IV Ad Nes.*, in *Ad. Nes.* (CPG 5244, 8629). See also *Comm. Jo. on Jo. 1.14* (Pusey I, 105-06); *De Adoratione et Cultu in Spiritu et Veritate*, in PG, 68, cols. 129–1125, *Ador. IV* (PG 68, 489) and *Glaph. in Pent. II* (PG 69, 504) for similar indwelling language.

Incarnate but only a man joined to the Word, his flesh would not be life-giving; and if he were not God by nature, it would not be possible for humanity to participate in the divine nature through the Holy Spirit.

Cyril's use of the term *idios* (ἰδιος) in connection with Christ's body emphasizes that the body truly belongs to the Word himself; it is his own. Cyril is excluding the idea that the body belongs to the Word in the same mode as his divinity, that is, as something proper to his divine nature from eternity. Instead, he means that the body belongs to the one divine Word personally—hypostatically, though not as a natural property of the divine essence.³³ Thus, contrary to Nestorius, the Son is neither separate from his flesh nor divided into a pair of sons following the union. Cyril explains that although human nature is not inherently sanctified, the incorruptible and immutable Son made it His own by transforming it (μετεσκεύασεν), rendering it life-giving and a salvific instrument for all those who participate in Him through faith.³⁴ Regarding Cyril's understanding of the intimacy of the union between the *Logos* and *sarx*, Grillmeier comments, 'the divine energy (ἐνέργεια) of the Logos flows directly into [Christ's] body...conjoined with life itself, and is also life-giving.'³⁵

This overview of *who* and *how* to explain the Incarnation was presented to lay the groundwork for the noetic benefits inherent in Cyril's Christology and sacramental theology. As previously noted, well before the Christological controversies of the 430s, Athanasius' influence and Cyril's own Nicene convictions had already prompted him to sternly rebut heretical formulations that compromised the integrity of the Incarnate union of natures—and by extension, the integrity of the Eucharist itself. Although his technical language had not yet attained the clarity it would later reach, his unitary Christology was nonetheless clearly

³³ Gebremedhin, *Life-Giving Blessing*, p. 37. Cyril was later more precise with his analogies and terms to illustrate the Incarnate union.

³⁴ *Comm Jo. on Jo. 4.2.* (PG 73, 581; Pusey I. 533).

³⁵ Grillmeier, *Christ in Christian Tradition*, pp. 474-76.

evident.³⁶ Theological precision regarding the Incarnation is so central to his thought that he links a right understanding of it to the proper interpretation of Scripture, both of which carry Eucharistic implications.³⁷ It is *this* Son, by the hypostatic union, who possesses the authority to re-create life, justify humanity, and bestow adoptive sonship by grace.³⁸ Believers are enabled to ‘ascend to the true and holy observance of the sabbath’—a renewal and rest occurring in the Eucharistic feast of *this* Christ.³⁹ This dimension of participation in Cyril’s theology will be examined more fully in the forthcoming subsection on the Eucharist. What follows from this claim is the condition under which renewed perception and understanding of divine reality become possible.

1.1.b. Physicalist Soteriologies: Athanasius and Cyril

Before turning to *theosis* and spiritual nourishment, this section aims to contrast the physicalist soteriologies of Athanasius and Cyril to explore how Cyril builds upon and departs from his predecessor in understanding how the Incarnation affects all humanity through

³⁶ Later Christological debates raised concerns about earlier formulations, particularly with regard to Christ’s soul. Aloys Grillmeier placed Cyril within the ‘Logos–Sarx’ school alongside Athanasius and Apollinaris, but this has been widely contested: *Christ in Christian Tradition*, pp. 414–15. Richard A. Norris resists assigning Cyril to any Christological school: ‘Christological Models in Cyril of Alexandria’, *STPatr* 14 (1975), 255–68. Others show that Cyril affirmed Christ’s soul before the Nestorian controversy, including Lydia Welch, *Christology and Eucharist in the Early Church* (OUP, 2011); Bernard Meunier, *Le Christ de Cyrille d’Alexandrie* (Cerf, 1991); John J. McGuckin, *St. Cyril of Alexandria: The Christological Controversy* (Brill, 1994); Frances M. Young, *From Nicaea to Chalcedon: A Guide to the Literature and Its Background*, (SCM Press, 2010); and Paul L. Gavrilyuk, *The Suffering of the Impassible God: The Dialectics of Patristic Thought* (OUP, 2004); Andrew Mercer, ‘Salvation and the Soul of Christ in Cyril of Alexandria’, *STPatr* 129 (2021), 69–74.

³⁷ *Comm. Jo.* on Jo. 12.48 (PG 74, 333). Cyril rejects ‘conjunction’ (συνφέα) terminology used by Nestorius and Theodore, which implies two distinct subjects within the union of the Word and his humanity. He cites 2 Cor. 5.19, ‘Let none of those who are accustomed to [heretical] interpretation of the divinely inspired Scripture confuse what is read when it states that ‘Christ is God by nature and *not a man clothed with God* like one of the prophets... That which the Son *brings to himself he truly brings to the Father also.*’ Italics mine.

³⁸ Keating notes that Cyril’s *skopos* regarding the Nicene Creed was reinforced by other teachers who, with a ‘proper and accurate reading of both the Scripture and the Creed’ recognized ‘the single-subject Christology that he espoused.’ Daniel A. Keating, ‘The Christology of Cyril of Alexandria’, *Religions*, 15 (2024), art. 4. doi:10.3390/rel15060688.

³⁹ *Comm. Jo.* on Jo. 7.24 (PG 73, 812), ‘Specifically the second Person of the consubstantial Trinity who subsists also as man by assuming his own human nature, and not that of a pre-existing human being.’

Christ's assumption of human nature. This secures the Christological conditions under which knowing God becomes theologically intelligible.

Ellen Scully points to Athanasius and Gregory of Nyssa when describing the fourth century as 'physicalist-friendly'. While Athanasius presents a strong physicalist soteriology, Cyril's view is more moderate. In Athanasius's account, grace is extrinsic to Adam but intrinsic to Christ, who imparts it to humanity through his Spirit. For him, salvation progresses along two lines: the incorruptible flesh of Christ protects human nature from death, and inner renewal occurs as people cooperate with the Spirit's work. This dual approach addresses his concern about the two agents of death: first, sin itself, which is a curse that empowers the devil, the second agent, to exercise control over it and through it.

We were all thus liberated by the kinship of the flesh, and for the future were joined, even we, to the Word. And being joined to God, no longer do we abide upon earth; but, as He himself has said, where He is, there shall we be also.. For as the Lord, putting on the body, became man, so we humans are deified by the Word as being taken to Him through His flesh, and henceforth inherit life everlasting.⁴⁰

In Athanasius' view, the Incarnation forms the basis for both the representative and transformative aspects of salvation. Although he teaches that deification is accessible to humanity through Christ, he does not suggest that this gift guarantees universal redemption. According to Scully, his thought is best understood as a composite view: the flesh of Christ provides the *possibility* of deification, yet its fulfilment depends on faith and Spirit-led transformation. Without the Spirit, deification is lost.⁴¹

⁴⁰ Athanasius of Alexandria, *Orations contra Arianos* (*Ar.*), II.69.5; III.34 (PG 26, 309, 412).

⁴¹ Ellen Scully, *Physicalist Soteriology in Hilary of Poitiers* (OUP, 2014), pp. 79, 82. Notes a physicalist trend, but cf. Athanasius, (*Ar.* III..32-33 [PG 26, 412-13]), A. Petterson and K. Anatolios suggest a predication model in Athanasius whereby Christ appropriates humanity to himself so that all humanity has the possibility of belonging to the subjectivity of the Word', thus denying both physicalism and Platonic universalism; see Andrew Petterson *Athanasius and the Human Body* (Bristol Press, 1998), p. 41; Khaled Anatolios, *Athanasius: The Coherence of His Thought* (Rutledge, 1998), 142.

Cyril builds upon Athanasius's insights while adding his own key clarifications. Like Athanasius, he teaches that all humanity is found 'in Christ', drawing on Paul's portrayal of the second Adam who gathers human nature in himself. Yet Cyril resists identifying this unity with an 'automatic' salvation.⁴² For him, incorruptibility operates on two levels: first as the endowment given in creation, and again as a reality renewed through Christ. As Jacques Liébaert observes, incorruptibility plays a central role in both Cyril's anthropology and soteriology. He departs from Athanasius by insisting that the Spirit's indwelling is conditional and ecclesially mediated rather than universal.⁴³ The Holy Spirit is given through Christ, who alone receives and grants the Spirit in full measure. His baptism and sinless life lay the foundation for humanity's Spirit-filled life, but the indwelling itself begins at Pentecost and is restricted to believers. Cyril expresses this point with particular care:

He also reveals another profound mystery to us when he affirms for our benefit that the Word 'dwelt in us': We were all in Christ, and the shared properties of our human nature were taken up into his person. That is why he is called the last Adam. He gives all the riches of his tranquility and glory to our common nature, just as the first Adam gave corruption and shame. Therefore, the Word 'dwelt in' all people through the one man so that when the one man was designated Son of God in power according to the Spirit of holiness, this honor might extend to all humanity.⁴⁴

In this passage, we see that Cyril holds in tension the universal reach and conditional fulfillment of salvation. By assuming his own human nature, Christ unites humanity to himself, yet in Cyril's view, participation in him is qualified, requiring the renewal of life and conduct.

⁴² *Comm. Jo.* 6.51 (PG 73, 520-21; Maxwell, *John I*, p. 232).

⁴³ See Jacques Liébaert, *La doctrine christologique de saint Cyrille d'Alexandrie*, 195–196, on the central role of incorruptibility in Cyril's anthropology and soteriology; this emphasis underlies Cyril's departure from Athanasius, particularly regarding the non-universal and ecclesially mediated character of the Spirit's indwelling. Jacques Liébaert *La Doctrine Christologique de Saint Cyrille d'Alexandrie* (Lille; 1951), p. 195-96. See also Gilles Langevin, S.J., for his work on the theme of incorruptibility in Cyril. «Le Thème de l'Incorrputibilité dans le Commentaire de Saint Cyrille d'Alexandrie sur l'Evangile Selon Saint Jean» *Sciences ecclésiastiques: revue théologique et philosophique*, 8 (1956), 295–316.

⁴⁴ *Comm. Jo.* on Jo. 1.14 (Pusey I.141; Maxwell, *John I* p. 65), cf. Rom 1.4. See also 1 Cor. 15 in Daniel A. Keating, *The Appropriation of Divine Life in Cyril of Alexandria* (OUP, 2004), p.173: '... by [Christ] being raised, we too are raised together with him. For the Word of God is Life by nature, bestowing the good of his nature...to the whole of human nature.' *Comm. Jo.* on Jo. 20.1, (Pusey III, 304) cf. Col. 1.18.

Cyril resists any claim that the Spirit directly animates human nature, since, in his view, this would compromise both divine stability and human moral agency. Grace, instead, works in cooperation with the will: Adam received the capacity to preserve incorruptibility through the Spirit, but lost it by turning from God. Restoration, therefore, consists in recovering the divine likeness through Christ's mediation and the renewing work of the Spirit. While Siddals maintains that Cyril's view of Christ's stability is rooted in his sinlessness, she argues that Christ's stable possession of the Spirit is inherently ontological due to both his natural (divine) property and acquired possession of the Spirit. I concur with Crawford and Scully, who argue that Cyril grounds Christ's stable possession of the Spirit as contingent upon the sinless completion of his earthly ministry.⁴⁵ Participation in the restored image of God is therefore neither automatic nor universal but depends on faith and cooperation with grace. Thus, Cyril reframes Athanasius's universal physicalism as a *potentiality* restricted to those within whom the Holy Spirit dwells.⁴⁶ This discussion provides a natural segue to the next section's discussion on deification and how Cyril expounds on the grace of participation in the Sonship, which the Son possesses by nature.

1.1.c. Participation (Deification)

Having established vivification as the Christological ground of renewal, the argument now turns to participation as the means by which that renewal is communicated and sustained within the life of the believer. This section supports my argument by offering a preliminary

⁴⁵ Scully, *Physicalist Soteriology*, p. 211; Ruth M. Siddals, 'Logic and Christology in Cyril of Alexandria'; *JTS*, 38 (1987), 341–67 doi: 10.1093/JTS/38.2.341, at 365; and Matthew R. Crawford, *Cyril of Alexandria's Trinitarian Theology of Scripture* (OUP, 2014), p. 105.

⁴⁶ Drawing on Gregory Hillis's Christological realism, Wagdy Samir rejects the static/dynamic distinction in accounts of participation because it presupposes an underlying ontological possession, whereas for Cyril participation is real and relational, grounded in continued communion with Christ as the Second Adam. Participation may therefore be lost through separation from the one participated in, not as a matter of degree, but as the forfeiture of an actualized relation rather than the diminishment of a possessed share. See Wagdy Samir, *Divine Partnership: Humanity's Participation in the Divine Life according to St. Cyril of Alexandria* (Peter Lang, 2018), pp. 64–65, citing 'New Birth through the Second Adam: The Holy Spirit and the Miraculous Conception in Cyril of Alexandria.' *STPatr* 48 (2010) 47–51.

discussion of Cyril's view of participation (μέθεξις)—later termed 'divinization' (θέωσις) in Byzantine theology—but begins with a brief overview of the broader patristic context in which early Christian writers interpreted Scripture's witness to humanity's ascent into the divine life.⁴⁷ Following this, I shift my attention to Cyril.

Patristic Snapshot

While the idea of union with the divine is not unique to Christianity and appears in various religious traditions,⁴⁸ early Christian authors did not employ a singular technical term for it. The earliest extant use of the noun *theosis* appears in Clement, who speaks of deification as the goal of human life, describing a form of progressive salvation whereby one assimilates to God 'as far as possible.'⁴⁹ Gregory of Nazianzus uses *theosis* explicitly and integrates it into Trinitarian and Christological reflections. Earlier writers, such as Irenaeus and Athanasius, articulated the underlying concept, particularly after debates arose over the divinity of the Son and Spirit.⁵⁰ Many preferred the language of participation or communion, suggesting relational contours added to the existing ontological framework. This reflects the Trinitarian debates,

⁴⁷ On Byzantine terminology, see Ellen Concannon (now Scully), 'The Eucharist as Source of St. Cyril of Alexandria's Christology', *Pro Ecclesia*, 18 (2009), 324. For background in classical sources, see Plutarch, *De sera numinis vindicta*, in *Moralia*, vol. VII: 525–610, trans. Phillip H. De Lacy and Benedict Einarson, LCL, 405 (Harvard University Press, 1959), §550; Epictetus, *Dissertationes*, I.9; II; Musonius Rufus, *Fragments*, 3, 16–18; Cicero, *De republica*, VI; *De finibus*, III.75; *De natura deorum*, II; and Seneca, *Epistulae morales ad Lucilium*, 73 and 76. In addition to Keating's work on participation previously cited, see recent scholarship from James Starr, *Sharers in Divine Nature: 2 Peter 1:4 in Its Hellenistic Context* (Mohr Siebeck, 2000), pp.144–66; Vladimir Kharlamov, 'Theosis in Patristic Thought', *Theology Today*, 65.2 (2008), pp.158–68 doi:10.1177/004057360809800205; Joel C. Elowsky, 'Bridging the Gap: Theosis in Alexandria and Antioch', in *Theosis: Deification in Christian Theology*, vol. II, ed. Vladimir Kharlamov, Princeton Theological Monograph Series (Wipf & Stock, 2011), pp.146-83; Norman Russell, *Theosis and Religion: Participation in the Divine Life in the Eastern and Western Traditions* (CUP, 2024).

⁴⁸ Plato identified *eudaimonia* (akin to being blessed with a good internal divinity), achieved through 'likeness to God so far as possible,' *Theaetetus* 176b. See *The Collected Dialogues of Plato*, ed. Edith Hamilton and Huntington Cairns (Pantheon Books, 1961), p. 881.

⁴⁹ Clement of Alexandria, *Protepticus* 1.8.4; *Strom.* 7.10; cf. *Christ the Educator* 1.6. in *ANF*, ed. Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson, 10 vols (Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1885–96), II, p. 215; see also *FOC*, 23 (CUAP, 1954), p. 26: 'becoming perfect, we are made divine.' Origen develops the idea with terms like *henosis* (union) and *methexis* (participation).

⁵⁰ Gregory of Nazianzus, *Or.* 29.19; 39.13. Theosis is a transliteration of the Greek word 'deification'. Robert V. Rakestraw, 'Becoming Like God: An Evangelical Doctrine of Theosis,' *JETS* 40 (1997), 257–69, at p. 260.

which served to refine this language, with most early authors using θεοποιέω, θεοπίησις, and θεόω or θέωσις.⁵¹ In the intervening centuries, the idea of deification remained flexible and somewhat fluid, particularly among the Greek Fathers.

Although Athanasius did not systematize a doctrine of deification, his writings present some of the most profound early articulations. His oft-cited maxim, 'He has made man so that we might be made God,' captures the core of his soteriological and ontological understanding of theosis. For Athanasius, even creation participates in the grace of God because the Son, as both the Word and Wisdom of the Father, is the deifying and enlightening power through whom humanity partakes of divine life. Dalmais observes, for Athanasius, that deification is so central that it functions as an axiom upon which broader theological reasoning is constructed.⁵² David Brakke has shown that Athanasius marks a pivot in the Alexandrian tradition from the speculative contemplation of Clement and Origen to a more practical spirituality. He goes on to claim that Athanasius's joining of deification to asceticism is also true of Cyril, that is, 'the divinized soul was the one that had mastered the body and achieved a life of virtue: it was an

⁵¹ The fourth century saw major advances in affirming the consubstantiality of Christ and the Spirit. See Athanasius, *ad Ser.* 1.24; and Gregory of Nazianzus, *Or.* 31:4. Kharlamov, Vladimir. 'Theosis in Patristic Thought', 158–168 doi:10.1177/004057360809800205 at p. 162. Basil of Caesarea and his brother Gregory of Nyssa were cautious regarding the use of deification; cf. *Pseudo-Dionysius, De ecclesiastica hierarchia* (EH) I.3 (PG 3, 373–76); Eng. trans. *The Complete Works*, trans. Colm Luibheid (Paulist Press, 1987), p. 198.. Gregory of Nazianzus draws on Platonic imagery in 1 Cor. 13.12, likening deification to polishing a mirror to reflect the divine light, though its fullness remains veiled: union with God occurs when the godlike (θεοειδές) part of the human—the intellect (νοῦς) and reason (λόγος)—is joined to him (*Or.* 28.17, SC 250, 134.1.6). Plato, *Republic*, 500c–d, trans. Raymond Armstrong, in *The Republic* Dent, 1930), p. 173. For Gregory of Nyssa, union with God surpasses gnosis, reversing the Platonic view of the intelligible Forms (νοητά) as the summit of ascent: he envisions an interior ascent as the summit of theορία, where the soul rises 'in quest of its Beloved,' and vision implies possession rather than knowledge (*Or.* 22, PG 35, 1164; *Homilia in beatitudinibus*, VI, PG 44, 893, 1269). See Jean Daniélou, *Platonism and Mystical Theology: The Spiritual Doctrine of St. Gregory of Nyssa* (SVSP, 2023); Vladimir Lossky, *The Vision of God* (SVSP, 1973), pp. 68–69; Georgia Huian, 'Between the Mirror and the Face: Gregory of Nazianzus and Augustine on 1 Cor. 13.12', in *Greek and Byzantine Philosophical Exegesis*, ed. Miklós Maróth and Christoph Horn (Brill/Schöningh, 2022), pp. 146–77; and Christensen, *Partakers of the Divine Nature*, pp. 25–30.

⁵² Athanasius *De Incarnatione Verbi* 54.3 (PG 25, 192B); idem, *De synodis* 51 (PG 26, 344B). Anna N. Williams, *The Ground of Union: Deification in Aquinas and Palamas* (OUP, 1999), p. 30. Dalmais, Irénée-H. 'Divinisation. II: Patristique grèque', in *Dictionnaire de spiritualité, ascétique et mystique, doctrine et histoire*, ed. Marvel Viller and others, 17 vols (Beauchesne, 1932–95), III (1937) col. 1379.

ascetic soul.⁵³ Athanasius's thought had a significant influence on Cyril regarding the full sanctification and deification of the believer.⁵⁴ The Christian being virtuous, according to Cyril, is tantamount to the Christian being like God.⁵⁵

There are approximately twenty references to divinization in Cyril's corpus, with most before the Nestorian debates, and most are located in the *Thesaurus*.⁵⁶ Keating and Russell both observe that Cyril distinguishes his use of the terms θεοποιέω and θεοποίησις to clarify the correct understanding of the Son's 'divinization,' using them positively in his early works, and more negatively in his later anti-Nestorian writings, contested those who claimed that he was asserting an 'apotheosis' of the Incarnate flesh.⁵⁷ He draws heavily on his predecessor's *c. Ar.*, and when he does use the terminology, he parallels Athanasius' usage. While his use of technical terminology appears restrained, he expounds on closely related themes from which we glean his views on the believer's union: sanctification and being made participants in Christ's sonship. These themes will recur throughout the remainder of the chapter. Cyril, preferring to rely on biblical sources rather than philosophical categories, looks to passages like 2 Peter 1:4 to highlight the grace that accompanies participation through the Spirit who restores the image of Christ to believers.⁵⁸ He develops Athanasius's conceptual distinctions

⁵³ David Brakke, *Athanasius and the politics of Asceticism*, (Clarendon Press, 1995), p. 149.

⁵⁴ Marie-Odile Boulnois, *Le paradoxe trinitaire chez Cyrille d'Alexandrie: Herméneutique, analyses philosophiques et argumentation théologique* (Brill, 1997); and idem, 'The Mystery of the Trinity: Trinitarian Experience and Vision in Cyril of Alexandria', in *The Mystery of the Trinity: Trinitarian Experience and Vision in Patristic and Medieval Thought*, ed. Gilles Emery and Matthew Levering (Sapientia Press, 2007), pp. 75–111. For the primary texts under discussion, see Cyril of Alexandria, *Thesaurus de sancta et consubstantiali Trinitate* (CPG 5238; PG 75, 9–656); idem, *De sancta Trinitate dialogi VII* (CPG 5240; PG 75, 1165–1412); and *Adv. Nes.* (CPG 5244; PG 76, 9–1460).

⁵⁵ Jonathan Morgan, 'The Role of Asceticism in Deification in Cyril of Alexandria's Festal Letters' *The Downside Review*, 135.3 (2017), 144–53 doi:10.1177/0012580617712950; cf. Brakke, *Athanasius*, p. 149.

⁵⁶ Cyril of Alexandria, *Thesaurus de sancta et consubstantiali Trinitate (Thes.)* (CPG 5238; PG 75, 9–656).

⁵⁷ Keating, *Appropriation*, 12; the latter term refers to his rejection that Christ's flesh became divinity. *Ad. Nest.* II.8-11 (ACO 1.1 6, 44, 46, 48, 49.) Norman Russell, 'Partakers of the Divine Nature' (2 Peter 1:4) in 'The Byzantine Tradition' (Porphyrogenitus, 1998), pp. 28–29.

⁵⁸ For Cyril, key texts are Ps. 82.6; and 2 Pet. 1.4, both of which refer to the human–divine relationship. Cyril cites 2 Pet. 1.4 more than forty times—more than any other Greek father. (cf. Rom. 8.29–30; Eph. 1.8; Phil. 3.20–

between the created and the Uncreated, and between the deified and the Deifying. For him, deification, or participation, is the highest goal of humanity.

Cyril is primarily concerned with Christological-Trinitarian heresies, making this discussion central to his thought.⁵⁹ Unlike Hellenistic philosophy, Christian participation is a *result* of knowing Christ, not an attribute intrinsic to human nature. For Stoics and Middle Platonists, virtue was a *means*, whereas for Christians, it is the result of incorruptibility. In Cyril's reading, 2 Peter 1.4 reflects the dynamic whereby the knowledge of God in Christ enables the believer to grow in the character of God, expressed in human virtues such as justice and wisdom. Neither Peter nor Paul suggests moral perfection, yet they urge moral purification and growth in the knowledge of Christ. What we see, however, is that Paul and other ancient authors do not employ 'partakers of the divine nature' as Peter does. Instead, his emphasis falls on being conformed into the likeness of Christ. This juxtaposition clarifies Cyril's insistence that participation cannot be reduced to moral progress or philosophical virtue. It is grounded in union with the Incarnate Son. While he sometimes borrows the imagery of ascent, Cyril does not suggest Neoplatonic ladder-like spiritual stages, either directly or indirectly. For him, union with God does not begin with the soul's unaided contemplative pursuits, but in the Incarnation itself, and is established through the sacramental life of the Church. In other words, the essence of deification for Cyril is not speculative ascent but Christological transformation, which both safeguards orthodoxy and directs the believer's moral life.

It is from this Christological lens that we can assess Cyril's place within the Alexandrian tradition. Because this study probes his frequent noetic references to shape his Christology, it is essential to distinguish his framework of participation from that of his

21; 1 Thess. 2.12). See Norman Russell, *Byzantine Tradition*, p. 3. The union of the Son with his own humanity is not analogous to the believer's participation in Christ; see Gebredmenhin, *Life-Giving Blessing*, pp. 36–37.

⁵⁹ For Cyril, the union between the Son and his own humanity is not analogous to the believer's participation to Christ. See Gebremedhin, *Life-Giving Blessing*, 36–37.

predecessors. Origen, for example, viewed deification as a matter of formation within a framework of progressive unification with the soul, grounded in his belief in pre-existent souls and a subordinated Trinity.⁶⁰ Cyril rejects both the Neoplatonic conceptualizations and the subordinationist tendencies, though we can still detect Alexandrian echoes, for instance, in Clement's account of progress in sanctification through the Spirit.⁶¹ What is distinctive in Cyril is his insistence that while rationality is essential, epistemic language and function must always be in service to Christology. This is illustrated in one of his comments on kinship with God, where he links likeness to the orientation of the mind:

...by setting our minds on his thoughts (διενθυμούμενοι φρονοῦντες τὰ αὐτοῦ), and resolve...to live piously, we will be called sons of God who is over all, and when we shape our mind (διαπλάττοντες νοῦν) to his will, as far as possible, this is how we are truly related to his likeness and most exact similitude.⁶²

Here, Cyril situates kinship in the reshaping of the mind through Christ, such that resemblance to God is both a gift of union and a responsibility of transformation. This provides the foundation for his larger discussion on kinship and cooperation through the Incarnation, in which believers are united to the Body of Christ by the Spirit. Building on my former point regarding Cyril's rejection of Neoplatonic ascent, we see from this passage a further departure. The believer's union with Christ grounds his or her identity as God's offspring; thus, participating in the divine nature is a gift, not an earned achievement. Having been granted this gift, believers are called to yield to the Holy Spirit, whereby their minds may be conformed to his divine will. For Cyril, likeness to Christ depends on the grace that effects union and the sustaining cooperative grace through Scriptural pedagogy, sacramental participation, and resulting virtue that ensures this ongoing transformation.

⁶⁰ Origen *Contra Celsum* 1.35, trans. Henry Chadwick (CUP, 1965), p. 34.

⁶¹ Rooted in Christ's baptism, Irenaeus saw Christ anointing his own humanity with the Spirit, who then grew accustomed to dwelling in human nature (*Adv. Haer* III, 18.3 [PG 7, 934]; cf. *Adv. Haer* III.17.1 [PG 7, 929]). In Clement, we see an emphasis on noetic progress. Clement of Alexandria, *Stromata* VII.5, in *Clemens Alexandrinus*, ed. Otto Stählin, GCS 17 (Hinrichs, 1909), pp. 21–22.

⁶² *Comm. Jo.* on Jo. 17.21 (PG 73, 724–28).

While resemblance to Christ is not primarily intellectual, correct thinking *is* essential, especially in view of the enemy's deceptive strategies. Here, Cyril's noetic concerns serve his pro-Nicene theology, namely participation in divine holiness and the divine way of life ($\tauῆς \ \dot{\epsilon}ν\xiέου \ \piολιτείας$). In this way, he reconfigures divine likeness around sanctification ($\dot{\alpha}γιασμός$) and kinship, mediated through Christ by the Spirit.

In the following passage, Cyril explores the implications of being refashioned in the image of Christ, presenting divine likeness as a multifaceted reality in which the believer is elevated through participation in Christ. He writes:

For being partakers of him through the Spirit, we were sealed unto likeness with him and ascend to the archetypal character of the image, after which the divine scriptures say we were made [...]. Therefore, we ascend to dignity above our nature because of Christ, and we too shall be sons of God, not like him exactly but by grace in imitation of him.⁶³

Here Cyril underscores that union with Christ confers upon believers a transcendent dignity, raising them to be partakers ($\kappaοινωνούς$) and participants ($\muετόχους$) in the divine nature, elevating their own nature.⁶⁴ This is always a gift of grace, where participation makes believers sons by adoption and imitation. Elsewhere, he states the same point with explicit emphasis on sanctification:

For we ourselves are created in the image and likeness of God. And that which imparts the divine image in new ones is certainly sanctification, that is, participation in God in the Spirit.⁶⁵

Cyril understands resemblance to the divine likeness as comprising three interrelated aspects. First, *spiritually*, believers receive sanctification through the Spirit, becoming holy by grace and indwelt by God himself.⁶⁶ Cyril writes, 'Each of those who believe in Christ is made

⁶³ Ibid., on Jo. 1.12 (Pusey I, 104). While Cyril, like his predecessors, employs Ps. 82.6, this passage offers a more extended treatment of believers as gods ($\thetaοι$). Cf. Jo. 1.3, 6–7, 9, 12–14; 3.33; 5.18; 6.27; 10.33–34; 15.9–10; 17.3–5, 20, 26; 20.17). See Ben C. Blackwell, *Christosis*, (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2011), pp. 33–34.

⁶⁴ Eph 2.6; 2 Pet. 1.4.

⁶⁵ *Thes.* 34 (PG 75, 585A–B).

⁶⁶ Origen presents the Spirit as a 'sanctifying energy' ($\dot{\alpha}γιαστική \ \dot{\epsilon}νέργεια$) but treats the Spirit's work as distinct and not fully shared with the other two Trinitarian Persons. (*De Princ.* I 3.7–8 (PG 11.152–154)).

a temple of the Spirit, receiving within himself...the whole fount of sanctification.⁶⁷ They are remade after the Archetype, elevated beyond the limits of fallen nature as participants in his incorruptibility. This sanctification entails nothing less than God's indwelling. Holiness, for Cyril, is union with God.⁶⁸

Second, relationally, Cyril describes the believer's relationship with Christ using terms that convey kinship (*συγγένεια*) or as Abraham's seed (*σπέρμα*), sharing in the sonship of Christ.⁶⁹ His exegesis of John 1.12-14 shows his most expansive account of the believer's kinship, or status as, 'gods'. In terms of his methodology, note that he frames this argument in a contrast between the Gentiles and the Jews; the former receive Christ and become children of God. The latter rejects him, thus forfeiting the privileges of sonship. This antithetical tension is used to amplify the restored dignity and sonship that the Spirit bestows on believers through the Incarnation.

Third, *morally*, they are called into a life of virtue and strength, cooperating with grace in an interplay of divine gift and human response. Cyril identifies moral resemblance as the necessary outworking of this sanctification and kinship.⁷⁰ This ethical resemblance is no less essential than the others; likeness is expressed through active conformity of mind and conduct to Christ, so that faith, hope, and love take concrete form within the communion of the Church.

⁶⁷ *Comm. Jo.* (Pusey III, 593) cf. Gal. 4.19; *Epistulae Festales* (hereafter *EF*), trans. Norman Russell, *Festal Letters* (SVS, 2000). *EF* 4.5 (PG 77, 464–65). John J. Burghardt identifies five ways Cyril interprets 'to be sanctified' (*άγιόζεσθαι*): (1) *ἀνατιθέμενον*, something dedicated to God, e.g., the firstborn of Israel (Exod. 13.2); (2) *προχειρισθέν*, one chosen by God to accomplish his will, e.g., Cyrus against the Babylonians (Is. 13.3), or the Son chosen for humanity's salvation; (3) *ἐν μεθέξει*, sanctification through partaking of the Spirit; (4) *ἀφοριζόμενον*, what is set apart for sacrifice, e.g., Christ in his passion; (5) *ἐνωθέντα*, what has the Word united to it, as in the flesh of Christ in the Incarnation. Thus, when Christ says in Jo. 17.19 that he sanctifies himself so his disciples may be sanctified (*ἅγιασμένοι*), this does not imply a sanctification imparting purity to himself, for he is without blemish, nor participates in the Spirit, since he possesses the Spirit as his own. Rather, he is a holy, sinless offering in accordance with the Law (cf. Jo. 10.36; 4.2 [Pusey I, 519]; 7 [Pusey II, 259–60]). See Burghardt, *Image of God in Man According to Cyril of Alexandria* (CUAP, 1966), pp. 68–69.

⁶⁸ *Gaph.* in Gen. 1 (PG 69, 29). Cyril of Alexandria, *Glaphyra on the Pentateuch, Vol. 1: Genesis*, trans. Nicholas P. Lunn, FOC 137 (CUAP, 2019).

⁶⁹ *Comm. Jo.* on Jo. 8.37 (Pusey II, 71–74): '...we have become kin (*συγγενεῖς*) to him due to the flesh in the mystery of Christ.'

⁷⁰ I expand on the phrase 'consequent life' from Keating, *Participation*, p. 120.

This invokes the active cooperation of the believer's will with divine grace, a reciprocal interplay in which right thinking, self-discipline, and virtuous living manifest participation in the divine life. Moral resemblance thus represents the ethical dimension of deification: a life conformed to Christ in faith, hope, and love.⁷¹

Because the spiritual, relational, and ethical aspects of resemblance to Christ flow from the continuity of the Incarnation and the sacraments, they will be examined more fully in Chapter Two on the sacraments. For now, it is key to note that for Cyril, sacramental participation serves as the principal means by which believers partake in and are sustained by the divine life, through which they grow in the knowledge of God.

1.1.d. Spiritual Nourishment

Before examining how the sacraments fortify the believer in the next chapter, it is necessary to outline the broader theological categories by which Cyril presents nourishment from the life-giving Word. The language of nourishment marks the point at which Christological participation becomes perceptible and formative, shaping not only incorruption but discernment and understanding. Growth in divine knowledge and virtue depends on rightly understanding Scripture. For Cyril, neglecting this nourishment is spiritually perilous.⁷² While the Eucharist is the tangible instrument, he consistently references the sustaining power of Christ's Person and the spiritual nourishment of Scripture.⁷³

⁷¹ Jo. 14.2-6; 8.44; Rom. 7.14-25; Matt. 7.3-5, 9.13.

⁷² *Ador. I* (PG 68, 152).

⁷³ See above, in part 1.3.e, where I discuss the Spirit as the vine's nourishing sap in relation to growth in fruitfulness.

Christ Himself

In John 6, Cyril offers his fullest treatment of the Eucharist while also presenting the Incarnate Word as the ongoing source of spiritual nourishment for the believer's inner life, intellect, and obedience. In commenting on John 6:33, Cyril broadens the meaning of 'the bread from heaven' beyond strictly Eucharistic implications. He variously applies the manna to Christ, Scripture, and the Eucharist, but the focus here is on nourishment through Christ's person. Cyril writes:

Let no one think...that [manna] is the true bread from heaven but let them rather acknowledge him who clearly has the power to feed the whole earth and...to give 'life to the world.' ...the only begotten Word of God himself was the manna, who comes from the substance of the Father, since he is life by nature and the one who gives life to all... As our bread, which is taken from the earth, does not allow the weak nature of the flesh to decay...so also he, through the operation (ἐνέργειας) of the Spirit, gives life to the spirit⁷⁴ and...he preserves the body itself in incorruption.... Christ himself is the true manna who is understood to be supplied...in type from God the Father.⁷⁵

In this passage, his spiritual interpretation of the manna refers to the true bread from heaven as the Only-Begotten of the Father, who gives life to the world and has descended from heaven to nourish humanity in himself.⁷⁶ In a few sentences, Cyril returns to Christ as 'the bread of life':

that is, Christ, nourishes us to eternal life, both by supplying us with the Holy Spirit and by participation in his own flesh, placing us into participation with God, and destroying death that comes from the ancient curse.⁷⁷

Here, he deepens his description by emphasizing both the agent and the benefits of divine nourishment. Christ nourishes believers through himself and the Holy Spirit, with this ongoing sustenance tied soteriologically to his defeat of death and the gift of eternal life.

⁷⁴ Gr: πνεῦμα, referring to the human soul.

⁷⁵ *Comm. Jo.* on Jo. 6.32-33 (Pusey I, 458). Maxwell, *John* I, 205.

⁷⁶ On Cyril's ambiguous comment, '...he, through the operation of the Spirit gives life to the soul, and...preserves the body itself for incorruption,' he either distinguishes between the Spirit's work in the soul and Christ's in the body or sees both as Christ acting through the Spirit; see Keating, *Appropriation*, p. 66.

⁷⁷ *Comm. Jo.* on Jo. 6.35 (Pusey I, 473).

In verse 35, when Christ declares, ‘I am the bread of life’, Cyril depicts Christ’s body as the true bread from heaven, nourishing the believer with divine life through the Spirit. The mystery of the Eucharist is thus hidden from the uninitiated through parables but revealed to the faithful. Cyril writes:

It is the custom of our Savior Christ when he explains the divine mysteries [‘I am the bread of life’] that are already foretold, to weave explanations of them that are enigmatic and not very clear (αἰνγανατώδη πως καὶ οὐ σφόδρα διαφανῆ). He does not allow his word, which is so august, to lie unveiled before those who have only profane and unholy desires...when he has hidden it in layers of enigmas, he does not make it obscure to those with understanding (οὐκ ἀσυμφανῆ μὲν τοῖς συνετοῖς). When he sees some of his hearers who have no learning and (ἀμαθαίνοντας) who understand nothing (οὐοῦντας οὐδὲν) of what he is saying, he makes clear whatever he wants to show.... he sets the knowledge of the mystery (τοῦ μυστηρίου τὴν γνῶσιν) before them, stripped bare and easy to see, thereby rendering their unbelief without excuse.⁷⁸

Notice that Christ’s use of enigmatic speech inspires Cyril to amplify the distinction between understanding and ignorance to shape his Christology. His use of antithesis (profane and unholy versus the understanding and receptive) and a climactic structure (building from mystery to clarity) is shaped to highlight the profound mysteries of Christ concealed behind the nourishing imagery. We see his rhetorical strategy at work, incorporating irony and inversion. Cyril sees Christ’s concealment of the meaning as intentional in order to reveal it more deeply to those able to discern it. By contrast, the plainness of the word is granted to the unlearned, not to foster understanding as much as to leave their unbelief without defense.⁷⁹

Later in the same chapter (vv. 49-50), Christ discloses the truth of his identity as the bread of life, while also alluding to the deeper mystery of the Eucharist. Cyril interprets Christ as yearning for the Jews to turn from corruption and seek participation in him, whose flesh

⁷⁸ Ibid., on Jo. 6.35 (Pusey 1.471). See also *Thes.* (PG 75, 283–92): ‘Being the Word and true Son, the Father clothed me with an earthly body to become a...beginning of those who have been built into me... be one body (σύσσωμος) with them...joined to me naturally (φυσικῶς)...in kinship according to the flesh.’

⁷⁹ Cf. Ps 78.2. *Comm. Jo.* on Jo. 8.58 (PG 73, 132); Maxwell, *John* II, p.20. Cyril notes that Christ first conceals his meaning in enigmatic speech, but then ‘strips his speech of its obscurity’ when his audience struggles to understand.

destroys decay and nullifies death.⁸⁰ As Farag notes, the theological importance lies in Christ's bringing grace and life to humanity through his holy body, conquering death by virtue of his supremacy over it.⁸¹

Scripture

One of the most noteworthy aspects of his theology is the central role Cyril assigns to Scripture. In what follows, I outline Cyril's understanding of the Word as spiritual nourishment for the believer, highlighting three ways Cyril presents Scripture as nutritive. First, the preached Word functions as a Trinitarian sustenance, being authored, sent, and spoken through the Godhead. Second, the Scriptures also fortify believers inwardly, producing spiritual fullness that overflows into a life of virtue. Third, Scripture strengthens them to resist the devil's schemes, especially those that seek to undermine the truth of the Incarnation.

Returning to Cyril's John 6 discourse, the miracle of the loaves and fish shows a Trinitarian contour that highlights the distributors of the bread:

What shall we conclude from this except that Christ is surely and truly the master of the banquet for those who believe in him and that he nourishes those who come to him with divine and heavenly food, namely the teaching of the law and prophets, as well as the Evangelists and the apostles. He himself, however, is certainly not the one who does these things, but the disciples serve us the grace from above. They are not 'the ones speaking,' as it says, 'but the Spirit of the Father is speaking' in them. The holy apostles...[w]hen they have distributed to us the spiritual food and have served us the good things that come from our Savior, they will receive the richest reward...⁸²

Cyril presents the nourishment of the Word within a Trinitarian framework. Christ appears as the one who invites and provides at the divine banquet—an image that carries both Eucharistic and eschatological significance. The Spirit completes this picture by bringing to

⁸⁰ *Comm. Jo.* on Jo. 6.49–50 (Pusey 1, 514).

⁸¹ Lois M. Farag, *St. Cyril of Alexandria, A New Testament Exegete: His Commentary on the Gospel of John* (Gorgias Press, 2014), p. 233.

⁸² *Comm. Jo.* on Jo. 6.12–13 (Pusey I, 420–21), Maxwell, *John* I, p. 187; cf. their 'unfading crown' in Jo. 15:5–6 (PG 74, 561).

fulfillment Christ's promise that his disciples would be given speech for their ministry.⁸³ Note that he interprets the loaves as symbols of spiritual nourishment, yet he initially draws attention to their number. The five loaves, he suggests, correspond to the five books of the Law, which offer what he refers to as 'the coarser food through the letter and narrative.' His attention then shifts to the apostles who distribute the loaves, a gesture he reads as the communication of heavenly grace through their preaching.⁸⁴ Christ himself is the Word, and the Spirit speaks through the apostles who dispense this grace in their ministry, participating in the divine feeding of the faithful. In this interpretation, the true nourishment comes by way of Trinitarian operations that author, send, and speak the Word through apostolic proclamation. Finally, Cyril frames the apostolic ministerial role within an eschatological lens, anticipating the rich reward awaiting them for their faithful service to the Body of Christ.⁸⁵

Cyril also discusses the manner in which Scripture nourishes the faithful:

...inspired Scripture, making clear by the Spirit what is hidden in it to those more prudent (*τοῖς νοούχεστέροις*). His purpose is for us to come to maturity, to the measure of the full stature of Christ, having a mind that is enriched and well-nourished, luxuriating in noetic enjoyment (*λιπαρὰν ἔχοντες καὶ εὐτροφουμένην τὴν φρένα, καὶ ταῖς νοηταῖς ἐνσπαταλῶσαν τρυφαῖς*).⁸⁶

Commenting on Micah 7.14, where the prophet speaks of shepherds feeding their flocks, Cyril relates this image to the saints' encounter with the Word. He describes their minds as being filled and strengthened by the many layers of meaning found in Scripture. Important for my argument is that this fullness does not culminate in intellectual satisfaction; rather, it moves toward the outward practice of virtue and the inward life of contemplation. For Cyril, this shows that the inward discipline of meditative focus on Scripture should lead believers to

⁸³ Cf. Luke 12.11–12.

⁸⁴ *Comm. Jo.* on Jo. 6.12-13 (Pusey I, 418-19).

⁸⁵ Cf. John 15.2. Cyril writes that the repentant idolators can 'bring forth the food of the divine gospel training...and bear fruit that is truly pleasing to [God]' (*Comm. Jo.* on Jo. 15.2 [Pusey 2.552]); cf. *Comm. Is.* on Is. 43.16 (PG 70, 948–52), Hill, *Commentary*, p. 84.

⁸⁶ *Comm. Mich.* on Mic. 7.14 (Pusey II, 732; PG 71, 1.732).

an outward life marked by ethical and spiritual fruitfulness, which *only then* can be considered true ‘noetic enjoyment’. This thought is echoed in his discussion on John 7, where Cyril writes about those instructed in the gospel being ‘so delighted spiritually’ that their thirst for the knowledge of truth will be satisfied. Rivers will spring forth from their bellies,’ which, quoting Paul, is a special grace of wisdom taught by the Spirit.⁸⁷

For we teach in the Churches by bringing forward doctrines from the divinely inspired Scriptures and by setting out the evangelical and apostolic word as a kind of *spiritual food*. Those who believe in Christ and who excel with an unswerving faith listen to these words, but they turn away from the voice of the false shepherds and avoid them like the plague.⁸⁸

The third way the Word fortifies noetically is by protecting believers against error and deception. Cyril is emphatic throughout his writings that believers must remain attentive to the Word, and he consistently places responsibility on the clergy to interpret and teach Scripture faithfully. He links sound doctrine to apostolic tradition, describing it as ‘spiritual food’ necessary for the believer’s nourishment. For him, the reading of Scripture and faith in Christ depend upon one another, and both must be shaped by Nicene teaching. False teachers—especially those who distort the doctrines of the Trinity or the Incarnation—undermine the gospel and corrupt the efficacy of the Eucharist.

He highlights the importance of the mind of believers being fed, writing elsewhere that ‘the mind should have the divine word as its nourishment’ and know well the ‘sacred doctrines that are correct and free from...deceit and falsehood. Such is the food that is pure and unleavened.’⁸⁹ He maintains that discernment must issue in faithful action. Insight drawn from Scripture, if left unpracticed, loses its power to shape the soul. He cautions that hesitation in obedience, most of all during testing or temptation, diminishes the believer’s share in ‘Christ’s

⁸⁷ *Comm. Jo. on Jo. 7.39* (Pusey 1, 689).

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, on Jo. 10.1-5 (Pusey II, 210); Maxwell, *John II*, p. 56. Italics mine.

⁸⁹ *EF* 16; cf. Matt. 4.4 (italics mine); *Festal Letters 13–30*, trans. Philip R. Amidon, SJ, and John J. O’Keefe, FOC, 127 (CUAP, 2009), pp. 52–53; trans. of Pierre Évieux, *Cyrille d’Alexandrie; Lettres Festales I–XVII*. SC 434. (Cerf, 1993).

blessing'. This corrective emphasizes the importance of a sanctified mind and sound judgment shaped by truth, which guard against error. This same concern appears in his Eucharistic theology, where understanding requires an 'ordered disposition' before the altar. This relation between discernment and participation lies behind his distinctions among communicants.⁹⁰

Finally, in his examination of a fragment from Cyril's commentary on Psalm 22.5, 'You have prepared a table before me over against those who afflict me,' Matthew Crawford highlights Cyril's emphasis on the nourishment of Scripture which—being 'rich and costly' and offering a variety of 'prepared dishes'—surpasses pagan wisdom by conveying Christ's superlative wisdom and knowledge. Scripture thus fortifies believers with the spiritual vigor to resist false teaching and pagan thought.⁹¹

Conclusion

I argue that Cyril relies on language of knowing and noetic tensions to craft his pro-Nicene theology, which, in turn, shapes his readers' minds to discern the mystery of Christ. To demonstrate this, it was necessary first to ground his epistemic ideas in their Christological source. By tracing the 'chain of custody' in his treatment of true knowledge of God, I gradually uncover the dimensions of pro-Nicene theology motivating his insistence on the believer's cultivation of correct thinking and his harsh polemic against heretics and unbelieving Jews. I began in this chapter by demonstrating that, for Cyril, Christ is not only the content of divine truth but the very epistemic condition for knowing God.

I began by examining the teleological orientation in Cyril's theology, in which life, incorruption, and glorification frame the divine purpose for creation. I showed that divine life is communicated to humanity through the Son, whose flesh is not only fully human but divinely life-giving. The hypostatic union, therefore, is the starting point for understanding the divine

⁹⁰ See § 1.3.b. for further discussion.

⁹¹ Matthew R. Crawford, *Cyril of Alexandria's Trinitarian Theology of Scripture*, (Durham University, 2012), pp. 152-53, where Cyril refers to Scripture as the 'evangelical table'.

economy, the meaning of Scripture, how the Church lives, and how the believer grows. In a departure from Athanasius, Cyril presents this union as enabling believers to begin the process of noetic renewal through the conditional, rather than automatic, presence of the Holy Spirit. Along this line, I also showed that Cyril's doctrine of deification is inseparable from the believer's conformity to Christ. This process requires the continual sanctifying work of the Spirit in concert with the believer's noetic renewal and cooperation in virtue. I then examined the nourishment in and through Christ, whose flesh and word serve not only as the means of union but also as the agent through whom divine knowledge and incorruptible life are progressively communicated.

The chapter demonstrates that for Cyril, questions of knowing are inseparable from his Christology and soteriology. The Word made flesh grounds all knowledge of God; accordingly, the hypostatic union determines how divine truth is received, as knowing arises from God's gracious initiative and union with Christ becomes the means by which understanding and a virtuous life within the ecclesia take shape.

In Chapter Two, I turn to the sacraments to show how believers are joined to Christ's flesh and drawn into the mystery of divine knowledge, demonstrating how Cyril employs language of knowing to form his readers' minds and to present the sacraments as empowered to effect the renewal of understanding through participation in Christ.

Sacraments as Sites of Knowledge and the Habituation of the Believer

Introduction

In the previous chapter, I showed that Cyril's Christology provides the ontological ground for a participation in the life of God. It is here that the sacraments enter into view. The sacraments are not optional complements to this theology, but their concrete realization: they make present the body and blood of Christ; they communicate the Spirit; and reconstitute the believer's capacity to be one who sees, understands, and lives rightly. This chapter turns to the sacramental life of the Church as the enfleshment of Cyril's participatory Christology. What follows examines how sacramental participation, though one in its source, yields differing effects as it is enacted and received within the Church.

I argue that Cyril's sacramental theology bears both ontological weight and decisive implications for knowing God. Because knowledge of God is realized through union with the Incarnate Word, the means by which that union is enacted are central to any account of theological understanding. For Cyril, the sacraments function as privileged sites in which divine reality is encountered and apprehended, rendering them indispensable to doctrinal understanding and ethical life. Baptism and the Eucharist thus operate pedagogically, initiating believers into the life of Christ and enabling their ongoing formation, as the Spirit renews them and progressively conforms their minds and wills in responsive participation.

The sacraments constitute the ongoing and complex interrelationship of the grace of divine initiative and human cooperation, between the historical Christ and the believer, and between spiritual blindness and illumination. This sacramental lens also helps explain Cyril's frequent polemic against heretics and unbelievers. For him, the refusal to believe rightly about Christ is less a failure of cognition than a failure of a faithful disposition to participate in, and to submit to, the life of the Church where Christ is truly known. Heresy is the manifestation of

alienation from the mystery. Thus, epistemic clarity comes by entering more deeply into the mystery of the sacraments. To see God rightly is ecclesially mediated. One must be washed in the water of rebirth, nourished by the flesh of the Word, and through disciplined mystagogical habituation, love of Christ and others fosters growth in the knowledge of God.

Structure

I will examine Cyril’s sacramental theology in two parts. In Part One, baptism, Cyril develops his understanding of the sacrament’s spiritual and corporeal cleansing through the inseparable work of the Trinity, bringing believers into adopted sonship of the Father, and how the believer is illumined to know God as Triune. The discussion shows how baptism unites the believer to Christ and begins the Spirit’s continuing work of noetic transformation.

Part Two moves to the Eucharist, the point at which Cyril’s theology finds its richest expression, and the believer’s participation in divine life in Christ and in fellowship with the Church is most clearly shown. He presents the sacrament as both the continuation of sanctification and the site where understanding matures through ongoing union with Christ.

In both sections, I will trace how, in Cyril’s theology, the sacraments function as both a means of grace and a form of pedagogy. Because of the real presence of Christ in them, they possess the capacity to orient the mind and heart to perceive rightly. They can teach the communicant how to read Scripture, to discern heresies, and to recognize the presence of Christ in the Church and in the world. As such, they are also disciplined practices—liturgical enactments that *should* form the soul into conformity to Christ.

Part One: Baptismal Regeneration and the Renewing of the Mind

For Cyril, both baptism and the Eucharist share essential features: both belong to a unified sacramental reality conferred in a twofold spiritual and material manner; both are described as ‘spiritual blessings’; and both bestow the gift of incorruptibility. In light of Cyril’s convictions regarding the Incarnational union effected through the sacraments, I argue that the renewal of the mind through baptism (to be followed by the Eucharist in Part Three) is central to his vision of the virtuous Christian life.

Part One advances my argument in four subsections. First, I examine Cyril’s account of the Spirit’s indwelling at baptism, through which the believer’s sonship is established alongside the Son. For Cyril, the Spirit’s presence is the tangible sign that the curse of the fall has been overturned. Second, I probe the noetic benefits of the believer’s union with Christ and with one another through the indwelt Spirit. Third, I consider Cyril’s interpretation of the noetic contrasts between Paul’s discussion of Adam and Christ, the Second Adam. Fourth, I focus on how Cyril envisions baptism’s potential to empower both the believer’s noetic transformation and pursuit of a virtuous life.

2.1.a. Indwelling Spirit and Sonship by Grace

Cyril’s comments on baptism’s purifying role are often placed alongside noetic observations that serve to integrate his pneumatological, Christological, and Trinitarian thought.⁹² The passage that follows illustrates how he links baptism with noetic renewal.⁹³ For Cyril, the primary effect of baptismal regeneration—and the reversal of the fall’s curse—is the

⁹² *Glaph. II* (PG 69, 576; Robert C. Hill, *Cyril of Alexandria: Glaphyra on the Pentateuch, Volume II: Exodus–Levitcus–Numbers–Deuteronomy*, FOC 143 (CUAP, 1994), p. 156); *Glaph. XII* (PG 69, 625; Hill, II, p. 197); *Glaph. XII* (PG 69, 632; Hill, II, p. 202 [cf. p. 178]).

⁹³ On Jo. 9.36, (Pusey I, 198), Cyril discusses the prerequisite of faith for baptism. ‘...those on their way to divine baptism are first asked whether they believe,’ and upon their confession, are granted ‘to grace as genuine.’ Citing Paul, he adds that this confession is to be made before ‘many witnesses’, namely the angels, warning of the grave consequences of speaking falsely in their presence. cf. 1 Tim. 6.12.

indwelling of the Holy Spirit, whom Cyril describes as the ‘lasting, good gift’ who transforms the believer’s whole nature and who empowers the renewal of the mind.⁹⁴ He frames the discussion by drawing on Romans 4.17, which addresses divine power and initiative to bring to life that which did not exist.

We must note, however, that we say the human spirit is an offspring of the Spirit⁹⁵ not as if it were from him by nature—that is impossible—but in the first place, it refers to what did not exist being called into being through him, and in the second place...it refers to our transformation (ἀναμόρφωσιν) through him toward God in which he stamps his own impression on us and transforms our mind (διάνοιαν μεταπλάττοντος) to his own quality.⁹⁶

The imagery of the stamp symbolizes two realities. First is the fulfillment of the divine economy to achieve union with Christ, who is himself united to the Father by nature, and who, at his baptism, secured his own Spirit to human nature on humanity’s behalf, a gift later extended through his sinless life and atoning earthly ministry. Second, being marked with Christ’s imprint through the Spirit, believers are adopted and brought into the divine sonship that Christ possesses by nature.⁹⁷ Believers, through this indwelling, are made children of the Father; they receive not only the Son’s image, but the Son himself, in what Bermejo describes as a ‘compenetration,’ by which the Son makes them offspring of the Father.⁹⁸

He also shows that believers become ‘offspring of the Spirit’ by grace.⁹⁹ Cyril wants to be precise, clarifying that believers do not share in the Spirit’s divinity; instead, being formed anew (ἀναμορφοῦνται) and transformed (μεταπλάσσονται) in baptism, they are adopted by

⁹⁴ *Comm. Jo. on Jo. 7.19* (Pusey I, 694). Cyril’s sacramental theology establishes a clear link between the Holy Spirit and baptism; cf. *Comm. Jo. on Jo. 2.1* (Pusey I, 237); Maxwell, *John I*, p. 106; cf. *Comm. Jo. on Jo. 7.24* (Pusey I, 638–40); Maxwell, *John I*, p. 286.

⁹⁵ Cf. Rom. 8.9, where baptism is implied in Cyril’s description of the gift of the Spirit: ‘We take the phrase ‘the spirit is life’ to refer to the human spirit (πνεῦμα...τὸ ἀνθρώπινον) that is given life by the grace of the Holy Spirit and enriched with righteousness by communion with Him’ (*Comm. Jo. on Jo. 6.63* [PG 74, 214.19–20]).

⁹⁶ *Comm. Jo. on Jo. 3.6* (Pusey I, 220.1–15); cf. Rom. 4.17, 12.2.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, (Pusey I, 219), along with justification by faith.

⁹⁸ Fernando Bermejo, *The Indwelling of the Holy Spirit in the Souls of the Just According to St. Thomas Aquinas* (Università Gregoriana Editrice, 1962), 78.

⁹⁹ Cf. 2 Cor. 5.15–17; Gal. 6.15; Col. 3.9–10.

grace. This sonship brings to completion the earlier figure of Israel's calling, so that believers may now truly call God, 'Father,' having received the Spirit of the Son within them.¹⁰⁰

2.1.b. Noetic Renewal

This section supports my claim that Cyril consistently treats knowledge and understanding as a key feature of his theological method.¹⁰¹ Although his polemical tone often sharpens the contrast between believer and unbeliever, it occasionally obscures his more nuanced interplay of how divine grace and human agency work together. For him, man's free will is not a potential good, but an ontological good enabling a person to turn toward evil or to reflect God through the pursuit of virtue. Yet Cyril also sees the will as dynamic, shaped by its dependence on the Spirit in the very act of choosing.¹⁰² Humanity is given privilege and responsibility to direct its faculties toward God as the center of all reality through ongoing dependence on the Spirit's grace. This dependence orients the desire to imitate the Son, and by grace, the believer's knowledge of God progresses through participation in the Church's sacraments. This dependence orients the desires to imitate the Son, and by grace, advances the believer's knowledge of God through participation in the Church's sacraments.

The dynamics of sacramental renewal provide the framework for Cyril's interpretation of John 9.1–9, in which Christ's healing of the man born blind illustrates how divine illumination restores both perception and understanding. Cyril repeatedly refers to the blindness and ignorance of the Jews and their misinterpretation of Christ's announcement that

¹⁰⁰ *Comm. Jo.* on Jo. 1.12-14 (Pusey, I, 135); cf. Jo. 17.18-19 (Pusey II 722).

¹⁰¹ Clement of Alexandria, *Clemens Alexandrinus, Vol. I: Protrepticus und Paedagogus*, ed. Otto Stählin, GCS 12 (repr. De Gruyter, 1972); Eng. trans. Simon P. Wood, *Christ the Educator* FOC 23 (CUAP, 1954), pp. 131–135. See also ANF, vol. 2, ed. Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson (Eerdmans, 1980), pp. 215–216.

¹⁰² *Comm. Jo.* on Jo. 13.18 (Pusey 1.358); cf. Gen 2.7. Cyril rejects total depravity; free will is a prerequisite if man is accountable for his actions. Willing comes by faith through persuasion, not compulsion. See Jo. 6.44-45 (Pusey I, 506-507); *Comm. Is.* 1.19-20 (PG, 70, 48-49), 'Where there is hearing and learning...there is faith, but by persuasion (πειθοῦς), not by compulsion (ἀνάγκης)...the doctrine requires free will and free choice (αὐτεξούσιον καὶ αὐτοπροαιρέτον) be preserved to the human soul.' He links renewed willingness to sacramental participation, but even then, it is not automatic but enabled.

He is the light of the world (v.5). The literal and spiritual interpretations both center on Christ as the one whose life-giving flesh enlightens not only physical but also spiritual blindness. Because the Only Begotten has the ‘knowledge (νοητὸν) and power to illuminate not only what is in the world,’ but the divine realities beyond it, he gifts this illumination in baptism by the Spirit.¹⁰³

It was not possible for the gentiles to thrust off the blindness (τυφλότητα) which affected them, and to behold the divine and holy light, that is, to receive the knowledge (γνῶσιν) of the holy and consubstantial Trinity, except by being made partakers of His Holy Body, washing away their gloom-producing sin, and renouncing the authority of the devil, namely in Holy Baptism.¹⁰⁴

Cyril is shaping his readers’ understanding of the scope of baptismal transformation and aims to inspire obedience to and faith in the consubstantial Trinity. By doing so, he leads his readers to infer the spiritual, noetic, and moral consequences of being unbaptized or outside the Church: dwelling in spiritual darkness; lacking the knowledge of God; and falling under the devil’s power, leaving them unable to live virtuously or share *koinonia* with God or the Church. In a comment on Romans 12.2, Cyril again uses antithesis to highlight the stark contrast between the deceived mind of the ‘old self’ versus the clarity and responsibility of the new, emphasizing that new life in Christ leads to the possession of a ‘mind now renewed and reveling in the bright beams of the true vision of God (θεοπτίας).’¹⁰⁵ He confines this knowledge to the Church’s possession, teaching that it is granted solely through the Spirit in baptism.

How does Cyril shape the relationship between divine grace and human cooperation? The first half of the answer is shown in a later passage where he makes an unequivocal link between the Spirit and the reception of the mind of Christ:

¹⁰³ *Comm. Jo. on Jo. 6.7* (Pusey I, 694); Maxwell, *John I*, p. 186.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, on Jo. 9.8-9 (Pusey II, 157) Maxwell, *John II*, p. 31.

¹⁰⁵ *EF* 23.1 (PG 77, 876), FOC 127, p. 128, cf. Eph. 4.17-24: Νέος γε μὴν ὁ εἰς καινότητα ζωῆς τῆς ἐν Χριστῷ μεταστοιχειούμενος, ἀνακατισθέντος ἐν αὐτῷ τοῦ νοὸς, καὶ ταῖς μὲν τῆς ἀληθοῦς θεοπτίας ἐντρυφῶντος. αὐγαῖς.

Then we hear them boldly saying, ‘We have the mind of Christ.’ By the mind of the Savior, they mean nothing other than the Holy Spirit, who enters them.¹⁰⁶

A superficial reading might suggest that simply receiving the Spirit is enough to think the thoughts of Christ; however, Cyril insists that the baptized must cooperate with both the initiating *and sustaining* power of divine grace. While the believer’s mind is indeed ‘enriched by heavenly grace from above,’ Cyril shows that grace also involves a renewal of strength, whereby the believer is enabled to exercise initiative to grow in the true knowledge of God.¹⁰⁷ I will offer more examples of this reciprocal dynamic throughout this thesis. For now, it is important to note that for Cyril, human cooperation is essential. Still, believers’ efforts are neither independent of divine grace nor do their minds become enriched apart from it.

Corporeal and Spiritual Renewal

Cyril understands baptism as an event encompassing the whole of human nature, corporeally and spiritually, in a single unrepeatable sacramental act: the Spirit consecrates the soul, while through the sanctified water the body is transformed (μεταστοιχειοῦται). This dual action breaks the devil’s hold by cleansing believers from ‘gloom-producing sin.’¹⁰⁸ Baptism thus can effect both therapeutic and noetic renewal; healing the whole person.¹⁰⁹ The material element can purify the body with water, and the soul can be washed clean of its defilement

¹⁰⁶ *Comm. Jo. on Jo. 16.12-13* (Pusey II, 627-28); cf. Matt. 15.11; Is. 40.31; 1 Cor 2.16.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.* (Pusey II, 68); cf. *Glaph. XII* on Num. (PG 69, 625), Hill, *Glaphyra II*, p. 197.

¹⁰⁸ In Cyril’s analogy between and the Eucharist, the former effects an initial cleansing confined to the body, whereas the latter accomplishes a more comprehensive cleansing, both somatic *and* psychic.

¹⁰⁹ As stated in my introduction, I agree with L. Wickham that Cyril uses ‘soul’ and ‘mind’ interchangeably, favoring a two-fold division (σῶμα, and ψυχή λογική/νοερά), and rejecting the Apollinarian three-part scheme, following Athanasius. See *Comm. Jo. on Jn 2.1* (Pusey I.219) ‘...man is a composite and not simple by nature, a compound of two things, sensible body and intelligent soul. (ἐκ δύο κεκασμένος, αισθητοῦ δηλονότι σώματος καὶ ψυχῆς νοερᾶς.)’ cf. *First Letter to Succensus* §7, ACO 1.1.6, 151–57; Eng. trans. *The Cambridge Edition of Early Christian Writings*, 731–739. Wickham, *Select Letters*, p. 189.

through the Spirit.¹¹⁰ Cyril envisions the removal of defiling deception through spiritual and physical cleansing, replaced by the indwelling Christ who guides believers into all truth.¹¹¹

2.1.c. Spiritual vs. Soulish - Noetic Distinctions

In a closely related discussion addressing composite human nature and the distinctions between soul and body, Cyril moves beyond a strictly ontological account in his treatment of the resurrected body in 1 Corinthians 15.35-49, where he examines the noetic contrasts Paul draws between Adam and Christ.

For indeed, corruption and weakness and unseemliness inhere in the body, which is fallen and, as it were, sown in the earth; and the mind (φρόνημα) is that which is soulish (τὸ ψυχικόν), which we assert to be also the same as that which is fleshly and more earthly. But when it was brought into being in the beginning, it was not thus by nature. But these things insinuated themselves on account of the transgression...¹¹²

The distinction between the ‘spiritual’ (πνευματικόν) and ‘soulish’ (ψυχικόν) body does not, for Cyril, primarily relate to the body’s physical substance or creation.¹¹³ Instead, it marks a moral distinction: the latter denotes fallen human nature, while the former signifies a mind oriented toward the heavenly.¹¹⁴ Before the transforming work of the Spirit in baptism, Cyril portrays the mind as degraded, blinded, and incapable of resisting the devil or perceiving the truth of God as Triune.

¹¹⁰ *Comm. Is.* on Is 1.16 (PG 70, 40): ‘Christ removes every stain... through the Holy Spirit and water...every form of wickedness in us disappeared and was consumed...’; cf. *Glaþh.* on Num. (PG 69.625).

¹¹¹ *Glaþh.* on Num. (PG 69, 625).

¹¹² *Comm. Jo.* on Jo. 6.56 (PG 74, 241-42; Pusey, III, 311).

¹¹³ Cyril comments on 1 Cor. 15:44-45 in his *Comm. Jo.* (notably in Book 6) and also in *Glaþh. in Pent.*, when treating the typology of resurrection life. His most direct discussion of the ‘spiritual body’ (σῶμα πνευματικόν) occurs in *Comm. Jo.* on Jo. 20.27, where he describes it as a body that is ‘completely freed from a carnal earthly mind’ (Pusey IV, 113-15; PG 74, 905-908, Maxwell, *John*, III, pp. 262-64).

¹¹⁴ Keating, *Appropriation*, p. 59, 75; *Comm. Jo.* (Pusey III, 311-12). Maxwell suggests that in 1 Cor. 15.44-45 Cyril addresses the Origenist term ‘soul body’ (σῶμα ψυχικόν), understanding a fleshly mind as ‘soulish’; in this sense Cyril associates the soul with the flesh, and the ‘spirit’ with Christ. Cyril echoes Paul’s contrast between Adam as a ‘living soul’ (Gen 2.7) and Christ as the second Adam. See David R. Maxwell, *Commentary on Romans, 1-2 Corinthians, and Hebrews*, ed. Joel C. Elowsky (IVP Academic, 2018), p. 80, n. 235.

Elsewhere he describes humanity as being under the sway of the ‘body of sin,’ a phrase that does not refer to the physical body itself, but to the unruly impulses that ‘drag the mind down to more shameful thoughts’ and immerse it in the murkiness of earthly pleasures.¹¹⁵ He goes on to explain the remedy, wherein Christ, taking on his own flesh, crucified sin in the flesh so that his triumph over the ‘body of sin’ might become a transformative grace extended to believers through the Spirit.¹¹⁶ Because Christ has glorified the body, Cyril reads Paul not as contrasting two kinds of material embodiment but as distinguishing two moral conditions: fallen and redeemed creation. As he explains, ‘the spiritual...is that which is set free from the fleshly and more earthly mind.’

Regarding the temporal extent of baptismal cleansing, the Son’s redemption includes driving away ‘not only sickness and the infirmities of disease but overthrowing even death itself and the corruption that presses on us.’¹¹⁷ Yet incorruption remains in this *already-and-not-yet* state. Physical suffering and sin are not entirely purged in the present life but will be when the body is raised at the resurrection.¹¹⁸ Because this interim state endures, Cyril emphasizes the present potential of baptism’s noetic benefits.¹¹⁹

2.1.d. Transformed Mind: Trinitarian Agency

As I have shown, Cyril demonstrates how baptism enables believers to be cleansed both spiritually and physically, empowers them to be partakers of the divine nature through the indwelling Spirit, and brings them into fellowship with God and one another. This two-fold cleansing enables them to know the Triune God, and, through sacramental participation, empowers them to cultivate zeal for God and to pursue a virtuous life.

¹¹⁵ *Comm. Jo.* on Rom. 6.6 (Pusey V, 191-92).

¹¹⁶ Cf. Rom. 7.1 ‘..the baptized have been buried with him so that they might die to sin and live to God...’

¹¹⁷ *Comm. Jo.* on Jo. 5.25 (PG 73, 345).

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, on 20.26 (Pusey III, 146-47).

¹¹⁹ I will discuss this in more detail in § 2.2.a., ‘Twofold Union’.

In the following passage, Cyril employs vivid language to encourage his readers regarding the ideal transformation mentioned above—the potential that begins with baptism and is sustained through ongoing participation in the Eucharist. I first discuss the believer’s cooperative response as the fitting outcome of divine grace, and second, highlight the prior agency of the Trinity:

For what do we have that could be of equal value to what God the Father has done?...and he put aside...the affection that was properly due to him. For Christ gave himself up for our sins...and it is we who have been saved...that rising up to life with him and because of him, and returning to a state of incorruption, we should joyfully say, ‘O death, where is your victory? O Hades, where is your sting? So, what, then, is the path that leads to this destination? It is the grace of baptism, through which we are all cleansed of all our filth and are declared to be partakers of the divine nature through the Spirit of Christ dwelling in us...we became partakers of the mystical blessing (*μυστικὴ εὐλογία*). Our minds were filled with grace from above...we became zealous and worthy of admiration (*ἀνωθεν χάριτος...ἀναπιμπλάντες νοῦν, ζηλωτοὶ καὶ ἀπόβλεπτοι*).¹²⁰

We see here that in baptism, the Spirit imparts grace that purifies believers from sin, and draws them into communion with God. Yet this cleansing marks only the beginning, since sanctification is a gift received that also unfolds throughout the believer’s life. Participation in the Eucharist—what Cyril often refers to as the ‘mystical blessing’ (*μυστικὴ εὐλογία*)—enables the further renewal of the mind, empowering the believer to appropriate grace from above. This grace-filled renewal *should* manifest in the believer’s zeal (*ζηλοῖ*) for God and the cultivation of virtue to a degree that renders the believer worthy of esteem (*ἀξιοτίμον*). This idea is echoed in Cyril’s festal letters, where he expounds on the moral implications of modeling one’s life after Christ. For example, Cyril exhorts the baptized—cleansed by the waters of regeneration and empowered through ‘Christ dwelling in [their] mind’—to imitate him both inwardly and outwardly. In doing so, they exercise their ability to fulfill the righteousness depicted in Isaiah, allowing virtue to take root.¹²¹

¹²⁰ *Gaph.* 12 on Num. (69, 625), cf. 1 Cor. 15.55; Hos. 13.14; Jo. 16.12-13 (Pusey II, 627-28).

¹²¹ *EF* 17.2 (77, 288), trans. John I. McEnerney, *Letters*, 1–50, FOC (CUAP, 2007), p. 60. Cf. Is. 1.17-18.

Trinitarian Operations in the Renewal of Believers' Minds

I have shown that Cyril's view of agency involves an inter-relationship between God and the believer. He often stresses the believer's task of faith and obedience, yet he never treats these as self-generated; their beginning and continuance rest on God's preceding and sustaining grace, which makes holiness possible. Cyril, meanwhile, emphasizes the inseparable work of the Trinity as beginning with the Father's initiative in sending the Son, whose sacrificial offering secures the resurrection of believers to eternal life.¹²² The Spirit's renewing of the mind is carried out in unity with the Son, and the believer's capacity for divine vision is granted by Christ, who 'reveals His own peculiar glory by a subtle and incomprehensible process, thereby showing forth also the glory of the Father.'¹²³

Christ's agency in granting this noetic capacity, in unity with the Spirit, is illustrated in the healing of the blind man, where Christ mixes his spittle with dirt to open the man's eyes. Cyril's spiritual interpretation suggests that the believers are similarly cleansed of 'defilement and uncleanness of the eyes of the mind to gaze upon the divine beauty.'¹²⁴ The life-giving body of Christ is efficacious for this noetic renewal, 'the temple of the living Word,'¹²⁵ which possesses all his energy to supply illumination, because his body belongs to the One who is by nature the true light.¹²⁶ While baptism inaugurates the life of union with God and serves as a prerequisite for the Eucharist, it is through the Eucharist that believers are continually renewed

¹²² Lewis Ayres. *Nicæa and Its Legacy*, pp. 138-39, lays out what pro-Nicenes meant by 'inseparable operations,' namely that Father, Son, and Spirit act as one because they share one power and will, even though their operations are hypostatically distinct. He traces how the doctrine takes shape across sources and against alternative accounts of Trinitarian activity in the fourth century, pp. 230-31, 260-67, 269.

¹²³ *Comm. Jo.* on Jo. 13.23-26 (Pusey II, 367)

¹²⁴ Rom. 6.6.

¹²⁵ Cyril cites Christ's reference to his body as a 'temple' in *Comm. Jo.* on Jo. 2.19-21 (PG 73, 224-25); cf. Rom. 8.3. (PG 74, 213).

¹²⁶ *Comm. Jo.* on Jo. 9.8-9 (Pusey II.158).

in their participation in the divine life. In this sacrament, believers can be strengthened to grow in virtue, to share in the mind of Christ, and to advance in the knowledge of God.

Precondition for Eucharist

Cyril maintains that participation in the Eucharist is reserved for the baptized, that is, those who now belong to the Church.¹²⁷ In his view, the sacraments both initiate and offer the believer's ongoing participation in the divine life; yet, as interrelated as baptism and the Eucharist are, their distinctions are essential. By receiving the Spirit by faith, Baptism marks the beginning of this journey, when the Spirit ushers the believer onto the 'heavenward way', yet baptism alone does not sustain that life. This ongoing role belongs to the Eucharist, which vivifies and strengthens. As I will discuss shortly, Cyril likens the Holy Spirit to the life-giving sap of the vine, flowing continually through the Eucharist to fortify the branches, representing believers united to Christ.¹²⁸

Summary

In Part One, I established that, for Cyril, the renewal of the mind through baptism functions as the means by which the believer might advance in both the knowledge of God and ethical transformation. Through a fourfold analysis, I showed: first, that Cyril's doctrine of the indwelling Spirit, and restored sonship by grace, are grounded in a twofold corporeal and spiritual union with Christ, effected sacramentally; second, that the life-giving properties of the Son—communicated through the Spirit—produce concrete noetic benefits, equipping the believer for moral likeness to Christ; third, that Cyril draws a robust contrast between the first and second Adam, locating the fullness of noetic restoration in the Incarnate Son's redemptive work; and finally, that Cyril's unwavering Nicene commitment to the consubstantial unity of

¹²⁷ He strictly prohibits the unbaptized from partaking of the Eucharist. *Ibid.*, on Jo. 20.24 (Pusey III, 141).

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, on 15.1 (Pusey II, 534-5).

the Trinity reinforces his soteriology, particularly the cooperative work of the Triune Persons in baptismal renewal. Taken together, these points confirm that Cyril understands sacramental participation as enabling the believer’s growth in noetic and ethical transformation by rooting their renewal in the divine life, mediated through the cooperative grace of the Triune God.

Part Two: Eucharistic Union, Noetic Habituation, and the Virtuous Life

If baptism initiates illumination and incorporation into Christ, the Eucharist sustains and deepens that illumination through repeated, habituated participation in his life. Here, I explore how Cyril integrates his Eucharistic theology with his vision of theological knowledge and moral formation. I argue that, for Cyril, Eucharistic union forms the basis of the ethical life, cultivated incrementally through the mystical, affective, moral, and social dimensions of Christian practice. With these dimensions in view, the Eucharist not only constitutes the Church but also serves as a pedagogical source from which virtuous living can flow, enabling the faithful to grow in their understanding of the divine mysteries and in their love for God. I discuss these five dimensions in the subsections below.

First, I will summarize Cyril’s twofold account of Eucharistic union—both corporeal and spiritual—as it encompasses the believer’s union with Christ and Christ’s union with the Church, and the union the faithful have with each other.

Second, I will examine the obligations Cyril places on the faithful, since safeguarding the sacrament’s integrity is inseparable from its mystical role in fostering knowledge of God.¹²⁹

¹²⁹ *Comm. Jo. on Jo.* 6.33, 41, 43–54. Pseudo-Dionysius echoes Cyril’s concern for preserving the purity of the sacred, insisting that only the initiated may approach. Those who have not been purified or enlightened remain unable to perceive God rightly; without spiritual hearing and sight, they are compared to the blind whose noetic vision is obscured. Ps.-Dion., (EH) III.6 (PG 3, 432C); II.3 (PG 3, 397B–C); II.8 (PG 3, 392B); VII.6 (PG 3, 561C). Paul Gavrilyuk, *Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite* (CUP, 2011), p. 91.

Third, I will show how the material elements and imagery of the Eucharist, together with the liturgy, serve as noetic instruments that should shape the believer's affective grasp of divine truth.

Fourth, I will demonstrate how sacramental participation should orient the faithful toward the moral dimension of knowledge, integrating will, intellect, and desire into proper judgment for spiritual things.

Finally, I will explore the social dimension of noetic formation, highlighting how Eucharistic union can sustain virtuous practices that mark progress in the knowledge of God.

2.2.a. Corporeal, Spiritual, and Communal Union

For Cyril, the importance of the Eucharist lay in its continuity with the Incarnation and its central place in salvation. Through ongoing participation in the sacrament, believers can enjoy life in the Spirit, participate in Christ, experience unity among fellow believers, and grow in divine knowledge.

How does Cyril explain the Eucharist's transformative effects within communicants? Drawing on the Apostle Paul and building on the theology of Athanasius, Cyril grounds the answer in the somatic union between Christ and the faithful.¹³⁰ He adds to Athanasius' communal focus by distinguishing two modes of union through which Christ, truly present in the Eucharist, imparts life to the faithful:¹³¹

Therefore, since the natural unity between the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit is acknowledged...come, let us consider how we too are found to be one

¹³⁰ Boulnois writes, « Se fondant sur la théologie de l'apôtre Paul, Cyrille est l'un des Pères qui développe de la manière la plus pénétrante les bases de la réflexion sur la constitution de l'Eglise comme corps grâce à l'Eucharistie », in « L'Eucharistie, mystère d'union chez Cyrille d'Alexandrie: les modèles d'union trinitaire et christologique », *Revue des Sciences Religieuses* 74 (2000), 160. See also Andrew P. Mercer, 'Imaging the Trinity in the Flesh', *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 25.4 (2023), 567-86 doi. 10.1111/ijst.12611.

¹³¹ Athanasius, *C. Ar. III*, 22 (PG 26 368-69) Athanasius highlights the unifying role of the Eucharist as the means by which salvation is communicated through Christ's flesh: '...all may be one body and one spirit and may grow up unto a perfect man. For we all, partaking of the Same, become one body, having the one Lord in ourselves.' *NPNF*, 406. See also his *Letter to Maximus* 61.2 where believers are 'deified not by partaking of the body of some man, but...the Body of the Word Himself.' (PG 26, 1088), *NPNF*, 578-79.

with another and with God both corporeally (σωματικῶς) and spiritually (πνευματικῶς).¹³²

This passage helps to answer the question by showing Cyril's twofold account of Eucharistic union: a spiritual union with Christ through the mediation of the Holy Spirit, and corporeal union through participation in Christ's flesh, whereby believers are made members of his body. This dual dynamic is consistent with his overarching sacramental theology, paralleling baptism, in which the believer is cleansed both spiritually and physically.

In the discussion that follows, I will show how Cyril presents each facet of union—spiritual and corporeal—before synthesizing them in his view of Christ's union with the Church, paying particular attention to their noetic implications. Before I begin, I offer two clarifications. First, although Cyril often refers to both aspects, his language can be ambiguous.¹³³ Nonetheless, his affirmations of the real presence in the elements suggest interdependence of the spiritual and somatic.¹³⁴ Second, I temporarily treat these aspects separately and acknowledge that they form a cohesive whole. As Keating observes, Cyril's texts may emphasize one dimension of union while downplaying the other, but both operate together.¹³⁵

¹³² *Comm. Jo. on Jo. 17.20-21* (Pusey II, 734) italics mine.

¹³³ Boulnois, *L'Eucharistie*, p. 154, notes that Cyril's metaphor of Christ's mingling with believers spiritually and corporeally in Zech. 5.5-11 offers no explanation of either term. See also Samir, *Eucharistic*, p. 207.

¹³⁴ Samir, *Eucharistic*, p. 217.

¹³⁵ Keating listed Cyril's texts that use one or the other, building on a compilation begun by Meunier. Keating, *Appropriation*, p. 75, n. 23.

Spiritual Union

Cyril describes the Eucharist as ‘the mystical blessing’ (εὐλογίας τῆς μυστικῆς) through which believers become fellow members of Christ’s body and partakers of his divine nature by the Spirit. This spiritual indwelling is effected by Eucharistic participation, and indeed, Cyril establishes a Trinitarian bond: Christ, too, dwells in the believer with the Spirit, uniting communicants to the Father, through the Son, and by the Spirit.

As Boulnois argues, the Spirit who effects this unity between Christ and the believer also brings about a ‘mystical participation’ (μυστικῆς μεταλήψε) wherein Christ remains in the soul through the indwelling Spirit so that the faithful share in his holiness.¹³⁶ Cyril writes:

For through the mystical blessing (εὐλογίας τῆς μυστικῆς) we have indeed become fellow members of his body. Yet we have been united with him in another way, because we have become partakers of his divine nature through the Spirit. For he resides in the souls of the saints, as the blessed John also says, ‘And by this we know that he abides in us, by the Spirit whom he has given us.’¹³⁷

Here, Cyril shows that Eucharistic union is not static but transformative. While union with Christ is effected sacramentally, its fruit depends on the believer’s ongoing conformity to divine likeness.¹³⁸ He links this to a ‘disposition of perfect thought, uncorrupted faith, and a loving and pure mind.’¹³⁹ Eucharistic participation, therefore, is not only ontological but ethical: it can reshape the faithful into the likeness of God through the Spirit’s renewing work

Two points follow. First, Cyril consistently binds spiritual union to communion in Christ’s flesh. Second, the Eucharist serves as the mode of transformation through which Christ

¹³⁶ Boulnois, *L’Eucharistie*, p. 156, commenting on Matt. 26.26-27 (PG 72.452). cf. 1 Jo. 3.24.

¹³⁷ *Glaoph* on Gen. 1 (PG 69.29); Lunn, *Glaphyra* I, pp. 63–64.

¹³⁸ *Comm. Jo.* on Jo. 20.21-33 (Pusey III, 132); cf. Eph 2.22, believers are ‘built up’ for the habitation of God in the Spirit.

¹³⁹ Ἐν διανοίᾳ τελείᾳ καὶ ἀδιαφθόρῳ πίστει, καὶ φιλαρέτῳ τε καὶ εἰλικρινεῖ λογισμῷ. *Ibid.* on 17.23 (Pusey III, 621.18–23).

and Spirit sanctify believers, cultivate holiness, and deepen knowledge of God. This spiritual dimension lays the foundation for Cyril's complementary account of corporeal union.

Corporeal Union

This section now turns to the second aspect of Cyril's twofold union, corporeal union, or what he calls 'natural participation' ($\muέθεξις φυσική$),¹⁴⁰ which refers to the union between Christ's body and our own. I address three main themes: first, Cyril's understanding of the Eucharistic elements and their relationship to Christ's flesh;¹⁴¹ second, the ethical implications of this physical union; and third, the Eucharist's role in conquering death.

He did not say that what you see is a figure ($\tauόπον είναι τὰ φαινόμενα$), but the elements are transformed into the body and blood of Christ so that by partaking we receive the life-giving and sanctifying power of Christ.¹⁴²

The Elements: The first part of my discussion begins by noting that Cyril neither reduces the elements to mere symbols nor identifies their union with Christ's flesh with the hypostatic union. Instead, he presents a parallel: just as the Word truly became flesh while remaining what he was, so the Eucharistic elements are truly transformed into Christ's body and blood, through a sacramental mode that cannot be explained in naturalistic terms.¹⁴³ This transformation occurs by divine power. Cyril does not offer any explanation on how the

¹⁴⁰ *Comm. Jo.* on Jo. 15.1 (Pusey II, 542). 'Natural participation' refers to Christ sharing our nature, making union with us possible through his humanity. While both divine and human, participation in him is natural by virtue of this shared humanity. See van Loon on Cyril's distinctions between 'natural participation' and 'natural unity.' The latter specifies the union of entities belonging to the same substance or nature. Hans van Loon, *Eucharist and Fellowship in the First Four Centuries of Christianity* (Peeters, 2008), pp. 103-4.

¹⁴¹ While 19th c. scholarship debated how Cyril understood Christ's relation to the Eucharistic elements, more recent studies affirm that he taught the corporeal presence of Christ's body and blood, e.g. Jean-Paul Mahé, *Cyrille d'Alexandrie et la polémique anti-nestorienne* (Beauchesne, 1972); Welch, *Christology and Eucharist in the Early Thought of Cyril of Alexandria* (International Scholars Press, 1994); Louth, *St. Cyril of Alexandria and the Christological Controversy* (Clarendon, 1983); Boulnois, *L'Eucharistie*, 74 (2000), 153–74; Keating, *Appropriation* (2004); Gebremedhin, *Life-Giving Blessing*, 53–55; and Scully, *Physicalist Soteriology* (2016).

¹⁴² Cyril of Alexandria, *Sancti Patris Nostri Cyrilli Archiepiscopi Alexandrini Commentarii in Lucam*, ed. R. Payne Smith, LFC (OUP, 1858–68; repr. Brussels: Culture et Civilisation, 1965) (*Lc.*) *Lc.* 22.19, cf. Matt. 26.26 (PG 72, 912–13). See also Chadwick, *Eucharist*, p. 154; Gebremedhin, *Life-Giving Blessing*, p. 59.

¹⁴³ See also Jonathan Morgan, 'The Unity of Christ in Cyril of Alexandria's Festal Letters' in *SJTh* 77.2 (2024) 163–174, which highlights how Cyril shapes his articulation of Christ's unity for the pastoral and liturgical context, less polemical than his exegetical and anti-Nestorian works.

elements are transformed into Christ's real flesh and blood. He does, however, caution against reasoning too deeply into this sacred mystery, mirroring his response to inquiries about the Incarnation.¹⁴⁴ I agree with Meunier that Cyril's concern is that such scrutiny might lead to a misunderstanding of the union, thus corrupting the Incarnation, as if the union is subject to division rather than accepted as an indivisible reality.¹⁴⁵ Cyril rests on the mystery by simply stating that, once consecrated, believers have faith that the elements are truly transformed into Christ's body. This is not a symbolic but substantial transformation, whereby the faithful are enabled to partake in the very life of Christ himself:

God sends the power of life into the gifts that are set forth and changes them into the energy of His own flesh that we may have them for life-giving participation, with Christ's vivifying body found in the faithful as a 'life-giving seed.'¹⁴⁶

Ethical Implications of Union: While Cyril's most expansive Eucharistic reflections concern the Church, he does not overlook the individual communicant, since union entails a co-mingling between Christ and the believer; yet the believer is never considered in isolation from the larger Body. Participation is not passive; it entails moral responsibility and transformation of the individual believer's ethical life.

For as if one should join wax with other wax, he will surely see (I suppose) the one in the other; in like manner, he who receives the flesh of our savior Christ and drinks his precious blood, as he says, is found one with him, commingled (*συνανακιρνάμενος*) as it were and mixed together (*ἀναμιγνύμενος*) with him through participation, so that he is found in Christ, Christ again in him.¹⁴⁷

¹⁴⁴ *Comm. Jo.* on Jo. 4.2 (Pusey I, 524, 552); cf. Col. 2:9 Jo 4.3. Maxwell, *John I*, p. 234.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid. on Jo. 6.52 (Pusey I, 526) Maxwell, *John I*, pp. 234-35. Bernard Meunier, *Le Christ de Cyrille d'Alexandrie* (Paris: Beauchesne Éditeur, 1997), p. 173, «On voit avec quel réalisme Cyrille identifie l'espèce Eucharistique avec le corps du Verbe: l'immutabilité de l'un (le Verbe) implique l'immutabilité du pouvoir vivifiant de l'autre.».

¹⁴⁶ *Lc.* 2.19 (PG 72.912) ἐνίησι τοῖς προκειμένος δύναμιν ζωῆς καὶ μεθίστησιν αὐτὰ προς ἐνέργειαν τῆς ἑαυτοῦ σαρκός

¹⁴⁷ *Comm. Jo.* on Jo. 6.56 (Pusey I, 535.5-12) Kharlamov writes that Cyril's terminology for union, ἀναπλοκή (mingle or blend), ἀναμείγνυμι (mix up; absorb), σύνοδος (mix/meet together), and ἔνωσις (unite), all suggest a deeper and more personal kind of union than what is conveyed by οἰκείωσις or συνάρτεια. See Vladimir Kharlamov (ed.) *Theosis: Deification in Christian Theology*, vol. 2, (James Clarke Company, 2012), p. 146.

Cyril writes that when melting two pieces of wax together, they form a single, new, and indivisible whole in which the original pieces are no longer easily distinguishable. This is one of the vivid images Cyril employs to portray the profound union effected by the believer's consumption of the vivifying flesh of the only-begotten Word of God. First, not only is Christ united physically with the faithful, but the communicant is mingled physically with him, in which they 'obtain a bodily union (I mean with Christ).'¹⁴⁸

Doctrinal Integrity: Cyril attaches a clear warning to Eucharistic participation that is relevant to my argument:

For if the flesh does not belong properly to the Word of God, then it is not truly life-giving; nor do we have any communion with it in the blessing, since it would not be presented to us as his life-giving body. And if we do not confess one Christ and Son, let us not receive the holy Eucharist, for we are in danger of losing our life in Christ, through unbelieving arrogance or even impiety.¹⁴⁹

Union with Christ in the sacrament demands doctrinal integrity. Because the Eucharist unites believers both to Christ and to one another, distorted teaching jeopardizes the entire Body. Cyril insists that 'those who corrupt the mystery of the Incarnation corrupt also the mystery of the Eucharist', and he warns that those who receive unworthily 'bring judgment upon themselves' when they approach without right faith.¹⁵⁰ As the passage above makes clear, if Christ's flesh is not confessed as belonging to the divine Word, then the Eucharist is emptied of its power, and those who receive it apart from right confession risk losing their salvation.

I will turn shortly to a closer investigation of the noetic obligations that qualify one's participation in the Eucharist. For now, it is sufficient to state that for Cyril, the Eucharist demands theological precision. Heretical clergy who misrepresent the Incarnation imperil the communicant's appropriation of the sacrament's benefits. Eucharistic union thus comes with

¹⁴⁸ Ibid., on Jo. 17.20-21 (Pusey II, 735) *John* II, p. 304.

¹⁴⁹ *Comm. Jo.* on Jo. 6.53-56 (PG 74, 433-36).

¹⁵⁰ Ibid., Jo. 4.14, (PG 73, 601C-604A); *Ador.* IX (PG 68, 725C-728A); cf. 1 Cor. 11.29.

doctrinal responsibility: believers are united to Christ, and to one another. As he writes, ‘each member individually’, is joined to Christ through the Eucharist, knit together with the Head, and with one another in the Church.¹⁵¹ For this reason, Cyril exhorts vigilance, echoing Paul’s caution not to be ‘tossed about by every wind of doctrine.’¹⁵² True participation is therefore both theological and moral: it builds up the Body in love and sustains union with the Head.¹⁵³

Overcoming Death: Third, Cyril also describes the Eucharist as the means by which Christ’s defeat of death is applied to the faithful:

...from the first time of the present world, death ravaged those who live on earth, until the hour of the meal, i.e., until the time of the table. But when the time of the holy table arose for us, the table which is in Christ and is mystical, from which we eat the bread which is from heaven and is life-giving, then death, which of old was fearful and most powerful, was destroyed.¹⁵⁴

As I noted earlier, the Son’s redemption includes driving out ‘not only sickness and the infirmities of disease but overthrowing even death itself and the corruption that presses on us.’¹⁵⁵ While Christ’s work overthrows sickness and death, it is at the Eucharistic table that this victory becomes tangible.¹⁵⁶ The consecrated elements are ‘life-giving seeds’ nourishing both the communicant’s soul and body.¹⁵⁷ Cyril illustrates this in his discussion of Peter’s mother-in-law. Just as she was healed of her fever by Christ’s touch, so too the faithful are healed through their concorporeal union (*σύσσωμοι*) with him in the Eucharist, a union experienced in physical taste and touch.¹⁵⁸

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.*, Jn 20.22. (Pusey II, 736).

¹⁵² Eph. 4.14.

¹⁵³ *Ibid.*, John II, 304.

¹⁵⁴ *Ador.* III (PG 68.289). Cf. *Comm. Jo.* on Jo. 13.1-4 where Cyril contrasts the long reign of death ‘from the first time of the present world’ with the new era opened up by the ‘mystical table’ in Christ, the Eucharistic banquet that overthrows death. See Gebremedhin, *Life-Giving Blessing*, p. 101.

¹⁵⁵ *Comm. Jo.* on Jo. 5.25 (Pusey I, 345); cf. section 2.1.c., p.139, nn. 112-113.

¹⁵⁶ *Ador* II (PG 68.240); *Comm. Is.* on Is. 1.5 (PG 70.236).

¹⁵⁷ *Comm. Jo.* on Jo. 4.13-14 (PG 73.584); cf. *Comm. Jo.* on Jo. 11.25-26 (PG 74.560).

¹⁵⁸ Cyril of Alexandria, *Commentarius in Matthaeum*, in PG, 72, cols 9–1209; (*Comm. Matt.*) *Commentary on Matthew* trans. R. C. Hill, (CUAP, 2018), on Matt. 8.14–15 (PG 72, 552).

Cyril adds that the Incarnation demonstrates God's intent to restore both the soul and body to incorruption. Death, for him, is a tyrannical force holding humanity in bondage,¹⁵⁹ yet the Eucharist has the power to expel (ἐξελαύνει) death, and drive out (ἐξέλαύνει) corruption.¹⁶⁰ Christ's resurrected body, clothed (ἀμφιέννυσθαι) with incorruptibility.¹⁶¹ now preserves (συνέχει) those joined to him.¹⁶² Though restoration is only partial in the present since suffering remains and sin persists, the Eucharist is a foretaste of eschatological incorruption, being a visible sign and continual witness of the glory secured in Christ's resurrection and ascension.¹⁶³

Communal Union: Between Christ and the Church

I have demonstrated how Cyril employs the twofold union to explain how the Eucharist unites the individual believer to Christ, and how this union bears noetic implications: that is, enables illumination, ethical renewal, and conformity to Christ. I now turn to the communal dimension of this same union, in which the Eucharist not only brings the Church into being, but sustains it as a living organism. Importantly, it is through the Church's actualization as Christ's Body that this noetic growth is extended and deepened because ecclesial unity is the context in which the faithful are continually formed. This section addresses three interrelated themes: first, the Eucharistic union between Christ and the Church; second, the Church's constitution through Eucharistic unity; and third, the Eucharist's role in enabling communal growth in virtue, knowledge of God, and love.

Now concerning the unity in the Spirit (τῆς ἐνόσεως τῆς ἐν Πνεύματι) ... all of us who receive one and the same [Holy] Spirit are mixed together, so to speak, with one another and with God. Even though Christ causes the Spirit, who is his own and who is from the Father to dwell in us who are many individually, nevertheless the Spirit is one and indivisible (ἐν ἐστι καὶ ἀμέριστον). He gathers

¹⁵⁹ Burghardt, *Image*, p. 94. For Cyril, death is dominating and tyrannizing humanity.

¹⁶⁰ *Comm. Jo. on Jo. 7.3-5* (Pusey I, 582).

¹⁶¹ *Comm. XII Prop. on Mal. 1.10* (PG 72, 297; Pusey II, 297).

¹⁶² *Comm. Jo. on Jo. 6.51* (Pusey I, 520-21).

¹⁶³ *Ibid.*, on Jo. 20.26 (Pusey II, 147).

together the spirits of others...making them all one in himself. *Just as* the power of his holy flesh makes those in whom it dwells one body (σώματι)...gathers everyone into a spiritual unity (πρὸς ἐνότητα τὴν πνευματικὴν).¹⁶⁴

This excerpt, from Cyril's extended exposition of Christ's high priestly prayer in John 17 highlights how ecclesial union with Christ is achieved. While the text affirms that each divine Person is involved in bringing about this union, Cyril gives particular emphasis to the Spirit's role in gathering and joining believers to Christ and to one another. By using the term 'just as' (ὡσπερ), he draws a parallel between the Eucharistic and spiritual participation, indicating that both are meant to effect renewal, nourishment, and unity among the faithful.¹⁶⁵

Cyril expands upon the preceding passage by offering his most comprehensive account of Eucharistic union in which he articulates the central elements of his Eucharistic theology, especially the divine intention to establish the Body of Christ through the Eucharist and the unifying effect it enables among believers.

In order that we too may be mixed together (συναναμισγόμεθα) and come into unity with God and one another, even though the difference between each of us makes us exist individually in terms of our bodies and souls, the Only Begotten devised (ἐμηχανήσατό) a means for that to happen, sought¹⁶⁶ by his wisdom and the will of the Father. (ἐξηρημένον σοφίας καὶ βουλῆς τοῦ Πατρός) By one body, that is, his own, he blesses those who believe in him through mystical participation (διὰ τῆς μυστικῆς μεταλήψεως) and makes them to be of the same body as himself and one another. Who could divide or separate from their natural union (φυσικῆς ἐνώσεως) with one another those who are bound together through his one holy body into unity with Christ? (καὶ τῆς εἰς ἀλλήλους φυσικῆς ἐνώσεως ἔξοικεῖ τοὺς δι' ἐνὸς τοῦ ἀγίου σώματος πρὸς ἐνότητα τὴν εἰς Χριστὸν ἀναδεσμούμενους;) If 'we all partake of the one bread,' then we are all made one body, since Christ cannot be divided. That is why the Church is called the 'body of Christ' and we are members of it individually, according to Paul's understanding. We are all united in the one Christ through his holy body since we receive the one indivisible body in our own bodies, and so we owe our members to him rather than to ourselves. Christ is classified as the head, and the Church is called the rest of the body, as it is composed of individual members... And when we come into participation with his holy body, we obtain a bodily union (I mean with Christ) ... If we are all members of the same body

¹⁶⁴ Ibid., on Jo. 17.20-21 (PG 74.736-7). Italics mine.

¹⁶⁵ ElRaheb, *The Body of Christ*, p. 175.

¹⁶⁶ Gr. ἔξεύρημα: 'a finding, invention, contrivance, device, stratagem' (LSJ, s.v. ἔξεύρημα).

with one another in Christ—and not only with one another but also with him who is in us through his flesh—how is it not obvious that we are all one both with one another and with Christ? Christ is the bond of union because he is God and a human being in the same person.¹⁶⁷

Here we see that the Eucharist actualizes the Church as the Body of Christ, or as Ayres describes this idea, ‘...the Eucharist makes present the Church in its true nature...it is a divinely given ritual through which the Son unites us into his own one sacrifice.’¹⁶⁸ Having been gathered to Christ by the Spirit in spiritual unity ($\pi\rho\circ\varsigma\ \acute{\epsilon}\nu\acute{\tau}\eta\tau\alpha\ \tau\heta\pi\acute{\nu}\epsilon\mu\alpha\tau\iota\kappa\heta\eta\varsigma$), Cyril frames this passage with a purpose clause to shape the intended outcome of Eucharistic participation: that the faithful be united to one another, thereby constituting the corporate Body of Christ. Previously, he employed terms such as ‘co-mingled’ and ‘mixed’¹⁶⁹ to describe believers’ Eucharistic union with Christ; here, he applies them to express the same depth of unity between believers.¹⁷⁰ In the Eucharist, the Church is made one body, nourished by one bread, and bound together as one people.¹⁷¹ His Old Testament exegesis reveals that the Church is intrinsic to his Christology. Russell comments that Cyril sees it as a ‘holy space’ where humanity is drawn into the life of the Trinity and offered transformation in this divine encounter.¹⁷² While the earlier Fathers spoke of the Church as the body of Christ, Cyril advances the image through his sacramental theology: the mystical body, he argues, reaches its fullest perfection in the Church’s union with the incarnate Son through the Eucharist.¹⁷³

¹⁶⁷ *Comm. Jo.* on Jo. 17.20-23 (PG 74.735.10-736.20), *Commentary*, vol. 2, p. 304; cf. 1 Cor 10.17, 12.27; Eph. 4.14-16.

¹⁶⁸ Lewis Ayres, ‘Seven Thoughts on the Church’, *Church Life Journal* (28 April 2025), § III.

¹⁶⁹ He uses both $\sigma\upsilon\eta\alpha\kappa\iota\eta\alpha\mu\acute{\epsilon}\nu\varsigma$ and $\alpha\eta\alpha\mu\gamma\eta\mu\acute{\epsilon}\nu\varsigma$.

¹⁷⁰ *Comm. Jo.* on Jo. 7.24 (PG 73.584; Pusey I, 627).

¹⁷¹ *Ibid.*, on Jo. 17.20-21; cf. Jo. 11.12 (PG 74.565). Writing on Paul in Eph. 4.5-6, Cyril emphasizes ecclesial unity and participation in Christ through the Spirit, ‘They were to be one body and to partake of the one self-same Spirit.’

¹⁷² Norman Russell, ‘The Church in the Commentaries of St Cyril of Alexandria,’ *International Journal for the Study of the Christian Church* 7 (2) (2007), 75.

¹⁷³ H. du Manoir, «La doctrine du corps mystique atteint chez saint Cyrille le plus haut degré de perfection auquel elle soit parvenue dans l’Église d’Orient », *Gregorianum*, 20.1 (1939), 85, referring in particular to the Church in the East.

For Cyril, this unity serves as the ground of both noetic illumination and ethical responsibility. Unity is achieved through the proclamation of the gospel to both Jew and Gentile, bringing the two into one new humanity. This union is the result of the peace won on the Cross when both were joined as one soul with one another, ‘by their complete likeness in godliness and obedience of faith and virtuous mind.’¹⁷⁴ Yet, this new humanity can only flourish as a Eucharistic fellowship shaped by the correct understanding of the Incarnation. In light of the parallelism that Cyril shapes, the ‘mystical table’ becomes the locus of noetic progress linked to virtuous pursuit—a divine-human interplay in which the faithful grow in understanding by responding to grace through a life of ethical action, unity, and love.

When Christ enters the faithful, and when they receive Him into their minds and hearts, he quenches the fever of unbefitting pleasures, raises up the faithful and makes them strong also in spiritual things so that they may be able to minister to him by doing those things which please him.¹⁷⁵

Since Christ implants his own life into the faithful through participation in his flesh, Cyril envisions Eucharistic fellowship as the potential wellspring of godly character and wisdom. The believer’s passions are to be gradually purged and replaced with a renewed capacity to desire and accomplish his will through the indwelling Spirit. Cyril again highlights that inward transformation is intended to be outwardly displayed in the fellowship of the Church, a unity anticipated in Christ’s high priestly prayer in John 17, where it is stated that ‘so too’ the faithful would be lovingly united in mind and purpose.¹⁷⁶

¹⁷⁴ *Comm. Jo. on Jo. 17.20-21* (Pusey II, 731) citing Eph. 2.14-16.

¹⁷⁵ *Lc. 4.38* (PG 72, 552); Smith (LFC), *Comm. Luc.*, p. 71.

¹⁷⁶ *Comm. Jo. on Jo. 17.11* (Pusey III, 698); *Commentary* vol. 2, 286.

2.2.b. Noetic Habituation, Distinctions, and Obligations

The goal of this section is to show how Cyril views participation in the Eucharist as a formative noetic site that offers the potential to shape the believer's mind and ethical resolve. Specifically, it explores how Cyril develops a theology of noetic habituation—a process in which participation in the sacrament cultivates spiritual discernment and virtue through grace-enabled response. The section unfolds in three parts. First, because the believer's receptivity is a key part of this discussion, I briefly address the devil's opposition to sacramental participation to undermine the believer's interest or readiness, and how the Eucharist functions as Christ's antidote through noetic renewal.¹⁷⁷ Second, I probe three tiers of communicants that Cyril identifies, ranging from the spiritually mature to the double-minded, emphasizing the differing degrees of readiness and receptivity in the sacramental life. Finally, I explore Cyril's account of the mind of Christ in connection with Eucharistic formation, by which intention and conduct should be conformed to his example.

Noetic Distinctions

At this point, the argument turns from sacramental efficacy to sacramental reception, since for Cyril growth is conditioned by disposition and habituation within participation itself, not as a fixed anthropological classification. In this light, and mindful of the devil's strategies such as corrupting passions and the doctrinal laxity that erode Eucharistic attentiveness, Cyril articulates categories of noetic habituation among believers as a way to assess fittedness for participation.¹⁷⁸ Cyril names three types of communicants, each marked by a different inner disposition and preparedness for the Eucharistic benefits. In descending order are first, those who truly love God, second, the mentally passive (or morally weak); and third, the double-

¹⁷⁷ Spiritual warfare will be discussed in more detail in § 2.2.d, 'Moral Knowing'.

¹⁷⁸ *Comm. XII Prop.* on Joel 2.21-24 (PG 72, 332; Pusey II, 332).

minded.¹⁷⁹ Each group possesses a distinct noetic posture, which I will now examine in turn. Cyril's articulation of these classifications demonstrates the complexity of the interrelationship between divine initiative and human agency in the believer's sacramental life, moral growth, and spiritual maturity, and sheds light on how his rhetoric should be interpreted.

To those born of God, participation in the mysteries of Christ [the Eucharist] and the grace through baptism shall become a spiritual blessing.¹⁸⁰

I begin with the first part of an antithesis to emphasize the gravity of Cyril's view of Eucharistic participation and its implications. The other half of the antithesis will be addressed shortly. In this passage, 'those born of God' are granted teaching, participation in the mysteries of Christ, and sacramental grace. However, at first, it is unclear whether he intends this designation to apply to all (as in the corporate Body) or to a more specific group. If the latter, the description appears to narrow the focus to the most spiritually mature. When set beside the other two groups, this one shows a greater depth of maturity and noetic resilience, traits that, for Cyril, are grounded in Eucharistic belief and practice.¹⁸¹ Given the passage's placement and the fact that the description cannot refer to everyone in the Church, I am persuaded this description refers to this spiritually mature subset within the fellowship of believers. He describes them as those who 'love God truly' and are thus liberated from weaknesses that might incline them toward evil or make them vulnerable to cowardice.¹⁸² He further states that:

For every God-loving and holy soul is very fruitful, productive, and richly equipped with holy fruits, with the achievements of virtue (ἀρετῆς αὐχήμασιν) arising out of goodness.¹⁸³

¹⁷⁹ Gebremedhin, *Life-Giving Blessing*, pp. 93-95.

¹⁸⁰ *Ador.* II (PG 68, 416.51-5); the particle μὴν adds 'fully' or 'surely', and the adverbial ἔτι denotes persistently.

¹⁸¹ *Ibid.* (PG 68, 416).

¹⁸² *Ibid.* (PG 68, 417).

¹⁸³ Gr.: ἀρετῆς αὐχήμασιν is an infrequent pairing (seven occurrences in Cyril's corpus), denoting superlative deeds, such as 'adorned with virtue,' 'exalted by virtue,' or 'ornaments of virtue.' *Comm. XII Proph.* on Hos. 14.9 (Eng.); LXX 14.10. (PG 71, 285.11; 266.21); *Comm. Is.* (PG 70, 44; 54).

Based on his description of the second group, the spiritually mature do not appear to represent an abstract ideal but likely refer to clergy entrusted with teaching and preaching the Word. In his discussion on Amos 9, he expounds on this tiered notion of spiritual capacity. He first identifies those ‘better endowed with virtue and understanding’, shaped by the teaching they have received and who, in turn, distill truth to others, Cyril likens them to the verdant trees on the mountain, flourishing beside spiritual water.¹⁸⁴ In that same discussion, he then distinguishes a second, lower tier based on the image of hills in the text as comprising those who, though fruitful and possessing a measure of discernment regarding sound doctrine, are less prominent than the former group in both virtue and stature.¹⁸⁵

Cyril’s second group, those ‘guilty of weaknesses in their inner mind,’ represent believers who have not rejected the faith but whose habits cloud perception and weaken determination. They are distinct from the ‘double-minded,’ for their fault lies not in defiance but in instability or inertia; their will falters, and their moral strength remains uncertain.¹⁸⁶ Their inward weakness reveals a mind susceptible to distraction, and a will that lacks the firmness needed for consistent virtue.

For those who are still guilty of hidden weaknesses in their minds (ταῖς εἰς νοῦν ἔσω κεκρυμμέναις ἀσθενείαις) partake of the [Eucharistic] blessing of Christ,¹⁸⁷ not as in the order of the saints, to the abundance of sanctification, steadfastness of mind, remaining consecrated to all excellences, but as in a manner that is fitting for those who weaker, [so as help them] to avoid evil, cease sinning, dying to pleasures, and attain spiritual well-being.¹⁸⁸

It is important to note that Cyril does not exclude them from Eucharistic participation; rather, he qualifies their noetic habituation and, consequently, the manner of their reception.

¹⁸⁴ *Comm. XII Prop. on Amos. 9.11* (PG 71, 544).

¹⁸⁵ *Comm. Jo., Prologue* (PG 73, 72–73; Pusey I, 1–2). Cyril privileges bishops and priests as those most qualified to interpret the Word.

¹⁸⁶ *Ador. XII* (PG 68., 793).

¹⁸⁷ μεταλάχοιεν ἀν τῆς εὐλογίας Χριστοῦ.

¹⁸⁸ *Ador XII* (PG 68, 793.26-33).

While they are permitted to partake, their communion does not attain to the same level of fullness (or spiritual fruitfulness) as that of the ‘holy ones’ in the previous group, who possessed a stability of mind and a permanence which is ‘joined to all that which is best.’ This ideal participation involves an active posture of faithful habituation, which grounds the believer in virtue and illumination that comes with unwavering focus on Christ.

In contrast, the morally weak partake in a manner befitting their diminished condition. The more unworthy one is, the less the Eucharist nourishes, not due to any frailty in Christ or the elements, but the believer’s faith.¹⁸⁹ Cyril still sees the Eucharist as potentially efficacious for them, though to a limited degree. The sacrament operates as a therapeutic grace: it assists them by enabling them to avoid evil and curb carnal desires, contributing to the gradual restoration of their spiritual health.¹⁹⁰ While not yet fully transformed, they remain within the sphere of divine assistance. The Eucharist, for them, becomes a means of recovering what has been lost or neglected—a source of renewed vitality and an impetus toward greater conformity to the mind of Christ, a topic I will revisit shortly.

Cyril is unambiguous in his treatment of the third category: those who are so habitually double-minded ($\tauο̄ς διψυχουσιν$) that they abandoned faith.¹⁹¹ He identifies them as ‘unholy ones’, individuals who are openly at fault and resistant to correction. This condition is not indecisiveness, but a deliberate and sustained rejection of the truth that culminates in heresy:

To those who are habitually double-minded ($μὴν διψυχοῦσιν ἔτι$) are driven to apostasy, wrath, and condemnation.¹⁹²

He warns that these individuals are to be barred from ‘partaking of the holy food,’ for their self-deception and neglect of true devotion to Christ render them unfit to receive its

¹⁸⁹ 1 Cor. 11.29.

¹⁹⁰ *Ador.* XII (PG 68, 893).

¹⁹¹ *Ibid.* XII (PG 68, 793.16-23).

¹⁹² *Ador.* II (PG 68, 416.51-5). The particle $μὴν$ adds ‘surely/fully’, while the adverbial $ἔτι$ denotes persistence.

sanctifying grace.¹⁹³ Notice that Cyril is not directing his rebuke about the unbaptized, but to communicants within the Church. He illustrates his point by appealing to the story of Martha and Mary, reading Christ's rebuke of Martha as a general admonition to the faithful.¹⁹⁴ Mary, in contrast, is called 'more intelligent' (συνετωτέρα), embodying the single-minded faith and spiritual focus proper to worthy participation. Cyril's perspective echoes Athanasius, who also warns against partaking unworthily. 'For to those who keep the feast in purity,' Athanasius writes, 'it is heavenly food, but to those who observe it profanely and contemptuously, it is a danger and a reproach.'¹⁹⁵ Interestingly, Cyril does not cite unseemly *behavior* as much as *doctrine* as a barrier. For both fathers, communicants are required to obey biblical truth as received and interpreted by tradition.

In closing, this section demonstrated that for Cyril, the Eucharist serves as both a means of grace and a site of noetic discernment. By classifying communicants according to their moral and intellectual readiness, Cyril highlights the interplay between divine initiative and human agency in the sacramental life. His view of the believer's noetic clarity extends to both cognitive orientation and virtuous action, confirming my argument that his theological formulations—in this case, his Eucharistic theology—incorporate a robust noetic emphasis to construct his Christological scaffolding. Among the manifold implications of his Eucharistic theology, Cyril teaches that the Eucharist is not uniformly effective, but varies according to the believer's receptivity and moral posture. His noetic insights are tethered to unity in Christ and the sacramental life of the Church, and expressed in ethical living.

¹⁹³ *Comm. on Jo. on Jo.* 11.40 (Pusey II, 285-86).

¹⁹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁹⁵ Athanasius, *Letters*, V.5, *NPNF*, Sec. Ser., IV, p. 519.

Noetic Obligation: The Mind of Christ

Given the salvific implications of Eucharistic participation, Cyril emphasizes the proper disposition of those preparing to partake. The following discussion will noetic obligations tied to self-examination and Eucharistic habituation: regular partaking, self-control, and possessing the mind of Christ.

When will you be worthy? When will you present yourself to Christ? If you are always going to be frightened by your stumbling—and you will never stop stumbling (since ‘who can understand their errors?’) as the holy psalmist says—you will be found completely without participation in the saving sanctification. Therefore, you should decide to live a more reverent life in accordance with the law and so participate in the blessing, believing it to drive away not only death but also diseases...¹⁹⁶

Cyril recognizes the devil’s tactic of exploiting believers by convincing them they are unworthy to deter them from receiving the Eucharist’s life-giving power. While urging self-examination, Cyril recognizes human sinfulness and frailty, cautioning them that neglecting to take communion regularly jeopardizes their salvation. Believers, as recipients and custodians of divine grace, bear responsibility for their readiness to receive the sacramental blessings.

Two dispositions are closely related to the passage above. First, Cyril insists that the faithful partake of the Eucharist regularly. While regular partaking is a priority, he exposes a deception committed under the ‘pretence of reverence (*εὐλαβείας*).’ In doing so, they ‘exclude themselves from eternal life.’¹⁹⁷ Second, because they are motivated by feigned piety, he writes that they ought to be sober-minded (*σωφρονεῖν*), *overcoming this deceit through self-control* (*ἐγκρατείας*).¹⁹⁸

Third, in a particularly relevant discussion for my argument, Cyril emphasizes that the communicant must possess the mind of Christ, a disposition he helpfully explains in detail.

¹⁹⁶ *Comm. Jo.* on Jo. 6.56 (Pusey I, 536), *John* I, p. 237.

¹⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, Jo. 2.24–25 (PG 73, 285); cf. *Comm. Jo.* on Jo. 6.56 (PG 73, 535) ‘...let us not, like some of the heedless do, refuse to be blessed, not letting the devil...fashion a harmful piety (*ἐπιζήμιος εὐλάβεια*) as a trap.’

¹⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, Jo. 6.27 (PG 73.476; Pusey I, 393–94).

Keating observes that Cyril's theology of participation portrays Christ not only as the one who communicates divine life in the Eucharist, but also as the pattern of filial obedience to the Father.¹⁹⁹ This dual emphasis, where Christ is both the instrument of divine life but also the model of obedience to the Father, is fundamental to Cyril's Eucharistic theology, in which possessing the mind of Christ is a key element:

And the person who has become a partaker of Christ, though having a share of his holy flesh and blood must also *have his mind*, (αὐτοῦ νοῦν ἔχειν) and [must have] exemplary understanding (συνιέντα εὖ μάλα) about him through coming to love [his] internal virtuous deeds...the 'mind' of Christ would be to think only (μόνα φρονεῖν) such things as to look to the glory of God the Father, and to intend to accomplish (βούλεσθαι κατορθοῦν) what seems good to him...the inspired disciples who chose to think and accomplish (φρονεῖν καὶ κατορθοῦν ἡρημένοι) this very thing, expressly said, 'We have the mind of Christ'....²⁰⁰

Cyril's view of participation in the Eucharist as dependent on possessing the mind of Christ helps to clarify a major point in his thought. To share in Christ is to receive not only his body, but also his mind—to think, to will, and to act as Christ does. Although Cyril insists that communion involves partaking of Christ's flesh and blood, he ties its spiritual benefits to the believer's inward disposition. This connection is evident in his earlier discussion of those he calls 'morally weak,' who fail to reach the fuller participation enjoyed by the more mentally faithful, and of the 'double-minded,' who are unfit to partake at all.

By 'the mind of Christ,' Cyril refers to Christ's perfect moral disposition, and believers are called to emulate Christ by conforming their own thinking to this standard as they meditate upon him in the Eucharist. This process, however, remains dependent on grace and cooperation, particularly mental resilience, as they orient their thoughts on Christ. In doing so, their understanding begins to reflect Christ's and leads them to embrace the very disposition that shaped his actions.

¹⁹⁹ Keating, *Appropriation*, 142.

²⁰⁰ *Ador.* XVII (PG 68, 1072.5-15; 1073.1-4), trans. Justin Gohl, St. Tikhon's Orthodox Theological Seminary.

Crucially for my argument, Cyril presents the mind of Christ as encompassing both thought and conduct, held together through a reciprocal dynamic in which divine grace invites and enables human cooperation. Believers are called to respond in faith, love, and obedience to what they receive, and through this response grow in the knowledge of Christ. The precision of Cyril's language in articulating this dynamic also underwrites his forceful polemic against unbelieving Jews, pagans, and heretics: apart from grace and participation in Christ, claims to righteousness and knowledge of God are exposed as distortions of truth rather than faithful participation in it.

My aim now is to probe how Cyril exegetes the orientation of one's faculties toward a desire to glorify the Father, followed by a willingness to act in pursuit of that end. In my interpretation of Cyril, to possess the mind of Christ is to unite intention and action in alignment with the divine will, empowered by grace. By presenting the apostles as exemplars, Cyril appeals to the highest tier of discipleship to illustrate this dynamic.

In a brief but important interpretation in 2 Corinthians 2.15–16, Cyril highlights the Spirit's role as the pedagogue of noetic renewal. This renewal, which enables the believer's reception of the mind of Christ, marks the fundamental distinction between the created soul and the redeemed one. He writes:

The spiritual (<ψυχικός) man discerns all things and winnows them, as it were, with exactitude. But he himself is subject to no one else's scrutiny. On the other hand, Paul makes it clear that those whom he calls 'natural' require spiritual teachers for their benefit and education by adding, 'For who has known the mind of the Lord to instruct (συμβιβάσει) him?' It is as though he should say: No one could instruct the natural man without having the mind of Christ (εἰ μὴ νοῦν ἔχοι Χριστοῦ). By 'instruct' he means 'prepare for knowledge (νοῆσαι παρασκευάσει).' Then he indicates who has the mind of the Lord by saying, 'But we have the mind of Christ,' that is, the Spirit speaking in the saints and revealing mysteries to them and rendering their mind divine, in a sense. (τὸ Πνεῦμα τὸ λαλοῦν ἐν ἀγίοις, καὶ ἐκκαλύπτον αὐτοῖς μυστήρια, καὶ θεῖόν τινα νοῦν ἀποφαντὸν τὸν ἐν αὐτοῖς).²⁰¹

²⁰¹ 1 Cor. 2.15–16 (Cod. Vat. Gr. 762; Maxwell, *Romans*, 43–47; cf. PG 74, 257.16–22). Cyril distinguishes what concerns the soul as created from what relates to the Spirit (πνεῦμα); cf. 2.14; Rom. 8.4.

Paul contrasts the ‘natural’ man who lives according to the flesh and relies on unaided reason with the ‘spiritual’ man who possesses the mind of Christ through the Spirit. Cyril takes up Paul’s rhetorical question, which uses the verb ‘instruct’ (συμβιβάζω), and strengthens its pedagogical vigor by restating it with ‘prepare’ (παρασκευάζω). This shift redirects attention to the Spirit’s role in preparing believers to discern the mystery of Christ, particularly within the Church’s sacramental worship.

2.2.c. Affective Knowledge: Encountering Eternal Realities

In this section, I further my argument by showing how Cyril understands the Eucharist as a site of affective knowledge of God in which believers grow in understanding through embodied, communal participation. This section proceeds in three movements: first, I examine Cyril’s understanding of the Eucharist as a therapeutic remedy for human weakness and sensory limitation; second, I show how scriptural imagery shapes noetic formation through sacramental imagination and repetition; and third, I consider how virtues and affective dispositions, particularly joy, generosity, and love, formed in and required for proper Eucharistic participation. Together, these sections support the claim that, for Cyril, Eucharistic participation is inseparable from the ordering of theological understanding, through which faithful sacramental incorporation trains perception and stabilizes right confession.

First, because the concept of experience has a long and varied history across both philosophical and theological traditions, I draw on López’s succinct description to provide a working definition for engaging Cyril’s thought. He writes:

Christian experience may be seen as the graced act through which a person becomes affectively aware of the meaning of the event of [and encounter with] Christ...it is the gradual entering into the mystery of Christ...it regards the person as a whole and engaged with the tri-personal God, others, and the world.

The affective dimension of experience emphasizes the emotional echo of the encounter with God.²⁰²

With this in mind, I examine how Eucharistic participation should shape the believer's understanding of divine reality, which fosters growth in knowledge and virtue. First, I address the formative role of tactile elements for both shaping belief and therapeutic responsiveness; second, I consider an epistemic argument for Cyril's use of scriptural images; third, I show how affections and virtue are integral to his Eucharistic theology.

The Eucharist and Accommodation to Weakness: Therapeutic Ministry

The consecrated material elements serve to elevate the imagination, inviting contemplation of divine mysteries through the preached Word and the touching and tasting of the holy bread.

...we close the doors, and Christ visits and appears to us all, both invisibly and visibly: invisibly as God and visibly as his body. He gives us his holy flesh and *allows us to touch* it. By the grace of God, we approach to participate in the mystical blessing, and we *receive Christ into our hands* in order that we too may firmly believe that he has truly raised his own temple. It should be quite clear that communion in the mystical blessing is a confession of Christ's resurrection by what he said when he instituted the pattern of the mystery.²⁰³

Cyril writes that the Church grows in faith and in the knowledge of divine realities through tactile engagement with the materiality of bread and wine, as God offers a gift addressed to the senses, and the Church receives the living Christ into its hands even before consumption, deepening conviction in the resurrection and affirming both the authority of the scriptural account of the Last Supper and the reality of Christ's true flesh in the Eucharist. Catherine Pickstock similarly notes that sensory or cognitive stimulation can activate secondary, involuntary pathways that heighten intelligible perception of the divine.²⁰⁴

²⁰² Antonio López, 'Christian Experience: A Catholic View', *St. Andrews Encyclopaedia of Theology*, ed. Brendan N. Wolfe (University of St. Andrews, 2022), p. 3.

²⁰³ *Comm. Jo.* on Jo. 20.26-27 (Pusey III, 145). Italics mine.

²⁰⁴ Catherine Pickstock, 'Spiritual Perception and Liturgy', in *Perceiving Things Divine: Towards a Constructive Account of Spiritual Perception*, ed. Frederick Aquino and Paul Gavrilyuk (OUP, 2022), p. 117.

As early as Hippolytus—and continuing through the Alexandrian fathers—the Church maintained the tradition praying for the sick, by hearing their confessions and anointing them with oil, often in conjunction with the consecration of the bread and wine.²⁰⁵ Cyril deepens this therapeutic dimension that unites Christ’s healing mission and the sacramental economy. Commenting on Isaiah 61.1, he writes that Christ ‘binds up the one who is crushed and raises the one who has fallen’, presenting the Incarnate Word as physician of both body and soul. The Isaianic motif is deepened in his *Comm. Jo.*, where, in expounding on Jo. 6.51–56, Cyril teaches that those partaking of Christ’s flesh and blood are restored from their fall and receive incorruption.²⁰⁶ Cyril further interprets Christ’s healing of Simon Peter’s mother-in-law as signifying a type of the Church’s healing through the Eucharist: just as fever represents the disordered passions, so their removal through Christ’s touch anticipates the cleansing and life-giving effect of the sacrament. Taken together, these passages reveal Cyril’s steady pattern of connecting the Isaianic mission of Christ, the Gospel accounts of bodily healings, and the Eucharist as the sacramental locus where Christ continues to heal, restore, and deify. In a similar vein, Cyril notes God’s mercy in accommodating human perception and emotional capacity.

That we may not be stupefied by seeing flesh and blood on the holy tables...God, condescending to our infirmities, sends the power of life into the gifts that are set forth...²⁰⁷

Cyril notes that for the sake of the protection of the divine mystery, at consecration, the elements are not accompanied by displays of the crucified flesh and blood of the Savior’s

²⁰⁵ *Bishop Serapion’s Prayer Book: An Egyptian Pontifical Dated About A.D. 350-356*, trans. G. Wobbermin, (Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1899), p. 75. Prayer IV. ‘Blessing of the Oils’. This unction is not mentioned by Just., Tert. or Aug., though it was apparently a custom in Rome. See George Dion. Dragas, ‘Monastic Theological Method’, *Theologia*, 65.1 (1994), 173; Bernard Botte, ‘La Tradition Apostolique de Saint Hippolyte’, *Liturgiewissenschaftliche Quellen und Forschungen* 39, (1963), 55.

²⁰⁶ *Comm. Is.* on Is. 61.1 (PG 70, 1245C-1248A); *Comm. Jo.* on Jo. 6.41–56 (PG 74, 517–536); *Lc.* 4.38 (PG 72, 552); cf. Gebremedhin, *Life-Giving Blessing*, 91.

²⁰⁷ *Lc* 22.19–20 (PG 72, 912).

passion. This is also presented as a merciful concealment by God so that the faithful will not be ‘stupefied by seeing flesh and blood lying on the holy tables.’ God graciously veils the mystery to preserve reverence and accessibility by withholding the literal sight of raw flesh and blood, keeping the act of worship fitting.²⁰⁸ Cyril uses vivid language to convey that the resurrected Christ presides over the liturgy, and that the sacred table does not diminish the reality of the crucifixion but instead powerfully evokes it. The communicant is invited into the mystery through a mode that is both fitting and tangible, as Cyril writes: ‘to be made partakers of Christ, both intellectually and by our senses, fills us with every blessing...He is with us ...by the means of our partaking in the oblation of bloodless offerings which we celebrate...’²⁰⁹

Eucharist: Imagination and Noetic Formation through Images

My second point concerns the relationship between Eucharistic participation and imaginative perception. In ‘The Whole Habit of the Mind,’ Christopher Hackett examines how Cyril unites reason and experience within the act of Eucharistic participation.²¹⁰ He appeals to the following passage from Cyril to identify and resolve the gap between abstraction and experience with the images of Scripture. My thesis extends his account by exploring sensory and communal dimensions under the banner of sacramental perception. He refers to the following passage from Cyril:

He suffers in his own flesh, and not in the nature of the Godhead. The method of these things is altogether ineffable, and there is no mind that can attain to such subtle and transcendent ideas... The force of any comparison falters and here falls short of the truth, although I can bring to mind a feeble image of this reality which might lead us from something tangible, as it were, to the very heights and to what is beyond speech.²¹¹

²⁰⁸ Ibid.

²⁰⁹ *Lc* 22.17, Sermon 142, Smith (LFC), *Luke* II, p. 64.

²¹⁰ Christopher Hackett, ‘A Whole Habit of Mind: Revelation and Understanding in the Christology of St. Cyril of Alexandria’, in *The Enigma of Divine Revelation: Between Phenomenology and Comparative Theology*, ed. Jean-Luc Marion and Christiaan Jacobs (Springer International Pub., 2020), pp. 119–130.

²¹¹ Cyril of Alexandria, *On the Unity of Christ*, trans. John A. McGuckin (SVSP, 1995), pp. 130-31.

Hackett argues that, for Cyril, theology is defined by liturgical encounter, with Christ's flesh serving as the fulcrum of salvation and theological understanding. He further observes that Cyril's Christology is marked by the inseparability of understanding and experience, as knowledge of God takes shape through participatory engagement in the divine economy, particularly through Scripture and sacrament.

Do not busy yourselves with vain speculations about the mode of the Incarnation, but rather cling to the faith which has been delivered to you. For the divine mystery is made known in the flesh of Christ, and is apprehended not by human reasoning but by faith.²¹²

Here we see Cyril's rejection of speculative abstraction about the hypostatic union and insists that the divine mystery is mediated through Christ's flesh and apprehended by faith.²¹³ This is also seen in *Comm. Jo.* where Christ's flesh vanquishes death due to this union, but the union is noetic only through faith since 'how this happens cannot be explained by human reason', being 'a mystery apprehended by faith.'²¹⁴

Hackett writes about Cyril:

Revelation opens up a new intellectual horizon' where Christ 'transforms human reason from within, not through abstract speculation in a 'dizzying ascent' but by kenotic immersion in the symbols of scripture and the Eucharist...an intellectual *imitatio Christi*.²¹⁵

He suggests that if divine knowledge involves both epistemic and relational union, then the renewal of the mind is a fruit of transformation in Christ, initiated by divine mercy, and actualized through Eucharistic participation. Therefore, renewal of man's faculties is moored in the transforming power of Christ in the sacrament.²¹⁶ To bridge the limits of both abstraction

²¹² *EF* 1 (PG 77, 566-72); SC vol. 392. See O'Keefe, *Festal Letters* 1-12, p. 96.

²¹³ *EF* 1-12 (PG 77.568-72) SC vol. 392.

²¹⁴ *Comm. Jo.* on Jo. 6.54-57 (PG 73.580-81).

²¹⁵ Hackett, *A Whole Habit of Mind*, p. 119.

²¹⁶ *Comm. Jo.* on Jo. 19.30; (73, 785); cf. Exod. 3.23. Cyril's visceral rhetoric may stem from personal experience, shaped by the certainty that the Incarnation of the Son, whose death on the Cross *as Man for man* is the supreme revelation of God's love and the definitive exegesis of who God is.

and sensory experience, Hackett, drawing on McKinion, shows how Cyril uses scriptural imagery to ‘give flesh to thought.’ Images cannot depict the ineffable divine union but can help one gain a better understanding. Thus, images like iron and fire,²¹⁷ or burning coal,²¹⁸ are being used to illustrate an ineffable mystery. Rather than reducing the divine reality, they help preserve its mystery in a form the mind can receive, allowing for a deeper conceptualization of the bread and wine ‘engulfed in their new signification,’ just as Christ’s flesh makes God tangible.²¹⁹

Hackett’s depth of insight on the effects of the Eucharist on human rationality links Apostle Paul’s concept of rational worship.²²⁰ Building on his persuasive foundation, I maintain, first, that Cyril’s vision of renewed rationality should examine the noetic implications of a fundamentally *repeated* and *communal* participation. For example, Cyril writes:

And this act then was a pattern for our use of the prayer (τύπος δὲ ἦν ἄπα τὸ δρώμενον εἰς ἡμᾶς αὐτοὺς) which ought to be offered, whenever the grace of the mystical and life-giving oblation is about to be spread before him by us: and so accordingly we are wont to do. For first offering up our thanksgivings, and joining our praises unto God the Father, both the Son and the Holy Ghost, so we draw near unto the holy tables, believing that we receive life and blessing both spiritually and corporeally...²²¹

This passage reflects this dimension within Cyril’s emphasis on regular partaking—its noetic and sensory formative power. In the Institution, the Eucharist functions to rewire sensory memory and impulses, reshaping the mind’s aspiration to worship in truth. It is also

²¹⁷ *Adv. Nes.* II.33 (PG 76, 61) Russell, *Cyril of Alexandria*, p. 43.

²¹⁸ *Comm. Is.* on Is. 1.4 (PG 70, 181) Hill, *Isaiah*, I., pp. 25-26.

²¹⁹ Hackett, ‘Whole Habit of Mind,’ p. 207. Citing Boulnois, who writes, ‘More fundamentally, [Cyril] prefers the universe of images, always open to multiple significations, to that of the concept, which encloses reflection in a definition.’ Boulnois, *La Paradoxe Trinitaire*, p. 114 Steven A. McKinion, *Words, Imagery, and the Mystery of Christ: A Reconstruction of Cyril of Alexandria’s Christology*, VCSup (Brill, 2000), pp. 73–75, 207.

²²⁰ Rom. 11.33–36, 12.1.

²²¹ *Lc.* 22.19 (PG 72, 908), Smith, *Luke*, Sermon 142, p. 664; cf. *Jn* 1.9 (Pusey I, 112): ‘...[believers] come forward, raise prayers of thanksgiving and sing out...’ *Jo.* 9.39 (Pusey II, 203): ‘...bowing as befitting the worship of the Lord, temporally and eschatologically.’ Gebremedhin notes the Spirit-epiclesis in fourth-century Alexandria corresponds to that of the present *Anaphora of St. Mark*. Cyril’s comments in *Matt.* 26.26 reflects the Anaphora epiclesis in *P. Ryl.* 3.465 and in the Greek-Melkite manuscripts. See Gebremedhin, *Life-Giving Blessing*, pp. 60-61; and pp. 71-72, nn. 3-36 for an extensive list of patristic liturgical sources.

intrinsically communal, shaped and imprinted by relational proximity, corporate prayers, hymns, shared experiences of scents, and visual and physical rubrics that accompany the liturgy.²²² Second, as shown previously, apprehending the mind of Christ in the Eucharist entails ethical action inseparable from Eucharistic observance.

The Eucharist: The Interplay of Affective and Ethical

I turn now to a passage that reflects the affective dimension of the Eucharist in which Cyril emphasizes joy and generosity. He *presupposes* joy as the appropriate posture among communicants, recognizing it as an emotion typically expressed in community. At the same time, Cyril portrays the Eucharist's efficacy as dependent on generosity, supporting my argument that he reinforces the link between the Eucharist and virtuous action. In this way, Cyril suggests that the believer's growth in understanding the mystery of the Cross, by which the Eucharist was instituted, depends in part on the moral disposition brought to the celebration.

For those who want to feast purely in a way pleasing (ἀρεσκόντως) to God, should give thought not only to their own enjoyment (εὐθυμίας) and plan *not just for how they alone* will hold the feast *joyfully* (εὐθυμίας), but they should weave into their plans mercy for the poor. Then—then—we will fulfill the bond of love for one another (τότε γὰρ τότε τὸν τῆς εἰς ἀλλήλους ἀγάπης ἀποπληροῦντες θεσμὸν) and celebrate a truly (ἐπιτελέσομεν) spiritual feast in honor of Christ our Savior...Therefore, those who do not include care for the needy in their planning do not do justice (ἀδικεῖ) to the fitting example for holy feasts. The union of the two would truly be a perfect feast (εἴη γὰρ ἀν ὄντως ἔορτὴ τελεία τὸ σύνομμα).²²³

Commenting on the Last Supper, Cyril notes the disciples' assumption that Judas was using funds entrusted to him for a noble purpose and then expands on this idea of noble intent in his Eucharistic theology. The Eucharist is itself the Christological focal point of affective and ethical participation, and the very site in which believers should appropriate these virtues.

²²² *Comm. Jo.* on Jo. 1.9 (Pusey I, 112); cf. Jo. 9.39 ‘...singing and bowing as befitting the worship of the Lord, temporally and eschatologically.’ (Pusey II, 203).

²²³ *Ibid.*, on Jo. 13.29 (PG 74, 374-5) Maxwell, *John* II., p.133. See also Jo. 3.29, 6.12. Italics mine.

For Cyril, joy, mercy, and generosity toward the poor are not only responses to the sacrament but are intrinsic to it, since these virtues are grounded in Christ. In the same discussion, he draws a stark antithesis between the joy proper to the Eucharistic community and the fear and malice wrought by the devil. Cyril speculates that Satan, fearing the Eucharist's power to move Judas to repent, acted to harden his heart.²²⁴ True Eucharistic celebration, then, should entail an ongoing (διατελοῖεν) expression of love which secures the authenticity of the sacrament. In referencing the 'bond of love,' he echoes John 17. Man should embody the bond between the Father and Son, although the bond of the Trinitarian persons is 'natural and true', while between humans it is 'the outer garment of the true unity' given by grace through faith.²²⁵

...a common bond of love and concord and peace, a bond that gathers the believers into a spiritual unity, as of a natural and essential unity, in other words, that which is considered to be the unity between the Father and the Son, copying its characteristics and resulting in a common procession toward unity in an assent which is in everything and in undivided unanimity of soul.²²⁶

Cyril's comments aim to deepen the Church's understanding of the scope of Christ's union with them and with one another, where in the Eucharist his real presence is made known—his body, his mind, and his love for others—offered for them to share in and embody. This framing reflects his nuanced view of the interplay between divine initiative and human agency, through which his Eucharistic theology integrates ethical responsibility into sacramental participation, together constituting his vision of 'the perfect feast'.

This section has shown that for Cyril, affective knowledge is an aspect of growing in the true knowledge of God and is cultivated through a lived encounter of the Eucharist. By mediating the reality of Christ's risen body in a form suited to human weakness, the table is a site that enables noetic growth and ethical transformation. Cyril integrates tactile and affective

²²⁴ Ibid. on Jo.13.30 (PG 74, 75-6).

²²⁵ Kneip, David, *The Church, the Bible, and the Sacraments: Neglected Aspects of Cyril of Alexandria's Pneumatology* (unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Notre Dame, 2013), pp. 45-47.

²²⁶ *Comm. Jo.* on Jo. 17.20-21 (Pusey IV, 731; PG 74, 881-884).

experience with doctrinal insight, insisting that understanding the divine mysteries is inseparable from lived virtue. This sacramental knowing—rooted in ecclesial life and the sanctifying power of the Eucharist—deepens Cyril’s vision of how divine truth is known, namely through embodied faithfulness in communion with Christ and his body, the Church.

2.2.d. Moral Knowing: Inclination, Wisdom, and Spiritual Opposition

Building on the preceding discussion of the communicant’s obligations, this section examines how Eucharistic participation shapes movement toward rightly ordered thought and action. The argument unfolds in two parts: first, it considers divine empowerment and human inclination toward virtue, showing how the Eucharist can impart wisdom and strengthen moral resolve; second, it turns to Cyril’s account of spiritual warfare, showing how Eucharistic participation equips the faithful to resist deception and overcome sin. Together, these sections support the claim that Cyril presents the Eucharist as a dynamic means of noetic transformation, through which participation deepens understanding as it is enacted in virtue and vigilance against evil.

Interplay of Eucharistic Strengthening and Communicant Willingness

Sacramental implications are brought to bear in the fact that participation in the sacrament is intended to restore the believer to incorruption, having ‘mingled’ with their bodies, making it at the very core of Cyril’s piety.²²⁷ Christ as the second Adam:

...condemned sin in the flesh, killed death by his own death, and makes us sons of God, regenerating those on earth in the Spirit and bringing them to a dignity that transcends their nature... [for the] race that had fallen away should be recapitulated and brought back to its original state...²²⁸

²²⁷ *Comm Jo.* on Jo. 3.6 (PG 73, 324).

²²⁸ *Ibid.*, on Jo. 14.20, (PG 73, 819-820). Rom. 5.12-19; 1 Cor. 15.20-23. Here Cyril builds on Irenaeus’s theme of recapitulation.

The Adamic typology provides Cyril with a moral and biblical framework to express this mystery, and it also anticipates the transformation that can be accomplished in the Eucharist.²²⁹ In this sacrament, Christ's obedience as the second Adam enables believers to be restored to the Adamic condition and, through the Spirit, to be conformed to the image of the Son, renewing within them the mind of Christ.

Cyril highlights the dynamic interplay between the Spirit's sanctifying work and the believer's responsive participation in renunciation and spiritual growth.²³⁰ Through continued Eucharistic participation, believers are enabled by the Spirit to 'drive away lust and all wickedness,' and to embody a life of virtue patterned after Christ. I begin by showing how Cyril draws on Paul to locate the source and movement of this transformation toward obedience and virtue:

just as [Paul] calls the fleshly will (σαρκικὸν φρόνημα) the 'law of sin and death' that carries us off into every kind of wickedness, so also he calls the spiritual will (θέλημα τὸ πνευματικὸν) the law of the spirit of life,' that is, the inclination of the mind (διανοίας ροπήν) toward the good.²³¹

In this passage, Cyril again draws on Paul's antithesis between the fleshly and the spiritual will. Paul refers to the 'law of sin' as the natural impulse (τὸ ἐμφυτὸν κίνημα), and passions of fleshly desire, in contrast to the 'law of my mind,' by which he means the will's inclination toward the good,²³² locating 'the law of the spirit of life' in the mind's divinely ordered orientation. By placing human inclination (ροπήν) at the center, Cyril locates the decisive movement of the will, either toward or away from God, while emphasizing that this

²²⁹ Robert L. Wilken, *Judaism and the Early Christian Mind: A Study of Cyril of Alexandria's Exegesis of the Old Testament* (Yale University Press, 1971), p. 199.

²³⁰ *Ador.* III (PG 68, 273).

²³¹ *Comm. Rom.* on 8.3 (PG 74, 210) Maxwell, *Romans*, p. 19, cf. Rom 7.16 (74, 206).

²³² *Ibid.*, Rom. 8.6–7 (74, 213-14) cf. Rom. 7.22 (74, 208).

turning is made possible through Christ's grace in enabling this Godward turning.²³³ Since the benefits of the Eucharist are received in proportion to one's moral disposition or willingness, Cyril does not portray Christ as overriding human freedom, but rather as supplying renewed strength and impetus to follow him. Though burdened by sin, humanity receives a grace-formed inclination that enables the faithful to resist former enslavement, to obey, and to act according to God's will in the pursuit of virtue.²³⁴

Next, I turn to how the union between Christ and the Spirit, effected through the Eucharist, enables believers to *follow through* on their will and perform deeds consistent with the indwelling righteousness of God:

When Christ dwells in us through the Holy Spirit and through *the Mystical Blessing* (εὐλογία)... ‘the powerlessness of the law, weakened by the flesh’ was ended by Christ when he condemned and abolished ‘sin in the flesh, so that the just requirements of the law might be fulfilled in us.’ The just requirements of the law...*which [are] that the will should focus on virtue*, are fulfilled when the law in us is no longer weakened in any way...by the tyranny of natural pleasures. Therefore, ‘the just requirements of the law’ are fulfilled in us when we ‘walk not according to the flesh,’ but...will to live spiritually...when the mind is enriched by the grace of Christ and full of power from above and seething with the Spirit and *striving for virtue*, such a person is not ‘in the flesh’, but ‘in the spirit’ and easily accomplishes great things for God.²³⁵

Here Cyril articulates the power of participation in Christ in the Eucharist. Having fulfilled the law, Christ condemns and abolishes the law of sin at work in the members of believers’ flesh, even as its effects persist. He secures the righteousness of the law, ordered toward virtue understood as love for God and others, so that the law might be filled in us.’ Believers are thus stirred to virtue in a twofold way: first, by the fullness of divine power from God bestowed through the Spirit; and second, by sustained attentiveness of the cultivation of

²³³ Gr: πέπτω: ‘to turn the scale’, ‘to gravitate’, ‘to cast weight’ (LSJ, s.v. πέπτω). See also the following sections for Cyril’s discussion on human will: § 2.1.b on sacramental renewing of the will, and §3.1.a. for sin and free will, and § 4.1.c. for disordered dispositions and impairment of knowledge of God and virtue.

²³⁴ *Comm. Rom.* on 8. 6–7. (PG 74, 213-14); Maxwell, *Romans*, p. 168. Christ’s death mortified man’s passions, but believers ‘still retain the mind of the flesh, those things that are...condemned as passions by the law,...were at work in us.’

²³⁵ *Ibid.*, on Rom. 7:25–8:2 (PG 74, 210-13) cf. Rom. 7.16 (74, 206) 7.22 (74, 208) Rom. 8.4; italics mine.

what is good.²³⁶ Strengthened by Christ, they continue to act in ways that please him, sowing to the Spirit, and, in contrast to the former burden of sin, reaping the fruit of virtuous deeds for God.²³⁷

Finally, Christ's strengthening is accompanied by the gift of wisdom and enlightenment in the Eucharist, fortifying both the believer's will to act and ensuring that the acts themselves are righteous. Cyril explains that humanity gains wisdom in the Eucharist. Once 'reduced to the level of beasts...now mount up to that degree of intelligence with befits man's nature...at his table we find...the bread from heaven.'²³⁸ As Gebremedhin observes, the implication here is that in the Eucharist, man can and should turn away from brutishness and reorient his desire for wisdom.²³⁹

Spiritual Warfare

Given the devil's role in introducing corruption into human nature, Cyril remains acutely aware of the enemy's ongoing attempts to entrap believers, especially in matters as vital as Eucharistic participation. In this section, I consider Christ's presence and authority to overcome the enemy during the feast, as well as the counter-deceptive, noetic aspects offered to the communicant. In the context of the passage below, Cyril's discussion of Passover is presented as a shadow of the Eucharist. He describes the presence, power, and authority of Christ, which enables the believer to overcome the enemy through partaking of the feast:

We pass over, therefore, from the love of the flesh to temperance; from our *former ignorance to the true knowledge of God*; from wickedness to virtue: and in hope, from the guilt of sin to the glories of righteousness, and from death to incorruption. The name, therefore, of the feast on which Emmanuel bore for us the saving cross, was the Passover.²⁴⁰

²³⁶ Lc. 4.38 (PG 72, 552), Smith (LFC), *Luke*, p. 71.

²³⁷ Jo. 6.26-27.

²³⁸ Lc. 1.7; Gebremedhin, *Life-Giving Glessing*, p. 96.

²³⁹ Ibid.

²⁴⁰ Lc. 22.7-16, Sermon 141.

Two key points emerge from this passage: the first is methodological, and the second is theological. First, Cyril employs contrastive language to underscore the reversal accomplished through the Cross, contrasting the destructive work of Satan—seen in false teaching, moral failure, and spiritual deprivation—with the restorative presence of Christ communicated in the Eucharist. Second, by applying the title *Emmanuel*, even though it is not explicitly stated in the text, Cyril affirms that Christ is truly present and active in the sacrament, granting believers access to divine strength. Also, Cyril presents the Eucharist as a continual means of salvation from the curses incurred at the Fall and as a strengthening capacity to overcome sin, the passions, and shame.

In a related discussion from a sermon on the healing of Peter's mother-in-law, Cyril argues for an even more robust power of the Eucharist to overpower escalated opposition powers of darkness:

Let us, therefore, also receive Jesus: for when he has entered into us, and we have received him into mind and heart, then he will quench the fever of unbefitting pleasures, and raise us up, and make us strong...but observe again...how great is the efficacy of the touch of his holy flesh. For it both drives away diseases of various kinds, as well as a crowd of demons, and overthrows the power of the devil...let [the power of the *Logos*] take hold of us, or rather let us take hold of him by the mystical blessing, that he may free us from the sicknesses of the soul, and from the assault and violence of demons...²⁴¹

Here, Cyril frames his message with two conditional clauses. While he does not talk about receiving the ‘mind of Christ’ directly, the implications of the link between a Christ-strengthened mind and the Eucharist are evident in both. He first suggests that the Eucharist should be received into both mind and heart for the ensuing benefits to take effect. He concludes by exhorting readers to ‘take hold,’ a phrase that calls for a single-minded focus on Christ, echoing 2 Peter’s warning to ‘hold fast’ so as not to slip into forgetfulness and error.²⁴² Between these two clauses, Cyril engages a form of ekphrasis to paint a vivid picture of the

²⁴¹ Lc. 4:38 (PG 72.553) Smith, *Luke* I, p. 71; cf. Jo. 6.35 (Pusey I, 476).

²⁴² Starr, *Deification*, 88.

Eucharist's power to expel demonic forces, mirroring Christ's authority over evil during his earthly ministry. This imagery recalls Gospel scenes of exorcism and resonates with texts such as John 16.33, where Christ proclaims his victory over the world, and 1 John 5.4–5, which speaks of believers overcoming the world through faith.²⁴³ Cyril's closing comment evokes the spiritual warfare familiar to the desert monks, especially the dramatic struggles of Anthony recounted by Athanasius in the *Vita Antonii*. In that same spirit, Cyril urges the faithful to partake of communion so they may obtain freedom from demonic assault and violence.

...yet Christ, uniting the Church to himself through the Spirit, rescues and saves her, and accomplishes *better things for her than the devil did in his deceit*. Thus, we are encouraged to proclaim that 'we are not ignorant of his schemes.'²⁴⁴

This last text draws a connection between the Eucharist and alertness to deception. By establishing the believer's superior state in Christ, Cyril echoes Genesis 1-3, where the enemy's first deceit was to cast doubt on God's goodness. One way the Eucharist is meant to bind the fellowship of believers to Christ and each other is by empowering them to appropriate its strengthening grace for spiritual discernment. Also, at the table, believers can be equipped to recognize and resist the tactics of the enemy. In this way, they grow not only in the knowledge of God but also in their awareness of the strategies of the powers of darkness.

Summary:

In this section, I demonstrated that for Cyril, the Eucharist is both a source of noetic strengthening and a means of moral formation. I showed how he grounds the believer's growth in virtue and knowledge in God in one's willing inclination, empowered by the Eucharist's capacity to elevate the will and enlighten the mind. Moreover, by treating the Eucharist as a weapon in spiritual warfare, Cyril presents the sacrament as actively opposing the effects of the Fall and guarding against demonic deception. These insights reinforce my larger argument

²⁴³ cf. Is. 8.11-12, 25, Jo. 18.28.

²⁴⁴ *Gaphyra*. 1 on Gen. (PG 69, 31), Lunn, *Gaphyra* I, p. 64. Italics mine.

that for Cyril, noetic progress is not an intellectual ascent, but a grace-enabled interplay in and through Eucharistic union with Christ. At the table, the mind can be fortified and the will oriented toward theological understanding, insofar as participation is rightly received and expressed in lived virtue.

2.2.e. Social and Communal Knowledge: Progress in the Virtuous Life

This section supports my argument that Cyril links sacramental participation—particularly the Eucharist—to the believer’s progression in the knowledge of the mystery of Christ, a progression authenticated by ethical living. I now turn to the social dimension of this progression, namely, the practice and outward expression of virtue (*ἀρετή*), a recurring theme in his works. It also underlies his frustration with Jews who, by rejecting Christ, are unable to know God in truth and, consequently, cannot genuinely embody or live out the righteousness of God they believe they possess by clinging to the Law. Cyril makes many references to virtue throughout his corpus, but this discussion will focus on how he articulates the virtuous life as shaped through Eucharistic participation.²⁴⁵

I structure this section in three parts. First, I briefly survey how Cyril frames two closely related and frequently used terms: (*μυσταγωγία*) and virtue (*ἀρετή*). Following this, I show that the virtuous life is rooted in participation in Christ, the Second Adam. Second, having grounded union in Christ in whom virtue originates, I explore the connections Cyril draws between participation in the Eucharist and virtuous living. Third, I analyze how he describes the ‘reciprocal interplay’ of God’s enablement and the believer’s practice of virtue, and its effect on Christian life. This discussion will focus on the general contours of the virtuous life, rather than offering a detailed account of individual virtues or specific disciplines he addresses.

²⁴⁵ A TLG lemma search of *ἀρετή*, *-ῆς*, *ἡ* shows 1,013 occurrences in Cyril’s corpus, most frequently in the genitive (*ἀρετῆς*, 457×) and accusative (*ἀρετήν*, 370×), especially in *Comm. Jo*, *EF*, and *Ador*. The adjective *φιλάρετος*, *-ον* (lover of virtue) also appears 77×, with its highest concentration again in *Comm. Jo*. and the festal works. For the connection of virtue and deification, see §1.1.d, n. 41.

Mystagogy: Virtue and the Second Adam

Cyril uses the word *mystagogy* (μυσταγωγία) to describe the transformative process, which includes instruction that brings believers into the mystery of Christ and shapes them into a ‘manner of life’ ordered by divine action through liturgical catechesis.²⁴⁶ Van Loon rightly observes that the cultivation of virtue, with its inherent pedagogical pattern and teleological aim, belongs within the scope of mystagogy.²⁴⁷ One aspect of van Loon’s research on mystagogy is less persuasive but pertinent due to the link between virtue and the Eucharist. He claims that Cyril places greater emphasis on proclamation and education rather than ‘singl(ing) out’ the sacraments for means or content of mystagogy.²⁴⁸ While I agree that education, and proclamation in particular, occupy a prominent place in Cyril’s usage, and that the language of mystagogy and its cognates appears more frequently in those contexts, less frequent usage of the sacraments does not lessen its status in the divine pedagogy as operative in revealing the mystery of Christ. My argument is that Cyril’s pedagogical economy is cohesive and extends across the full range of ecclesial participation and ministry, such that the sacraments properly belong within the scope of mystagogy. Proclamational and educational elements are not external to the sacraments but are embedded within them, and the Eucharist, by actualizing the Church’s life, carries sufficient pedagogical weight to warrant this inclusion. Moreover, the sacrament bears witness to the Resurrection and communicates the mind of Christ. In this

²⁴⁶ See Hans van Loon, *Living in the Light of Christ: Mystagogy in Cyril of Alexandria’s Festal Letters* (Peeters, 2017); Cyril employs the term more frequently than any writer before him. Matthew Crawford’s study shows Cyril’s usage is similar to other Fathers such as Origen, Eusebius of Caesarea, and likely most influenced by Didymus in the use of mystagogical language conveying the sense of teaching the mysteries (τὰ μυστήρια). See Crawford, *Trinitarian Theology*, pp 94–103, 196–98.

²⁴⁷ van Loon, *Living in the Light of Christ*, p. 87.

²⁴⁸ Ibid., 24, 28, 46–61; by ‘proclamation,’ this includes prophets and the ‘types’ throughout the Scriptures.

sense, the liturgy and the regular participation it invites exercise a distinct and sustained pedagogical function in forming understanding of the divine mystery.²⁴⁹

It is necessary that the one who has become a participant in Christ through a sharing of his holy flesh and blood also have his mind, and that he loves to walk in virtuous actions.²⁵⁰

In this passage, we see the link Cyril makes between the Eucharist and virtue, but it is vital to understand what he means by virtue. The term ‘virtue’ conveys both moral integrity and the disciplined pursuit through which it is acquired.²⁵¹ Unless it is practiced, virtue remains merely rhetorical; neglecting it results in arrested spiritual development and diminished growth in faith. However, unlike Hellenistic conceptions of virtue as a means of achieving incorruptibility, Cyril, as Keating observes, consistently upholds the primacy of divine initiative, presenting virtue as a gift *received* from God through Christ, rather than the result of human striving.²⁵²

Cyril interprets participation in the divine nature of 2 Peter as carrying ethical consequence. The believer is obliged to exhibit faith, self-control, righteousness, goodness, and knowledge—virtues that are constitutive of Christ’s own character and disposition. As such,

²⁴⁹ I note also, that while the term virtue (ἀρετή) has a number of occurrences, these do not include those instances when Cyril mentions a particular virtue without identifying it as such.

²⁵⁰ *Ador*, XVII (PG 68, 1072).

²⁵¹ van Loon, ‘Virtue in Cyril of Alexandria’s Festal Letters,’ in *STPatr* Vol. XCVI: *The Second Half of the Fourth Century; From the Fifth Century Onwards (Greek Writers); Gregory Palamas’ Epistula III*, ed. Markus Vinzent, (Peeters, 2015), 22. Cf Jn 15.4. Van Loon shows that Cyril’s use of aretē adapts the Greek and Christian philosophical tradition through Scripture, where virtue reflects the *imago Dei* and God as ‘a lover of virtue’ (EF 7.2, 27.3; EF 8.1, 29.1). Like the Cappadocians, he sees passions as irrational due to man’s created participation in the Logos. Virtue orients the mind toward God. Where Nyssa sees a stronger ontological connection, Cyril’s conception appears to ground virtue in Christ, who gifts it through the Spirit as a preparatory marker of the spiritual life, as a way God permits humanity to know something of him, cf. Gregory of Nyssa, *Contra Origenem* (NPNF, 292); see also A.N. Williams, *Divine Sense*, ch 3.

²⁵² Keating, *Participation*, 141. As Fairbairn clarifies, Cyril does not employ a forensic framework in his soteriology; he neither distinguishes between justification and sanctification, nor finds stages within them. Righteousness/holiness ‘is a gift given to the Christian by God from the outside...and as a result, the holiness that accompanies it is...given from the outside, not so much produced from within [by the believer]...’ Rather, believers ‘become what they already are,’ actively engaged at every step from faith to maturity. Donald Fairbairn, ‘Justification in St. Cyril of Alexandria and Ecumenical Dialogue’, *Participatio: The Journal of the T.F. Torrance Theological Fellowship*, 4 (2013), 123-146. Cf. § 2.1.d, n. 41, where I note the contrast with Hellenic views of virtue as a means to incorruptibility in order to highlight Cyril’s distinct Christological grounding of virtue.

these are the inheritance of the Church through which believers are continually shaped into his image. As Kharlamov observes, ‘The *telos* of the virtues is not self-improvement, but life in the new creation.’²⁵³ For Cyril, the virtuous life is anchored in the Second Adam who imparts, through participation in the Eucharist, not only the capacity to share in his virtues, but also the power to cultivate them. As I will demonstrate, this reflects Cyril’s thought on the social dimension of the knowledge of God, as his virtue is made manifest and extended through acts of love to others.

Virtue’s Source: The Second Adam

To trace Cyril’s argument for the believer’s virtue, it must come by way of the Second Adam, who restores man to his created condition. This is important to the chapter because it deepens the connection between Cyril’s anthropology and soteriology. Having discussed the effects of sin previously, I now turn to show how the restoration of knowledge through Christ, the Second Adam, not only re-illuminates and re-forms the mind but also reinforces my broader argument about the Eucharist. Participation in the Second Adam reorients believers toward the knowledge of God and accomplishing his will. Cyril writes:

The likeness to God we obtained in our primal constitution (and we are images of God); man’s nature is capable of goodness and justice and holiness and has the appetite (ἔφεσιν) for these things implanted in it from God.²⁵⁴

The passage shows that Adam received the Holy Spirit as a conditional grace at creation, enabling him to reflect the divine character, stirring in him an ‘appetite for virtue.’²⁵⁵ Through disobedience, however, he forfeited the Spirit, and with him ‘every sort of virtue,’ including goodness, justice, and holiness.²⁵⁶ Because Cyril insists on human freedom as the

²⁵³ Kharlamov, *Theosis*, p.232.

²⁵⁴ *De dogmatum solutione* 3 (Pusey, III, 555-60) Burghardt, *Image*, p. 50.

²⁵⁵ *Comm. Jo.* on Jo. 14.20 (Pusey II, 484) ἔφεσιν τὴν εἰς ἀρετήν.

²⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, (Pusey 2.485)

ground of moral responsibility, virtue necessarily involves voluntary cooperation with divine grace.²⁵⁷ Only in the Second Adam is this lost capacity renewed: through union with Christ, believers recover and display the virtues proper to his restored humanity.

...born of a woman...by His own free will, in order that He might in Himself first, and through Himself regenerate it into the glory which it had at the beginning; and that he, having proved himself the second Adam, that is a heavenly Man, and being found...the first fruits of those who are built up into newness of life in incorruption...might...send good gifts to the whole race...²⁵⁸

Here, Paul's typology of Christ as the Second Adam is primarily employed to refute Arianism and, by extension, Apollinarism by grounding salvation in the full and true humanity of Christ. For purposes of my argument, Christ, as the Second Adam, exercises perfect obedience through his human free will, thereby restoring the capacity and agency of those who believe in him to share in the noble character of God.²⁵⁹ Cyril's use of Adamic typology is among the most prominent theological frameworks in his exegesis of John, serving a threefold purpose: first, to affirm that Christ is truly human as Adam was; second, to present Christ as a unique, Heavenly man, and *most relevant for this section*, to demonstrate Christ's obedience, the benefits of which, namely the return of the Holy Spirit and participation in the divine nature, are made available to humanity.²⁶⁰ Cyril's identification of Christ as the Second Adam provides a soteriological implication for pursuing a life of virtue:

Whoever does not *keep his command* will be in precisely this position...after all, the origin of sin is found in not keeping the divine commands. In the same way...choosing not to practice virtue leads to the origin of wickedness...evil and virtue are...far removed as opposite qualities of each other...both could not belong to any one person among us at the same time and be fulfilled in action. A person is either wicked or good, even though they may not have reached the pinnacle of wickedness or goodness. If the [pattern] of virtue consists of *keeping*

²⁵⁷ Ibid., particularly as a result of natural participation in God's nature, which included the 'knowledge of everything good'.

²⁵⁸ Ibid., on Jo. 17.18–19 (Pusey II, 539), cf. Jo. 1.32–33 (Pusey I, 145); Jo. 7.39 (Pusey I, 549) Jo. 15.7 (Pusey II, 395); and Jo. 17.4 (Pusey II, 496).

²⁵⁹ Paul's motif in 1 Cor. 15.45–49 and Rom. 5.12–21. Despite Cyril's use of the term throughout his exegesis of John's gospel, John himself does not refer to Jesus as a second or last Adam.

²⁶⁰ Robert L. Wilken, 'St. Cyril of Alexandria: The Mystery of Christ in the Bible', *Pro Ecclesia* 4 (1995), 470.

the commands, how could it not be clear that the origin of evil consists of not keeping them?²⁶¹

On the surface, Cyril appears to depict the practice of virtue as the marker that separates the righteous from the wicked. The pattern or nature of virtue is defined by consistent obedience to Christ's commands. However, outside the framework of Christ as the Second Adam, any striving for virtue risks being indistinguishable from Hellenistic moral ideas or Jewish adherence to the Law. Using forceful language, Cyril emphasizes the soteriological stakes of virtue: participation in the obedience of the Second Adam establishes the boundary between goodness and wickedness. Christ's dwelling in the virtuous is the mark of union with him, while attachment to wickedness discloses failure of participation. Through believer's participation in the Second Adam, the Spirit brings about divine restoration, enabling the expression of virtue and communion in the Son's life, and conforming believers to his image.²⁶²

Advancing in Virtue

Having established the connection Cyril draws between the obedience of Christ and the believer's possession of virtue through participation, I now turn to examine how he portrays the believer's ongoing growth of virtue. I argue that, for Cyril, growth in the knowledge of God occurs as believers partake of the Eucharist and appropriate its sacramental grace by actively exhibiting Christ's self-giving love toward others. This discussion is structured around four aspects of Cyril's pedagogical framework for virtuous formation: first, the link between the Eucharist and virtue, second, the soteriological connection he makes between obedience to the Scriptures; third, his account of the practice of abiding in Christ; fourth, the reciprocal interplay divine grace and human response in the believer's interior renewal and the formative role of virtuous action itself.

²⁶¹ *Comm. Jo.* on Jo. 14.24 (Pusey II, 501).

²⁶² *EF* 7.2 (SC 392, p. 50). 2 Pet. 1.4

The Eucharist and Virtue

First, how does Cyril connect the Eucharist to the exercise of virtue? In the following excerpt from one of his festal letters, Cyril invokes the language of the Old Testament priesthood to link the believer's virtue and intimacy with God,

But what is most of all fitting... once we have been adorned...and made splendid with the glories of virtue, *to push within the sacred curtains* and to appear thus to the all-pure God...as the all wise Paul writes, 'While we have the opportunity, let us do good to all'...not being conformed to the passions of your former ignorance, but as he who calls you is holy, be holy yourselves...not as those who are held fast by carnal impurities...but those who distinguish themselves by the *splendour of their virtues*...let our mind therefore be merciful, tender, and gracious...and let us acquire the other virtues: justice, continence, mildness, humility, patience, and even-temperedness...For [God] sees into the mind and heart, and searches out the beauty of the brave deeds in souls.²⁶³

This passage shows, first, that Cyril establishes an inseparable link between the believer's virtue and access to God, a communion mediated through Christ in the sacrament. He uses the language of adornment to describe this dynamic. In *EF* 24, for example, he twice refers to the faithful as arrayed in garments of virtue, prepared for the eschatological wedding feast of the Lamb. There, believers are 'sanctified...wearing the splendour of virtue as a kind of garment most fair, befitting...for the One who furnishes the festival for us'.²⁶⁴

Second, this imagery is deepened by Cyril's reference to the temple veil and access to the Holy of Holies. Since Christ is simultaneously the high priest, the temple, the sacrifice, and heavenly bread, it is those adorned with his life-giving virtues who can draw near. Cyril appears to treat virtue as a predicate of holiness, suggesting that virtue, as moral action, constitutes both participation in and reflection of the very character of God.

Third, we also see that Cyril employs noetic language by using 'soul' and 'mind' interchangeably, contrasting this with the believer's former state of ignorance. This reinforces

²⁶³ *EF* 27.2, 3, 4. FOC, pp. 169-171; (PG 77.929-955), cf. 1 Pet 1.13-16; Lev 11.45; Heb 4.12.

²⁶⁴ *EF* 24.2, FOC, p. 136; cf. Lev. 11.45; Matt. 22.12-13. The letter also includes a warning for those not 'suitably arrayed' for the feast.

my earlier argument that the Eucharist can fortify the gift of the mind of Christ. Here, he shows how it is possible to acquire virtues through sacramental participation,

Now by his giving thanks...he signified unto us that he, so to speak, shares and takes part in his good pleasure in granting us the life-giving blessing which was then bestowed upon us for *every grace and every perfect gift* cometh to us from the Father by the Son in the Holy Ghost.²⁶⁵

In this sermon excerpt on Christ at the Last Supper from Luke, Cyril links Christ's prayer of thanksgiving to the bestowal of every good blessing in the Eucharist. While the previous passage highlighted Cyril's emphasis on the believer's *entering* the feast with virtue, here the text illustrates how the Eucharist can *provide* the believer with every grace and perfect gift. Given Cyril's consistent prioritization of participation in Christ as sharing in the divine nature, it follows that the cultivation of virtue and holiness is a provision that can and should be appropriated by the communicant.

Heeding the Word

Second, given Scripture's priority in Cyril's thought, it is unsurprising that he emphasizes the sacred text as essential to the advancement of virtue. Mastery and correct interpretation are indispensable for conveying life-giving, transformative wisdom; thus it is foundational to the believer's moral formation and growth in righteousness throughout the whole of Christian life.

Now accompanying Christ, the Savior and following him...is accomplished through virtue in deeds, to which the wisest disciples, having fixed their minds on *that* effort. (ἐφ' ἣ τὸν οἰκεῖον καταπήξαντες νοῦν οἱ σοφώτατοι μαθηταὶ)—refuse (as deadly) to turn back with the unbelievers—they cry out for good reason, 'Where can we go?' meaning, we will always be with you and cling to your commands and receive your words. We will not accuse them in any way or, with the uninstructed, think that what you say is hard as you lead us into the mysteries. Instead, we will think, 'How sweet are your words to my throat, sweeter than honey...to my mouth.' Such then is the meaning of this passage.²⁶⁶

²⁶⁵ Lc. 22.17, Sermon 142, Payne, *Luke*, vol. 2, 64. (PG 75.579-580).

²⁶⁶ *Comm. Jo.* on Jo. 6.68, Pusey (1.668); Maxwell, *John* I, p. 252), cf. Ps. 119.103 (LXX Ps 118.103).

This passage gathers together several themes central to Cyril's thought. First, he exhorts believers to follow Christ by living as he did—a life marked by intentional love expressed in concrete action. In line with his earlier emphasis on 'keeping,' this requires a steady commitment to good deeds. Second, such consistency is possible only insofar as believers 'fix their minds on that effort.' Third, by highlighting the reward of obeying Christ's commands, Cyril emphasizes the importance of sound biblical teaching to aid spiritual growth. He praises the disciples' devotion to Christ's words, noting that their faithfulness grants revelation of divine mysteries and strengthens virtue, which deepens their moral conduct and ministry. By contrast, the uninstructed dismiss Christ's teachings as obscure and fall into self-deception.²⁶⁷ As noted in the *Second Adam* subsection, Cyril warns of the peril of 'choosing not to practice virtue,' which he sees as bound up with keeping of Christ's commandments—his holy Word. Virtue is contingent upon attentiveness and obedience to Scripture and serves as both a soteriological marker and a means of growth in the knowledge of God.

Abiding in Christ

Third, for Cyril, the cultivation of virtue is inseparably linked to the practice of abiding in Christ. In the passage below, Cyril draws his interpretation from the image in John 15 of the vine and the branches, which presents a distinct instance of nourishment through the Spirit that strengthens believers in virtue:

He wants to show that it is good for us to cling to our love for him and to show what...we will gain from our union with him.... He is the vine as an illustration, and those who are united to him...have come to share in his nature by participation in the Holy Spirit are the branches. His Holy Spirit is what unites us to Christ...the union with the vine of the branches that proceed from it belongs to the faculty, and the vine's union with us is relational. By a good choice, we have drawn near through faith and have become his offspring, receiving the honor of adoption... Christ is situated in the order of the vine, and

²⁶⁷ Ibid., on Jo. 14.24 (Pusey II, 50). cf. 1 Jo. 2.56, 3.24.

we are dependent on him as branches, enriched as it were by his grace, and drinking in through the Spirit spiritual power to bear fruit.²⁶⁸

Cyril interprets the parable with a polemical aim, opposing the Arian view that union with the Father in Christ through the Spirit is only spiritual (*πνευματικός*) and not also somatic (*σαρκικός*). As indicated in the Scripture, Christ is the vine, believers are the branches, and the Father is the vinedresser. Although the text does not explicitly mention *sap*, Cyril adds the image to express the Spirit's role in sustaining believers, continually giving life that brings forth virtue and holiness.

Because the Holy Spirit, figured as the sap, unites believers to Christ by faith, Cyril envisions a divine-human cooperation which may be termed a *reciprocal dynamic*: one aspect involves the believer's agency in responding to grace by choosing God, and the other entails the reception of a divinely initiated relationship. Regarding the former, Cyril insists that the union between vine and branches belongs to the faculty of choice, indicating that those who draw near to Christ do so by a voluntary act of the will to seek and to remain in Christ. This dynamic culminates in the Spirit's grafting the believer's union with Christ, now reconstituted as a relational bond—not only with Christ, but also with the other branches.²⁶⁹ This bond requires continual abiding: an ongoing remaining in Christ to bear the fruit of the Spirit. Through this Spirit-formed bond, the faithful are drawn into a deeper communion with Christ and with each other, nourished by the life-giving sap of the Spirit.²⁷⁰

If the branch does not have the life-giving sap supplied to it from its mother, the vine, how could it yield grapes? What fruit could it bear and how? Similarly, you should understand the statement to apply to us. No fruit of virtue will ever sprout in us if we have fallen away from our union with Christ. However, the ability to bear fruit will easily belong to those who are joined to him who is able to feed and nourish them for godliness by the bounty and grace of the Spirit,

²⁶⁸ Ibid., Jo. 15.1 (Pusey II, 534-38); cf. 1 Cor. 6.17, 'Anyone united to the Lord is one Spirit with him.' Acts 17.29.

²⁶⁹ Ibid., (Pusey II, 534), are the branches' dependent on Christ for growth. Maxwell, *John* II p. 297.

²⁷⁰ Ibid.

like life-giving water. The Only Begotten knew this and said in the Gospels, ‘Let anyone who is thirsty come to me and drink.’²⁷¹

Cyril explains that without continual participation in Christ, believers—like branches separated from the vine—cannot produce true virtue or experience real union, for the Spirit alone sustains that bond. Life in Christ, then, is an active reality that requires believers to tend and preserve the divine life at work within them. Cyril is critical of what he calls ‘a bare faith’—faith that lacks the demonstration of godly virtue, and thereby risks being cut off.²⁷² In his interpretation, the unfruitful branches are likened to Adam, who lost the indwelling Spirit and was ‘cut off’ from life in God. By contrast, those who abide in Christ are cleansed and pruned precisely so that they may bear the fruit of virtue in abundance.

Reciprocal Interplay: Divine Grace and Human Response

This fourth element benefits my argument by focusing on the inner response to God's initiating grace, thereby motivating why Cyril shapes his arguments with noetic emphases. Here, the cultivation of virtue is sustained by sacramental participation and evidenced in the inward formation of the soul, which in turn bears fruit in outward acts of Christian love. This process culminates in what I term ‘communal’ or ‘social knowledge’; a conceptual and affective apprehension of divine truth formed within relationships and embodied in the life of the Church. Cyril envisions this as a dynamic interplay between God and believers, previously illustrated in his vine-and-sap metaphor.

The following passage introduces something akin to ‘inner forensics’ to examine how Cyril sees the interplay of the divine summons and the believer’s inclination to assent or resist.

Hence, we are already dismissing the passions of the flesh, *directed as we are* towards salvation, and, in *settling within ourselves* the pure grace of the Spirit, *we are being refashioned* into a better way of life...and rendering a life lived in

²⁷¹ Ibid., on Jo. 15.4 (Pusey II, 559) cf. Jo. 7:37, cf. Jo. 15.3 (Pusey II, 556-57).

²⁷² Ibid., on Jo. 15.1 (Pusey, II, 549); cf Ez. 15.2-4; Jas. 2.20; Lk. 8.7. Keating, *Participation*, 138. cf. Jo. 15.1 (Pusey II, 534-547).

virtue as a gift in return to Christ, who died for us. Thus, indeed, the Psalmist says, ‘All around him will bring gifts?’²⁷³

Here we see his account of the inward summons of the Spirit to respond in obedience to enabling grace. Ideally, the individual, believer or unbeliever, willingly submits to a transformative process that necessarily manifests in outward moral action as a definitive reciprocal gift ‘in return to Christ.’ For Cyril, this ongoing interplay of grace and faith—divine initiative and human response, offering and receiving—constitutes the innermost movement of the soul toward God. The goal of the Spirit’s conforming work, central to the very purpose of participation, is again featured in the passage that follows.

God... adorns our souls with...virtue which consists in all saint-like excellence of living, in order to complete in us His likeness...for rational creatures the best and most excellent beauty is the likeness of God, which is *wrought in us* by the exact vision of God, and by virtue *perfected by active exertion*.²⁷⁴

In this text, the purpose of the inner summons is the individual’s conformity to the image of God.²⁷⁵ The Trinity is in view here, and, in an echo of Hebrews 1, Cyril identifies Christ, the ‘exact vision’ of God, by the Spirit through whom the divine likeness is wrought in believers. Growth in this likeness entails the reimpresing of the image of God by the Spirit at baptism and its gradual completion in the life of faith. Yet this process is neither passive nor automatic. As López observes, ‘mystical life is nothing other than the Christian life brought to its free and conscious development graciously granted by God and accepted by the believer.’²⁷⁶ For Cyril, the realization of divine likeness depends on this reciprocal process: it is given by

²⁷³ EF.2 (PG 77, 405B-408A); Russell, *Festal Letters*, pp. 64–67.

²⁷⁴ Lc. 14.12–14; Sermon 103, Smith (LFC) *Luke*, vol. 2, p. 480.

²⁷⁵ See also Cyril, *Letter to Calosyrius*, ‘Man’s formation in God’s image has other meanings...for man alone, ... on earth, is rational, compassionate, with a capacity for...virtue, and a divinely allotted dominion over all the creatures of earth...therefore inasmuch as he is a rational animal, a lover of virtue, and earth’s sovereign that man is...made in God’s image.’ Ep.83. (PG 73, 585–588; ACO I.1.6, 160–163); cf. Burghardt, *Image*, p. 55.

²⁷⁶ López, *Christian Experience*, pp. 21-22.

grace yet also requires the cooperation of human inclination, through which virtue is brought to completion ‘by active exertion.’²⁷⁷

I turn now to Cyril’s account of the follow-through that should result from the sacramental life. Knowledge of God does not grow apart from the outward demonstration of love rooted in Christ. I suggest this explains why his Eucharistic theology incorporates this interplay that begins with the gracious divine summons to a willing response, which becomes visible through virtuous action. This response results in individual transformation, communal witness, and growth in the knowledge of God. It serves as the basis for Cyril’s rebuke of Jewish leaders who reject Christ and, therefore, cannot love God.²⁷⁸ For this reason, his harsh rhetoric warrants careful theological attention rather than summary dismissal.

Cyril offers a remarkable illustration of this dynamic in his commentary on Christ’s encounter with the woman at the well in John 4, a passage that vividly exemplifies the central claim of this section: that believers grow in the knowledge of God through virtuous action:

Immediately, she exercises love, *the fairest virtue* of all, and the way of *affection for others*. She runs into the city, quickly announcing to the others the blessing that she had found. The Savior was echoing within her, at least so it seems, and whispering *secretly in her mind*, saying, ‘Freely you have received, freely give. *Let us learn from this* not to imitate that timid servant who accordingly buried his talent in the earth, but let us be eager to *put it to work*. This famous woman does this well. She shares with others the good that fell to her. The water she has come to draw is no longer taken from the breasts of the fountain, nor does she carry her earthen water jar home again, but with divine and heavenly grace and with the all-wise teaching of the Savior, she *fills the storehouses of her understanding*. We *should learn from this type and sketch* that by utterly despising things that are insignificant and corporeal, we will receive better things, and many times more of them, from God. What is water from the earth, after all, *compared with wisdom from above*?²⁷⁹

²⁷⁷ Keating, *Participation*, 138.

²⁷⁸ See Chapter Four for a fuller treatment, particularly § 4.1.b.

²⁷⁹ *Comm. Jo.* on Jo. 4.29 (Pusey I, 288-89); cf. Matt. 10.8; 25.18. Here, Cyril calls love the ‘fairest virtue of all.’ In *EF* 7.1 (SC 392, 22), however, fasting is the ‘mother of every virtue,’ setting the paradigm of the others, yet fasting alone is insufficient, as it must be joined to other good deeds in order to be ‘acceptable to God.’ *EF* 13.4 [SC 434, 106]; cf. 22.1 [PG 77, 860-61; FOC 127, 93]).

Here we see Cyril's theological focus lies not in the surface exchange between Christ and the woman, but in the formative work of grace within the encounter itself. Cyril approaches the narrative by beginning with the outcome and then tracing it backward to disclose the inward summons of grace meeting a receptive heart. On account of this, he ascribes to her the 'fairest virtue of all,' love, as evidenced by her desire to share her blessing with the townspeople. He thus portrays the enabling grace as actively summoning her to share the knowledge of Christ. Cyril exhorts his readers to emulate her in the following respects: they are to overcome fear in bearing witness to the gospel; her encounter functions typologically to illustrate how Christ draws the mind from material distractions and lifts it to the perception of divine realities; and Christ deepens understanding of himself in proportion to the response to his enabling grace.

He is teaching us...that when each of us fulfills our commanded service and carries out God's commands to their completion, we surely glorify him by our works, not as though we were giving him something he did not have...but we cause those who see the works and benefit from them to praise him. 'Let your light shine before others,' he says, 'so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven'⁷⁰ When we are *courageous* and *willing to do good works for God*, we are not seeking a good reputation from this for ourselves, but we are winning a good reputation for the honour and glory of him who rules...²⁸⁰

In this final text of the section, Cyril identifies additional effects of virtuous action, which are realized only through concrete expressions of love toward others. He reserves the glorification of God to those whose virtue bears fruit in visible, relational action. The believer matures by embodying traits such as courage, humility, and the mind of Christ, with the corresponding reward being a commendable reputation before God. In this way, Cyril demonstrates that affective, moral, and social dimensions of knowledge converge and result in the consistent display of virtue. As with sacramental and pedagogical differentiation, because virtue results from participation in Christ through the habituation effected by sacramental and

²⁸⁰ Comm. Jo. on Jo. 17.4–5 (Pusey II, 672); Maxwell, John, II, p. 275.

doctrinal mystagogy, its absence functions diagnostically to disclose disordered personal and ecclesial dispositions. This discernment emerges through Cyril's rhetorical framework.

Conclusion

I began the previous chapter by tracing Cyril's thought to show that the Incarnate Son is the ontological source of all life, wisdom, and incorruptibility. I segued to this chapter, where the sacraments serve as the principal means by which divine knowledge can and should be actualized in the believer. For Cyril, the faithful do not contemplate the Word from afar but are brought into intimate union with the Trinity through baptism and the Eucharist. I argued that Cyril's noetic distinctions are integrated in the sacraments of baptism and the Eucharist, which have the potential to mediate divine life and restore the image of God in the believer. I demonstrated that sacramental union with Christ thus becomes the theological condition for virtuous living and noetic renewal. Therefore, the sacraments are physically and spiritually efficacious, serving as privileged *noetic sites* that communicate the knowledge of God.

In Part One, I showed that Cyril's pro-Nicene theology was shaped using epistemic references to highlight correct doctrine and to expound on divine grace, enabling human cooperation. This demonstrates that baptism should initiate the believer into a new mode of perception: one oriented toward divine truth. The renewal of the mind is intrinsic to this baptismal transformation, not only restoring what was lost in Adam, but inaugurating one's life in communion with the Triune God.

In Part Two, I argued that the Eucharist functions in Cyril's theology as the sustaining sacrament of noetic and ethical formation. Union with Christ in the Eucharist, both spiritually and corporeally, constitutes the foundation from which virtuous action flows. I demonstrated that participation in the Eucharist is vital to life in the Spirit, communion with fellow believers, and the increase of divine understanding. I also show virtue both as the outcome of sacramental union and as the outward expressions by which believers grow in affective, experiential, and

communal knowledge of God. This sacramental formation does not diagnose failure or distortion; rather, it establishes the conditions of knowing and the meaning of the mystery by which Israel's history and the problem of ignorance can be meaningfully assessed in the chapters that follow. This study shows not only that the diagnostic dimension emerges from Cyril's polemical and antithetical argumentation in which differentiation and causation are discerned, but that this rhetoric serves a pedagogical purpose by initiating readers into right perception of the mystery of Christ within the Church's formative economy.

This prepares the way for the following two chapters, both of which will examine how Cyril shapes his audience's minds through his interpretation of Israel, the Mosaic Law, and the types and shadows that both reveal and conceal the Incarnation within. Cyril's positive (Chapter Three) and negative portrayals (Chapter Four) sharpen his pro-Nicene formulations and inspire his readers to cultivate correct thinking while resisting heretical deceptions, anchoring their understanding of divine mysteries in the fulfillment found in Christ.

Knowledge of God and the Law: Noetic Formation in Israel's Worship

Introduction

In this chapter, I examine Cyril's account of Israel, building on the previous chapters where I traced Christ as the condition and content of knowledge and the sacraments as privileged sites of knowing. This chapter, therefore, approaches Israel not primarily as a historical subject but as a divinely ordered pedagogical site within the economy through which perception is formed and tested. I ask, how does Cyril shape his readers' Christological understanding of Israel? He consistently relies on the rhetorical antithesis of knowledge and ignorance to frame his theological insights, and nowhere is this more evident than in his treatment of Israel. I therefore divide my analysis between two noetic lenses: in this chapter, I present Cyril's view of Israel as a constructive site of noetic grammar. In contrast, the following chapter will examine how Cyril shapes Israel's unbelief as a pathology of ignorance.

My argument is that Cyril's noetic language functions prescriptively within his pro-Nicene propositions, methodologically in the construction of his theological formulations, and rhetorically in shaping the minds of his readers. By presenting Israel as the locus where divine pedagogy unfolds through the provisional and typological economy of the Law, established as the 'kindling of knowledge', Cyril trains his audience to resist deceptive claims by learning to perceive how Israel is ordered within the divine economy and, by extension, to be motivated to interpret Scripture rightly.²⁸¹ Israel functions as a formative grammar of knowledge: its rites, sacrifices, and covenantal practices both conceal the mystery of Christ and the Church while

²⁸¹ *Comm. Jo.* on Jo. 3.22–24 (Pusey I, 233); cf. Heb. 10.1 ‘...the Law of Moses is said to have a shadow of the good things to come...since the Mosaic letter is a... pre-catechesis of worship in the Spirit...’ Cyril presents Moses as a type of Christ, with his most positive depiction appearing in the Christological reading of Moses' infancy. *Glaph.* II on Exod. (PG 69, 413–16), Lunn, *Glaphyra*, vol. 2, pp. 31–34.

also preparing for the mystery's unveiling in the Incarnation and the gift of the Spirit.²⁸² Here, the language of knowledge and ignorance names ways of seeing and confessing Christ that bear ecclesial consequences rather than an abstract account of human knowing.

Building on Paul's description of Israel and the Mosaic Law as a pedagogical tool in the divine economy, Cyril develops a typological and liturgical hermeneutic rooted in the conviction that the same Word once veiled in the Law is revealed in the Incarnation and remains present in the Church's sacramental worship.²⁸³ His polemic against Jewish interpretation, which resists this mystery, intensifies his rhetoric but serves a constructive end: to shape his readers' conviction that actual knowledge of God is inseparable from communion with the Incarnate Word. Proper noetic appropriation of the Law and its sacrificial worship, then, leads to a fuller grasp of how Christ has ordered both Israel and the Church within the divine economy.²⁸⁴

This chapter continues the epistemic trajectory of the thesis by showing that God's establishment of Israel serves to form the Church in habits of spiritual interpretation and faithful living. It highlights Cyril's Christological reading of the Law, which calls the Church to read with minds oriented to the Incarnational and sacramental mystery of Christ and his Body. In doing so, the chapter prepares the way for the next, where Israel functions diagnostically as a warning against spiritual blindness.

²⁸² Kerrigan, 'the μυστήρια are truths hidden from the profane by means of shadows and enigmas whose secrets are made known only to those who are capable of understanding them correctly' *Ador.* XII (PG 68, 617); *Glaph.* on Num. (69, 645). He also notes that 'the knowledge of the mystery presupposes that the hearts of listeners are endowed with a divine light.' *Glaph.* on Lev., (PG 69, 536). Kerrigan, *Interpreter*, p. 149.

²⁸³ Following tradition, Cyril links Israel's typology to the mystery of Christ. Ignatius affirms that 'the prophets...lived according to Jesus Christ...announcing beforehand the mystery of His coming', Ign. *Magn.* 8.2, in *AF*, vol. 2, p. 123; Clement views Israel's sacrificial system as types of the true knowledge revealed in Christ who perfects the 'barbarian philosophy' of the Hebrews, Clem. *Strom.* VI.17, ANF, vol. 2, p. 305). Bas., *Hex.* 1.2, (PG 29, 8–9]) and Greg. Naz., *Or.* 38 (PG 36, 320–321), both affirm that the economy is prefigured in Christ, 'the mystery of the incarnation prepared in Israel...from Abraham to Moses.' (NPNF, ser. II, vols. 7–8).

²⁸⁴ Wilken writes that though Cyril's anti-Jewish rhetoric is acerbic, 'he constantly turns the discussion to the larger theological and exegetical issues...his confrontations raise issues that provide him an opportunity to develop his theology. Wilken, *Judaism and the Early Christian Mind*, p. 67.

Structure

This chapter unfolds in three major sections. In Part One, I rely on his *Comm. Jo.* and *Comm. Is.* to establish his theological anthropology of man's created and fallen knowledge of God. If Cyril intends for his readers and listeners to consider the gulf between the ignorance of the Jews and the knowledge of Christians, what, then, is the content and character of that knowledge? Unlike Chapter One, which focused on demonstrating the divine nature of the Son and Incarnation as the ground of salvation and knowledge of God, this discussion brings into sharper focus Cyril's theological anthropology.

Part Two moves from postlapsarian darkness to Israel's establishment as embodied pedagogy, tracing how the Law's types and shadows habituate discernment rather than exclusively signifying doctrine.

In Part Three, I shift to examine elements of sacrificial worship more narrowly. Cyril's interpretation of the various components of the Tabernacle highlights the implications of humanity's renewed capacity to discern the mystery of Christ when reading and interpreting the Old Testament. When joined to participation in the sacraments, such discernment is intended to issue in a transformed life and embodied Christian praxis. I will use three of the Tabernacle category headers from his dialogue with Palladius in selections from *Ador.*'s exposition on Exodus to synthesize his noetic references and their analogical link to believers' renewed capacities to discern the pedagogy of the divine economy. The material that follows is therefore selective rather than exhaustive, intended to demonstrate how liturgical and priestly forms shape his readers' understanding of how the knowledge of God is mediated and regulated within the Church's mystagogical oversight.

3.1.a. What does Cyril mean by ‘knowledge’?²⁸⁵

If Cyril intends his readers to see a gulf between the ignorance of Israel and the knowledge granted to the Church, then how does he characterize knowledge? To trace the timeline between man’s original understanding of God and the ‘kindling of knowledge’ of the Law, this section offers a more explicitly epistemic focus within his theological anthropology than was present in Chapter One’s discussion of man’s reception of the Son’s incorruptibility. Here, I trace Cyril’s thought as he roots human receptivity to knowledge in creation, wherein humanity is fashioned in the image and likeness of the Logos—‘the fount of all knowledge,’ in whom are ‘hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.’²⁸⁶

Because the Son possesses all the perfections of the Father, being an exact image (ἀκριβεστάτη) and likeness (όμοιόσις) by nature (φυσική), Cyril demonstrates that the Son exists inseparably from the Father, very Light of very Light, eternally by the Holy Spirit.²⁸⁷ All true understanding originates from the Father, through the Son, and by the Spirit.²⁸⁸

²⁸⁵ In light of the Greek philosophical terminology used in this thesis, Michael Christensen offers a succinct summary: ‘Plato’s privileging of reason as the most spiritual part of us characterizes the major trends of Greek thought is the essential background for [patristic] Christian thought.’ While Plato references the mind for reasoned arguments (λογιστικός); The reward for disembodied reason is noetic vision. ‘Contemplation (θεωρία) of the heavens can occur for blessed souls just as it does for the gods.’ The reward of *logos* is not logic but vision (contemplation), ‘an intelligible awareness of true knowledge, goodness, and being.’ Plato, *Tim.*, 28a, 90c, and *Phae.*, 247c in *Plato in Twelve Volumes*, ix, LCL, pp. 234, 36; *Republic*, 508c, in *Plato in Twelve Volumes*, v, LCL, p. 237. Athanasius grounds contemplation in Christ’s incarnate ministry, using theosis to describe Christian deification through participation in the divine life. Christensen, *Partakers of the Divine Nature*, pp. 52-54.

²⁸⁶ Cyril’s use of epistemic/noetic terminology is not consistent but shows clear theological intent. He is careful to parse what belongs properly to the Son from what pertains to humanity. In *Comm. Jo.* 1.9, Pusey 1, 111), he identifies understanding (ἡ σύνεσις) as an essential property of the Son, while in humanity it is tied to rational capacity (τὸ λογικόν). Knowledge of God that transcends human reasoning is expressed through terms such as γνῶσις and θεογνωσία (*Comm. Jo.* 4.27; 15.21; 16.25–26 [Pusey II, 645]). Human wisdom, described as ‘partial’ (μέρος σοφίας), is contrasted with the Son, the ‘source and fullness of wisdom’ (πηγή σοφίας), and also appears as η φρόνησις, denoting common sense. Finally, *epinoia* (ἡ ἐπινοία), which relates to conceptual knowledge or distinctions in thought, is rare in Cyril (only 35 occurrences), likely due to its association with Cappadocian-Eunomian debates in the fourth century. See § 5.2.a. for fuller treatment of *epinoia* and *noesis*.

²⁸⁷ *Comm. Jo* on Jo. 1.1, 1.9, 3.4 (Pusey 1.18), Maxwell, *John I*, pp. 7,14. See also n. 17 on the distinction between divine and human, the latter being more of a copy (ισοτυπία). *Ibid.*, Jo. 14.9 (Pusey II., 422) where Cyril affirms that the three are undivided in essence; their only difference lies in their distinction by relation, not essence (οὐσία), while each subsists in his own hypostasis (ὑπόστασις).

²⁸⁸ *Comm. Is.* on Is. 4:5-7, 14 (PG 70, 888-91), *Comm. Jo.* on Jo. 1.2 (Pusey I, 64) Jo. 11.2 (Pusey II, 637) γὰρ εἰδέναι τὰ πάντα ἐξ ἀρχῆς μέχρι τέλους πρέποι ἂν μόνον τῷ κατὰ φύσιν ὄντι Θεῷ.

‘Knowledge and love are activities of the divine persons and therefore inseparable based on divine simplicity.’²⁸⁹ The *Logos*, then, is not only the agent of creation, but the archetype in whom humanity is made.²⁹⁰

Cyril’s anthropological framework indicates that Adam was first ensouled before receiving the Spirit, affirming the composite nature of humanity as both soul and body. As I showed in Chapter One, the reception of the life-giving Spirit marks humanity’s reception of incorruption and immortality. Adam was created with a perfect knowledge of divine truth and, through this gift of the Spirit, was granted the capacity for unhindered communion with the Father and the Son for eternity.²⁹¹

This passage captures Cyril’s account of the noetic structure of man’s creation:

God, as illumination (φωτισμός), enlightens everyone coming into the world...by the divine act of creating, he inserts a seed of wisdom (σοφίας), or knowledge of God (θεογνωσίας), and he implants a root of understanding (λογικόν) into everything he calls into existence. He shows that it participates in his own nature, and he sends into the mind luminous vapors, as it were, of his ineffable brightness in a way and a mode that only he himself knows... In this participation, He [the Son] is wisdom (σοφία) and understanding (σύνεσις) (which is what light is called in rational creatures) so that things capable of reason (λογικὰ) may become rational and things capable of wisdom (φρόνησις) may possess it.²⁹²

Two key points emerge from this passage. First, divine knowledge is a communicable attribute yet remains rooted in its divine source. Second, Adam was made with two interrelated

²⁸⁹ A.N. Williams. ‘Contemplation’, in *Knowing the Triune God: The Work of the Spirit in the Practices of the Church*, ed. by James J. Buckley, and David S. Yeago (Eerdman’s 2001), p. 126.

²⁹⁰ *Comm. Jo.* on Jo. 1.4-5 (Pusey I, 87–88) For Cyril, all creatures lack light and are by nature darkness, wholly distinct from their Creator. Of the five forms of created image-bearing, only humanity reflects the Son as ‘an accurate impression of form which represents it.’ Jo. 1.3 (Pusey 1, 74) and Jo. 5.23 (Pusey I, 339).

²⁹¹ Ibid., Jo. 1.14 (Pusey 1, 110-11) Maxwell, *John*, I pp. 49-50. A collection of points: Meaning: For Cyril, ‘soul’ is usually interchangeable with ‘mind’ but may also denote the human composite of body and rational intellect. Scope: Cyril limits man’s capacity to grasp the Trinity because of finitude, though Adam possessed ‘perfect knowledge from the start’ (Jo. 1.9). It was not cumulative but seeded, awaiting eschatological fulfillment when σύνεσις will give way to full γνῶσιν of God, ‘with utter clarity’ (Jo. 16.26, Pusey II, 647). Manner: Adam received wisdom immediately, preserving the illumination imparted to his nature. Source: Cyril rejects the view that the Spirit’s breath ensouled man, since this would render sin contrary to nature. (Jo. 14.20; cf. Gen. 2.7 Pusey II, 484-5).

²⁹² Ibid. Jo. 1.9 (Pusey, 1, 106-7), quoting Col. 2.3. Jo. 1.7 (Pusey, I, 87), Maxwell, *John*, I. p. 49.

capacities: rationality (λογικόν), which allows for conceptual judgment, and divine knowledge (θεογνωσία). Man, in his rational soul, bears the imprint of the Logos, with the soul made receptive to the divine, not by essence but by participation in what is proper to the Son—namely, wisdom, understanding, and divine knowledge.

This metaphysical distinction grounds Cyril's noetic construct. Humanity, being derivative, unlike the unoriginate Son, who is Light by nature, can only 'lend light', having received it from the Son by grace.²⁹³ The capacity to share knowledge stems from rationality, but this alone cannot yield true knowledge of God. Such knowledge remains partial, constrained by humanity's finitude and temporality, while the divine nature itself is ineffable. To supply what is lacking by nature, God at creation bestowed 'his own good' (ἴδιον ἀγαθόν), a gift surpassing nature.²⁹⁴ This gift, Cyril explains, is revelation (ἀποκάλυψις): the very Spirit of God. Thus, for Cyril, 'knowing' is not simply cognition, but the reception of the Spirit of the Son of God—the substance of truth and the revelation of divine reality.

Sin and Free Will

The creature was loaned the sight to conceive of the one who is God by nature, but squandered the gift and limited the scope of its contemplation to created things. It shrank from advancing, burying illumination by laziness. It neglected the gift.²⁹⁵

For Cyril, sin blinds the mind.²⁹⁶ When Adam turned from the Creator to the god of this age, the luminous imprint was darkened. Cyril's language shifts to that of bankruptcy, employing terms such as 'without a mind' (ἀνόητος) and 'emptied' (δεδαπάνηκεν) to describe

²⁹³ What is Light? The divine Son is rationality by nature, the true Light who illuminates by grace every human being (Jn 1.9); from Him all creation has its existence and essence by grace through participation.

²⁹⁴ *Comm. Jo.* on Jo. 1.30-31 (Pusey I, 172), Maxwell, *John*, I, p. 77. The good is 'the knowledge of things to come and the understanding of hidden mysteries' which is the revelation from Himself as Triune.

²⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, on Jo. 1.9 (Pusey 1, 106-7), Maxwell, *John*, I, p. 47.

²⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, on Jo. 1.10 (Pusey I, 128-29). See § 2.1.b. for the initial treatment of divine grace, human agency, and free will within the context of the mind's renewal through the sacraments; cf. § 3.1.c. See also § 4.1.c. for Cyril's discussion on disordered dispositions which inhibit the knowledge of God and the life of virtue.

the depletion of Adam's divine knowledge.²⁹⁷ This void prompts Cyril to draw a vivid contrast not only in terms of what Adam knows and does not know, but between Adam's original nobility and his postlapsarian degradation. He refers to man as 'the creature' and likens him to the 'ignorant beasts' (κτήνεσι ανοήτοι), as one no longer conscious of his exalted origin.²⁹⁸ On this point Russell interprets Cyril as seeing man as oriented towards vice and in servitude to the enemy.²⁹⁹ Nevertheless, Cyril stops short of asserting a doctrine of total depravity:

People do not have a total lack of light (for God-given intelligence is indeed preserved in their nature), but they extinguish it with a foolish way of life. They turn, eroding and melting away the measure of grace. 'Open my eyes that I may perceive your wonders out of your Law.' He gave the Law as a help to rekindle the divine light in us and to clear away the darkness imposed by ancient ignorance like a sort of film over the eyes of the heart.³⁰⁰

Here, Cyril maintains that free will remains intact and necessary for moral responsibility, even as he affirms the damaging effects of sin; it is the instrument through which humanity can still choose good over evil. Sin, however, despoils the soul by corrupting its moral discernment.³⁰¹ Although Cyril affirms that the immortal soul, once severed from communion with God, enters a state of estrangement, he does not regard the ignorance that results as a static condition.³⁰² Its origins, which I will explore more fully in the following chapter, are traced here. For Cyril, ignorance is closely allied to darkness, a dynamic condition of the soul that can intensify. Through persistent unbelief, this darkness deepens, transforming ignorance into an active estrangement, whereby willful rejection of truth further incapacitates the soul's capacity to perceive God.

²⁹⁷ Ibid., on Jo. 1.10 (Pusey 1, 129); Maxwell, *John*, I, p. 58 n. 22 trans. 'destroyed'.

²⁹⁸ Ibid., on Jo. 1.11 (Pusey 1, 130), how the world 'runs away' from the συνέσεως that befits humans.

²⁹⁹ Russell, *Cyril of Alexandria*, p. 13.

³⁰⁰ Is. 8:20; *Comm Jo.* on Jo. 1.10 (Pusey 1, 128).

³⁰¹ Ibid., on Jo. 1.32–33 (Pusey 1, 183).

³⁰² Ibid., on Jo. 1:14 (Pusey 1, 139); cf. Gen 3.15–19; Is. 53.10–11.

Cyril upholds the tradition's belief that human rationality persists after the fall, through its relation to the eternal *Logos*. To deny the integrity of human rationality would, by implication, undermine the divine source from whom it proceeds.³⁰³ Man possesses life and sustains his intelligence through the gift of the intellect's participation in the Son; however, this is distinct from participation in sonship by grace, which entails the knowledge of the Father. Adam forfeited this 'higher' participation through his deliberate choice of a self-directed 'foolish way of life.'

It was impossible for us to be restored, once we had fallen because of the original transgression, back to our original beauty except by attaining an ineffable communion and union with God.³⁰⁴

In this state of estrangement from divine communion and knowledge of God, we come to Israel and the Law: for unless the agency of the Word enlightens humanity externally through the Spirit, it remains incapable of discerning and recovering what was lost, namely, the truth of the Trinitarian center of all reality, and the perception of the divine economy directing history toward redemption. For Cyril, until the 'kindling of divine knowledge' with the giving of the Law to Israel, the world remained in total darkness concerning the true knowledge of God.

Thus, epistemic language pervades Cyril's theology, particularly in his depiction of the contrast between ignorance and death on one hand, and life in the light of Trinitarian knowledge on the other.

³⁰³ Williams, *Divine Sense*, p. 4.

³⁰⁴ *Comm. Jo.* on Jo. 17.20-21 (Pusey II, 731).

3.1.b. The Law: Kindling of Knowledge

This second part of the chapter moves from Israel as conceptual preparation to Israel as embodied pedagogy, showing how worship trains perception rather than merely symbolizing doctrine. It examines how Cyril, echoing Paul, interprets the Mosaic Law as a divinely given pedagogy to train and reorient fallen minds toward the knowledge of God. By unfolding the Law's sacramental and Christological meaning, Cyril shows how Israel's sacrificial worship and practices, when rightly perceived, become tools for shaping the mind toward the truth of Christ. At the heart of this formation lies Cyril's conviction that the Law's ordinances were divinely ordered to prepare God's people for the reception of the Incarnate Word. I argue that Cyril reads the Law as a provisional but genuine means of noetic illumination, designed to lead believers to discern the mystery of Christ within the economy. The Law's ultimate *telos*, then, is fulfilled in shaping a people capable of perceiving Christ spiritually through worship. Cyril's concern is not only that the Law refers to Christ, but that it forms a disposition and interpretive grammar by which Christ may be rightly recognized.

Open my eyes that I may perceive your wonders out of your Law.' He gave the Law as a help to rekindle the divine light in us and to clear away the darkness imposed by ancient ignorance like a sort of film over the eyes of the heart.³⁰⁵

For the sake of his audience's proper understanding of Israel, Cyril presents the kindling of divine light as the revelatory breakthrough of God into a world veiled by the darkness and ignorance of sin. This event fulfills his promise to establish for Himself a people set apart, which is a type and shadow of the Church. God's grace to Israel was and is a sign of hope to the nations 'rendered useless' by their idolatry, a hope ultimately fulfilled in Christ.³⁰⁶ Cyril regards the Law as a divine good, insofar as it reveals the Word of God to His people but insists

³⁰⁵ Ibid., on Jo. 3.22–24; cf. Is. 8.20.

³⁰⁶ *Comm. Is.* on Is. 1.16–18 (PG 70, 43–44) cf. Rom 7.7 (PG 70, 43–44). Is. 1.16–18 referenced in the rest of the paragraph.

it must be interpreted spiritually. Like Paul, he maintains that without the Law, humanity would not recognize sin, understand the righteous and gracious character of God, nor comprehend how he mediates his divine presence.

Nevertheless, for Cyril, this illumination of knowledge did provide Israel with the same ‘explicit instruction about the Son’ that was given Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, owing to Israel’s prolonged assimilation into Egyptian polytheism.³⁰⁷ By ‘explicit instruction,’ Cyril means the pre-Incarnate appearances of the eternal Son who progressively revealed Himself to the patriarchs and to Moses. In contrast, Cyril views Israel’s education as governed by divine pedagogy: they were taught to worship ‘a single God first,’ and upon this monotheistic foundation, led gradually, through types and shadows, toward a fuller apprehension of the true nature of God. Two key passages follow to articulate how Cyril frames the Law:

[T]he God of all things freed Israel from Egypt, rescued them from the error of polytheism, and brought them by the Law of Moses from the chicanery of the demons...[and] taught them to worship a single God and bow down before a single Lord. Then by means of types and shadows he wanted to raise them to what was still better and more perfect, that is, to the things that are in Christ.³⁰⁸

How would one understand the forgiveness of transgression and the relief related to this, without the Law condemning us beforehand? That what I am saying is true, and that the discourse about this is not something foolish or without charm, Paul intervenes to help when he says how the Law was added on behalf of transgressions, until the seed, which was promised would come, by ordinance of angels?³⁰⁹

Not only does Cyril envision the pedagogical necessity of reawakening Israel’s monotheism, but more importantly, he sees the Law as concretizing the hopelessness of humanity’s sinful condition apart from divine grace. Citing Paul, he affirms that the Law functioned as a pedagogue until Christ so that humanity might be justified by faith. Yet, despite this tutorial function, the Law still kept man ‘shut up in sin,’ casting the dark backdrop of

³⁰⁷ *Comm. Jo. on Jo.14.7* (Pusey, II, 417).

³⁰⁸ *Comm. Is on Is. 4.2* (PG 70, 960).

³⁰⁹ *Ador. II* (PG 68, 220); cf. Gal 3.19–24; Acts 7.53.

human helplessness in contrast to the glory of Christ's fulfillment and the blessed relief of the forgiveness of sins made possible by his abrogation of the old covenant ordinances. Cyril is emphatic that the Law justified no one—despite the Jews' tenaciously clinging to it for their self-righteousness and the prophetic admonitions against such reliance—and that it was incapable of actualizing the good it prescribed. The implications for the Jewish understanding of God was that their knowledge, though genuine, remained partial and imperfect. He does, however, make exceptions for Israel's mystagogues, Moses and the prophets. Moses, for instance, is described as 'the hierophant' (ἱεροφάντης) who revealed the mysteries of Christ, while the prophets, as writers of Scripture, possessed 'comprehensive knowledge of the divine revelations' concerning the Incarnation, since their minds were inspired by the Holy Spirit.³¹⁰

The Law's limitations introduce another way in which Cyril seeks to deepen his readers' understanding of the Holy Spirit's role. One illustrative example is his demonstration to them that the Law is insufficient to compel (ἀνασειράζειν) them to exercise correct spiritual judgment (κρίνειν ὄρθω). This insufficiency underscores the necessity of the Spirit's illuminating work. The absence of these gifts not only left Israel unable to resist the sins exposed by the Law but also revealed a deeper pattern of increasing resistance to both divine correction and God's holiness throughout Israel's history.

Thus, Cyril teaches that the Law kindled knowledge of Christ, contrasting its imperfect good with the superior life revealed in him within the Law's types and shadows. He tells Palladius that the Law's enigmatic language pointed to the true mode of spiritual worship. The Law, then, functioned as a 'simple curriculum' (μαθημάτων ἀπλῶν) using the types and

³¹⁰ EF 18.4, (PG 77, 813). For Cyril, the Law is fulfilled in Christ and transfigured into the Church's spiritual worship, yet the prophets retain significance as ongoing witnesses of God. He calls them μυσταγοῖ, 'foretellers of the mystery to come,' and 'Spirit-bearers' who, through inspired Scripture, illuminated the path to Christ (cf. Is. 26.7–10 [PG 70.573]). See Matthew Crawford's doctoral diss., *Cyril of Alexandria's Trinitarian Theology of Scripture*, (Durham University, 2012) Ch. 3 on prophets as mystagogues; see also, Hans van Loon, 'The Meaning of 'Mystagogy' in St. Cyril of Alexandria', in *Seeing Through the Eyes of Faith*, ed. Paul van Geest (Peeters, 2015), pp. 37–54.

shadows of a gathered people group, priests, temple, sacrifices, and prophets to prepare for Christ, in whom God's goodness and human righteousness cohere, and by whom 'the truth has shined, and the shadows depart.'³¹¹ Yet, it is the Holy Spirit who illuminates the meaning of these shadows, enabling believers to discern the mystery of Christ they prefigured. They resist ignorance by cultivating virtue and sound judgment, and in the light of Christ's truth, become a new tabernacle, the Church, formed by the Spirit in the knowledge of God.³¹²

3.1.c. Noetic References in the Law's Sacrificial Elements

In this part of the chapter, I continue to explore how Cyril's readers are to think about Israel by narrowing the investigation to the sacrificial aspects of the Law that he directly correlates with the renewal of the believer's mind. His primary concern is to uphold pro-Nicene Christology, which underlies and informs the connections he draws between believers' theological understanding and the elements of Mosaic worship. His repeated comparisons between the ignorance of the Jews and the knowledge of the faithful stem from his spiritual interpretations of the Law, and within those interpretations, I show that Cyril's typology is formative by demonstrating how worship and priesthood train perception, discipline judgment, and regulate Christological confession. For the initial presentation of Cyril's interpretation of Israel's worship apparatus, I will rely on selected noetic references within his own categories of discussion in *Ador*.

The discussion proceeds cumulatively, treating each element as a focused instance of how cultic practice disciplines perception and stabilizes Christological understanding. The examples are not intended as an exhaustive catalogue of typology, but as demonstrations of how worship and priesthood function epistemically to regulate Christological recognition. This

³¹¹ *Ador*. II. (68, 224).

³¹² *Comm. Jo.* on Jo. 1.2 (Pusey 1, 49) Jo. 13.34 (Pusey II, 384) Is. 1.16–18 (PG 70, 43-44). Cyril envisages self-control, not simply passive restraint, but joined to rigorous pursuit of a life of virtue; cf. *Comm. Is.* on Is. 1.16, (PG 70, 225–28); 26.7-10 (PG 70, 573-76); 29.3-5 IPG 70, 632-36); Hill, *Isaiah*, vol. 2, pp. 134-136.

reflects the pedagogical nature of his typology, as it trains his readers to discern the necessity of ecclesial mediation and regulation of divine knowledge, thereby safeguarding it.

Matthew Crawford summarizes two general approaches to *Ador.* The first and most influential suggests that the work is a polemical response to Judaism in Alexandria by demonstrating that the Church's way of life is already signaled in the Law, and, with the Law now spiritually contemplated in Christ, the Church 'supersedes' Jewish interpretation and discloses the 'mystery of the synagogue' from the Law's inception at Sinai, to the future incorporation of the remnant of Israel into the Church in the eschaton.³¹³ The second approach is something of a *ressourcement* of earlier interpretations of *Ador.* which suggests that the Mosaic Law, when properly understood, informs the Church of how Christ is received.³¹⁴ Mark Elliott and others have persuasively challenged the perceptions of discontinuity in *Ador.*, finding consistent support for Cyril's respect for the Old Testament. In conjunction with Crawford's insights from his translation of its preface, *Ador.* emphasizes the positive role played by the Law. This exposition of the five books of the Pentateuch is not a verse-by-verse commentary, but according to *Glaph.*, Cyril refers to *Ador.* as a moral and dogmatic exhortation, akin to a constructive ethical work for the monks, written in the form of a dialogue with an interlocutor named Palladius.³¹⁵ Cyril's use of 'the twofold form of πατέρευσιν', which

³¹³ Matthew Crawford, 'The Preface and the Subject Matter of Cyril of Alexandria's 'De Adoratione'', *The Journal of Theological Studies*, NS, 64/1 (2013), p. 162. He cites Wilken, Young, and Blackburn on the adversarial Alexandrian backdrop. Wilken stresses sharp discontinuity (*Early Christian Mind*, p.67). Young acknowledges the hostile context but with more of a mediated tone (*From Nicaea to Chalcedon*, pp. 305-6); Russell highlights the unity in both Old and New Testaments, with Christians as heirs of God's promises (*Cyril of Alexandria* p. 13); and Blackburn sees in *Ador.* an implicit indictment of Jewish observance after Christ (*The Mystery of the Synagogue: Cyril of Alexandria on the Law of Moses* (diss., Notre Dame, 2009), p. 258).

³¹⁴ Ibid., p. 163, n. 41.

³¹⁵ Crawford, *Preface*, p.164, cites the concluding homily's relation to monastic life and notes the absence of explicit references to the Jews or the inadequacy of the literal reading of the Law. See also, T. K. Elliott, 'What Cyril of Alexandria's "De Adoratione" is All About', *STPatr* 50 (2011), 251-252, (italics mine). Other scholars support the view that it addresses the practical dimensions of Christian life in fifth-century Alexandria. Groh, trans. *Ador.* IX, p. 4; and T. Pietsch's 'St. Cyril of Alexandria and the Mysteries of Isis in *De Adoratione*', *JEH* 74.4 (2023), 705. Cf. *Glaph.*, Exod. 1 (PG 69, 385). Crawford credits Georges-Mathieu de Durand's discovery of this preface to *Ador.* in Oxford's Bodleian Library (1989), first published in 'Un prologue inédit au *De adoratione* de Cyrille d'Alexandrie?' *STPatr* 20 (1989), pp. 3-7.

is both moral and dogmatic (ἡθικήν τε καὶ δογματικήν), is consistent with his hermeneutical approach and quite similar to Origen's spiritual interpretation of the Mosaic Law. However, Cyril's is more robustly Christologically-focused.³¹⁶ *Ador.* is primarily intended for a monastic audience, and following this, for other teachers in the Church offering catechetical instruction to those in the early stages of progress in the faith.³¹⁷ An excerpt of Crawford's translation of the preface will introduce this discussion:

Having determined that I should provide moral guidance for those who have chosen to live their life in the most excellent way...so that they may know exceedingly well (ώς ἂν εἰδεῖεν εὖ μαλα) how to walk the path that leads into everything worthy of admiration and how to accomplish rightly and without error (όρθως τε καὶ ἀπλανῶς) the glorious achievements of the way of life in Christ, I was constrained to introduce this treatise...[F]or since one must speak precisely and attend to extremely subtle thoughts (έπειδὴ γὰρ ἀνάγκη λεπτοεπεῖν καὶ ταῖς ἄγαν ἴσχναις προσβάλλειν ἐννοίαις) when unfolding the shadow of the Law and bringing those things spoken in enigmas into the most manifest knowledge (έμφανεστέραν ἀγοντες γνῶσιν), for this reason it was necessary for the treatise to be relaxed...³¹⁸

Here we see that Cyril's moral and dogmatic guidance to the monks unfolds through meticulous exegesis and nuanced interpretation of the sacrificial vessels in the Old Testament tabernacle. As Athanasius did before him, Cyril maintained a long-held admiration of monks, having spent years in the desert during his formation before his episcopate.³¹⁹ The monks have chosen the 'most excellent way' of life; yet, having embraced a new 'evangelical way' (εὐαγγελική πολιτεία) in Christ, it became essential for them to attain a precise understanding of the mysteries within the Old Testament Scriptures. This deeper comprehension would enable

³¹⁶ Crawford, p. 12, on Cyril's *Comm. Mich.* 7:14-15). While 'moral', it echoes (though not precisely) Origen's emphasis on the soul's progress. For Origen, the Israelites' desert journey symbolizes the soul's growth in virtue, and the tabernacle's spiritual meaning lies in preparing the soul to become a dwelling place of the Lord. Origen, *Homilae in Exodus* 9.1 (SC 321, p. 278). 'Homilies on Genesis and Exodus, trans. Ronald Heine, FOC 71 (CUAP, 1982), p. 334. See also Blackburn, *Mystery of the Synagogue*, pp. 100-102.

³¹⁷ Crawford, *Preface*, 165, also Gohl, p.4.

³¹⁸ Ibid., p.159.

³¹⁹ Lois Farag writes that Cyril's uncle Theophilus sent him to the Scetis of St. Macarius in the Nitrean desert; ascetic practices influence his writings. Farag, *A New Testament Exegete*, p. 3. See also McGuckin, *Cyril of Alexandria: Bishop and Pastor* (SVSP, 2004) on Cyril's relations with the Melitians and the monks.

them to articulate with utmost clarity the Church as the true tabernacle, the hypostatic union of the Incarnate Son, and the consubstantial Trinity with theological accuracy. Notice Cyril's emphasis on the sophistication and mental rigor required to interpret the texts, and his readers' need to develop 'extremely subtle' and nuanced theological thinking to navigate the enigmatic aspects of the Law that evaded generations of Jews from without, and heretics from within.

I begin with the images of light and fragrance because Cyril repeatedly associates illumination with the basic capacity to discern the mystery concealed within the Law.

Lamps – Incense and Oil: The Sweet Scent of the Knowledge of the Trinity

In his discussion of Exod. 30.7-8, Cyril interprets the tabernacle's ritual elements—lamps, incense, and oil—as typological signs that reveal the mystery of Christ. In dialogue with Palladius, he draws out a richly layered theology in which Christ is both the substance of these figures and the one who imparts knowledge of himself through them. The interrelated symbols of light and fragrance are interpreted Christologically and noetically, portraying divine illumination as the condition for rightly perceiving the divine economy:

For [Moses] says, 'the lamps burning and being trimmed in the morning and the evening' with 'evening and morning' indicating incessantly and continually, and that there was to be burning of incense by lamps, which shows quite well that when we are illuminated by divine light (φωτὶ τῷ θείῳ καταλαμπόμενοι) we are then and there richly filled with the sweet smell of Christ, (εὐωδίας Χριστοῦ) and thus we come to the sense-perception of the good things (αἴσθησιν τῶν ἔσω σκηνῆς ἀγαθῶν) within the tabernacle, i.e., of the distribution of the *divine charismata*, which Christ desires for those who are worthy. Therefore, if someone has not yet come to be in the light of faith, he is assuredly not a partaker of the noetic sweetsmell [νοητῆς εὐωδίας ἀμέτοχος], as he does not yet know the mystery of Christ. For 'if you do not believe,' he says, 'you will by no means understand' (Isa 7.9). For the faith is the means of approach which yields understanding, and unfolds the mind (ἀπλοῦσα τὸν νοῦν), as it were, for the reception of the divine light.³²⁰

³²⁰ *Ador* on Exod. 30.7–8 (PG 68, 624), cf. Is. 7.9; J. Gohl, *Ador*, p. 41.

Cyril's mention of 'noetic fragrance' (νοητῆς εὐωδίας) highlights a central feature of his account of knowing God: divine knowledge cannot be achieved by 'reasoning up' to God; rather, it is granted by grace through faith as perception is formed by participation, rather than attained through discursive ascent.³²¹ By participating in the mystery of Christ, the believer undergoes a perceptive transformation, resulting in both experiential and conceptual knowledge of God. The life-giving powers of Christ's divinized humanity is communicated to us through our shared humanity.³²² Faith, for Cyril, enables the mind to receive light from the Spirit and to discern the true identity of Christ hidden in the Old Testament figures.³²³

He contrasts this divine language with its counterfeit forms. The 'sweet fragrance of Christ' cannot be reproduced by human effort or corrupted teaching. For Cyril, the olive oil that fuels the lamps and the incense offered before the Lord serve as symbols of true teaching. The oil, produced from the 'choicest olives,' symbolizes sound doctrine delivered by faithful teachers:

While that procured from human notions and demonic inspiration is part of the craft and trade of some and has a spurious use. This teaching is useless and cast away, wholly ineffectual for the illumination of the knowledge of Christ.³²⁴

Doctrinal purity, then, is integral to one's ability to perceive Christ rightly. By contrast, heretical teaching is likened to defective oil, incapable of fueling true illumination and exposed as demonic in origin. Similarly, his typological interpretation of the incense points to Christ's incomparable sweetness, which Cyril shapes by inserting polemical language to oppose the counterfeit incense of Jewish unbelief:

So then, with the incense being referred to Christ (for he is incomparably 'sweet-scented'), we will not make for ourselves incense like it, for we will

³²¹ He surpasses all other ancient writers in his use of the lemma εὐδία; in 16 instances, he employs 'νοητῆς εὐωδίας' denoting the multifaceted character of divine knowledge that accompanies participation in Christ, and the contingency of faith in apprehending the true mystery. The majority occur in *Ador*, with the rest in *Glaph*.

³²² Hackett, *Habit of the Mind*, p. 126.

³²³ Elsewhere Cyril speaks of the 'dawning of light' or 'torchlight'; cf. Is. 1.16, 26.7–10, 29.3–5. Hill, *Isaiah*, vol. 2, pp. 134–136; *Comm. Jo.* on Jo. 16.25 (Pusey II, 645).

³²⁴ *Ibid.*

accept absolutely no one else than him, as doubtless did the miserable Jews [who accepted] the son of lawlessness. For such people will be convicted of making their own composition, while we, in accordance with that truly sweet-scented and special incense of God the Father, who has caused the scent of his knowledge to appear to us in the Son, through whom we ourselves also exude sweet scent, do not compose fine incense for ourselves...³²⁵

For Cyril, the ‘composition’ produced by the Jews constitutes a counterfeit liturgy; their misrecognition of Christ sustains unbelief and generates an illegitimate form of knowing that rejects the Incarnate Word and forfeits the true fragrance of divine truth. Believers, by contrast, are shown to exude a ‘sweet scent’ through their union with Christ.³²⁶ Cyril’s typology points to the transformation wrought by the Spirit that joins right knowledge with spiritual radiance, resulting in both correct knowledge and spiritual luster. This theological and pedagogical purpose is further developed in his reading of the Tabernacle’s pillars, described as silver-colored and set on bronze foundations. The silver represents the clarity and integrity of the apostle’s preaching, even as they are ‘silver-plated’ through their participation in Christ (the Light), gleaming with ‘noetic rays’ (*νοηταῖς ἀστράπτων*). Together, these images express the unity of Cyril’s Christology and underscore the ecclesial mediation and regulation of right knowing exercised through apostolic teaching and the full range of mystagogical ministry.

Finally, Cyril connects this symbolic framework to the noetic renewal of the believer in Christ, by highlighting Trinitarian inseparable operations that effect this transformation:

Those who are in sins, and worship the creature rather than the Creator, have their heart in some way ugly and their understanding (*διάωσιαν*) exceedingly unsightly...when they welcome [faith] in Christ, they are mentally transformed (*μεταπλάττονται νοητῶς*) to His divine and excellent beauty...God the Father wishes, therefore to mold to Him [Christ] those who believe, to mold them by understanding (*συνέσει*), that is by His own Wisdom, divine I mean, and to make them conformed to Him through sanctification in the Spirit...³²⁷

³²⁵ *Ador.* IX on Exod. 30.34–38. (PG 68, 648); cf. 2 Thess. 2.3.

³²⁶ 2 Cor. 2.14–15.

³²⁷ *Comm. Is.* on Is. 53.10–11 (70, 1189).

The renewal Cyril refers to is thoroughly Trinitarian: initiated by the Father, revealed in the Son, and actualized by the Spirit. Divine knowledge is inseparable from divine likeness. To know God rightly is to become conformed to Christ. The noetic reshaping of the believer presupposes faith, correct doctrinal confession, scriptural teaching, and sacramental participation, through which the believer grows in wisdom by being incorporated into the life of the Trinity.

Cyril's interpretation of the Tabernacle operates as a theological and epistemic pedagogy, teaching readers to perceive Christ, the Trinity, and the Church in Scripture, and to remain steadfast against doctrinal error. He employs a range of rhetorical tools which include antithesis and ekphrasis to shape his audience's imaginations and accomplish multiple pedagogical aims: fostering a desire for doctrinal truth; cultivating critical engagement with theological instruction, and—keeping in mind the clergy and monastics among his readers—ensuring vigilance over the content of their teaching concerning Christ.³²⁸

The focus then turns from illumination to cleansing, reflecting Cyril's insistence that growth in knowledge entails purification from error through sacramental incorporation and renewal by the Spirit.

Laver and Cleansing from Error: Baptism, Justification, Charismata

What does the spiritual interpretation of the bronze laver teach Cyril's readers about thinking correctly about Christ and advancing in the knowledge of God? Cyril's interpretation of the bronze laver in *Ador*: advances his theological integration of sacramental cleansing, justification, and the acquisition of divine knowledge.³²⁹ The bronze laver, which typologically

³²⁸ On Cyril's use of rhetorical tools, these are only two of many he relies on, as shown by J. David Cassel's *Cyril of Alexandria and the Science of the Grammarians: A Study in the Setting, Purpose, and Emphasis of Cyril's Commentary on Isaiah'* (Univ. of Virginia, 1992).

³²⁹ Keating argues that Cyril treats justification and sanctification as a single work of redemption. Fairbairn concurs and shows also that Cyril consistently uses the passive form of justification ($\delta\kappa\alpha\iota\omega\tilde{\nu}$) for believers, and

prefigures baptism, functions, for Cyril, as a site of epistemic transformation, where false notions about God are purged, and the believer is initiated into life in Christ through the Spirit.

Cyril writes:

For we are baptized, not benefitting from a removal of the stain of flesh, but rather being freed from pollutions of mind and heart, and being washed from defilements of errors, by the grace and love for mankind of him who calls [men] to salvation. For, according to the Scriptures, we have been justified not from the works of the Law, but from the faith of Jesus Christ.³³⁰

This passage shows that Cyril links justification and cognitive renewal, so baptism enables a transformation of the intellect and affections, which can cleanse the mind from doctrinal errors.³³¹ He centers this renewal on the Trinity: the Father initiates salvation, the Son mediates it, and the Spirit effects it within the believer. Baptism begins this Triune renewal, but the ‘sweet fragrance’ of Christ, which is an image Cyril uses elsewhere, signifies the ongoing reception of divine knowledge and presence beyond the moment of initiation.

Cyril further links the potentiality of this epistemic cleansing to Christ’s own baptism, presenting the Son as both the recipient and giver of the Spirit, acting on behalf of humanity because Christ shares human nature and receives the Spirit for humanity’s sake.³³² As I discussed in Chapter Two, through this union, believers are made partakers in the incorruptibility of the Father by the Spirit.³³³ The renewal of humanity that begins at Christ’s baptism is extended to believers at Pentecost, where, by grace through faith, they are illumined with the knowledge of God.³³⁴ Cyril characterizes this as participation in a ‘recreated life,’ one

the active form for Christ, emphasizing that salvation is wholly Christ’s initiative through the Spirit. Keating, *Appropriation*, pp. 141, 192; see also Fairbairn, *Justification*, pp. 123–146.

³³⁰ Exod. 30.17-21; *Ador.* VIII (PG 68, 628); cf. Gal. 2.16; Rom. 3.28.

³³¹ Cf. See § 2.1.b. n. 102 for a discussion of the interplay between divine agency and human cooperation, including Cyril’s convictions that man maintains free will following the fall, allowing him to choose evil or, by grace, image God through exercising virtue.

³³² *Comm. Jo.* on Jo. 1.33 (Pusey I, 183-5).

³³³ Ibid., (Pusey, I, 175). Cyril is emphasizing the Creator/creature separation. The Son possesses his own Spirit, receiving the Spirit at baptism on behalf of and as a pattern for man.

³³⁴ Ibid., on Jo. 14:20 (Pusey II, 487).

that entails not only forgiveness but also deliverance from false conceptions about God and entry into the knowledge of the Trinity.

This cognitive and ethical transformation is expressed through ecclesial and sacramental life: baptism, doctrinal instruction, liturgical worship, and Eucharistic participation.³³⁵ In describing the bronze laver, Cyril makes a vivid observation about its material origins:

Women from the bloodline of Israel who found remnants of worship in Egypt in their personal effects brought these mirrors as an offering...into material for the laver. And when the holy tabernacle was being erected, they fasted...living in observance of all things with purity...[having] fasted by the doors is a riddle of the fact that those who have been justified in Christ enter into the Churches not through blood but by excelling in spiritual sacrifices, and bringing forth to God self-control...the mortification of the flesh...³³⁶

Here, he introduces a twofold noetic dynamic.³³⁷ First, the image of the fasting women symbolizes those who prepare themselves inwardly and outwardly for baptism through moral and intellectual purification. The laver represents the initial bestowal of grace in baptism, which requires ongoing self-examination, echoing Paul's warning in 1 Cor. 11.30-32.³³⁸ Second, these women model the 'evangelical life,' presenting their bodies and minds in rational worship. Their purity of self-discipline in body and mind shows them to be transformed vessels; those suited for holy baptism and the Church.

These examples show how increased illumination issues in interpretive capacity, particularly in Cyril's linking of spiritual gift, discernment, and the right handling of Scripture.

³³⁵ *Ador.* VIII (PG 68, 629).

³³⁶ *Ibid.*, (PG 68, 632); cf. 1 Cor. 6.20; Rom. 12.1.

³³⁷ He refers to as 'the first noetic reality' (δῆλον τὴν νοητήν) of two in the text.

³³⁸ Cf. Jo. 13.10.

Charismata: Progress in Knowledge and Interpretive Capacity

While early Fathers emphasized the Spirit's charismatic gifts as immediate, Cyril echoes the later patristic interpretation in which these gifts unfold as the believer matures in faith and love.³³⁹ Charismata become a visible identifier of the believer's 'spiritual mindedness,' seen most clearly in those who live in humility, resist doctrinal error, and walk in charity toward others. They are not extrinsic adornments, but signs of an interior transformation shaped by ongoing knowledge of God's mercy and holiness, and not to be neglected.³⁴⁰ Cyril carries the relationship between baptism, justification, and charismata into his scriptural interpretation.:

When we have set ourselves the goal of love (ἀγάπης) toward God and toward our brothers, which is the fullness of the whole Law...we will also be filled with the charismata (χαρισμάτων) of God and enriched with the gifts given by the Spirit, I mean with the capacity to prophecy, namely, to interpret the prophets.³⁴¹

In this passage, he associates the presence of charismata—notice the stipulations of loving God and others—connected to the exegete's capacity to perceive and proclaim the mystery of Christ in Scripture. In the next passage, 'spiritual *theoria*' is tied to attentive preparation, intellectual discipline, and prayerful dependence on divine illumination. Cyril carefully parses the interplay between divine initiative and the human inclination toward the

³³⁹ In the ante-Nicene period, *charisma* referred to divine gifts given at baptism. Fathers later developed a Spirit-mediated form of knowledge requiring discernment. By the Nicene era, *charismata* were more closely tied to baptismal liturgy, with gifts expected either at initiation or emerging gradually through spiritual maturity, especially in ascetic contexts. See A. Schatzmann, *A Pauline Theology of Charismata* (Hendrickson Publishers, 1987), p. 3; Ign., *Eph.* 17.2; in ANF I, p. 100; idem, *Pol.* 2.2, ANF I, p. 100; *I Clem.* 38.1, ANF I, p. 15; Ronald Kydd, *Charismatic Gifts in the Early Church*, (Hendrickson Publishers, 1984), p. 87. Kilian McDonnell and George Montague, *Christian Initiation and Baptism in the Holy Spirit* (Liturgical Press, 1991), citing also Cyr. Jer., Philox., and Ps.-Mac.; for the theology of spiritual gifts, see Karl Shültz, *Isaias 11.2 die Sieben Gaben des hl. Geistes in den Ersten Vier Christlichen Jahrhunderten, Alttestamentliche Abhandlungen* 11, no.4 (1932); cf. the apologists like Just. Mart., *Apol.* I.33, in ANF I, p. 170; Iren., *Adv. Haer.* 3.17.3), ANF I, p. 441; and Tert., *Adv. Marc.* 5.8, ANF iii, p. 451, who taught that Jesus received the Spirit's gifts at his baptism, and having been perfected in him, were given to believers, esp. as an expression of Trinitarian life. See also Aug., on *Gr. et lib. arb.* 18, and *Ep.* 194, in NPNF, v, p. 449; Jacob Dodson and Amos Yong, 'Charismatic Gifts', in *University of St. Andrews Encyclopaedia of Theology*, ed. by B. Wolfe and others (University of St. Andrews, 2022).

³⁴⁰ Cf. 1 Tim. 4.14.

³⁴¹ Cyril's treatment of charism in *Ador.* echoes a pre-Nestorian fragment of 1 Cor. 14.2, (PG 74, 890), see Bertrand deMargerie, S.J., *The History of Exegesis: the Greek Fathers*, vol. 1 (Saint Bede's, 1993), p. 264.

truth of God when opening the Scriptures. This perspective fuels his animus toward Jewish leaders who fail to probe the scriptures with this disposition toward truth.³⁴²

Let us approach, then, the Savior's words, not carelessly, and without due preparation, but with that attentiveness...which befits those who would learn. For so alone can those subjects for contemplation, which are difficult of comprehension, be rightly understood. Let us...ask of Christ that light, which He sends down upon *the simple of mind and heart*...being enabled correctly to understand the force of what is said.³⁴³

Cyril elsewhere writes that the Spirit enables the mind to transcend the letter and discern the spiritual sense, in which 'the Inaccessible makes himself accessible.'³⁴⁴ *Gnosis*, in this sense, is not Origenian mystical knowledge, but a gift that opens the eyes of the heart to behold Christ. Clergy and monks have a distinct obligation to interpret Scripture faithfully, yet Cyril teaches that the Spirit may enlighten any sincere believer to grow in divine knowledge and to live in likeness to Christ.³⁴⁵ Nevertheless, he reminds the clergy that sound interpretation demands both intellectual discipline and reliance on the Spirit whose illumination discloses the mystery of Christ in the Scriptures for the benefit of the Church..³⁴⁶

Summary: In this section, I showed how Cyril shapes his readers' minds by using noetic references in his spiritual interpretation to help them discern the mystery of Christ amid the shadows of the Tabernacle's furnishings. Noetic insights were intended to guide his audience to understand better the cleansing and renewing properties of the sacraments, which can shield them from error and induct them more fully into the true knowledge of God. Cyril's

³⁴² Cyril argues that the Jews, though entrusted with the Law, clung to its letter rather than its spiritual light, and thus remained 'spiritually blind.' (See Is. 26.7–10; Jn 5.39 (*Comm Jo.*, Pusey I, 385.1–3); *Glaph.* (PG 69, 536B–537A; 69, 241B). Italics mine.

³⁴³ *Lc.* 7.24–28, *Homily 38*, Smith, *Luke*, p 161. Italics mine.

³⁴⁴ *Comm Jo.* on Jo. 1.14 (Pusey I, 105–06). Cf *Ador.* IV (PG 68.489D); *Glaph.* (PG 69.504C). de Margerie quotes Cyril's view of gnosis (from Pusey II, 494.9): '...gnosis consists in the reasoning process enabling...people to know that Christ is God and that He is truly and really the Son of God.' De Margerie, *History of Exegesis*, vol. 3, p. 164.

³⁴⁵ *Comm. Is.* on Is. 43.4–5 (PG 70.885): 'Though the sense of the passage is very difficult to arrive at, I shall give an explanation with the guidance (*κατεύθυντος*) of God, who imparts wisdom and knowledge (*γνῶσιν*).'

³⁴⁶ *Ador.* I (PG 68, 180.24, 37); III, (321.4); VI (536.41); VII (621.19, 54); XII (1013).

pedagogical instincts include moral and dogmatic exhortations for monks and clergy, reinforcing the crucial need for dependence on the Spirit, diligent exegesis, clear teaching, and mental rigor.

The argument moves from cultic elements to priestly mediation, since for Cyril the formation of perception is inseparable from ecclesial office, teaching authority, and sacramental governance.

Christ the True Priest

In this section, I examine how Cyril draws on Old Testament shadows to form his readers' ecclesial understanding, teaching them to perceive the priesthood in a Christological light. I will add to this discussion in the next two sections that focus on the dignity of the call and the priesthood's noetic requirements. For Cyril, these figures point to the Church as the body joined to Christ, the true Lamb and Priest, through whom believers share in the divine life by sacramental worship and sound teaching.³⁴⁷ The Tabernacle's curtains symbolize the Church's worldwide reach through the proclamation of the gospel, while also representing unity in faith and sacramental communion. Each new Eucharistic assembly is an instantiation of *the* one Church, centered around the bishop and joined to Christ, the true Lamb and Priest.³⁴⁸ This is seen in his view that every new altar represents the Eucharistic gathering wherever a new Church is established. The redeemed peoples, like the tabernacle's curtains, are extended across the nations through the sacrifice of Christ, who is at once priest, holy victim, fragrant cleanser, and sovereign of the Church.

[The priests] from Israel slaughtered the lamb; they consumed unleavened bread with it in accord with the ancient prescriptions of the Law, but, as I said, intelligible realities were depicted for the ancients in shadows. The truth has shone forth, since Christ, the true lamb...has been slaughtered for us...We have made our food the purest thing of all, I mean the food that comes through the evangelical oracles, and among us the task of putting off, in an intelligible sense,

³⁴⁷ Ibid., VII (PG 68, 641) on Exod. 27.9-12.

³⁴⁸ Ibid., (PG 68, 633).

all leaven—that is, diabolical evil has become a serious and important undertaking.³⁴⁹

This passage illustrates, first, Cyril's consistent claim that Christ fulfills and surpasses all the sacrificial rites of the Old Testament. Second, it reflects the ethical and intellectual demands he places on the faithful: proper participation in Christ requires moral purification and right understanding. This concern becomes a defining feature of his episcopal ministry: fidelity to doctrinal orthodoxy is indispensable; and ecclesial unity cannot come at the expense of Christological truth.³⁵⁰ Writing in a context where vestiges of Eunomian, Arian, and Apollinarian heresies still lingered, Cyril interprets the tabernacle's 'court' as representing the orthodox Church itself, the proper sphere in which sacrificial worship is to be offered, and the true people are gathered. Within this framework, he links Christ's priesthood directly to the Eucharist, affirming its centrality and efficacy for the ongoing transformation of the believer:

How can Christ be telling the truth when he says that knowing the one true God and Father, along with his Son, is eternal life? I think we must respond that the Savior's statement is certainly true. Knowledge is life because it is pregnant with the full power of the mystery, and it brings participation in the mystical Eucharist (*εὐλογία*) by which we are joined to the living and life-giving Word...knowledge...is life that also brings the blessing of the Spirit.³⁵¹

Cyril's claim that 'knowledge is life' refers to a knowing that draws the believer into participation in the divine life, a participation realized above all in the sacraments. Such knowledge is transformative because, when one truly knows the mystery of the Trinity revealed in Christ, one is drawn by grace to live in accord with it. This indicates that true understanding of God develops only through sacramental participation. The priestly office, therefore,

³⁴⁹ Cyril of Alexandria, *Contra Julianum (c. Iul.)* Bk. X.35 (PG 76, 733–34; vol. II GCS NF 20). Cyril sees the divine economy as a pattern for incremental progress—the Law's shadows are sketches that are not erased but added with colors, with provisional forms advancing toward their fulfillment revealed when Christ appeared.

³⁵⁰ Norman Russell, 'The Church in the Commentaries of Cyril of Alexandria' in *International Journal for the Study of the Christian Church*, 7.2 (2007), p. 70-85, doi: 10.1080/14742250701256138. During the early composition of *Ador*, remnants of Eunomian, Arianism, and Apollinarianism persisted.

³⁵¹ *Comm. Jo.* on Jo. 17.3, (PG 73, 670).

occupies a central place in the Church's life, since the soundness of its teaching and the holiness of the ministers shape the faith and conduct of the faithful.

How does this discussion on the tabernacle curtains help show how Cyril wants his readers to think about Israel? Cyril trains readers to see the Church in union with Christ as the mystery behind the shadows of Israel's worship. If participation in the Eucharist enables the believer to be restored to the Adamic state, this process depends on faithful priestly mediation and adherence to sound doctrine.

The Priesthood: Its Dignity and Divine Call

It is important to turn to the dignity of the Priesthood and especially to explain how...in type...[it] points to the true Priesthood, which is in Christ, and through Christ sanctifies the holy people who have been brightened by faith and enriched with their communion with God through partaking of the Holy Spirit.³⁵²

In this subsection, I highlight how Cyril roots the dignity of the Priesthood in Christ, the true and final High Priest. In his interpretation of Exodus 28, Cyril uses his typological readings of Aaron's ordination and sanctified vestments to emphasize spiritual and intellectual dispositions necessary for those called to minister. In addition to the inherent dignity of the priesthood, this passage below shows that the priesthood is not simply an accompaniment to ritual, but an eschatological participation in Christ's resurrected life.

God also made quite clear to us the very time in which the course-change (μεταδρομή) of all things to the better reality will occur, [and] the *tropos* of the renewal, when He says, 'And it will be from the eighth day and onward that the priests will offer your whole-burnt offerings on the altar, and your [sacrifices] of salvation, and I will accept you, says the Lord.' He names the time of our Savior's resurrection the 'eighth day.' It is at this [time] that 'the whole-burnt offerings,' that is, believers' perfect and complete consecration to God and [their] spiritual offering, are acceptable to God.³⁵³

³⁵² *Ador. XII* (PG 68, 725) trans. George Dion. Dragas, *Teaching on the Priesthood*, (Orthodox Research Inst., 2004); p. 1.

³⁵³ *Ibid.* (PG 68, 229), cf. Ez. 43.27, 44.15-16; Mal. 3.1-3; Heb. 13.15-16.

The choosing of priests belongs solely to God, thereby nullifying any claims to a humanly authenticated priesthood and affirming Aaron's divine calling as emblematic of Christ's.³⁵⁴ To describe the transition or course-change from the old covenant priesthood to the surpassing dignity of the priesthood in Christ, Cyril repeatedly employs the term μεταδρομή, a word he uses twenty-six times across his corpus, more than any other ancient author.³⁵⁵ A second, equally significant Christological foundation in this passage links Christ's resurrection to Aaron's ordination through the symbolism of the 'eighth-day.' This motif recurs throughout *Ador.* in the descriptions of the tabernacle sacrifices, all prefiguring Christ. In this light, Christ's priesthood inaugurates a new creation, with clear noetic implications.

Cyril next portrays the priesthood's intimacy with the communicant through the symbolism of Christ's presence in the breastplate, which extends from the High Priest to the believer. The twelve stones, inscribed with the names of Israel's tribes, signify the saints whom the Lord, through the High Priest (that is, the bishop), beholds both individually and collectively, holding them close to his heart. In this image, Christ's role as mediator forms the vital bond between priest and believer, a bond that fosters spiritual growth, sharpens discernment, and deepens knowledge of the divine will.³⁵⁶

The priesthood's Christological foundation is expressed in the sacred vestments, which Cyril interprets for their intellectual and spiritual meaning. Like the fabric of the Tabernacle, these garments reveal 'the many truths concerning the Lord Jesus Christ and his works.'³⁵⁷ Clothed in the breastplate, ephod, tunic, turban, girdle, and colored linen of gold, scarlet, blue, and purple, the priests reflect the majesty of Christ. George Dragas observes that the

³⁵⁴ Dragas, *Priesthood*, p. 3. Young comments on Cyril's high degree of correspondence of the realities discerned by *theoria* (Θεωρία), as it does here, cf. Young, *Exegesis*, p. 114.

³⁵⁵ Statistics on the lemma μεταδρομή, -ῆς, ḥ in TLG database (as of 18 Feb 2025). Translations vary: 'transposition' (Dragas), 'course-change' (Gohl), and 'change' or 'turn' (Hill).

³⁵⁶ The breastplate carries noetic symbolism; Cyril sees Christological meaning in all priestly vestments.

³⁵⁷ *Ador.* XII (PG 68.732AB), cf. Exod. 28.13–21.

breastplate, known as the “oracle of judgment”, signifies divine wisdom and justice. Cyril associates the “heart and inward parts” (καρδία, σπλάγχνα) with the mind (νοῦς), from which right discernment and virtuous action proceed. Each vestment points to Christ’s mediating work and to the believer’s call to discern and carry out the Father’s will.³⁵⁸

The focus now shifts from ritual forms to ecclesial mediation, because for Cyril, the training of perception is inseparable from priestly office and teaching authority.

The Priesthood: Noetic Qualifications and Disqualifications

In this third section of the chapter, I examine Cyril’s interpretations of the Old Testament Law’s noetic requirements for clergy, such as intellectual capacity, and the moral cultivation of wise judgment. This focus is crucial to my argument, since many of Cyril’s critiques of Jewish leaders and heretics hinge on their failure to exercise proper reasoning and thus their false claims to righteousness.³⁵⁹ Not intending an exhaustive typological list, I will limit my discussion to a few selections with noetic implications, while also noting how he intends his readers to interpret Israel through these texts. In this way, this final section reaches its conclusion by showing that noetic formation culminates not only in recognizing Christ in the Law, but in the Church’s regulated capacity to teach, judge, and worship faithfully.

One may learn that those admired for their manliness, of a sort that is spiritual and godly, being those having a firm and vigorous mind (οἱ εὐσθενῆ τε καὶ ἐρρωμένοι³⁶⁰ ἔχοντες νοῦν), would one day come to perform the sacred ministry of the mystery of Christ. ... [They] were in fact sent forth, and they presented the burnt offerings. We find that the holy apostles performed this same thing. These...roamed the earth ministering to Christ and presenting burnt offerings, that is, those distinguished by a pure faith and who were especially well-fitted³⁶¹ to pursue virtue diligently. For the ability instruct in the mysteries does not belong to a feeble understanding (διανοίας ἀδρανοῦς) nor to a mind

³⁵⁸ Dragas, *Priesthood*, pp.10–11.

³⁵⁹ J. David Cassal provides insight on Cyril’s use of classical literary interpretation for the formation of an influx of largely inadequately educated clergy, ‘Cyril of Alexandria as Educator’, *In Dominico Eloquio—In Lordly Eloquence*, ed. Paul M. Blowers and others (Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2002), pp. 348–68.

³⁶⁰ Gr.: ἐρρωγα (LSJ, ‘formidable’ or ‘powerful’).

³⁶¹ Gr.: σαφῶς (LSJ ‘clearly’); (Bauer, ‘high degree of exactitude’).

that is afflicted with weakness (νοῦς νοσοῦντος τὸ ἄναλκι), or that is wont to fall into worldly desires...³⁶²

In this passage, Cyril articulates the noetic and intellectual rigor of those called to the priesthood. He first highlights the cognitive and moral strengths he esteems, such as a ‘firm and vigorous mind’ (οἱ εὐσθενῆ τε καὶ ἐρρωμένον ἔχοντες νοῦν), before disqualifying those marked by a ‘feeble understanding’, or a ‘mind...afflicted with weakness’ (διανοίας ἀδρανοῦς ...νοῦς νοσοῦντος). For Cyril, the positive traits are indispensable to sacred ministry, since the priest must guard doctrine, instruct in the mysteries, and exercise wise spiritual judgment. The ability to ‘pursue virtue diligently’ is inseparable from a rightly formed intellect. Spiritual manliness, then, is not brute strength, but the capacity for firm and reasoned discernment in both teaching and liturgical service. The ‘perfection of mind’ he prizes may be innate, yet more often it is the fruit of a life shaped by virtuous achievements.³⁶³

Cyril views the apostolic ministry as the true continuation of Israel’s priesthood, fulfilled in Christ. Moses and Aaron foreshadow Christ, while apostles, exemplars chosen for their ability to proclaim the truth, embody the fulfillment of the priestly type.³⁶⁴ Where Aaron assisted a faltering Moses, the apostles ran alongside Christ, who strengthens them for their ministry, with ordination confirming their intellectual readiness.³⁶⁵ As Joseph Lucas and George Dragas observe, Cyril’s concern is not with Levitical order *per se*, but with the elevation of the priesthood in Christ’s disciples, whose minds are illumined by the Spirit and

³⁶² *Glaph.* on Exod. 28 (PG 69, 520.32).

³⁶³ *Ador.* XVII (PG 68, 852), cf. Exod. 28.13. Cyril connects shaving with Paul’s mortification of the flesh, as it signifies the mind’s deliverance from sinful desire, which must be cut off at its root.

³⁶⁴ Crawford shows Cyril teaching that the apostles called the remnant of Israel to the ‘knowledge of the Immanuel,’ whose light intellectually illuminates all people, not Israel alone (καταφωτίζοντος νοητῶς). Crawford, *Trinitarian Theology*, pp.18-19. Some debate exists over whether Moses himself or only his ministry typifies Christ; in either case, Christ ultimately supersedes him.

³⁶⁵ *Ador.* XVI (PG 68, 729); cf Exod. 28.1; Phil. 4.13. cf. Joseph R. Lucas, *Offerer and Offering: Cyril of Alexandria on Jewish and Christian Sacrifice* (doctoral dissertation, Redboud University, 2022).

whose ministry is defined by faithful and correct theology.³⁶⁶ Methodologically, Cyril frames this noetic emphasis so that his readers connect the apostles' role with the Temple priesthood through the Spirit. This divine act not only ordains the apostles to minister at the 'sacred altar', but as Lucas observes, also serves a dogmatic purpose: Cyril employs the moment to affirm both the consubstantiality of the Son and Spirit and the continuity of their relationship in the Incarnation.³⁶⁷

According to the Law, animals with physical blemishes were deemed unfit for sacrifice, a concept that Cyril interprets spiritually through Paul's exhortation to be 'without blemish and beyond reproach'.³⁶⁸ Thus, the physical blemishes disqualifying Old Testament sacrifices are spiritual signs of noetic deficiency. Blindness³⁶⁹, lameness,³⁷⁰ and deformity³⁷¹ correspond to impaired reasoning, spiritual sluggishness, and vulnerability to error. Each blemish symbolizes a defect in discernment that undermines the priest's role in conveying divine truth. For Cyril, these distortions can only be remedied through repentance and purification in Christ, who alone restores clarity of mind and readiness for ministry.

Conclusion

Because Cyril's exegetical works are permeated with the noetic contrasts between knowledge and ignorance—most of them relating to the Mosaic Law and Jewish unbelief—I divided his reflections on Israel into two chapters, this one and the next, to investigate what he means by each theme. In this chapter, I asked two questions: first, if Cyril intends for his readers

³⁶⁶ Dragas, *Priesthood*, p. 6, citing *Ador* (PG 68,729A-C), where Cyril presents the bishop as the high priest who typifies Christ, while the priests serve under him as the disciples served Christ.

³⁶⁷ Lucas, *Offerer and Offering*, p. 177; citing *Comm. Jo.* on 13.31 (Pusey, II, 671–72).

³⁶⁸ *Ador*. XVII (PG 68, 784-5A); cf. 1 Tim 3.2.

³⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, (PG 68, 785-8); These cannot absorb God's truth; cf. Prov. 4.25 and Jer. 22.17 which suggest that blindness leads to dishonesty, oppression, and violence. See also Dragas, *Priesthood*, p. 30.

³⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, cf. Is. 37.3; Ps. 17.45; referring to lethargy—the lack of strength and will for virtue.

³⁷¹ *Ibid.*, (PG 68, 797); cf.1 Cor .11.27-28; 15.33. One with a deformed nose or ears symbolizes impaired judgment, prone to error through either inability or unwillingness to heed wisdom.

to perceive the contrast between Christian knowledge and Jewish ignorance, how does he characterize knowledge? Second, I ask, how does Cyril shape his readers' Christological thinking about Israel? By presenting Cyril's anthropological theology, I showed that the Trinity effects divine knowledge to reveal the Trinity in relationship. Humanity, created in the image of the Logos, the 'fount of all knowledge,' lost this participation in the fall.

The establishment of Israel and the Law rekindles only partial knowledge of God. I showed that Cyril, building on Paul, interprets Israel's history as a divinely ordered pedagogy. Israel's types and shadows conceal the mystery of Christ, whose Incarnation restores humanity's knowledge of the Triune God. The Tabernacle features I examined reflect his insistence on thinking correctly about Christ, as distorted doctrine can lead to spiritual peril. By interpreting the Tabernacle and the priesthood Christologically and typologically, Cyril sees in Israel's worship the Incarnational design pointing to Christ.

I now turn to Chapter Four, where the same antithesis between knowledge and ignorance is treated diagnostically, as Israel's unbelief is used by Cyril to expose and correct distorted modes of ecclesial perception.

Shaping the Christological Remedy of Ignorance

In this chapter, I turn to Cyril’s treatment of ignorance, the necessary counterpart to the previous chapter’s exploration of the anthropology of knowledge. His usage is not one-dimensional; ignorance spans from unfamiliarity to a deliberate distortion in perceiving Christ. Cyril’s account of both knowledge and ignorance is most fully developed in his exegesis of Israel, and here I develop the other side of this noetic trajectory: how the failure to know the truth of Christ distorts both Israel’s vocation and the Church’s orthodox understanding of Christ. My argument across both chapters is that his Christological interpretations of Israel and the Mosaic Law employ noetic concepts to guide his audience toward a deeper apprehension of Christ’s presence within the types and shadows of the Old Testament. This examination of the more negative side of the noetic trajectory further demonstrates my argument that Cyril’s distinctions between knowledge and ignorance are foundational to shaping his readers’ Christological understanding of Israel. Where Chapter Three traced the Law’s pedagogical cultivation of knowledge, this chapter traces what happens when that pedagogy is resisted or fails.

For Cyril, just as Christ assumes and heals human nature, so too does he restore the disordered faculties of human perception corrupted by sin. This conviction underlies his polemical intensity: ignorance, for him, is a condition of alienation from Christ, the source of all true knowledge. Knowledge, in this framework, is relational. To know rightly is to be united to Christ. Those who reject Christ misrepresent the mystery of the hypostatic union and fail to recognize him in the Scriptures. Their error is not only intellectual but spiritual. Their unbelief obscures the truth, leaving them in darkness. Hence, the danger of doctrinal error lies not simply in an intellectual deviation but in the existential consequence of being severed from the

One in whom divine knowledge is revealed and received. Accordingly, the discussion that follows treats ignorance as a theologically charged pathology of misrecognition, not simply the absence of information.

First, I will summarize the diverse views of ignorance held by Cyril's predecessors. Second, I highlight Cyril's terminology and the groups to which he applies it, while I also acknowledge that there is invariably cross-pollination between them. Third, because he seeks both to refute heresy and to foster a pro-Nicene apprehension of the mystery of Christ, what forms of ignorance obstruct his objectives? Part One establishes the category and its internal distinctions; Part Two shows how Cyril deploys that diagnosis in exegesis to sharpen pro-Nicene Christological confession. I identify three core deficient intellectual dispositions that underlie Cyril's repeated critiques. These three categories are: uncritical thinking, presuppositional resistance, and the carnal mind. Each corresponds to an opposing virtue which, though not always explicitly stated by Cyril, is nonetheless implied.

Part One: What is Ignorance?

The following section situates Cyril's 'theology of ignorance' within the broader patristic tradition.³⁷²

4.1.a. Tradition and Terminology

The theme of ignorance appears in the New Testament: Luke writes, 'The times of ignorance God overlooked, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent' (Acts 17.30), and Paul describes sinful humanity as, 'darkened in their understanding, alienated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them, due to the hardness of their heart. (Eph.

³⁷² Hill notes deception as a recurring theme in Cyril, though I have found no sustained study of its role in Cyril's exegetical method. Hill, *Twelve Prophets*, on Hos. 6.5, p. 141 n 7.

4.17). Earlier, I noted brief glimpses of Cyril's view of ignorance, which echo aspects of Fathers whose conceptions ranged within a narrow spectrum from intellectual insensibility and lack of self-discipline to a more ontologically grave spiritual condition marked by moral blindness and estrangement from divine truth.³⁷³ This brief survey maps the semantic range of ignorance in the tradition so that Cyril's usage can be read with greater precision rather than as a single undifferentiated charge.

I begin with Ignatius, who, though not using the term 'ignorance' directly, implies in *Eph*. That turning away from the Church's orthodox teachings is a kind of ignorance rooted in the rejection of Christ. He warns, 'Be not deceived with strange doctrines, nor with old fables, which are unprofitable,' showing that ignorance arises from resisting apostolic truth. His concern is practical: it disrupts communion with God through the Church, rather than posing a metaphysical barrier to vision.³⁷⁴ Ignorance, then, is the antithesis of the knowledge of God. Both Ignatius and Tertullian regard it chiefly as a moral failure arising from the refusal to embrace orthodox doctrine.³⁷⁵

Cyril's predecessor, Clement, writing within a Hellenic context in the *Stromata*, describes *agnosia* less as the sheer absence of knowledge than as a failure to employ the faculties of faith and reason in attaining the knowledge of God.³⁷⁶ Eric Osborn posits that Clement has a less visceral view of ignorance, seeing it as a somewhat neutral, unenlightened condition characteristic of humanity's 'primal' state. The ascent from this condition is effected

³⁷³ As Young observes, the Fathers consistently framed human limitations like ignorance in moral terms more than simply intellectual. Young, *Biblical Exegesis*, pp. 139-141.

³⁷⁴ In *Eph*. 4.1, see *AF*, vol. II, p. 47. Eric Osborn, *The Emergence of Christian Theology* (1993), pp. 34-36, Ignatius prioritizes unity over intellectual speculation, framing ignorance as a pastoral issue.

³⁷⁵ Ibid. Echoing Ignatius., Tertullian in *Praescr. haer.* 3 writes, '... ignorance of God is the root of all error.' *ANF*, III, p. 246. Eric Osborn, in *Tertullian: First Theologian of the West* (CUP, 1997), pp. 89-91, reads this as Tertullian's insistence on scriptural clarity over human speculation.

³⁷⁶ Clement, in *Strom.* V.11 observes that gnosis overcomes ignorance, 'Ignorance is the mother of vice [hindering spiritual growth], but knowledge is the parent of virtue,' *ANF*, II, p. 462.

through what Clement calls the *paideia* of Scripture, supported secondarily by philosophy, and completed through ecclesial instruction, which together guide the believer out of ignorance.³⁷⁷

Origen, following Clement but with greater metaphysical complexity, maintains that ignorance stems from the pre-existent soul's fall from the vision of God. He writes that 'the mind, through ignorance, fell into the depths,' suggesting that ignorance inhibits the soul's return to divine unity. As a universalist, he likely views ignorance as a temporary condition, ultimately overcome in the final restoration (*apokatastasis*).³⁷⁸ As Mark Edwards notes, Origen characterizes ignorance as a voluntary turning away from God's light, making it antecedent to sin, and therefore morally culpable. It can only be overcome through ascetic and intellectual striving.³⁷⁹ So with both of these Fathers, ignorance is akin to an existential state from which one may be progressively delivered through divine enlightenment.

Departing from the Alexandrians, St. Augustine and the Cappadocians establish a more direct link between ignorance and sin, as well as humanity's post-fall degradation.³⁸⁰ In Augustine's view, sin has two roots, *ignorantia* and *infirmitas* (weakness). The rebellion of Adam and Eve inaugurates this root, with their sin less of an epistemic failure but more intentional. They *preferred* the deception of Satan over the wisdom of God; therefore, humanity's intellectual and moral deformity is compromised by ignorance.³⁸¹ He describes

³⁷⁷ Eric Osborn, *Clement of Alexandria* (CUP, 2005), pp. 178-180.

³⁷⁸ Origen, *De princ.* II.9.6. *ANF*, IV, p. 292.

³⁷⁹ Mark J. Edwards, 'Origen Against Plato', *Ashgate Studies in Philosophy & Theology in Late Antiquity*. (Ashgate, 2002), p. 87, 121.

³⁸⁰ Aug., *Conf.* VII.7, trans. by Henry Chadwick (OUP, 1991); Bas., in *De Spir. Sanct.* 18.44.; 'Ignorance (ἀγνοία) of the Spirit leads to blasphemy', Greg. Naz. *Or.* 31.25 (*Or. Theol.* V): 'We know in part, and our ignorance is greater than our knowledge,' implies ignorance arises from rejecting the Spirit's illumination.

³⁸¹ *Comm. Jo.* on Jo. 3.20. (PG 73, 231). James Wetzel, in *Augustine and the Limits of Virtue* (CUP, 1992), pp. 134–136, argues that Augustine views ignorance as a moral failing rather than merely intellectual, in contrast with Gregory's apophatic approach.

ignorance as blindness of the soul, writing, ‘I was ignorant of what I sought... blinded by my own darkness,’ portraying ignorance as a barrier to seeing God, yet remedied by grace.³⁸²

Due to the breadth of their writings, I can offer only a summary of the Cappadocians’ thought. They are central figures in the development of apophatic theology, which distinguishes between the divine *ousia* and the *energeiai*. In *Life of Moses*, Gregory of Nyssa presents ignorance (ἀγνοία) in a paradoxical light, treating it not as a deficiency but as a positive recognition of the limits of human reason before the infinite reality of God. Though he affirms human rationality as a divine gift, Gregory maintains that ‘true vision and true knowledge...consists in not seeing, in an awareness that our goal transcends all knowledge.’³⁸³ In other words, writes Gregory Nazianzus, there are limits to the rational faculty which can tell us *that* God is, but not *what* he is; thus, knowledge proceeds by way of negation. Drawing on 1 Cor. 13.12 (‘For now we see through a glass darkly’), Gregory of Nyssa portrays ignorance as the necessary condition for the soul’s perpetual ascent (ἐπέκτασις) in the knowledge of God. This ascent is not achieved by intellectual mastery, but through humility in the face of divine incomprehensibility, ultimately culminating in union with God (theosis).³⁸⁴ I include this apophatic usage to mark a limit: Cyril’s ‘ignorance’ is not the reverent recognition of incomprehensibility, but a culpable darkness that obstructs recognition of Christ.

Only Chrysostom exceeds Cyril’s references to ignorance, with both standing atop the TLG canon in volume, with Chrysostom at 684 references to Cyril’s 488. Chrysostom uses the

³⁸² Aug., in *De Civ. Dei* XXII.29, where ignorance ends with the beatific vision and the soul attains ultimate clarity. See *NPNF*, I, p. 108, and II, p. 500.

³⁸³ Greg. Naz., *Or.* 28 36, 32C, 37; Greg. Nyss., *V. Mos.*, II.163; cf. Bas. *De Spir. Sanct.* (*NPNF*, VIII, p. 27); Greg. Naz., *Or.* (*NPNF*, VII, p. 324). Morwenna Ludlow. *The Cappadocians* (SVS Press, 1995), pp. 89-92, tie their views to a shared apophatic tradition.

³⁸⁴ Morwenna Ludlow, in *Gregory of Nyssa: Ancient and (Post)modern* (Oxford, 2007), pp. 202-203, interprets this as Gregory’s ‘dazzling darkness,’ where ignorance is a stage rather than the ultimate impediment. See also eadem, *Universal Salvation: Eschatology in the Thought of Gregory of Nyssa and Karl Rahner* (Oxford, 2000), pp. 45-47, where she links Origen’s view with Gregory’s, while noting their different emphases on eternal progress.

more intensified lemma (*ἄνοια*) 425 times, and far more than the other four terms I researched. However, there is some overlap in their meanings.³⁸⁵ Both he and Cyril share a forceful tone, admonishing readers to orient their minds toward Christ. Chrysostom's homilies, however, appear to treat ignorance as a failure rooted in hard-heartedness that requires repentance, reliance on the grace of the Spirit, and correction in behavior. In other words, man's culpability is due to his voluntary blindness, with the deficiency being more ethical than ontological. 'The world knew Him not...not from inability, but from unwillingness to receive light,' and '[t]hey are ignorant who seek riches over God...this is not from nature, but from their own choice and sloth.'³⁸⁶ In light of his strict asceticism—and lofty view of priests, virgins, and monks—his references to ignorance are not surprising when virtue appears to be an essential component of his anthropology and soteriology. There is a tension in Chrysostom between relying on the grace of the Holy Spirit and situating the remedy for ignorance in the agency of the believer.

What do we learn from this survey of the tradition? Frances Young observes that, in general, the Fathers understood Scripture as addressing 'the human condition in its alienation from God,' implying, though not stating outright, that ignorance belongs among the consequences of humanity's fall.³⁸⁷ Their accounts differ, yet they share a conviction that

³⁸⁵ Searches in TLG on (26 February 2025) showed 488 references to ignorance in Cyril's corpus and 684 in Chrysostom's. Four principal lemmata emerge. First, the lemma *ἀμαθία*, *-ας, ἡ* is found 282 times in Cyril, but is unattested in earlier Fathers. It denotes willful blindness, stupidity, sin, or courtesy. Second, *ἄγνοια*, *-ας, ἡ* appears 125 times in Cyril (second only to Chrysostom's 259), with the sense of feigned ignorance, a lack of perception, or failure to know. It is also used by Theodoret, Origen, and Maximus the Blind. Third, *ἄνοια*, *-ας, ἡ* dominates Chrysostom's usage (425 times) compared with 38 in Cyril and denotes extreme folly. The gloss in LSJ shows 'a great fool' or 'exceptional degree of folly'. Bauer adds the sense of error of false teachers. Cyril's emphatic use of the relative adjective *δυσμαθής* parallels this term. Other prominent users include Theodoret (89 times), Gregory Nyssa, Epiphanius, and Gregory Palamas. Fourth, *ἀπαιδευσία*, *-ας, ἡ*, is most frequent in Cyril (43 times). While LSJ gives the primary meaning as 'want of education', Cyril often employs the secondary senses: 'stupid', 'boorishness', and 'coarseness' as synonyms of ignorance, reflecting lack of receptivity, carnal thinking, and mental passivity. This term also appears in Isidor, Ephrem, Origen, Gregory Nazianzus, and Theodoret. Notably, in *Comm. Jo. on Jo. 4.22* (PG 73, 274.17–21), Cyril uses three of these four lemmata within five lines to highlight the varieties of ignorance shared by the Samaritans and Jews.

³⁸⁶ John Chrysostom, *Hom. 8 on Jo. 1.10-11* (NPNF, XIV, p. 27), and *Hom. on Matt. 6.24–34* (NPNF X, p. 138). See also *Hom. 2* and *13* available at *New Advent*.

³⁸⁷ Young, *Biblical Exegesis*, pp. 139–141, cf. p. 49, where she notes that the Fathers view human wisdom apart from God as insufficient.

ignorance cannot be reduced to a mere absence of information; it is a disorder of the mind and will that finds its remedy in Christ's redemption and the illumining work of the Holy Spirit.

4.1.b. What Does Cyril Mean by Ignorance?

Because his denunciations reflect centuries of Greek and Christian antipathy toward Judaism, his remarks about ignorance can be seen as nothing more than hostile rhetoric lacking Christological significance. I argue, however, that beyond the fact that he and John Chrysostom surpass all Greek authors in the number of references to ignorance, Cyril's engagement with the concept is far from incidental; rather, it often functions as an integral feature of his Christological framework. My aim is therefore to interpret his language of ignorance as both a diagnostic tool and methodological feature.

Beyond his theological precision in the Christological controversies, Cyril is perhaps more than any other Father known for his scorn for unbelieving Jews, pagans, and heretics. On one hand, we can see *why* he is motivated to use forceful language: it reflects the pressures on the Churches in Alexandria as believers are regularly tempted to return to their former way of life—a concern that fuels his exhortations to embrace the evangelical way of life in Christ. The tension is intensified by the reality of apostasy within the Church. These pastoral and doctrinal factors surely account for the severity in his polemics, yet they do not fully exhaust their purpose. In what ways do Cyril's views echo or diverge from his predecessors, and what can we glean theologically from his recurring use of the theme? The passage below from his *Comm. Jo.* will introduce the discussion. It reflects Cyril's frequent linking of ignorance to his Christological formulations. The passage is representative in that it couples harsh diagnosis with Christological Trinitarian claims so that 'ignorance' functions as a way of staging the necessity of the Incarnate Son's revelatory work:

The Evangelist intensifies his plea that the world did not recognize who it was that was bringing it light, that is, the Only-begotten, and beginning with the more serious sin of the people of Israel, not only firmly establishes the crimes

of the Gentiles but also demonstrates the disease of ignorance ($\delta\sigmaμαθείας$) and unbelief that had come to affect the whole world...no wonder that the world did not recognize ($\epsilon\gammaνω$) the Only-begotten, seeing that it had abandoned the understanding ($\sigmaυνέσεως$) that befits human beings, and 'not knowing ($οὐκ εἰδώς$) that it is and was made in honour, had become like the dumb beasts', as the Psalmist said.³⁸⁸

Cyril's harsh rhetoric is ethically troubling by modern standards—it is neither neutral nor benign—yet theological truth can still be conveyed through it, for example, in his use of the term 'dumb beast' which is intentionally charged. It is important to note that he is not making an ontological ascription but using rhetoric that is both functional and diagnostic. His comment is situated within a pedagogical strategy aimed at moral and intellectual shock, intended to expose, as Cyril understands them, the cognitive and spiritual consequences of doctrinal error. In this case, he is punctuating the claim that by rejecting the divine Son, Jews and heretics forfeit the gift of divine knowledge. This forfeiture is depicted through imagery meant to convey the severe diminishment of human nobility.³⁸⁹ The rhetoric ultimately serves to profile the eternally divine nature of the unbegotten Son, who is Light from Light, and who became Incarnate to rescue humanity from corruption. Through the Incarnation, the Son enables human beings to apprehend and articulate faith, repeatedly cleansing them of sin and spiritual blindness, thereby granting them knowledge of the Father within the sacramental life of the Church.³⁹⁰ Rejection of the Son constitutes not only doctrinal error but a desecration of the dignity conferred upon humanity.³⁹¹ Cyril's rebuke draws together Christological and Trinitarian claims, all used to expose and counter the deceptions that foster noetic darkness and

³⁸⁸ *Comm. Jo.* on Jo. 1.9 (Pusey I, 130.8-144.9); cf. Ps 48.13, 'Ὥ τῆς ἀνοίας...ό κόσμος οὐκ ἔγνω'; Jo. 17.25 (Pusey III, 10.21-24).

³⁸⁹ Is. 14.20-21: alongside Israel's ignorance, Cyril identifies Arian, Eunomian, Apollinarian, and later Nestorian heresies as internal distortions that obscure the knowledge of Christ. Their claims, he argues, make salvation impossible. In reply, he defends the consubstantial unity of Son and Spirit with the Father and rejects subordinationist or tritheistic views as 'godless ignorance.' Jo. 1.13 (Pusey I, 136) Maxwell, *John*, 1, p. 60.

³⁹⁰ *Comm. Jo.* on Jo. 1.1 (PG 73, 69-72); cf. Jo. 1.18. (PG 73, 161-64): 'By becoming man, the Only-begotten has granted us adoption as sons and the knowledge of divine nature.'

³⁹¹ *Comm. Jo.* on Jo. 12.29 (Pusey II, 321): the *communicatio idiomatum* does not apply between the two natures, or between the Word and human nature.

ignorance within the Church. For Cyril, two theological convictions remain inseparably joined: first, as the image of the invisible God, only the Incarnate Son reveals the Father through the Spirit; and second, because this revelation renders knowledge of God possible, humanity is made accountable for receiving it.

Cyril's application of the concept of ignorance has flexibility. He adapts the meaning and rhetorical emphasis based on the culpable subject and the Christological priority he intends to shape. In the larger context of the following pericope, he anchors one of his central themes: worshiping Christ in spirit and truth. A close reading shows how he distinguishes between two types of people he considers 'unlearned':

Christ reveals himself not to untaught ($\alpha\piαιδεύτοις$) or completely unlearned ($\alpha\muαθέσι παντελῶς$) souls, but he shines forth and appears to those souls who are already more prepared to want to learn and who, giving birth to the beginning of faith in simple words, hasten on toward the knowledge ($\gammaνῶσιν$) of the more perfect.³⁹²

This passage shows multiple key distinctions. For Cyril, not all forms of being unlearned merit blame. For example, those in an early, receptive yet unfamiliar stage of formation who are preparing to receive truth. This is exemplified in John 4 with the Samaritan woman, whose simple faith becomes a seedbed for more perfect knowledge.³⁹³ Cyril's nuance lies in his ability to distinguish degrees of ignorance according to spiritual disposition.

Also, notice that the groups of the unlearned are initially lacking in understanding, yet only one of them is given access to Christ's self-revelation. Again, a key difference for Cyril lies in disposition: one group remains hardened and resistant, while the other is inclined to seek truth. Cyril's Nicene theology reinforces this distinction. First, only the consubstantial Son through the Spirit can illumine the human mind with divine knowledge. Second, Christ bestows

³⁹² *Comm. Jo.* on Jo. 4.26 (PG 73, 285D–288A).

³⁹³ *Ibid.*, Jo. 4.23 (73.285A-C) Though the Samaritan woman misunderstands Christ three times, Cyril notes that her mind is not far from the truth, as she 'applies it more coarsely' yet preserves messianic expectation (Jo. 4.25–26). 'Inquiry is the beginning of learning, and a question is the root of understanding for the ignorant.'

this revelation as a gift to those disposed toward understanding. Although they possess what Cyril elsewhere calls ‘coarse reasoning,’ their willingness to pursue truth renders them capable of receiving divine instruction.

Cyril’s distinctions surrounding the ‘unlearned’ serve to redefine the supposed wisdom of Israel’s religious teachers. Though skilled in rabbinic study, they are judged as spiritually disqualified due to their obstinate blindness and opposition to Christ. Cyril contends that they ‘teach with mere words and no knowledge,’ and consequently, ‘they *cannot love*.’³⁹⁴ This is not innocuous. In his view, ignorance and lovelessness are bound together, since instruction detached from Christ loses all transformative and ethical power. Thus, a polemical slight reflects the theological significance of divine knowledge and love existing only through union with Christ in the mystagogical life of the Church. Therefore, Cyril’s treatment of ignorance operates at both the moral and noetic levels and serves as a key Christological and pastoral distinction.

Since the Mosaic Law did not remedy the consequences of the fall, Cyril frames ignorance as rooted in humanity’s unredeemed, Spirit-less condition. Yet he carefully preserves human freedom, insisting that moral responsibility remains intact, and that unbelief is a choice with consequences. Although this topic is treated more fully elsewhere in this study, a brief comment here is appropriate given its relevance to the discussion.³⁹⁵

Where there is hearing and learning and benefit of instruction, there is faith, by persuasion, that is, and not by force. The knowledge of Christ is given by the Father to the worthy as an aid out of love rather than by force. That is because the word of doctrine requires that free will and free choice be preserved in the human soul, that it may ask for the just rewards of its good deeds, or if it falls from what is right and heedlessly transgresses the decree of the lawgiver, that it may receive the most reasonable punishment.³⁹⁶

³⁹⁴ Ibid., Jo. 8:55 (PG 73, 785B–788A) (italics mine).

³⁹⁵ For a fuller discussion on the will, see § 2.1.b., on free will and sacramental renewal of the will, § 3.1.c., for the will and justification, and § 4.1.c., for disordered dispositions that impair the renewing of the mind.

³⁹⁶ *Comm. Jo.* on Jo. 6.45 (73, 508): rationality is nonetheless prone to hardening, even when a person believes they are pursuing the good.

This passage illustrates Cyril's view that grace and knowledge are not coerced, but gifts of the Spirit, received through faith and presupposing a free and responsive will. This theological anthropology helps explain the pedagogical rationale behind Cyril's appeals and the warnings that permeate his writings.³⁹⁷ Rhetoric serves to summon response, expose resistance, and train perception rather than to compel assent. Accordingly, the sharpest edge of Cyril's critiques is directed toward unbelieving Jews who, as the chosen people of God, are portrayed as having squandered their inheritance by rejecting the Incarnate Son and thereby rendering themselves subject to greater punishment.³⁹⁸ Heretics and false teachers follow closely, frequently described as 'unlearned' (*ἀγνοησατ*), while Greeks and other Gentiles are depicted as intellectually impaired through idolatry, their stupidity (*ἀπαιδευσίαν*) betraying minds shaped by 'the spirit of the prince of this world.'³⁹⁹ Cyril in turn gathers this rhetorical cluster under the figure of Satan himself, whom he names 'that wicked and God-hating beast', 'utterly ignorant' (*ἀγνοήσαντί παντελῶς*), and the agent of the soul's destruction.⁴⁰⁰

4.1.c. Disordered Dispositions

If Cyril aims to fight heresy while fostering understanding and a desire to reflect on the mystery of Christ, then which aspects of 'ignorance' does Cyril identify as most perilous to faith and contemplation? I identify three main areas behind Cyril's repeated critiques: uncritical thinking, *a priori* resistance, and carnality. Each aligns with an opposing virtue or mental habit, which, while not always clearly stated by Cyril, is implied.⁴⁰¹ These are not separate themes

³⁹⁷ Ibid., Jo. 4.22, (PG, 73.281), where Cyril urges zealous recourse to Scripture for every disputed question.

³⁹⁸ There are cultural and ecclesial contexts which contribute, Wilken, *Early Christian Mind*, p. 69. Cyril's theological imagination was gripped by Matt. 5.17-18 and Jo. 4.23-24 and that his extreme rhetoric reflects Post-Constantinian tensions between Judaism and Christianity over biblical interpretation and the legacies of the past. Cf. O'Keefe, *Festal Letters 1-12*, pp. 20-21.

³⁹⁹ *Comm. Jo.* on Jo. 1.3, (73, 65) also in Jo. 6.24 (PG 73, 433); Maxwell, *John*, I p. 421 adds 'disease' to convey the affliction described in φρενὸς δὲ τοῦτο νόσημα ψυχὴν as 'coldhearted disease of the mind and soul'.

⁴⁰⁰ Ibid., on Jo. 13.29 (73, 373); cf. Gen. 2.7.

⁴⁰¹ Hans van Loon, *Virtue in Cyril of Alexandria's Festal Letters*, pp. 237-248.

but interlocking dispositions: each names a recurring obstruction to perceiving Christ rightly in Scripture, worship, and doctrine.

Uncritical Thinking, or Passivity

While most of his criticism targets post-Incarnation Israel, he also holds pre-Incarnation Israel responsible for failing to reflect on the Law's deeper meaning. However, he stops short of blaming them for not grasping a revelation that has not yet been given.⁴⁰² He contends that the Law was meant as a lamp guiding Israel toward truer worship to come, not as an end in itself.⁴⁰³ Judah's self-righteousness, he argues, arose from an inability, or unwillingness, to see the Law's pedagogical purpose: preparing them for the mystery of Christ hidden within its types and figures.

The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from your brethren; listen to all he says to you.' So, listen to the word of the Lord, heed the Law of God—that is, understand in your case as well the force of the Gospel oracles. Moses gave this direction, being a guide to Christ, and the fulfilment of the oracles of the Law has reference to the mystery about him.⁴⁰⁴

Here we see an example of intellectual passivity. For Cyril, the directive from Moses about the prophet God would raise up—that is, Christ—*ought* to have compelled Israel's leaders to investigate further. Their failure to do so reflects a weakness of the will.⁴⁰⁵ His critiques function pedagogically, shaping his audience's minds by exposing Israel's errors within a rhetorical framework intended to persuade them not to repeat those mistakes, but to discipline their minds to probe more deeply into the meaning and implications of biblical truth.

⁴⁰² After the Incarnation, they refused to believe, even though the Law proclaimed the mystery and bore witness to Christ, who taught that belief in Moses should have led them to faith in him. (Is.1.22-23; Jo. 5.45).

⁴⁰³ *Comm. Jo* on Jo. 3.22-24 (Pusey I, 233); cf Heb 10.1 ‘...the Law of Moses is said to have a shadow of the good things to come...since the Mosaic letter is a... pre-catechesis of worship in the Spirit...’.

⁴⁰⁴ *Comm. Is.* on Is. 1.10-14 (PG 70, 161–68); cf. Deut. 18.15. Clem. Rom. and Greg. Nyss. also preached this text similarly to Cyril, though unlike them, he does not appeal to Ezek. 36.25–27.

⁴⁰⁵ Cf. § 2.1.b., n 102, for Cyril's discussion on free will, the sacramentally renewed mind, and his rejection of total depravity to uphold human responsibility; and § 3.1.c for elaborating on baptismal cleansing from errors.

What dispositions does Cyril identify as contributing to Israel's failure to perceive the deeper mystery embedded in the Law?

First, he attributes their lack of engagement to mental listlessness, reflected in their inability (μὴ...εὐσθενὲς) to sustain the intellectual and spiritual resilience required to obey God. Because 'the mind of those under guidance was weak,' they had to be led by the types and shadows of the Law's sacrificial system.⁴⁰⁶ Second, this instability of will exposes them to distorted ideas of righteousness.⁴⁰⁷ Their reluctance to look beyond the surface fostered a collective self-deception that merely possessing and quoting the Law was sufficient.⁴⁰⁸ Third, and most decisive, was the profundity of the hidden contemplations in the 'words enigmatically spoken by Moses.' Cyril ties their lack of understanding to an absence of wonder or genuine inquiry, so that Scripture's silhouette of Christ 'escaped the mind of the *unprobing* hearers.'⁴⁰⁹

So, there was no *wise architect* (σοφὸς ἀρχιτέκτων) among the Jews. Nor was there an *intelligent listener* (συνετὸς ἀκροατὴς), whom we conclude to be someone with spiritual discernment capable of determining who is speaking with God's spirit, and who in turn, through Beelzebul. There were many ideas held by many people, in fact, that offered doctrinal explanation and proposed a treatment of probity in behavior; but on the one hand, some lacked understanding and learning and indiscriminately accepted what they were told without examination, despite its lack of any value, and its capacity instead to cause great harm. The *intelligent listener*, on the other hand, like an expert banker, accepts what is likely to be of value but rejects as counterfeit what has none. Blessed Paul said something to this effect, 'Be prudent bankers, test everything, hold fast to what is good, abstain from every form of evil.'⁴¹⁰

⁴⁰⁶ In *Glaph.* III (PG 69, 136.50), Lunn translates that Israel 'lacked strength (μὴ...εὐσθενὲς) to fully obey.' A better rendering, following LSJ, is 'lacking firmness' or 'resolve', so as not to imply physical weakness.

⁴⁰⁷ Cf. Gen. 2.7, where free will allows man to still elect evil. Man images God insofar as he chooses to exercise virtue. See *Comm. Jo.* on Jo. 3.18 (Pusey I, 358). Also, man cannot be compelled, Jo. 6.40-41, 44-45 (Pusey I, 499-500, 506-07) and *Comm. Is.* on 1.19-20 (PG 70, 48-49). Cyril links sacramental participation to renewed willing (see baptism, §2.1.b-3 and Eucharist §2.2b and the interplay of divine grace and human cooperation).

⁴⁰⁸ *Comm. Is.* on Is. 29.13 (70, 656).

⁴⁰⁹ *Comm. Jo.* on Jo. 1.18 (Pusey I, 375); riddle/enigma (αἰνιγμα), and here Cyril discusses the hiddenness of divine realities (κεκρυμμένων θεωριμάτων) and the superficial mind that rushes past what it only half-heard, instead of probing (τὸν τῶν ἀζητήτως ἐπακριωμένων παριπεύοντα νοῦν).

⁴¹⁰ *Comm. Is.* on Is. 3.1-4 (PG 70, 101.11-28); cf. 1 Thess 5:21. Italics are Cyril's quotes from the text. Hill, *Isaiah*, vol. 1, pp. 86-87.

Cyril's rhetorical strategy is evident in his directive to the faithful to resist passivity as listeners. His use of contrastive language aims to persuade his readers to actively engage with the Church's teachings and approach them with more disciplined theological attentiveness. He grounds this exhortation in a Christological claim that true discernment and spiritual strength are impossible apart from faith in Christ as both fully divine and fully human. Developing his argument through antithesis, Cyril portrays the Jews as lacking strength, for their recitation of the Law, divorced from union with Christ, renders them vulnerable to uncleanness and demonic deception. Despite their familiarity with Scripture, they remained, in his words, 'bereft of all understanding.'⁴¹¹ By contrast, he presents the remedy as contemplation and Eucharistic partaking of Christ through the Spirit. Christ, the life-giving bread from heaven, nourishes and fortifies believers through his flesh and his word. Because right understanding of Christ's divinizing flesh in the Eucharist is theologically decisive, Cyril exhorts his audience to resist intellectual complacency and to measure teaching against Scripture, liturgical practice, and the doctrinal boundaries of orthodoxy.

This passage illustrates the pattern I have argued is key to Cyril's method. First, he identifies noetic deficiencies in his opponents not only to refute error but also to build the scaffolding of his Christology. The theological priority here is the integrity of the Son's divinity, and the pedagogical point is that this truth cannot be grasped apart from faith in the Incarnate Word. Unlike other texts that stress moral or spiritual failure, this one highlights the epistemic consequences of doctrinal error.

Second, Cyril's diagnosis of noetic deficiency also serves a rhetorical purpose, alerting his audience to the dangers of deception and mental complacency while instilling the content of correct doctrine in their minds. As I develop more fully in Part Two, Cyril presents Paul as the model teacher, one who strengthens believers through sound doctrine and cultivates

⁴¹¹ Cf. Rom. 2.28–29.

discernment and maturity. By contrast, Jewish and heretical teachers corrupt the true meaning of Scripture in ways that undermine sound discernment. Hearers must refuse passive acceptance and cultivate theological vigilance.⁴¹² Cyril insists that teachers transmit ‘precise knowledge of what is beneficial,’ that is, teachings rooted in Nicene theology. He praises the disciplined mind as ‘truly fitting for the saints that they may be found to be of sober and admirable reasoning.’⁴¹³ For Cyril, rationality is the defining trait of human nature and the very ground of the believer’s obligation to pursue truth. For this reason, both teachers and hearers bear responsibility for forming habits that lead to the correct (orthodox) understanding of Scripture and safeguard against noetic stagnation.

Where passivity names a failure to attend and test what is heard, the next disposition names an active refusal of truth even when confronted by it.

A Priori Resistance

This section describes the intentional disregard of all opposing evidence by unbelieving Jews. Cyril’s commentaries are filled with this language as he remarks on their rejection of Christ. Below, he gives a vivid description of this mindset.

But whenever anything surpasses the unpracticed and obstinate mind⁴¹⁴, that is most assuredly what it rages against with its unbelief. It shuns anything that prevails over it as though it were something fraudulent, ascending from uneducated brashness⁴¹⁵ to ultimate contempt. That which is unwilling to give way to anyone, after all, or to think that anything is greater than itself—how would it not in the end fit the description we have just given? We will find...that the Jews too fell into this disorder. They should have had no problem accepting the words of the Savior, since they had already marveled many times before at his God-begetting power and incontestable authority over all things. And they

⁴¹² *Comm. Jo.* on Jo. 1.18 (PG 73, 375; Pusey I, 375); cf. *Comm. Is.* on Is. 3.9–11 (PG 70, 533-36) Cyril cautions against uncritical acceptance of teaching; also *Ador.* I (PG 68, 148C-149A), *Glaoph.* in *Exod.* II (PG 69, 432), and *EF.* II.5 (PG 7, 437C), where Cyril exhorts his audience to theological vigilance over passivity.

⁴¹³ *Ibid.*, on Jo. 6.68 (73, 563); Maxwell, *John*, I, p. 258.

⁴¹⁴ Cyril describes the mind as ἀτριβής (‘unpracticed’) and ἀχειραγώγητος (PGL, obstinate; refusing to be led; LSJ, ‘untamed’). Maxwell sees ‘uninstructed’, but the Greek carries a more visceral sense of resistance..

⁴¹⁵ Gr. ἀπαιδεύτου θράσους.

should be eager to search⁴¹⁶ the matters that were hard to understand and should have sought instruction⁴¹⁷ in those matters that irritated them. But instead, they ignorantly⁴¹⁸ ask ‘How?’ concerning God, as though they did not know that this...is full of blasphemy...since they are unspiritual, as the blessed Paul says, they do not receive ‘the things of the Spirit of God,’ but so august a mystery is found to be foolishness to them.⁴¹⁹

Cyril’s intensity reflects his deep frustration with what he perceives as the Jews’ misreading of Scripture, a misreading that, in his view, blinds them to the mystery it contains. While God foretells from his knowledge of future hidden events, the Jews’ malice blinded them from opening the eye of their mind to see or hear for conversion, which would have kept their minds safe and secure. The passage’s context centers on Christ’s declarations: he is from God; he has seen the Father; whoever believes in him has eternal life; and he is the living bread from heaven offered to those willing to partake of his flesh. Cyril’s exegesis ruminates on these affirmations, often repeating key phrases to draw out the layered pro-Nicene implications of Christ’s divine origin, which implies his consubstantiality with the Father, and his sovereign authority over life and death.

Cyril frequently injects his exegesis with noetic remarks, unsurprising given John’s depiction of the audience’s hostile reactions to Christ and even to one other.⁴²⁰ Yet, Cyril’s concern for orthodoxy is consistently paired with accountability.

Christ instructed them in so great a [Eucharistic] mystery they could have reasonably avoided punishment by pleading ignorance...but *since they knew and are often instructed in the mystery*, they insult him with their unbelief... On the other hand, though witnesses of such marvels and recipients of words from him, they remained obdurate and unresponsive—or rather, kept no control over their mouths, presuming in their impiety to call him a Samaritan, a drunkard...⁴²¹

⁴¹⁶ Gr. φιλοπευστεῖν - to be fond of inquiry, be curious about (LSJ).

⁴¹⁷ Gr. δυσερίκτοις φιλοπευστεῖν, καὶ παιδεύεσθαι μᾶλλον παρακαλεῖν.

⁴¹⁸ Gr. δυσφημίας – This adj. form suggests emphatic foolishness.

⁴¹⁹ *Comm. Jo. on. Jo. 6.52-53* (PG 73, 525–526). See also *Comm. Is. on Is. 1.2-4; 6.9-10* (PG 70, 185); cf. 7.14; 9.6-7; 28.16; 29.10-11.

⁴²⁰ *Comm. Jo. on Jo. 6.52-53* (73, 524).

⁴²¹ *Ibid., Jo. 6.59* (73, 547) cf. Jo. 15.22). Italics mine.

Cyril constructs his argument not only against Christ's unbelieving audience, but also against those in his own era who display their forebearers' obstinacy. He offers a detailed analysis of Christ's pedagogical method leading up to and including his pivotal self-revelation as the bread of life. This revelation confronts the resistant minds in the crowd, unformed by the truth; 'uninstructed minds' predisposed to hostility, labelling Christ as demonic, drunk, or a profane Gentile.⁴²² Cyril warns that such resistance not only distorts judgment but reinforces their intellectual feebleness and spiritual blindness—as I illustrated in his typological treatment of the Levitical priesthood in Chapter Two. Their refusal to respond to overwhelming evidence, such as miracles, teachings, and the very presence of the Incarnate Word, constitutes wilful rejection.⁴²³ Worse still, Cyril insists, this rejection fulfils the very Scriptures they claim to uphold, further indicting them.

Cyril employs a double tension to shape the minds of his readers. On the one hand, he reinforces Nicene theological priorities so that they may rightly perceive and desire Christ. On the other hand, by referencing Jewish obduracy and its consequences, he offers a cautionary paradigm: failure to orient one's mind toward Christ inevitably leads to a loss of wonder and, ultimately, to darkness. Yet even in his sharpest rebukes, Cyril embeds a remedy. He commends the epistemic posture of the true seeker, captured in the verb meaning 'to love the pursuit of truth' (φιλοπευστέω), a term he uses more frequently than any other author in the TLG corpus. For Cyril, this reflects an *a priori* humility: a readiness of heart and mind marked by intellectual eagerness, sustained focus, and a persistent desire to uncover the mystery of Christ:

The hearers who are truly intelligent store away the more obvious teaching in the treasure chest of their understanding (διανοίας). They research and study with unceasing devotion of divine things (τοῖς τῇ περὶ τὰ θεῖα περινοστίᾳ καὶ σπουδῇ διατελοῦσιν⁴²⁴ to learn those subjects whose meaning seems

⁴²² Ibid., Jo. 6.52-53 (73, 524).

⁴²³ *Comm. Is.* on Is 6.9-10 (PG 70, 252-256), in fulfillment of God telling the prophet that though they would see and hear, they would remain blind and deaf due to the 'malice of their own will.'

⁴²⁴ Gr.: περινοστεῖν (*LSJ* 'examine closely'; 'stalk'; a TLG search (28 February 2025). Cyril often expresses the same idea with φιλοπευστέω, a verb meaning 'diligent investigation. His usage is more extensive than that of any

difficult...and does not the wise and prophetic oracle call us to such a habit, saying, ‘Seeking, seek; and dwell with me’? The seeker must seek, that is, they need to bring a focused enthusiasm to the task and not be distracted⁴²⁵ by fleeting thoughts. The more difficult something is, the sharper the mind⁴²⁶ that is needed to apply themselves, and they must storm the gates of what is hidden with a more vigorous mental approach.⁴²⁷

By pairing ‘research’ (διερευνάω) and ‘study’ (περινοστεῖν) with unceasing devotion, Cyril underscores the importance of both intellectual honesty and consistent focus. He contrasts the Spirit-given illumination with spiritually unaided investigation. He reiterates these principles in an earlier discussion on the proper attitude of the exegete when approaching the biblical text. Cyril cautions both clergy and congregants to ‘approach...the Savior’s words, not carelessly, but with that attentiveness...which befits those who would learn...’⁴²⁸ He goes on to exhort his listeners to humbly, but expectantly and repeatedly, ask of Christ, who enables the ‘simple of mind and heart’ to understand. This idea of devoted seeking is rewarded by the Holy Spirit, who both illumines truth and strengthens the mind, which supports the idea that Cyril subscribes to movement or a dynamism in his theological ontology, which allows for saved or ‘Spirit-less’ unbelieving faculties to either progress in strength or grow increasingly feeble or stiff-necked.

They twisted the truth about him into the semblance of a crime, when the Savior of all called himself the Son of God and Father, revealed the shadow of the Law to be of no substance, and provided the beauty of worship in spirit, they persecuted him for *not only breaking the Sabbath* but calling God his own Father, thereby making himself equal with God. So, the text says *those murmuring will learn to hearken, and the babbling tongues will learn to speak peace*; in other words, the tongues of those in the habit of misrepresenting Christ *babbled*, but they will learn to represent him properly and give utterance to peace, not returning to their original folly, but submitting the neck of their mind

other ancient author, with roughly half of its occurrences in *Comm. Jo*. The term is not always positive, as in ‘carnal or foolish eagerness’ (Jo. 6.22) or ‘malicious, presumptuous curiosity’ (Jo. 8.25).

⁴²⁵ Gr: ἀπονοσφίζομαι (*PGL*: ‘embezzle’, ‘hold aloof’, *LSJ*: ‘bereaved’, ‘robbed of’).

⁴²⁶ Gr: προσέχοξυτέρῳ (*PGL*: ‘clear-sighted’, ‘keen’).

⁴²⁷ *Comm. Jo* on Jo. 7.39 (73, 525); cf. Is. 21.12 . cf. *LSJ* on the last clause, ἐνθύμημα: ‘sense’, or ‘meaning’.

⁴²⁸ *Lc.* 7.24-28 *Hom.* 38, Smith, *Luke*, p. 161.

to him. Now, anyone who speaks peace to Jesus, if he says, ‘Lord our God, take possession of us, we know no one else but you, we call on your name.⁴²⁹

Having discussed the virtue of humility in the context of seeking truth, I close this section with another antidote for the weakness of scorning truth: namely, humility to receive Christ’s peace. The expression ‘submit the neck of their mind’ is obscure, but the idea suggests a movement from obstinate rejection to intellectual and spiritual humility. In his exegesis of Isaiah 29, Cyril summarizes Israel’s place in the divine economy, showing that their inability to receive the things of God is due to their rejection, albeit temporary. God’s faithfulness to them as His chosen people anticipates the promised eschatological peace when Christ will reconcile even the most scornful and rebellious of the Jews.⁴³⁰ Only the transforming power of Christ will upend the *a priori* resistant posture of the Jews to their submission to divine truth. Their hope will culminate in reverencing Christ’s name and living in peace under his eternal authority and reign.

If the prior section concerns the will’s resistance to revelation, the final disposition concerns the downward pull of the flesh that renders the mind incapable of sustaining attention to what is ‘from above.’

Carnality

The passage below is from Cyril’s exegesis of John 6.27. Though lengthy, it is particularly fitting for this discussion as it underscores both the degradation that comes from yielding to the appetites of the flesh and the virtues found in submitting to the Spirit.

[Paul] says that they sow to the flesh who hand over the reins...to the pleasures of the flesh and set out at a run to whatever they want. They make no distinction between what is beneficial to them and what injures and harms them...They are heedlessly dragged away at the mere pleasure of the moment; they prefer nothing to what is seen. By contrast, he maintains that they sow to the Spirit who expend the entire energy of their mind on whatever the Holy Spirit wills

⁴²⁹ *Comm. Is.* on Is. 29:24 (70, 629–29); cf. Is. 26.13. Hill, *Isiah*, vol. 2, pp. 206-207. When the idolatry and deception are undermined, they come ‘to hallow his name’, for the fear of the Lord brings life. (cf. Prov. 14.27).

⁴³⁰ *Ibid.* 29.22-23 (70, 628).

us to excel in, employing so great a concentration on the cultivation of goods that, if a natural...principle had not planted in them care for the necessary nourishment of the flesh, they would never have endured to descend to it. So, it befits us to make no provision... ‘for the pleasures of the flesh,’ but to be...eager to practice whatever raises us to the eternal and divine life. After all, to marvel at the luxuries of the body and consider nothing superior to a full belly is truly brutish and shares in the most extreme lack of reason. But to be devoted to good things, to be *extremely eager* to excel in virtues, to submit to the laws of the Spirit, to seek readily the things of God which are able to supply us on the road to salvation—I will grant that these are truly fitting for those who know their own nature and are not ignorant that they have been created as rational animals in the image of the Creator.⁴³¹

For Cyril, carnality, worldliness, and flesh stand in for ignorance of the mind. Because this mindset is rooted in the demonic realm, it is identified as a disease: one of such darkness that it elicits repeated warnings. The carnal mind is the opposite of heavenly-mindedness, which is cultivated by those who ‘sow to the Spirit, from whom they reap eternal life.’⁴³²

The consequence of nurturing a carnal mind is the inability to discern between what is beneficial and what is harmful. He identifies this failure of judgment as a symptom of the deeper sinful disorder that Christ comes to remedy. Cyril links Christ’s rebuke of self-indulgence to his admonition not to worry about what we eat or drink. The underlying issue, he explains, is the failure to recognize what genuinely benefits the soul (a term interchangeable with ‘mind’) versus what merely sustains the body.⁴³³ For Cyril, the soul holds a higher dignity than the body because the body is meant to be guided by reason. Yet the deception of the enemy is to ‘treat the soul as an afterthought and place no concern for it’, leading people to prefer what is inferior. Thus, when Cyril interprets Christ’s admonition to ‘not work for food that spoils,’ he reads it as affirming reason’s capacity to discipline the body as a form of advocacy

⁴³¹ *Comm. Jo. on Jo. 6.27* (PG 73, 438–39; Maxwell, I, pp. 195–96); cf. Gal. 6.8; Rom. 13.14; Matt. 6.25. Cyril calls it ‘most absurd to provide for the flesh while neglecting the soul’ (PG 73, 439). Cf. Jo. 13.23–26 (PG 73, 367), on protecting the mind free from worldliness; and Jo. 14.11 (PG 73, 452), where indulgence of lust marks the worldly and carnal, who, without the Spirit, divide the Son from the Father (italics mine).

⁴³² Gal. 6.8.

⁴³³ See § 2.1.b. n. 109 for Cyril’s interchangeable use of both soul and rational mind (*σῶμα* and *ψυχή λογική*/voερά).

rather than as punishment, so that both soul and body are continually fortified by the true bread that strengthens reason, which—soteriologically—'preserves a person to eternal life.'⁴³⁴

For those who do not ask for the grace from above to achieve virtue, but for the enjoyment of carnal pleasures and worldly desires, God practically shuts his ears and gives them nothing.⁴³⁵

Such degradation risks increasing carnality, the loss of spiritual perception, and estrangement from God. Cyril writes that Satan's deception is to thwart humans from thinking they ought to be sober-minded, and once defiled, he persuades them to 'shrink from the grace' that would bring them to sobriety.⁴³⁶

...since the human mind is sometimes, through extreme indifference, reduced to forgetfulness of gifts from God to each one, hence a divine communication frequently brings us to recall them, not at all allowing us to lose ardor and become indifferent, but inflaming us with love of God and a desire for every good thing.⁴³⁷

Here, Cyril combats apathy in the Church by directing the clergy to uphold doctrinal instruction and preaching. He emphasizes the pedagogical value of repetition and emotional resonance, requiring them to follow Christ's methods by modeling faith and piety. He exhorts his readers to yield to the Spirit's reign over the soul. As they focus on this, they choose what is superior and walk in holiness and wisdom, exercising right reason for themselves.⁴³⁸

Part One Summary

In this section, I contributed to my argument that Cyril relies on noetic language in his Old Testament interpretations by demonstrating the prominence of the theme of ignorance in his exegetical method, which in turn shapes the minds of his readers as they think about Israel.

⁴³⁴ *Comm. Jo. on Jo. 6.27* (PG 3, 439-440.)

⁴³⁵ *Ibid.*, *Jo. 14.15*, (PG 73, 463).

⁴³⁶ *Ibid.*, *Jo. 6:5* (PG 73, 476).

⁴³⁷ *Comm. Is. on Is. 43.16-17* (PG 70, 948-49).

⁴³⁸ Paul Moser, 'Divine Hiddenness, Agape Conviction and Spiritual Discernment' in *Perceiving Things Divine: Towards a Constructive Account of Spiritual Perception* ed. Paul Gavriliyuk, ed. (OUP, 2022).

By first examining the tradition, I showed that this theme was prominent among Cyril's predecessors, but in Cyril, we observe a more vigorous Christological interpretation of Scripture.

I showed that Cyril's distinctions carry clear theological significance, depicting ignorance as a condition rhetorically presented as enduring insofar as it arises from sinful estrangement from the knowledge of God, yet theologically understood as a moral and mutable state that can intensify and degrade the rational faculties. This distinction clarifies why his denunciations cannot always be reduced to invective: the pathology he names is often ordered to a remedy that is explicitly Christological and ecclesial. His approach emphasizes the concrete, revelatory nature of the Incarnation for human knowledge—while preserving the ineffability of the hypostatic union—rather than focusing on abstract metaphysical concerns or relying on virtuous human agency.⁴³⁹ Throughout these discussions, Cyril consistently includes Nicene theological implications. My final section identified three key aspects of ignorance that hinder his pastoral aims and are therefore frequently mentioned. I paired them with the corresponding habits, which Cyril views as essential to bolstering believers' desire to contemplate the mystery of Christ as they probe the Old Testament's types and shadows.

⁴³⁹ Ibid., Is. 49.1-3 (PG 70, 1040) 'The Son was ineffably sprung from the being that reigns over all.'

Part Two: Shaping Noetic Tensions and the Incarnation

If you do not believe, neither will you understand...understanding will not be granted by Him to people who insult the word of God with unbelief. They ought to immediately accept what comes from God and readily agrees with what He promises. This...is the way for us to achieve a sound understanding and for our minds to be illumined by the light of the wisdom that comes from Him.⁴⁴⁰

Having defined ignorance as a noetic and moral condition, I now turn to how Cyril identifies and addresses it within Scripture through Christological exegesis. In the preceding section, I focused on the terminology, tradition, and habits connected to increasing ignorance; this section examines Cyril's use of ignorance in his method by showing how he shapes the minds of his readers to think about the mystery of Christ within the history of Israel. I demonstrate how ignorance and knowledge are narratively or conceptually paired, following Paul's balanced antitheses to shape his Nicene theological priorities and his readers' imaginations about Christ.⁴⁴¹ What follows is not a formal method Cyril names, but a recurring pattern in which interpretive tension becomes an occasion for diagnosing noetic failure and reiterating a Christological remedy. Cyril's spiritual interpretation often links a tension within the passage to a lack of understanding of a specific truth about Christ.⁴⁴² By identifying noetic deficiencies and the practices that correlate to that deficit, he directs the readers to the remedy in Christ. In this way, Cyril reiterates his pro-Nicene theology while also reinforcing in his readers the necessity of correct understanding and the importance of Christologically focused biblical interpretation.

Method and Structure: Given that Cyril's *Comm Is.* and *Comm Jo.* containing the most references to ignorance in his corpus, I will primarily draw from these works to illustrate his 'noetic tension methodology.' The examples are therefore illustrative rather than exhaustive,

⁴⁴⁰ *Comm. Is.* on Is. 7.8-9 (PG 70, 200); Hill, *Isaiah*, 1, pp. 165-66.

⁴⁴¹ Other antitheses are death to life, slavery to sonship, and corruption to incorruption.

⁴⁴² For Cyril, the text suggests the effects of unbelief on inclinations and motives.

chosen to show how the same diagnostic logic serves distinct Christological priorities under exegetical pressure. They will be organized into three categories related to the Incarnation: Christ's authority, Christ's mission, and Christ's divinity, the last of which compares his interpretation of John 3.1-6 with that of Chrysostom.

4.2.a. Christ's Divine Authority

The first pericope chosen to illustrate this method is from Cyril's extensive commentary on Jesus' healing of the man born blind in John 9.1-41. The gospel account does not explicitly reference ignorance or knowledge, yet throughout this pericope, Cyril crafts a swath of doctrinal affirmations, often relying on noetic tensions to amplify them. Due to space limitations in this subsection, I highlight examples that profile Christ's divine authority not only to heal the man but also to exercise his supremacy and divine judgment.

He compares them to a man 'blind from birth' because they were in error from their origination and from their earliest youth, as it were, they were bereft of the true knowledge of God and did not have the light from God, that is, illumination by the Spirit...sight was restored to the Gentiles...when Christ transferred his mercy to them because of Israel's disobedience. This was what Moses sang of ... 'I will make them jealous with what is no nation, and I will provoke them with a nation that has no understanding.'⁴⁴³

In his discussion, Cyril describes Christ's Incarnation as a judgment that withdraws the mercy once granted to Israel. Now that mercy is gifted to the 'ignorant Gentiles' for their benefit. Here, Cyril links divine mercy and knowledge of God, based on what he describes each group losing or gaining, according to Christ's divine decree. The knowledge the Gentiles acquire at Israel's expense is so central to Cyril's point that I italicize the following possessive pronouns to capture Cyril's emphasis: Christ becomes *their* wisdom and sanctification. He is the Light healing *their* blindness and awakening *them* from ignorance. In contrast, Cyril

⁴⁴³ *Comm. Jo.* on Jo. 9.1 (Pusey II, 135-208), Maxwell, *John* II, pp. 21-55.

portrays Israel's leaders as blind to their own judgment—a blindness reflected in their confusion and irritation when the man is healed..

Cyril further develops this divine authority by shaping a vivid account of noetic contrast into his interpretation of Christ's revelation of his identity to the man. This disclosure signals that the now-seeing Gentile typifies those illumined by the Spirit, now commissioned as 'new' teachers of truth. In contrast, the Jewish leaders, by persisting in the darkness of unbelief, render their influence 'dead in the shadow of the letter.'⁴⁴⁴ Cyril depicts this spiritual decline as stemming from their failure to guard their minds, which has led to a persistent history of rejecting correction. Their stubbornness triggers a chain reaction: jealousy obscures truth and understanding, which in turn hardens their unbelief. This downward spiral, rooted in 'inordinate passions' and 'minds taken over' by the tyranny of their own desires, leads them to insult Christ rather than worship him.⁴⁴⁵

The deeds of the Son of God are...more marvellous than the ministry of Moses...the charge of unbelief is severe and great, since he is the Son and the Only Begotten. The more trustworthy something is, the more one who dishonors it will be condemned for a terrible transgression.⁴⁴⁶

Cyril anchors his interpretation in the affirmation of the Son's consubstantiality with the Father, from which he profiles Christ's authority to execute judgment. To amplify this point, Cyril imports noetic tension. Here, he interprets Christ's declaration that 'light has come into the world' as a pre-Cross real-time judgment, illustrated by the Jewish leaders' unwillingness to interpret Christ's claims correctly.⁴⁴⁷ Within this framework, Cyril accentuates the moral implications of ignorance and knowledge, employing this pericope to deepen his Incarnational

⁴⁴⁴ Ibid., Jo. 9:10 (Pusey II, 160); Jo. 9.28 (Pusey II, 185); 9.39 (Pusey, II, 204).

⁴⁴⁵ Ibid., Jo. 9.34 (Pusey II, 196) cf. Is. 26.11 'jealousy makes [the Jews] an uncorrected people, and are expelled from hope in Christ, while the nations are adopted.' (PG 70.577).

⁴⁴⁶ Ibid., Jo. 3.18 (Pusey I, 229-230).

⁴⁴⁷ cf Is. 26.9 Cyril, following Paul, says believers become 'children of the light' by admitting the divine light into their minds, rejecting deceit, and being enlightened by the gospel oracles. (Cf. Eph 5.8; 1 Thess. 5.5).

theology by affirming Christ's authority to execute pre-eschatological divine justice.⁴⁴⁸ Cyril blames this judgment of the unbelieving Jews on their willful ignorance. By preferring (προκρίνοντες) darkness, they choose to endure the grave consequences of their rejection.⁴⁴⁹

4.2.b. The Son's Incarnate Mission

This following illustration of Cyril's method is from his commentary on Isaiah 49, a passage that occurs within the context of the 'servant songs' of Isaiah, which prophesy a coming Servant who is by nature God Incarnate: 'Now the Lord says this, the one who formed me from the womb to be his servant and to gather Jacob and Israel...' ⁴⁵⁰ The chapter does not explicitly address ignorance or understanding. However, his pro-Nicene theological priorities are accompanied by noetic references, for example, when he urges readers to abandon an irrational life 'suited to cattle' by embracing 'the true light' in their minds.

In 49.1-4, he expounds on the revelation of the Savior, recounting the prophecies related to Emmanuel, all fulfilled in the Incarnation of the eternally existent consubstantial Son. In verse five, Cyril shifts to 'the manner of the emptying,' describing the Incarnation as Christ being fashioned for the service of the Father. Cyril introduces noetic tensions to heighten the significance of the Incarnation's reconciling work and mission:

The inventor of all depravity had driven everyone on earth into all kinds...of sin, leading them to apostatize⁴⁵¹ completely from the creator, causing them to be subject to himself and to the unclean demons, casting on them the yoke of sin that was difficult to dislodge and made it completely impossible for them to know⁴⁵² who is by nature Lord God of all. Those who had the Law of Moses to guide them on their duties on the other hand, he made indifferent and supine⁴⁵³, leading them way into every form of offense, with the result that they paid little

⁴⁴⁸ *Comm. Is.* on Is. 1.19–20 (PG 70, 48-49).

⁴⁴⁹ *Comm. Jo.* on Jo. 3.19 (Pusey 1, 230) Cyril's phrasing is in the active tense, which I reflect in translation: πῶς οὐκ ἀν εἰπεν εἰκότως αὐτοὶ καθ' ἐμνῶν τῶν δεινῶν ὄρισται...εἴπερ ἡσαν ὄρθοὶ τῶν πραγμάτων ἐξετασταὶ. His interpretation also alludes to Israel's eschatological restoration.

⁴⁵⁰ Cyril's quote of Is. 49.5.

⁴⁵¹ Gr.: ἀπέστησεν, 'apostacize', withdraw (twice in the passage); Hill uses 'distracting', Hill, *Isaiah*, p.197.

⁴⁵² Gr.: εἰδέναι (LSJ, 'recognize'; 'acquaint').

⁴⁵³ Gr.: ἥψθύμους (LSJ, 'frivolous'; ἀναπεπτωκότας, LSJ, 'to give ground', 'give up', 'recoil').

heed to the Law and followed their own devices⁴⁵⁴, teaching human doctrines as precepts.⁴⁵⁵ When Christ appeared in the world, however, they were gathered by faith in one, upright, and faultless mindset⁴⁵⁶ after they had been scattered by Satan; those who had formerly withdrawn from love of God made their way to him...are at peace with Christ. And the divinely-inspired disciples also cried aloud, ‘so we are ambassadors for Christ, since God is making his appeal through us; we entreat you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. Now we achieve reconciliation with God when we approach Christ in faith, as Paul in his holiness again says... ‘In Christ God was reconciling the world to himself,’ for it is in Christ that the world is reconciled to God. He therefore makes clear the ministry involved in the Incarnation when he says that he was formed by the Father from the womb to be his servant and to gather Israel and Jacob.⁴⁵⁷

How best to profile the Incarnate Son’s mission? Cyril situates a noetic tension in his summary of man’s fall—which is not unexpected—but his narrative adds interesting noetic contours. He presents the key figures in the following order: Satan, the Jews, Christ, and the disciples. His spiritual interpretation of the text identifies the victory of the Incarnate mission, accomplished in the Son’s power to reconstitute a holy people for himself. Cyril arranges these figures into two distinct (though unequal) ‘leader/follower’ sets: Satan and the Jews on one side, and Christ and the disciples on the other, with each illustrating a noetic cause-and-effect dynamic. The first pairing shows Satan’s enslavement of humanity, which not only leads people astray from their Creator, but their subjection to demonic oppression severs their ontological capacity to comprehend the true nature of the Son.⁴⁵⁸ Cyril curiously omits any reference to Adam in this anthropological narrative. Instead, the Jews’ bondage to the Law serves as an image of demonic oppression, signifying humanity’s indifference toward the knowledge of God. In stark contrast, the Incarnate Son overturns Satan’s curse by reconciling and dignifying humanity, gathering a unified ‘faultless-minded’ people to Himself, and regenerating them as

⁴⁵⁴ Gr.: Πράττεσθαι (LSJ, ‘managing’, ‘practice, incl. secret practices and intrigues’).

⁴⁵⁵ cf. Is. 29.13; Matt. 15.9

⁴⁵⁶ Gr.: ἀνεπίπληκτον (LSJ, ‘unpunished’) γνώμην.

⁴⁵⁷ *Comm. Is.* on Is. 49.5 (70, 1045.42; [no 1046-47] to 1048.25); cf. Is. 27.5; 2 Cor. 5.19-20.

⁴⁵⁸ See also *Glaoph.* on Exod. 1.11 (PG 68, 412. ‘When we are ignorant of God, then we also become subject to those who would do us harm. We roll ourselves in the mire of sin, with unclean demons as harsh masters...’)

children of the consubstantial Father through faith. Following the Resurrection, Christ's ongoing ministry as Emmanuel continues through the disciples, who are commissioned ambassadors serving as co-laborers in his global ministry of reconciliation, uniting one Church under his reign.

4.2.c. Divinity of Christ

I will now examine John 3:1-6 as my final illustration of Cyril's noetic method to shape his Christology.⁴⁵⁹ In this analysis of the dialogue between Jesus and Nicodemus, I will compare Cyril's interpretation with that of Chrysostom, as the latter shares Cyril's unitive Christology and a fondness for the term 'ignorance.'⁴⁶⁰ By comparing their insights, I demonstrate how much more sharply Cyril employs the antithesis of truth and ignorance to shape his Christology. Implicit in the discussion of these doctrinal distinctives are objections that both fathers infer from Nicodemus' responses. For Cyril, Nicodemus assumes the persona and the ignorance of the quintessential Jewish leader, serving as the foil to the truth of Christ. In contrast, Chrysostom presents Nicodemus as a more sympathetic figure who receives Christ's patient tutorial on the new birth.

The comparison is intended to sharpen what is distinctive in Cyril's use of the ignorance/truth antithesis, not to suggest that Chrysostom lacks a participatory or unitive account of salvation. The table offers representative quotes from passages from both Cyril (left) and Chrysostom (right). My discussion will examine how each father shapes the interplay between Nicodemus' perceptions and their respective Christological insights. Where possible, I present similar and contrasting ideas side-by-side to facilitate easier analysis.

⁴⁵⁹ *Comm. Jo. 3.1-6* (PG 73, 212-216); While implied earlier, it is not until v.10 that 'οὐ συνιᾶσιν' is stated explicitly (about the teachers of Israel in general, cf. Is. 6:9), before Jesus asks, 'ταῦτα οὐ γινώσκεις' (73, 221.20).

⁴⁶⁰ The pericope is treated by Chrysostom in *Homilies 25-27* (PG.59, 143-158). See *Commentary on Saint John the Apostle and Evangelist Homilies 1-47*, trans. Sr. Thomas Aquinas Goggin (CUA, 1957) pp. 250-167, and *The Syriac Version of John Chrysostom's Commentary on John I. Mêmrê 1-43* (Peeters, 2013) pp. 210-230.

John 3.1–6

1-3a Cyril

[N]⁴⁶¹ refuses to be forthright and divides his mind in two...by coming in secret he is convicted of being double-minded⁴⁶²....When he calls him 'teacher from God' he does not yet know that he is God by nature and does not understand the message of the *oikonomia* with the flesh. He approaches thinking [Christ] is a mere man and has little understanding of him.⁴⁶³

Chrysostom

...[N] was well disposed toward Christ, not as...he ought, nor in the proper frame of mind...but the mercy of God did not censure him... but discoursed with him kindly...But he still was talking like the heretics, saying that Christ received His power from outside Himself, and needed the help of others in doing the things He did... so as to convince men that He was doing nothing in opposition to His Father.

Both fathers introduce a noetic tension through their interpretation of Nicodemus' clandestine meeting with Christ at night. Throughout his commentary, Chrysostom emphasizes Christ's gentle and restrained posture toward his interlocutor, maintaining a relatively charitable view of Nicodemus. Rather than directly accusing him, Chrysostom implies guilt by association, leaving it to the reader to draw this inference. In contrast, Cyril adopts a more critical stance, twice accusing Nicodemus of having a divided mind. However, his sharpness is balanced by a clear articulation of the dogmatic issue at stake, as he understands that there can be no new birth apart from the hypostatic union of the Son, with the divine economy being paradigmatically structured by the Incarnation. While Chrysostom is less explicit, he alludes to Christ's divinity; thus he, like Cyril, frames the tension as fundamentally doctrinal.

⁴⁶¹ To save space, I show Nicodemus as [N].

⁴⁶² Cf. Jam. 1.8; 4.8. Gr.: διπλῆ τῇ γνώμῃ, (LSJ, 'double mind/will/judgment'). The range includes duplicitous or deceitful ('twofold mind'), ambivalent or inwardly divided, and, more rarely, 'twofold intent' in a neutral sense (acting with two purposes in view). In Greek Christian usage, however, the term usually carries a negative sense.

⁴⁶³ *Comm. Jo.* on Jo. 3.18 (Pusey 1, 217).

3b- The will of my Father is that a person be made a participant in the Holy Spirit and that the citizen of earth be reborn into a strange and unaccustomed life and be called a citizen of heaven. And when he says that rebirth by the Holy Spirit is 'from above' he shows clearly that the Spirit is of the substance of God the Father, just as he says, 'I am from above', and... 'The one who comes from above is above all.'⁴⁶⁴

In order to make his words less troublesome, [Christ] did not speak explicitly...[N] showed his thirst for knowledge.. Christ spoke obscurely....he wished to make his hearers more inclined to ask questions and to cause them to be more attentive. For this idea you have is not spiritual but carnal. [Christ] did not speak in this way, however, to avoid frightening [N]. To see the Kingdom of God...He meant himself and showed not merely that which is seen exists, but we need other eyes to see Christ.

Higher/Lower dialectic

[N] is convicted of still being unspiritual and therefore of not receiving 'the things of the Spirit of God' since he thinks that so illustrious a mystery is foolishness... When he finds the height of learning to be unattainable by his own ideas, he falls down...I think an ignorant mind, when it strikes ideas that are more vigorous than its own, bounces back down exhausted.⁴⁶⁵

[N] did not understand that it was of the Spirit. He 'dragged' what was said down to the lowliness of the flesh.⁴⁶⁶ [N] maintained his respect for Christ. He did not scoff at what had been said ... Let us not examine into the things of God by reasoning and let us not submit divine things...to the necessity of nature...(p239)

Cyril continues to show more doctrinal clarity, particularly in his discussion of both the *taxis* and *energeia* of the Trinity, with the will of the Father expressed in the mission of the Son through the consubstantial Spirit. He further delineates the *telos* of the divine economy, identifying the Incarnation as the means by which humanity is recreated for participation in the divine life through the Spirit. Cyril's narrative is ascendant, emphasizing the higher, exalted nature of divine reality. In contrast, Chrysostom adopts a less dogmatic approach, focusing instead on the condescension of Christ, who tempers his words in consideration of the limitations of human reasoning. This downward emphasis is reinforced through his use of 'carnal' and 'dragged'. While both fathers engage the spiritual-carnal duality, Chrysostom's language underscores his focus on descent. By contrast, Cyril's critique of Nicodemus' 'ignorant mind' puts in sharper relief the latter's inability to grasp the higher, more spiritually profound meaning of Christ's revelation.

⁴⁶⁴ Cf. Jo. 3.31.

⁴⁶⁵ *Comm. Jo.* on Jo. 3.18 (Pusey 1, 218); cf. 1 Cor 2.14.

⁴⁶⁶ Gr.: χαμαὶ συρομένης (Syr. لَهْلَ (zahal, 'crawl'; LSJ 'dragging') earthwards; earthly.

3:5b- 6 Jesus instructs with clearer teaching and sets the knowledge of the mystery more plainly. Rebirth is through the Spirit 'from above' showing that the Spirit is of a substance that is higher than all and that through him we become partakers of the divine nature.⁴⁶⁷ As we enjoy the one who proceeds from the divine nature consubstantially, we are transformed through him and in him to the archetypal beauty, and we are reborn into newness of life and refashioned into divine sonship.⁴⁶⁸

[N] did not understand 'from above',⁴⁶⁹ ...fell into a chain of reasoning which forced him to conclude this was impossible, and he was caught being both foolish and ignorant.

[N] fell into error by distorting Christ's words...Christ explained more clearly.

Even so, it was difficult for one with a carnal point of view, but which...had power to raise up the hearer from his earthly mindedness...the birth which is of the Spirit easily opens the vaults above. [N] did not understand. Nothing is worse than to relegate spiritual things to human reasoning. This kept him from a lofty and sublime interpretation. To lead him away from this idea, which was dragging him earthward...[Christ] spoke these words because he wished to attract him to the faith through fear of the threat, and to persuade him not to think that the thing was impossible... 'Why do you drag the meaning down to earth?...this bringing forth is superior.

[Creation and Ontology]

Since human beings are composite and not simple by nature, mixed from two things—a body with senses and an intellectual soul—they need a twofold healing for the new birth...so the human spirit is sanctified by the Spirit and the body is sanctified by the water [baptism], which is also sanctified...through the activity of the Spirit, perceptible water is transformed into a divine and ineffable power and sanctifies those with whom it comes into contact.

For just as in the beginning the earth underlay [creation]...so also water now underlies as an element, and all is of the grace of the Spirit. Man became a living soul...The soul does not give life to another, while the Spirit not only lives by His own power but also gives life to others.

[lengthy discursis on first and second creation]

Christology

Jesus moves him to ascend to a higher level of understanding so that when he hears of a spiritual rebirth, he does not call to mind properties that belong to the body. When things have different modes of being, their modes of birth certainly will not be the same. However...the human spirit is an offspring of the Spirit...it refers to what did not exist being called into being through him,⁴⁷⁰ and in the *oikonomia*, it refers to our transformation through him toward God in which he stamps his own impression on us and transforms our mind⁴⁷¹ to his own

He set us free from punishment but also endowed us with a life much more splendid, brought us to another world, and made us another creature. We were entrusted with paradise and did not prove worthy of our sojourn there. Yet he brought us to heaven. At first we were not found faithful, but he entrusted to us greater...

[A series of contrasts between the sinful state and Christ's work.]

⁴⁶⁷ Cf. 2 Pet. 1.4.

⁴⁶⁸ Cf. Rom. 6.4.

⁴⁶⁹ Gr. ἀνωθεν, trans. 'from above'; also 'again.' Cyril has both meanings in mind. Maxwell, *John I*, p. 98.

⁴⁷⁰ Cf. Rom. 4.17.

⁴⁷¹ Cf. Rom. 12.2.

These excerpts show both fathers engaging the mystery of the new birth by linking creation to the Spirit's sanctifying work through the baptismal waters. Cyril again emphasizes Nicodemus' inability to perceive what is 'from above,' setting it against the depth of healing humanity requires from the Spirit. Both affirm that this transformation exceeds human effort and depends on the divine will and the Spirit's regenerative action. For Cyril, this involves a twofold healing of body and soul, through which believers are reborn in the image of Christ, and participate in divine Sonship.

By stressing the dismal nature of carnal thinking and the inadequacy of reason to grasp such divine truths, Chrysostom notes Christ's patience in guiding Nicodemus from erroneous ideas about spiritual rebirth.⁴⁷² Notably, in verse 3.11, he presents Christ's teaching method as an example of avoiding impatience with those who misunderstand. However, I do not mention the extensive apologetic of Chrysostom's emphasizing the redemptive power of the new birth compared to the limitations of the original creation. This approach reflects his larger aim of expounding on the reasonableness of trusting in God's supernatural ability to recreate the human soul, grounded in a detailed recitation of divine miracles recorded in scripture.

Both Fathers identify noetic conflicts and articulate the carnal limitations of human reason, and emphasize the new birth, yet they deploy these themes differently. Because Chrysostom does not interpret the encounter as an opposition between truth and error, his commentary softens the implications of reason's incapacity. He emphasizes Christ as a model exemplar, offering wisdom and pastoral patience in response to Nicodemus's 'earthly-mindedness.' He prefers to describe Nicodemus' thoughts as 'dragging him down' rather than ignorance. The weightiness of his discussion is counterbalanced by appeals to scriptural

⁴⁷² On Jo. 3.9-10 Chrysostom says Nicodemus persisted in 'Jewish obtuseness' despite the clarity of teaching. Gr.: εὐτελείας (LSJ, 'thin', 'cheap') (PG 59.151.13), *FOC*, 255. See *Syriac Version*, p. 220, 'contemptibility of Judaism'. Cyril echoes this idea in his references to ignorance.

evidence, presenting God's miraculous works as a compelling demonstration sufficient to elevate human thought toward divine realities.

Cyril does not adopt Chrysostom's approach but instead emphasizes the Incarnate Son's consubstantiality with the Father and Holy Spirit as the foundation underpinning the means of humanity's new birth. For Cyril, the mystery of the new birth cannot be understood apart from the ontological reality of Christ's divine and human natures united in one person. Cyril shapes both his argument and the formation of his readers with his interpretation of a Jewish priest who, despite apparently initiating the encounter, is portrayed as foolish and ignorant for his failure to believe. It is striking that Cyril adopts a more charitable tone in his commentary on the subsequent encounter between Christ and the woman at the well. Although she is likewise bewildered by Christ's self-disclosure and lives in open immorality, Cyril presents her more favorably as receptive to divine instruction despite the unsolicited nature of the meeting. Nicodemus, by contrast, is not treated as a genuine seeker of truth; he represents a more culpable priestly class whose adherence to and propagation of the Law resists the revelation of divine truth. On one level, this contrast highlights the noetic difference between rejection of Christ and the disclosure of true knowledge granted to believers. On another, it reveals Cyril's antagonism against ecclesial leaders who fail in their mediatorial responsibility and instead reinforce heresy among the people. This distinction accounts for the markedly different tone Cyril adopts toward the woman, who has only a peripheral acquaintance with knowledge and who holds no mediatorial or regulatory office.

Conclusion

Cyril's theological and pedagogical method appropriates Israel's history and the Law to draw out the noetic tensions within the text, shaping both his Christology and his audience's theological reasoning. Although many of Cyril's insights are embedded within his vitriol, they play a crucial role in refining his Christological formulations and reflect his pastoral concern

to cultivate ‘intelligent listeners’ who know and love Christ in truth. In this way, the chapter shows why formation must include correction and warning as well as illumination.

In Part One, I addressed two key questions central to my argument: first, how Cyril wants believers to think about Israel to deepen their Christological understanding and faith; and second, in view of the prominence of his usage, how he defines ignorance. Drawing on his predecessors, I showed that Cyril repeatedly frames ignorance as a pathology that must be healed by Christ: uncritical thinking is corrected by divine truth, presuppositional resistance by the Incarnation, and the carnal mind by the Spirit’s illumination. His aim is to combat heresy and to cultivate a deeper understanding of the mystery of Christ within the types and shadows of the Old Testament.

In Part Two, I examined how Cyril uses the theme of ignorance in shaping his Christology. His exegesis consistently identifies noetic tensions to reveal their remedy through facets of his Christological or Trinitarian priorities, aiming to shape the faithful’s theological knowledge and biblical interpretation. Through analyses of John 9, Isaiah 49, and John 3.1-6 (in comparison with Chrysostom), I showed that Cyril integrates the use of ‘noetic tension’ as a strategy to stage his pro-Nicene formulations. In the above cases, to demonstrate God’s transfer of knowledge to the Gentiles, establishing the real-time judgment of the Incarnation, to frame the contrast between the diaspora of ignorant exiles with the Lord’s mission to unite a Christ-minded ecclesia, and to punctuate the loftiness of the new birth through the divinity of Christ.

Having examined in Chapters Three and Four Cyril’s ‘grammar of knowledge’ and ‘pathology of ignorance’, I now turn to Abraham, whom Cyril frames as a site where growth in knowledge is traced positively and progressively—an analogue of formation in which perception of Christ matures in concert with faith and virtue.

The Pedagogy of Progression in Abraham's Formation

Introduction

By concluding with Abraham, I show him as the culminating figure who embodies the ideals explored in the preceding chapters. For Cyril, Abraham exemplifies the healed faculties of knowledge, faith, and obedience; the very remedies to the noetic ignorance traced in Israel's history. He shows that divine revelation, rightly received, restores the mind and draws humanity into union with God. As the one in whom the truth of Christ was revealed in advance, Abraham typifies the ideal Christian life, demonstrating how faith responds to divine initiative and grows in understanding through participation in God's self-disclosure. I am not claiming that Cyril formally theorizes Abraham as an exemplar for believers. I am arguing that Cyril's portrayal allows Abraham to function implicitly and analogically within the economy as a narrative site where formation can be seen in motion.

By relying on a close examination of Cyril's interpretation of Abraham in key texts from *Comm. Jo.*, *Glaph.* and *c. Iul.*, I argue first, by framing Abraham as the recipient of the pre-Incarnate Son's direct revelation, Cyril has the flexibility to articulate core themes such as the mystery of the Incarnation, the Trinity, soteriology, justification by faith, and divine ineffability to show how right theological thinking is bound to the unfolding economy. What follows therefore uses Abraham to gather claims already established in the dissertation rather than to introduce a new line of argument. The chapter is synthetic by design, but the narrative remains the organizing thread. Second, though Cyril does not state it explicitly, by profiling Abraham as an ideal recipient of revelation, he implicitly presents him as an analogous locus of noetic and pedagogical progress, where the knowledge of Christ is joined with faith and virtue. Third, I argue that Cyril views the Incarnation as the structuring principle of revelation

itself, where the Son embeds the mystery of God within the types and covenants first granted to Abraham, and through him, the people of God participate in the mystery of Christ.

Structure

Part One examines Cyril's portrayal of Abraham's spiritual habitation, leading up to his call to leave Ur in Genesis 12. Here, I analyze how Cyril employs the epistemic and pedagogical features of the economy to resolve the soteriological tension between Abraham's status as a sinner and as a virtuous seeker of God.

Part Two continues this conceptual trajectory, tracing Abraham's progression toward deeper revelations of God in Genesis 14 and 18, while highlighting Cyril's depiction of his spiritual preparedness for these revelations. Both sections conclude with an analogy Cyril develops between Abraham's conceptual growth and the spiritual development of the believer. As Abraham's encounters with God intensify across the narrative, Cyril increasingly relies on epistemic distinctions to articulate how genuine knowledge can advance without collapsing divine transcendence. This chapter will therefore draw on Cyril's vocabulary of apprehension to clarify how formation deepens as revelation unfolds.

Part Three transitions to Cyril's pedagogical interpretations of the types and images present in the covenant-making ceremonies of Genesis 15, 17, and the sacrifice on Moriah in Genesis 22. I will illustrate how these material and symbolic elements convey divine realities and demonstrate how the Incarnation functions as the paradigmatic model upon which the entire economy is structured.

Part One: Abraham as Seeker, Conceptual Knowledge of the One True God

In his reading of Cyril's portrayal of Abraham's understanding of the nature of God, Bradshaw observed that 'the acquisition of suitable concepts is not simply an intellectual process, for it requires proper habituation to the reality those concepts describe.'⁴⁷³ With this in mind, how does Cyril define proper habituation?

Cyril's depiction is shaped to illustrate that faith is at once a divine gift and a cultivated habit. As I have previously shown, Cyril envisions a 'reciprocal interplay' within the divine-human relationship. Here, he introduces Abraham as already in the habit of cultivating his mind (voūç), orienting it toward faith even before God called him to leave Ur. His readiness to obey God's command was rooted in this prior intellectual and spiritual disposition:

He was an extremely prudent man (πανσύνετο) with wide learning (πολυτέλεστορο) and was eager to categorize among the most serious of pursuits the duty of knowing the truth (προθυμούμενον τὸ δεῖν εἰδέναι τὸ ἀληθὲς) and the identity of the Craftsman and Lord of all.⁴⁷⁴ For he rejected and pushed far away the views of the Assyrians – I mean those pertaining to the polytheistic error – and was welcomed by God because he supposed that knowing the truth (ἀληθείας τὴν γνῶσιν) would be enough to bring complete well-being. For he heard, 'Go out from your land and from your family and from the house of your father and go into the land that I will show to you.'⁴⁷⁵

Cyril's analysis in *c. Iul* of Abraham's earliest theological orientation aims to disassociate Abraham's character from the taint of polytheism, a task grounded in Cyril's understanding of Scripture's *skopos*: the self-revealing Word of God who manifests himself in the economy of salvation as the Incarnate divine *Logos*. We see his interpretation is firmly

⁴⁷³ Bradshaw, *Philosophical Theology of Against Julian*, pp. 21–40.

⁴⁷⁴ For the benefit of Cyril's pagan audience, Cyril invokes the concept of 'Craftsman' by citing Plato's *Timaeus*, which asks whether the cosmos is 'what always is and never becomes' (28b7) or 'what becomes and never is' (28a6) concluding that its cause is a Craftsman who fashioned the universe after an eternal model (28a6). Cf. *c. Iul.* VIII (PG 76, 865-962).

⁴⁷⁵ Gen. 12.1. *c. Iul* II.10.11-14. (PG 76, 621-624). I am indebted to Matthew Crawford for providing his pre-published English translation of *c. Iul*.

rooted in Nicene orthodoxy, expressed in the ineffability of the divine nature.⁴⁷⁶ He frames Abraham's repudiation of polytheism by presenting him as a lifelong seeker of divine truth in an intellectual and spiritual pursuit marked by his prudence, education, and diligent inquiry. Notably, Cyril employs the related terms of knowing (ειδέναι; γνῶσις) likely to emphasize Abraham's monotheistic conviction before the divine summons.

The divine Abraham understood (ἔγνω) that he must depart from the error of polytheism, and by considering (κατανενόηκε) the things set under heaven, he perceived (κατανενόηκε) that God is one, the Lord and Creator of all; for it would not be correct for anyone to suppose that the constitution of the world arose from the things that came into being.

Cyril shows that Abraham's discernment, gained through close deliberation on the things that have come to be, led him to conclude that God is One and Creator of all.⁴⁷⁷ The perfect tense of the verb *katanoeō* stresses the abiding result of Abraham's attentiveness. This perceptive clarity is further highlighted by Cyril's portrayal of Abraham's disdain for the surrounding culture's 'stupid ideas' of confining the divine nature to the created order, a conviction that Cyril insists why God received Abraham.⁴⁷⁸

In this context, Frances Young highlights an overlooked aspect of Cyril's reading of Abraham, where he views the patriarch's virtuous excellence in his journey out of Ur as a prefiguration of Christ, the preeminent model of virtue.⁴⁷⁹ Yet, Cyril places soteriological constraints around that image, allowing a deeper examination of Abraham's spiritual formation

⁴⁷⁶ For the important role of the term 'skopos' (σκοπός) in Cyril's exegesis, see Crawford, *Trinitarian Theology*, p. 228 n.142

⁴⁷⁷ *c. Iul.* II.24 (PG 76, 665B–668A). Here Cyril does not employ the epistemic terms ἔννοια, αἴσθησιν, ἐπίνοια, or the verb ὄράω, instead he frames Abraham's discernment twice using a more intensified 'to observe closely' (κατανοεῖν). Other verbs Cyril uses to describe Abraham's discernment from creation to Creator are 'reason/deduce (λογίζεσθαι), and comprehend (συνιέναι), leading to the confession of 'one God, Creator of all', Cf. *c. Iul.* II.10.11–14 (PG 76, 621–624); see also *Glaoph.* on Gen. 12.1 (PG 69, 72–73); *Comm. Is.* on Is. 49.5 (PG 70, 1045.42–1048.25).

⁴⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, II.22.

⁴⁷⁹ Frances Young notes that mimesis is in view here rather than typology, since there is nothing prophetic in the way a 'type' of Christ is envisaged. 'Cyril himself calls it *ethike paraenesis*...yet it does have a dramatic quality.' *Biblical Exegesis*, p. 210. She argues that Cyril reads the Pentateuch as a pattern of exile, repentance, and renewal, with Abraham's journey and Israel's exile serving as paradigms of grace and conversion, fitting his theology of progressive pedagogy. See my n. 25 for his use of ἀρετή.

before his divine call in Genesis 12. The following passage describes how Cyril conceives of Abraham's spiritual disposition before this pivotal moment, shedding light on the interplay between divine initiative and human readiness within the pedagogical structure of the divine economy.

But our Lord Jesus Christ seems to be convicting them...of thinking highly (φρονοῦντας μέγα) of a man, and supposing that the blessed Abraham was altogether free. By showing more generally that everyone who 'commits sin is a slave to sin,' he puts Abraham himself in the snare as a slave to sin at one time...We say this not at all to be contentious about the glory of that righteous man but because there is no human being who has not experienced the dart of sin. Even the one reputed to be great surely bore the yoke of sin.⁴⁸⁰

This passage is situated within Cyril's discussion on Jo. 8.33, where the Jews invoke their lineage from Abraham to dismiss Jesus' claim of possessing the authority to liberate them from the bondage of sin.⁴⁸¹ Cyril suggests that Jesus's words may have been intended to convict them for their exaggerated veneration of Abraham—a man who, before placing his faith in God, shared the universal condition of humanity: a 'low birth' by being born 'ensnared as a slave' to sin. Only after Abraham demonstrated faith was he set free, accounted as righteous, and 'made illustrious.'⁴⁸²

Given Cyril's portrayal of Abraham as both an enslaved sinner and a virtuous seeker, how does he reconcile this apparent tension within Abraham's theological habituation through the lens of the economy? In the next two sections, I analyze Cyril's harmonization of this tension: first, in his presentation of Abraham as a sinner, and second, in his depiction of Abraham's virtue. In both cases, Cyril aims to develop his Christological priorities by utilizing an epistemic framework.

⁴⁸⁰ *Comm. Jo. on Jo. 8.35* (PG 73.65).

⁴⁸¹ *Ibid.*, on Jo. 8.33 (PG 73, 579-580).

⁴⁸² *Ibid.*, quoting Gen 15.6. Cyril describes sin's grip as having its 'barbarian mother' in the soul, enslaving the whole person (body and soul), while freedom belongs solely to God. Cf. Jo. 8:34 (PG, 73, 579-88).

5.1.a. Sinner

The first, more concise discussion concerns Abraham's enslavement to sin, examined through the lens of Cyril's soteriology. What are his objectives, and how does he integrate pedagogical features or epistemic function to shape his argument? Abraham's enslavement provides Cyril with an opportunity to expound on the sinless perfection of the Incarnate Son of God, who alone possesses both the ability and authority to liberate enslaved sinners.⁴⁸³ He asserts unequivocally that Abraham's deliverance from the bondage of sin was accomplished solely by grace through faith in Christ. I concur with Joussard's suggestion that Cyril interprets a 'proleptic union' where Abraham participates in advance in the mystery of Christ by divine revelation. This present study demonstrates this feature. This anticipatory participation is distinct from sacramental union; however, it does highlight Cyril's conviction that even the patriarch's liberation was effected only through Christ's Incarnate work.⁴⁸⁴ This further illustrates Cyril's understanding that the Incarnation serves as the paradigmatic design of the divine economy rather than as an event that occurs sequentially. The following discussion blends Abraham, the economy's pedagogical example, and Cyril's soteriology.

Keeping the economy's pattern in view as a crucial feature in Cyril's theology, he uses a noetic tension between Abraham and his descendants to illustrate this. In the passage below, he accuses the Jews of thinking too highly of Abraham. As a result, they fail to think reasonably (*εἰκότα φρονεῖν*) and disregard the Son's appeal to elevate their carnal minds to a 'completely

⁴⁸³ The adverbial *μόνον* occurs five times: twice of God, and three times of Christ). Shortly after, Cyril uses the adjectival *μόνος* twice of the Son. In two instances, the adverb highlights the effects of ignorance.

⁴⁸⁴ Cyril writes that Abraham was taught (*ἐδιδάσκετο*) the divine mystery directly by the Son. On Jo. 8.56, he links Abraham's vision on Moriah to Christ's sacrifice (*Comm. Jo. on Jo. 8.56* (PG 74, 273-281); cf Jo. 15:15 PG 74, 340-44) See also Jacques Joussard, *La notion de l'union mystique d'après saint Cyrille d'Alexandrie* (Beauchesne, 1939), esp. pp. 85-90, on the nature of Abraham's 'anticipatory participation' in the mystery of Christ before the Incarnation.

fresh and unexpected instruction (*παιδευσιν*)' about himself.⁴⁸⁵ Cyril's strategic use of a noetic tension bolsters his argument, highlighting the economy's gradual progression of human understanding, framed to magnify the Incarnation as both the means of redemption and the ultimate vehicle for divine self-disclosure:

Foolishly, then, the Jews reject the grace that frees the very founder of their race and advance only to the one who was freed by it...they are ignorant (*ἀγνοῆσαι*) of their slavery...[Christ] lifts those who are carnal and looking only at corporeal matters out of their ignorance (*ἀμαθίας*) and leads them to more spiritual matters. transports them to a completely fresh and unexpected *παιδευσιν*, as it were, pointing out the hidden slavery that they were unaware of for a long time...He proceeds, as it were, to what is necessary and what they really need to learn. (*ωρήσας τὸ ἀναγκαῖον, καὶ ὅπερ ὄντως ἔδει μαθεῖν,*) He says that whoever commits sin is 'a slave to sin.' ...but freeing from sin should fittingly be attributed to God alone. Therefore, [Christ] persuades them to think reasonably (*ἀναπείθει τὰ εἰκότα φρονεῖν*) ...and thus to seek not for the glory of their ancestor...but to seek God alone. The glory of God, in addition to other things, is to be utterly unable to fall into sin, which of course is reserved for Christ alone. For he alone has become 'free among the dead' since he committed no sin...the Lord was hinting that the blessed Abraham himself, who was once enslaved to sin and was set free through faith alone in Christ, was not sufficient to pass on this spiritual nobility to others, since he is not authorized with the power to free others when he did not on his own put off the slavery of sin. Nor did he bestow freedom on himself; he received it...from Christ himself....⁴⁸⁶

The noetic tension is seen in the two terms Cyril used to describe the Jews' ignorance (*ἀγνοῆσαι* and *ἀμαθία*), which convey the depth of their deception. The former denotes a failure to perceive their spiritual slavery, while the latter suggests a coarse, willful blindness rooted in ignorance. Cyril sees Christ alluding to his pre-Incarnate appearance to Abraham, during which he gave the same teaching. Abraham was receptive to divine truth, described as 'being fully intelligent' (*πανσύνετος*), 'widely learned' (*πολυϊστόρα*), and possessing 'knowledge of the truth' (*ἀληθείας τὴν γνῶσιν*). On the other hand, the Jews' carnality clouded

⁴⁸⁵ Ibid. In addition to antithesis, Cyril often uses comparison (*σύγκρισις*) to juxtapose opposing responses to encounters he presents as structurally similar. Gregory T. Howard, *Glossary of Rhetorical Terms*: 2nd edn. (University Press of America, 1991) p. 36; Stanley E. Porter, *Classical Rhetoric*, (Brill, 1997), pp. 232-34, 321.

⁴⁸⁶ Ibid., on Jo. 8.35 (PG 73, 577-580), cf. Rom. 3.10, 23; Ps. 88.4 (Ps 87.5 LXX) .

their perception of Christ. This contrast also alludes to the divine-human interplay, showing the grace of God's summons enabling humanity to receive or reject.

Cyril's use of noetic references serves to provide a stark lens to highlight the Incarnation in comparison to the oppressive nature of sin's enslavement, which extends to all humanity, including Abraham. Cyril emphasizes the universal need for redemption by portraying the Son as both the revealer and the revelation of God throughout the unfolding of economy. This dual role of the Son is intended to elevate the carnal minds of unbelievers and shape the faith of his readers to perceive and respond by faith in the mystery of Christ.

Two critical points emerge from Cyril's discussion of Abraham's sinful status prior to his call, each reinforcing my argument. First, Cyril's use of pedagogical language and noetic tension shapes his soteriology. This language emphasizes the necessity of thinking rightly about Christ's divinity, specifically, recognizing him as the eternally divine Son who holds preeminence over, and eternal pre-existence to, Abraham. Second, Cyril's spiritual interpretation situates the pre-Incarnate Christ as both the revealer/instructor of eternal realities and is himself the content of the divine mystery. This interpretive move strengthens my argument by showing that the Incarnation functions as the paradigm on which the *oikouμία* of salvation is disclosed, rather than as a phase within an existing chronological sequence.

5.1.b. Virtuous Exemplar

The second, and more extended, discussion involves how Cyril reconciles Abraham's theological disposition in light of the economy, asking, Why does Cyril portray Abraham so favorably despite his enslavement to sin before God's call?

In c. *Jul.*, Cyril's Nicene priorities are framed through a comparison between Abraham's virtuous cultivation of faith in the divine mystery and Greek philosophical rejection of Christian interpretation of divine reality. At the outset of the discussion, Cyril asserts that it is impossible for anyone to perceive matters 'surpassing [their] mind and innate rationality'

unless God illuminates and enables the mind to grasp something of ‘the ineffable realities about him.’⁴⁸⁷ He describes Abraham’s nascent perceptions of the one God as not only exposing the futility of polytheism, but also revealing an eternal glory beyond all comprehension,

The divine Abraham did not adhere to their folly (ἀσυνεσίας). For he deplored their proclivity for regarding God’s supreme nature, which transcends everything, as one of those visible things that are subject to sense, and he indeed did not fall short of the truth by confining the divine nature to the creaturely realm. Rather, he restored it to its lofty place and placed it above everything called into existence... It was for this very reason that God received him. For the one whom he was seeking (ὁ ζητούμενος) eventually made himself known to him.⁴⁸⁸

Cyril’s commendation of Abraham’s thinking reflects his pro-Nicene priority to uphold divine ineffability within his ideal portrayal of Abraham, whose progress in understanding fortifies both his piety and disposition as a seeker. In response to Abraham’s openness, God graciously reveals himself as ‘the One whom [Abraham] was seeking’ (ὁ ζητούμενος). Abraham’s faithful stewardship of his knowledge of God represents the appropriate human response to divine revelation, which, in turn, leads him to deeper faith.

Now the nature that is above all would be seen not by the eyes of the body, but by the inner, hidden eyes of the mind τοῖς ἐν τῷ νοὶ κεκρυμμένοις ὄφθαλμοῖς), which focuses its subtle and precise curiosity (λεπτομερῆ καὶ περιεργαστικὴν ἀκριβολογίαν) on him and takes in the rays of the vision of God through imagery transcending sense-perception (ὑπεράνω τῆς αἰσθήσεως θεωριῶν).⁴⁸⁹

Here, Cyril’s praise of Abraham’s virtuous faith is tied to his claim that no one can perceive matters ‘surpassing [their] mind and innate rationality’ unless God actively enables the mind to grasp something of the divine mystery.⁴⁹⁰ As Farag observes, ‘mystery (μυστήριον) is an understanding that is not a physical inability, but a spiritual deprivation from the divine glory that will not allow people to know something temporally.’⁴⁹¹ In Cyril’s anthropology, this

⁴⁸⁷ *c. Iul.* I.20 (PG 76, 544-549).

⁴⁸⁸ *Ibid.* II.22.1-8 (PG 76, 605-06).

⁴⁸⁹ *Ibid.* II.20 (PG 76, 617).

⁴⁹⁰ *Ibid.*

⁴⁹¹ Farag, *New Testament Exegete*, p. 234.

spiritual deprivation is due to sin dulling humanity's natural intuition of divine realities. Even so, there remains a limited, obscured, yet true knowledge of God.⁴⁹² This knowledge is accessible only through an 'instruction through riddles,'⁴⁹³ a means of accommodating subtle concepts ($\grave{\epsilon}\nu\grave{\nu}\o\grave{\iota}\alpha\iota\zeta$) about God for those encountering them for the first time.⁴⁹⁴

It is precisely these subtle concepts disclosed through the economy's types and shadows that bolster Cyril's claims regarding Jewish culpability and inform his Christological formulations. As I show next, he strategically contrasts Abraham's pursuit of truth with the failure of Greek philosophers, situating this contrast within a broader pro-Nicene defense of divine ineffability.

In his rebuttal to Julian about Abraham, Cyril introduces this extended noetic tension by shifting his focus to the Greeks, using them as a foil to highlight Abraham's superior virtue. This comparison not only reinforces Abraham's readiness to receive divine truth but also critiques the Greeks' philosophical shortcomings, such as their failure to apply their own pedagogical methods to discern the ultimate reality of God.⁴⁹⁵ This reflects Cyril's stipulation that apart from divine illumination, unaided reason cannot penetrate the mystery of the Trinity.

Accordingly, because the distinct and exceptional properties of the deity are 'difficult to explain' and hard to expound since they are not amenable⁴⁹⁶ to observation, and because whatever words one might use...would turn out to...fall short of the divine dignity, we learn ($\mu\alpha\theta\alpha\grave{\nu}\o\mu\epsilon\mathfrak{v}$) about it through

⁴⁹² Joseph K. Gordon, *Divine Scripture in Human Understanding* (University of Notre Dame Press, 2019), p. 212: 'The work of the Triune God in history is one. Despite our lack of understanding of the precise contours of the history that is, it is still one.'

⁴⁹³ Gr: δι' αἰνιγμάτων παιδαγωγίας, c. *Iul.* II.27 (PG 76, 609B).

⁴⁹⁴ See Ayres, *Nicaea*, p196. Cyril echoes Basil, who, Ayres writes, in response to Eunomian challenges distinguished the unknowability of the divine essence from what can be known of the Father and Son. Basil stresses that creation does not act under compulsion but cooperates with the Creator, so human knowledge of God is not deficient but reshaped by God to heal and redirect human thought and imagination. Basil of Caesarea, *Contra Eunomium* II.32 (PG 29, 637-540), FOC 122 (CUA, 2011), pp. 179-183

⁴⁹⁵ c. *Iul* I1.21. (1).

⁴⁹⁶ Gr: ὀλίσκομαι (LSJ, 'caught', 'seized', or, in a good sense, 'achieved', 'proved'), which Cyril employs more than 600 times—more frequently than any other ancient author, especially in c. *Iul.* and *Comm. Jo.*

more palpable forms and types,⁴⁹⁷ as ‘in a mirror and in a riddle’.⁴⁹⁸ We maintain it was in this way that the divine Abraham received instruction.⁴⁹⁹

Here, Cyril expresses bewilderment at the Greek philosophers’ unwillingness to consider the Christian account of God, given their reliance on comparable pedagogical strategies to articulate incorporeal forms and first principles. His writings reveal familiarity with philosophical categories, even as he restricts their scope. In this instance, he argues that the Pythagorean appeal to numbers parallels the geometers’ use of diagrams to gesture toward abstract ideas. For Cyril, such figures point beyond themselves to a metaphysical reality exceeding the mind’s capacity to comprehend or language to express. Because of the inherent limits of human nature, God can be perceived only ‘through a mirror, in a riddle,’⁵⁰⁰ which confirms the necessity of types (*τύποι*), images, and semantic innovation for communicating the ineffable divine mystery.

By contrast, Cyril commends Abraham’s cultivation of a mind (*νοῦς*) habituated toward faith, an intellectual and spiritual habituation that strengthens his piety and sustains his pursuit of divine truth. God reveals himself as ‘the One whom [Abraham] was seeking’ (*ὁ ζητούμενος*), a disclosure Cyril presents as intentional rather than indiscriminate. With the failure of the Greeks in view, he describes this revelation as ‘a grace from God that is not given indifferently but to those who are free from fleshly passion, prepared in mind with deeds leading to piety.’⁵⁰¹

How are we to understand the interplay between faith and reason in connection to Abraham’s earliest theological thinking and the economy? I will discuss this in more length in

⁴⁹⁷ The word translated here as ‘forms’ (*σχημάτων*) is the same one translated in the passage from Porphyry as ‘shapes,’ referring to the diagrams of the geometers.

⁴⁹⁸ Gr: *αινίγματι*

⁴⁹⁹ Gr: *πεπαιδεῦσθαι* c. *Iul.* I.26.1-5 (PG 76, 608A)

⁵⁰⁰ *ἐσόπτρου ἐν αινίγματι.*

⁵⁰¹ c. *Iul* I.21-22 (PG 76, 605-608); VIII.39-40 (PG 76, 1005-1008), where he states ‘We therefore hold that μυστήριον τὴν γνῶστιν was given to Abraham before anyone else. (cf. Jo. 8.56).

the Genesis 18 section, but for now, the reciprocal relationship between faith and knowledge reflects how intellectual formation and spiritual receptivity are mutually reinforcing, a point Cyril echoes in a reference to Moses. There, Cyril uses the metaphor of ‘warm-up exercise’ (προγύμνασμα) to illustrate the elementary preparation needed to advance in divine study.⁵⁰²

Bradshaw observes that, for Cyril, faith is not only a conviction *that* God exists, but the awareness of his reality as Trinity, combined with an innate assurance of his goodness. I discussed this in Chapter Three. Faith, then, is ‘a moral and cognitive orientation that is necessary in order for rational inquiry to be possible.’⁵⁰³ Cyril thus highlights the interplay of divine initiative and human readiness: the Trinity graciously discloses itself, from the Father, through the Son, and by the Spirit, while the seeker—depicted in this idealized presentation of Abraham with Christians in view—cultivates moral and intellectual receptivity by adopting a disposition open to the light of true knowledge.

5.1.c. Reconciling Sinner and Exemplar

By examining how Cyril reconciles Abraham’s sinful nature with his exemplary character, I demonstrate that Cyril’s portrayal of the patriarch’s virtuous orientation is framed in noetic language to highlight his soteriology. Cyril again uses a noetic tension to bolster his argument. He compares Abraham’s wise pursuit of divine truth with the Greek failure to follow their own pedagogical standards.

The Greeks offer Cyril a prime example of how sin distorts the ability to cultivate one’s mind toward its *telos*. Despite being a sinner, Abraham’s virtue reflects not only his intellectual engagement but also his moral preparedness. The divine mystery abides well above reason, yet

⁵⁰² Ibid. I.11 (PG 76 532-537). On Moses’ acquaintance with Egyptian wisdom, see *c. Iul.* VII.23.12–14, where Cyril’s emphasizes both divine revelation and preparation as one ‘learned in all the wisdom of the Egyptians’ (Acts 7:22). cf. Augustine, *Civ. Dei* 18.37. The theme of intellectual formation recurs frequently among the Fathers, for example, Clement of Alexandria and Cyril of Jerusalem, *Cat. Lect.* VI, where learning and reasoning are presented as deepening faith.

⁵⁰³ Bradshaw, *Philosophical Theology*, pp. 24-25.

Cyril esteems the rigor of this contemplative effort to then arrive at faith in the mystery beyond it. I will discuss the interplay of faith and understanding in 5.2.b. For now, it is sufficient to say that faith deepens understanding. For Cyril, ‘faith provides the root to nurture understanding because it is the beginning of genuine devotion and brings life to those who receive it.’

Cyril reconciles Abraham’s sinful nature with his virtuous orientation as the fitting response to the prior gracious activity (*ἐνέργεια*) of the ineffable Triune God who descends in the economy of salvation to make Himself known to sinners, doing so incrementally and over the course of time via ‘an education in riddles.’ Cyril’s interpretations of Abraham’s perceptions of God are linked to a posture of obedience and worship, particularly in the depiction of Abraham’s motivation to accord God a ‘lofty’ status. That being said, Cyril’s commendation of Abraham is framed to emphasize Nicene theology, particularly the divinity of Christ who is the revealer of the ineffable consubstantial Trinity.

Part One Summary

How does this first section on Abraham’s early pursuit of knowledge address Cyril’s interpretation of the relationship between theological thinking and the divine economy? By focusing on Abraham’s pre-call spiritual habituation, I demonstrated how Cyril relies on the economy’s pedagogy of incremental growth in knowledge—framed by noetic tension—to reconcile Abraham’s sinful nature with his exemplary character as a seeker. Cyril contrasts Abraham’s wise pursuit of divine truth, revealed by grace, with the failure of Greek pagans to follow their own pedagogical principles in tracing truth to its metaphysical *telos*. As the progenitor of the Messianic line—one forged by faith—Abraham represents a theological understanding grounded in the Triune God. Through the economy of salvation, God progressively reveals the mystery of the divine nature through the Son by the Spirit, a truth Abraham apprehends by faith.

Part Two: Abraham's Conceptual Progress: Knowledge of the Trinity

I continue the conceptual discussion in this second section by analyzing Cyril's interpretations of Abraham's encounters with Melchizedek in Genesis 14, and the theophany at Mamre in Genesis 18 to explore how Abraham's understanding of the Trinity develops without sacrificial or covenant-making elements. As the chapter moves into these denser episodes, Abraham's progress remains the interpretive anchor, ensuring that the doctrinal claims are read as developments drawn from his formation rather than departures from it. After this section, I present an example of how Cyril envisions an analogous relationship between the preparatory stages in Abraham's understanding with the preparations believers must undergo in their knowledge of Christ. At this stage in Abraham's formation, the narrative raises questions not only about obedience but about the mode of knowing appropriate to deeper revelation, which is why Cyril's distinction between apprehensive and discursive understanding becomes necessary for what follows.

5.2.a. Genesis 14: The Most High

In this section, I show that Cyril employs language of knowing to frame the pedagogy of the economy. I rely on *c. Iul.*, which offers Cyril's fullest treatment of Abraham's interior dialogue, prompted by Julian's polemical focus on the patriarch. Although Cyril is not explicit in linking Abraham and believers, the presentation of him as an ideal figure through whom his pro-Nicene formulas suggests an implicit analogy. Abraham serves as an exemplar who conceptually progresses from rejecting polytheism to invoking 'the Most High', illustrating how human reason, by grace through faith, can discern divine truth through the economy's progressive disclosure. Cyril interprets this incremental progress as part of the divine pedagogy structured by the Incarnation.

The discussion unfolds in three stages: first, Abraham's rejection of pagan polytheism in favor of the one true God; second, his deepening recognition of God as 'Most High' in Genesis 14, which Cyril interprets as a step toward Trinitarian knowledge; and third, Cyril's wider apologetic, which contrasts the rational coherence of pro-Nicene theology with pagan cosmologies and highlights the Incarnation as the interpretive center of the economy. The necessary background on Melchizedek matters here only insofar as it sets up Cyril's interest in Abraham's confession of 'the Most High' as a step in conceptual progress. I will therefore keep the focus on Abraham's movement in apprehension, not on reconstructing the full typological tradition.

I give primary attention to *c. Iul.*, where Cyril provides his most substantial exposition of Abraham in response to Julian's criticisms. Cyril rebuts Julian's arguments by establishing the following: that the Church is continuous in the divine economy with Israel's monotheism; by affirming the legitimacy of the Christian interpretation of Scripture; and by asserting the exclusivity of Christianity as the one true faith. I add another preliminary element regarding the tradition's understanding of Genesis 14, which has a great deal to say about Melchizedek. Cyril's interpretation participates in a gradual shift beginning in the fourth century and into the fifth toward a more Christological typology of the King of Salem, grounded in the Epistle to the Hebrews.⁵⁰⁴ His pro-Nicene theology informs both his insights on this text in *Glaph.*, and two decades later, his apologetic strategy in *c. Iul.* The Eucharistic reference in the Melchizedek encounter in *Glaph.* follows the tradition begun by Clement of Alexandria, who

⁵⁰⁴ Heb. 5.6; 6.20; 7.1–17. Patristic exegesis of Melchizedek varies; some read him as angelic or as a figure of the Spirit, but Chrysostom (*Hom. in Heb.* XIII.4), Eusebius (*Dem. ev.* V.241–42), Cyril (*Glaph. in Gen.* II, on Gen. 14.18 [PG 69, 104–05]), Cosmas (*Topogr. chr.* V), and Jerome (*Ep.* 73.6–7) treat him as a type of Christ the High Priest. S. E. Robinson notes the fourth- and fifth-century shift affirming Melchizedek's mortality and Abraham's subordination to him: 'The Apocryphal Story of Melchizedek', *JSJ* 18 (1987), 37, doi: 10.1163/00472212-018-01-04. This tradition stressed the superiority of his priesthood over the Levitical, portraying Christ's as surpassing Aaron's. See also H. Grypeou and H. Spurling, *The Book of Genesis in Late Antiquity* (Brill, 2013), pp. 223–24, on patristic efforts to detach Melchizedek from Israelite priestly tradition in favor of a Gentile identity.

was the first to interpret the bread and wine offered to Abraham as a type of Eucharist.⁵⁰⁵ In Cyril's reading of Hebrews 7.3-7, however, Melchizedek functions primarily as a figure of Christ's priesthood, while the Eucharistic dimension receives little attention, at least as far as the elements themselves are concerned.⁵⁰⁶ Instead, Cyril focuses on the spiritual interpretation of Melchizedek, particularly as a corrective to erroneous literal readings. For my argument, Cyril does not indicate what Abraham himself may have discerned of the Eucharistic or priestly allusions, apart from the significance assigned to Melchizedek's name. Although Abraham holds a greater status in the historical sense, Cyril's spiritual interpretation assigns Melchizedek the higher standing, viewing Abraham as inferior in that he received a blessing and, in turn, presented a tithe of the spoils.⁵⁰⁷ At this point, the narrative weight returns to Abraham: Cyril uses the encounter to frame how Abraham's language for God is being refined, and that refinement is what carries the pedagogical argument forward.

Shifting focus from Melchizedek to Abraham, I narrow the analysis of Genesis 14 to Cyril's interpretation of the economy's pedagogical function, particularly its role in cultivating a conceptual understanding of God as Trinity that frames his dogmatic claims. Cyril's apologetic in *c. Iul.* emphasizes Abraham's progressive grasp of the Trinity, presenting Abraham's experience as an instance of the pedagogical unfolding of the divine economy. This reading is further illuminated by relevant insights from *Glaph.*, where Cyril develops the same theme of gradual instruction leading to a fuller apprehension of God's triune reality.

⁵⁰⁵ Clement of Alexandria, *Strom.* IV.25. This interpretive tradition extends from the second century on, e.g., in Eusebius (*Dem.Ev.* V.242), Theodoret (*Interp. Ps.* 110; PG 80.1773) Ps-John Chrysostom, *De Melch* (562;262), and Jerome (Ep. 73.3). Cyril depicts the heavenly gift received from Christ as the mysteries of the provisions of life' (ἐφόδιον ζωῆς δεχόμενοι τὰ μυστικά) in *Glaph.* I (PG 69, 105).

⁵⁰⁶ Cyril highlights the that both Melchizedek and Christ share a mystical heritage, as neither are of the tribe of Levi nor appointed to serve as priests under the Law, but become priests 'through the power of an indestructible life' (Heb 7.16). He makes this point in *Glaph.* in Gen. I (PG 69, 109) and reiterates it in *c. Iul.* V, where he defends the superiority of Christ's priesthood over the Levitical order.

⁵⁰⁷ *Glaph.* in Gen. (PG 69, 108-09).

I have lifted my hand to the Lord, God Most High (κύριος ὁ Θεὸς ὁ ὑψιστος), possessor of heaven and earth...⁵⁰⁸

In his post-victory encounter with Melchizedek, Abraham vindicates himself by invoking the name ‘the Most High.’ Cyril finds this appellation markedly distinct from other episodes that incorporated both sensory perception *and* corporeal means. Here, the insight is apprehended deductively, marking a transition to a more reflective and abstract mode of theological knowledge. For Cyril, this shift underscores the progressive unveiling of divine truth, mirroring Abraham’s growing intellectual and spiritual advance toward a fuller apprehension of the Trinity,

Now surely the quality of being ‘high’ is not something sensible (αἰσθητὸν), nor indeed is it understood (νοούμενον) as denoting a particular place or anything that one could take as something physical. Instead, it is indicating that he is set over everything, in a manner befitting the deity, and that he has created both those things in the heavens and those things on the earth and...and if everything has come to be by him, then he must undoubtedly also be other than everything else, and other according to nature, since he is neither created nor has he come into existence from non-existent things, but is rather uncreated, eternal, older than all time, and the first cause of the universe.⁵⁰⁹

Cyril leverages Abraham’s invocation of ‘the Most High’ to dismantle pagan cosmologies by advancing an articulation of the eternally existent, uncreated God who is the Creator of all things. Following Clement, Origen, and Eusebius, he appeals to the greater antiquity of Moses over the Greeks to assert the priority and authority of biblical revelation. Moses’ authority reinforces his apologetical aim by establishing the reliability of both Christianity’s literal and spiritual interpretations of Scripture,

Nevertheless, I think the following observation should help anyone realize that Christianity is notable for its antiquity. For there was not yet even knowledge of writing among the Greeks when Moses’ books had already been written...indeed also Plato himself...no doubt also marveled at Moses’ books. And one may see from their actual writings that the Greek historians were

⁵⁰⁸ *c.Iul.* II.24. (PG 76, 621-628); cf. Gen. 14.18-22.

⁵⁰⁹ *Ibid.* As Boulnois observes, Julian consistently praises Plato, and Cyril draws on this to highlight the philosopher’s points of affinity with Christian doctrine. See also Boulnois, ‘Cyril of Alexandria’s Reading Porphyry,’ *Journal of Early Christian Studies* (2020), 463.

extremely well acquainted with Moses. For Polemon, in the first book of his *Greek Histories*, mentioned him...⁵¹⁰

The key to his rebuttal is Moses' status in Greek thought. As the inspired Word of God for both Jews and the Church, Moses' writings not only hold chronological precedence over Greek philosophical works but also establish his reputation as one of antiquity's most esteemed figures.⁵¹¹ Because the Mosaic writings possess definitive authority to the Greeks, it follows that Cyril grounds his argument in the divine truths spoken by Moses, which were ultimately fulfilled and revealed in Christ. By linking Christianity to this inspired lineage and canonical corpus, he legitimizes the Church's spiritual interpretation of the Hebrew Scriptures and establishes the legitimacy of Christian worship. Furthermore, the Genesis 14 account allows Cyril to frame his pro-Nicene argument to affirm both the *oikonomia* of God as it unfolds in human history and divine ineffability.⁵¹²

This observation is vital to my argument. The relationship between theological reasoning and the divine economy emerges clearly in Cyril's effort to expose the error and incoherence of pagan and heretical conceptions of God. The work of the undivided, consubstantial Trinity in history, both in its recurring patterns and progressive unfolding, exhibits an intrinsic magisterial coherence, even as the imminent divine nature remains incomprehensible to human understanding. The theme receives further development in Cyril's *Glaph.*, where he reflects on the interplay between theological reasoning and the mystery of the divine nature. There, he defines the limits of human inquiry, affirming the suitability of

⁵¹⁰ *c. Iul.* I.1-19. Polemon of Athens was a second century BC geographer and philosopher. His work does not survive, but Eusebius of Caesarea in his *Praeparatio evangelica*, citing Julius Africanus, quotes Polemon (*Jul. Africanus ap. Euseb. P.E. X*, 10). See Carmelo Serrano, 'The Name 'Palestine' in Classical Greek Texts,' *Journal of Holy Land and Palestine Studies*, 20.2 (2021), 146-79. doi:10.3366/hlps.2021.0270.

⁵¹¹ Austin Steen notes Cyril's appeal to Moses' priority over Greek poets and philosophers as the basis of his authority. As with Cyril *c. Iul.* I.14, *Graecarum affectionum curatio* II.43 also emphasizes that Moses preceded Greek philosophers and poets. See Austin Steen, 'The Significance of Narrative in Cyril of Alexandria's Exegesis,' *Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, 75 (2024) pp.1-19; and Young, *Nicaea to Chalcedon*, p. 24, notes Greek philosophers such as Plato were often claimed to have borrowed from Moses.

⁵¹² *c. Iul* I.11-24 (PG 76, 532-561).

rational investigation of the Trinity while distinguishing it from the more appropriately inscrutable mystery of the hypostatic union of the Incarnate Son:

While among those things that have been created we have nothing at all with which to compare the divine, ineffable Being, yet from so many thousands of illustrations (*παραδειγμάτων*) we are in some measure able to gather something that can be understood or said concerning him to the degree that this is attainable. The mystery concerning Christ nonetheless remains extremely obscure, and the [manner] of his becoming human is not easily comprehended by ordinary people.⁵¹³

Cyril explains an important principle for understanding his ‘economy of knowing’. He recognizes that the divine essence is incomparable with anything created, yet he admits that created realities, serving as illustrations, images, or patterns (*παραδείγματα*), can serve pedagogically to provide partial, analogical knowledge of God. This distinction shows that, for Cyril, theological reasoning is valid only within the economy’s historical and material revelations. The divine nature itself is ineffable; nonetheless, God graciously accommodates human understanding by using created signs that direct the mind toward true comprehension.

By drawing this line, Cyril establishes a precedent for distinguishing which divine realities are somewhat accessible to reason and which must remain veiled in mystery. Knowledge of the Trinity’s work in creation and redemption is accessible to human understanding, whereas the *ad intra* life of the divine *ousia* remains inaccessible. The Incarnation stands at the juncture of this distinction: while the fact of the Word’s becoming flesh is revealed and can be confessed, the mode of union remains inaccessible to human inquiry; it is unintelligible apart from the sacrifice of the Cross, and for Cyril, is the ‘ultimate exegesis of who God is,’ showing the boundless depth of divine love.⁵¹⁴ This both roots theological reasoning in divine activity and marks the Incarnation as the definitive interpretive key, since it is the supreme historical revelation of the otherwise incomprehensible God. In this

⁵¹³ *Gaph.* on Gen. 6.14 (PG 69, 88).

⁵¹⁴ *Comm. Jo.* on Jo. 1.18 (PG 73, 161).

way, Cyril demonstrates not only the pedagogical method of divine revelation but also the limits of human reason. This is the hinge where Abraham's progress turns from monotheistic clarity to the question of how true knowledge can remain genuine yet partial when faced with divine ineffability.

Having traced Cyril's interpretation of Abraham's conceptual advance in Gen. 14, showing that theological reasoning is legitimate only within the economy's historical and material disclosures, the next step is to consider the limits of such reasoning. I ask, if progress in knowledge is real yet partial, how does Cyril account for the mystery of God that transcends human comprehension? Next, I examine his treatment of divine ineffability and the patristic distinction between *noesis* and *epinoia*, which marks the point where human understanding must give way to revelation mediated by types and images, and by the Incarnate Word. Before turning to the typological pedagogy of Gen. 18, it is necessary to consider how Cyril frames the relationship between intellectual apprehension and divine vision as an aspect of the economy's gradual instruction.

Ineffability: Noesis and Epinoia

This section is not an abstract digression, nor does it make claims about Abraham's interior cognition. Rather, it situates the theological logic at work in Cyril's account and its patristic context in order to explain how Abraham's knowledge can genuinely advance while remaining bounded by divine mystery. The discussion serves the narrative's shift from response to promise, toward apprehension of divine reality. Cyril's insistence that God transcends human understanding is well attested in Scripture.⁵¹⁵ However, as Jacobs notes, the Eastern fathers sought to reconcile the distinctions between the biblical affirmation of God as being 'above

⁵¹⁵ 1 Jo. 4.12, 1 Tim. 6.16, with the Old Testament affirming that no one can see God and live: Exod. 19.21; 33.20-3; Judg. 6.22; 13:22; Is. 6.5; Ps. 139.11-12.

intelligence' (*hyper dianoian*) with divine vision.⁵¹⁶ Jacobs identifies a twofold philosophical rationale underlying their position: first, the necessity of distinguishing *noesis* and *epinoia*, and second, the assertion that God is never an object of *noesis*. While I addressed Cyril's terminology for knowledge in Chapter Three on Israel, the present discussion on divine ineffability warrants a brief but closer examination of the distinction between the two terms.⁵¹⁷

In *noesis*, the intellect apprehends the properties of a form, wherein mental abstraction is still regarded as a type of empirical knowledge.⁵¹⁸ However, since objects are not merely forms but possess a deeper hypostasis and a foundational 'prime matter' that sustains the form (while lacking properties of its own), the mind cannot directly grasp it through *noesis*.⁵¹⁹ God, being eternal, wholly distinct from finite creatures, is uncircumscribed by time, and not only formless, but beyond form (*hyperousios*).⁵²⁰ By contrast, *epinoia* serves as the intellect's recourse when direct comprehension of 'prime matter' is impossible, relying instead on analogies and images to approximate understanding.⁵²¹

⁵¹⁶ Nathan Jacobs, 'The Revelation of God, East and West: Contrasting Special Revelation in Western Modernity with the Ancient Christian East' in *Open Theology*, 3, (2017), 656-58. References to God's ineffability in Irenaeus, *Adv Haer.* 4.20.5 (PG 94.797b-801c); Origen, *De princ.* 1.15 (PG 11, 124); Basil of Caesarea, *Ep.* 234.2 (PG 32:869b-870c). See also Gregory of Nazianzus, *Or.* 28.29 (PG 36, 67-68), 28.31 (PG 36:69-74); Gregory of Nyssa, *De vita Moysis* (PG 44:376-77); Pseudo-Dionysius, *De mystica theologia* 1.1 (PG 3, 997-98); John of Damascus, *De fide orthodoxa* 1.4 (PG 94, 797-801).

⁵¹⁷ Nathan Jacobs, *The Revelation of God, East and West*, pp. 656-589.

⁵¹⁸ Plato, *Republic*, ed. and trans. by C. J. Rowe (Penguin 2000), VI-VII, esp. 509-11 on *noesis* as the intellect's grasp of the intelligible form.

⁵¹⁹ Aristotle, *De Anima*, III.405 (429-30), the intellect abstracts form from sense-impressions (*phantasma*); Plotinus, *Enn.* V.3.3 and V.9.5, where the intellect apprehends the intelligible form but still relies on a sort of intellectual 'seeing'; cf. Lloyd P. Gerson, *Platonism and Naturalism: The Possibility of Philosophy* (Cornell University Press, 2020), esp. ch. 4, for a discussion of late-antique noetic epistemology.

⁵²⁰ Cyril, *Thes.* 12 (PG 75, 97-100) and *De. Trin.* II.3 for his insistence that the divine essence is unknowable in itself. He does not use the term 'hyperousios', seen in later usage. Cyril comes close with 'beyond nature (ὑπέρ φύσιν or 'beyond creation' (ὑπέρ κτίστιν). Pseudo-Dionysius, *Div. Nom.* I.1; V.8 (PG 3, 588; 817), repeatedly calls God *hyperousios*; Gregory of Nyssa, *c. Eun.* II.163; III.5 (PG 45, 536; 601), on the incomprehensibility and uncircumscribed nature of God; See Eric Perl, *Theophany: The Neoplatonic Philosophy of Dionysius the Areopagite* for later Christian adaptation of the notion that matter/hypostasis lies beyond intellectual apprehension. See my anthropological discussion in §3.1.a., n. 291.

⁵²¹ There is, to my knowledge, no dedicated study of the use of ἐπίνοια in Cyril of Alexandria. *c. Iul.* I.4; V.9 where Cyril uses *epinoia* for the mind's constructive apprehension of divine mysteries when direct comprehension is impossible; cf. Clement, *Strom.* V.11.71; VI.15, shows early Christian use of *epinoia* as a way the mind approaches divine realities through concepts and analogies. On the Cappadocian development, see Basil of Caesarea, *c. Eun.* (PG 29, 504-669); see also Gregory of Nyssa, *c. Eun.* (PG 4-46) who builds on Basil, tying

The Fathers' interpretation of Matthew 5:8—'the pure in heart will see God'—raises the question of how they resolved the relationship between purity and divine vision.⁵²² This topic is extensively explored in patristic literature, yet the Cappadocians' debate with the Eunomians is particularly relevant. The Eunomians argued that human reflection (*kat' epinoian*), was sufficient for how one could attain direct knowledge of the divine essence, asserting that God's nature is fully intelligible through language. This claim, however, was met with rigorous opposition from the Cappadocians, who upheld the fundamental ineffability of the divine essence. Building on Origen, Basil articulated a distinction between natures and individual realities to assert that while the Father and Son are the same in essence, they are distinct—at another level—which preserves the *taxis* among the persons.⁵²³ He argues that divine names are *epinoia* (conceptual attributions) rather than names of *essence*, which is key to the Cappadocian response to Eunomius.⁵²⁴ As Lewis Ayres observes, 'Basil distinguishes the unknowability of the divine essence, and the knowability of the particular characteristics, the *ιδιώματα* of Father and Son.'⁵²⁵ Basil cautiously allows the possibility of definitions based

epinoia to how we can predicate of God without claiming 'essence knowledge'; and their opponents Eunomius of Cyzicus (and Aetius), who claim that the 'name equals essence' provokes Basil and Nyssa's *epinoia* strategy. Cf. Mark DelCogliano, *Basil of Caesarea's Anti-Eunomian Theory of Names* (Brill, 2010); and Georgios D. Panagopoulos, 'The Theory of *ἐπνοία* in St. Basil of Caesarea and Eunomius of Cyzicus: Philosophical and Theological Background', *Vox Patrum*, 37 (2017), doi:10.31743vp.3336. See also John Behr, *The Nicene Faith*, vol. 1, (SVSP, 2004) pp. 108-11 for a discussion of *epinoia* in patristic Christology, and Rowan Williams 'The Logic of *Epinoia*: Patristic Reflections on Knowledge of God' in *STPatr.* 17 (1982), 284-98.

⁵²² Matt 5:8. See Vladimir Lossky, *The Vision of God*, trans. Ashleigh Moorhouse (Faith Press, 1963), ch. 2, observes that Augustine likewise argues that purification strengthens the mind, enabling it to see and cling to divine light, with mind and virtue mutually purifying one another, see *De. Trin.* 1.2.4, and *De libre arbitrio voluntatis* (PL 32; CCSL 29, pp. 205-321).

⁵²³ Origen was the first to make a distinction between God's essence and his energies. *De princ.* 1.3.4; 1.3.8 (PG 11, 148-150; 154-155).

⁵²⁴ Basil of Caesarea.. *c. Eun.* (PG 29, 504-669).

⁵²⁵ Ayers, *Nicaea and Its Legacy*, pp. 195-96. noting Basil's claim that we know God through his activities (*ἐνέργειαι*), but not his substance, which remains incomprehensible (*ἀκατάληπτος*) (Ep. 234). Basil distinguishes essence, power, and activity, though not in the later essence-energies sense. Cf. Bergdhart on Cyril's view that rationality and the divine image are natural yet ordered to a supernatural destiny through right use of reason. See also Bergdhart, *Image*, p. 38.

on specific differences in accordance with Aristotelian logic; even so, a creature's essence is far more complex than a definition can fully capture.⁵²⁶

Following Paul's reasoning, the Fathers conclude that just as one can discern aspects of a person through their actions toward others, so too can something of God be known through his operations (*ενέργεια*) in creation.⁵²⁷ Basil adds another contour by asserting that these are communicated from the divine to 'come down to us,' through the Incarnation, enabling humanity's transformation through them. This idea builds upon Peter's teaching that believers share in the divine nature and are granted knowledge of the hidden, divine mysteries.⁵²⁸

With that theological backdrop in mind, we turn to Cyril's understanding of 'divine vision' in relation to Triune ineffability. The standard term Cyril uses, as do the Cappadocians, is expressed in the term *theoria* (θεωρία), which reflects the contemplation of God and the believer's subjective process to grow in a greater understanding of God through spiritual disciplines. He does not suggest an unaided or unmediated vision of God's essence, thus guarding against any view that confuses 'seeing God' with comprehending God's essence.⁵²⁹ Because Cyril links virtue to knowledge, this examination substantiates that he links the ability to contemplate the mystery of God to the measure of one's purification. One's capacity grows in proportion to participation in the divine nature.⁵³⁰ How does Cyril parse the quality and boundaries of the believer's knowledge of God? Relying on Paul, he writes:

The Savior says...they will no longer need enlightenment (φωταγωγίας) from him, but because when they receive his own Spirit and have the Spirit dwelling in their heart, their mind will lack no good thing but will be filled with perfect

⁵²⁶ Jacobs, *Revelation of God, East and West*, p. 579, quoting Basil, *Ep. 235.2* (PG 32:872-873); Aristotle, *Analytica priora et posteriora*, 97a23. The term *energeia* originates with Aristotle. See Bradshaw, *Aristotle East and West* for a fuller discussion on the Eastern Christian reception of the term.

⁵²⁷ The Fathers rely on Paul: Phil. 2.12-13; Col. 1.29; Eph. 1.19, 3:7). See Basil *Ep. 9.1* (PG 32, 267); *De Spiritu Sancto* 9.23 (PG 32, 109b-c); cf. *Ep. 236* (PG 32:875-886), see also Jacobs, *Eastern Fathers*, p. 580.

⁵²⁸ Cf. 2 Pet 1.4.

⁵²⁹ This idea is not related to intellect, education, or ontology. *Or. 28.2, 4, 27* (PG 36, 29-32; 48-49). See the Platonic background on contemplation in § 1.3.b, n. 101.

⁵³⁰ Jacobs, *Revelation of God, East and West*, pp. 580-81.

knowledge.⁵³¹ By perfect knowledge, we mean that which is right and unswerving...but which has the right view concerning the holy and consubstantial Trinity.⁵³² Though now we ‘see through a mirror and in an enigma’ and we ‘know in part’ as Paul says, nevertheless since we do not depart from the precision of the dogmas but follow the intent of the holy and divinely inspired Scripture, we have a knowledge that is not imperfect, which one could not get in any other way than by the illumination of the Holy Spirit⁵³³...we approach God the Father in no other way than through the Son.⁵³⁴

Notice that, while the believer’s knowledge of God remains partial in this life, the quality of that knowledge is ‘not imperfect’. For Cyril, deification (*theosis*) is made possible solely through the Incarnation, for without the Son’s shared divine nature with the Father, no one could behold or comprehend God, whether partially in the present or fully in the age to come. Here, he articulates the distinction between the believer’s limited but true knowledge in this life and in the perfected vision that awaits in the eschaton, when the radiant illumination of the Son will utterly surpass the partial and fragmented knowledge we now possess. In that final consummation, believers will behold God in the fullness of His Triune reality with unveiled faces, transformed by the light of His presence. As Lossky eloquently expresses, ‘with untrammelled thought we shall have in our intellect the beauty of the Father,’ while contemplating the resplendent glory of the One who eternally shines forth from Him.⁵³⁵ This beatific vision is the consummation of deification; the inheritance of those who, through grace, become sons by participation in the divine nature of the Son, drawn into the eternal communion of the Father and the Son through the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit.

With that distinction in view, Abraham comes back into the foreground as the narrative test case for how types and images carry what the mind cannot grasp directly. From this

⁵³¹ γνώσεως τῆς τελεωτάτης ἀνάπλεων τὴν διάνοιαν ἔξουσι.

⁵³² τελείαν δὲ γνῶσιν εἶναι φαμεν, τὴν ὄρθήν τε καὶ ἀδιάστροφον, καὶ ἀπηχὲς μὲν οὐδὲν ἢ φρονεῖν ἢ λέγειν ἀνεχομένην, ὄρθως δὲ δοξάζουσαν περὶ τῆς ἀγίας τε καὶ ὁμοουσίου Τριάδος.

⁵³³ γνῶσιν ἔχομεν οὐκ ἀτελῆ, ἢν οὐκ ἀν ἔλοι τις ἐτέρως, οὐκ ἐπιλάμψαντος αὐτῷ τοῦ Ἅγιου Πνεύματος.

⁵³⁴ *Comm. Jo. on Jo. 16:24-5* (Pusey II, 645-46) cf. 1 Cor 13.12.

⁵³⁵ Lossky, *Vision of God*, p. 81.

conceptual discussion of incremental progress of Trinitarian knowledge as a feature of the divine pedagogy in Genesis 14, I now turn to Genesis 18, where the use of τύποις and images becomes more central. This shift marks a natural transition into an exploration of how the divine economy utilizes material and sensible elements to communicate spiritual realities.

5.2.b. Genesis 18: Perceiving the Triune God in Faith

As Boulnois observes, the exegetical history of the Mamre theophany is intertwined with various theological debates and polemical contexts.⁵³⁶ Cyril's discussion of this Trinitarian theophany in *c. Iul.* is situated within a sustained defense of two central points: first, the continuity of Christian teaching with the Mosaic tradition; and second, the legitimacy of interpreting scriptural imagery in ways that underscore the infinite distinction between the uncreated, consubstantial Trinity and the created order.⁵³⁷ Both arguments counter pagan and heretical reinterpretations that subordinate the Son.⁵³⁸

He also says that one day three men, who contained the figure of the holy and consubstantial Trinity, made themselves seen by Abraham when he was sitting near the oak of Mamre, that afterwards the divine Abraham addressed them, not saying: 'Lords', but 'Lord', in the singular, 'if I have found favor in your eyes'. But since we have already spoken of this passage in another book,⁵³⁹ it is necessarily in a brief manner that we have now recalled it.⁵⁴⁰

Cyril's approach involves a multi-layered account of his Trinitarian theology. He begins with a defense of the superiority, continuity, and coherence of a Trinitarian interpretation of the

⁵³⁶ Internally, with monarchists who confused the divine persons. See Novation, *de Trinitate* 18, CCL 4, (Brepols, 1961) pp. 44-48); and Marie-O. Boulnois, «Le rôle de l'exégèse pour la formation du dogme chrétien dans la polémique anti-juive: le cas de la théophanie de Mambré (Gn 18)», in *Exégèse, révélation et formation des dogmes dans l'Antiquité tardive*, Serie Antiquite, 208 (Institut d'Études Augustiniennes, 2020), p. 243.

⁵³⁷ The Trinitarian reading of Mamre arose in the fourth century in response to Arian subordinationism, with Cyril's interpretation marking a novelty in the Greek tradition. See Boulnois, *Mambré*, pp. 241-68. Earlier exegesis generally saw two angels, while the Jews and Theodoret read all three as angels. *Quaestiones in Octateuchum*, ed. N. Fernández Marcos and A. Sáenz Badillo, (1979), p. 65, 1. 23. Only Asterius of Amasea (*Homilies* 1.9.4) hints at a Trinitarian reading, but without argument, See Boulnois, *Mambré*, pp. 241-68.

⁵³⁸ Boulnois, *Mambré*, 243 n. 7.

⁵³⁹ *c. Iul* I.26

⁵⁴⁰ *Ibid*, VIII.23 (PG 76, 912); cf. Gen 18.3.

Genesis creation narrative over Julian's construal. Unfazed by the textual complexities arising from the text's alternating use of singular and plural related to the three guests—and their varied responses to the patriarch—Cyril assures his readers that there is no distinction of the hypostases within the unity of the divine substance. As I noted previously, Cyril cites Porphyry as a credible source to show that Abraham's initiation into the knowledge of the Trinity required passing through riddles and enigmas, thereby validating the detour through symbolic forms.⁵⁴¹ With a hint of Socratic strategy, Cyril first establishes common ground before advancing his argument: he and Julian agree on the existence of a supreme divine unity. However, Cyril upholds the Triune God as eternally uncreated and the Creator of all, defending a Christian interpretation of the Scriptural creation account as coherent both internally and in relation to the world. This coherence stands in sharp contrast to the flaws of pagan cosmologies, which fail to resolve the tension between an incorruptible divine monad and the communication of intellect to a corruptible humanity.

Cyril's discussion follows a brief survey of the gradual erosion of divine knowledge after the flood and emphasizes the economy's role in renewing that knowledge through Abraham. His progressive understanding perceives the revelation of the Trinity.⁵⁴² The significance of this theophany is underscored by the preparation required to receive it and the necessity of forms (*τύπων*) accompanying the revelation, which enables Abraham to better conceptualize the Trinity.

But when time had sharpened his mind, (ἡκόνησε τὴν διάνοιαν) leading to his advancement in correct understanding (όρθῶς ἐγνωσμένων), it was then, yes then, that he received more subtle theological instruction (θεότητος λόγους ισχνότερον ἐπαιδεύετο). For he learned (διεμάνθανεν) not only that there is one God, and none other besides him, but was also taught, still in types and

⁵⁴¹ Ibid I.25.47, *Porphyry's Philosophical History*. As Crawford notes, the citations originally came from this four-volume work but have been transmitted in the manuscript tradition as a distinct treatise, *Life of Pythagoras* (see Crawford's translation of the unpublished *Contra Julianum*, n. 88).

⁵⁴² For a fuller discussion of Cyril's use of Aristotelian and Porphyrian tools of logic to achieve precision in his Christology, soteriology and exegetical method, see Ruth Siddals. 'Logic and Christology in Cyril of Alexandria,' *JTS* 38 (1987), 341–67.

practically mediated by the senses, that the fullness of the one unmixed nature is understood (*νοεῖται*) as denoting the holy and consubstantial Trinity.⁵⁴³

The passage echoes earlier depictions of Abraham's readiness. Yet, the density of noetic terminology here surpasses that of previous accounts, likely due to its occurrence after the covenantal ceremonies in Genesis 15 and 17. The descriptions depict trust and intimacy, cultivated through Abraham's sustained eagerness to attain a deeper understanding.⁵⁴⁴

The verbs here function as 'divine passives' in service of his Trinitarian theology. Abraham's mind *was sharpened* through both time and correct thinking (*ὁρθῶς ἐγνωσμένων*), and he *was instructed* (*ἐπαιδεύετο*). Monotheism must be 'expanded conceptually' (*κατευρύνεται νοητῶς*) into a holy triad of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit: distinct in personhood, yet consubstantially united in an undifferentiated divine nature.⁵⁴⁵

Cyril remarks that what transpires at Mamre represents 'the way that the divine Abraham received instruction (*πεπαιδεῦσθαι*) regarding God's consubstantial Triune nature, a theme he develops further in the passage below.⁵⁴⁶ There, Cyril contrasts the higher understanding of divine realities attained through persistent contemplation with the lower, rudimentary perceptions of those who remain immature in their grasp of divine truth. This distinction allows him to present Abraham both as an exemplar of faithful inquiry and as a pivotal figure through whom the divine economy progressively unveils the divine mystery. His depiction of preparedness for divine revelation reflects the qualities that distinguish the deeper knowledge acquired by those disciplined in contemplative practice from the more superficial awareness of those not yet habituated to such intellectual and spiritual rigor,⁵⁴⁷

⁵⁴³ *c.Iul* II.24.12-16 (PG 76, 657); cf. Eph. 4.6.

⁵⁴⁴ Cf. Jo. 8.40, Cyril expounds at length Christ's perspective of Abraham's devotion compared to the Jews.

⁵⁴⁵ *c.Iul.* II.27.8-13. (PG 76, 684).

⁵⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, II.26.7 (PG 76, 681); *ἰσχνότερον* is often rendered 'subtle', but its semantic range also allows the adverbial 'more plainly,' and 'unadornedly'.

⁵⁴⁷ Discussed in more detail in the next section.

those only recently called ‘to knowledge of truth,’⁵⁴⁸ who don’t possess a mind well acquainted with contemplative knowledge⁵⁴⁹, the light of the vision of God...really is, somehow ‘unapproachable.’ For this kind of knowledge (γνῶσις) requires a mind (νοῦ) firmly established, disciplined by training...in addition... faith is established first (προεισοικισμένου τὴν πίστιν). For it is the bedrock and unshakeable foundation of theology.⁵⁵⁰ For it is the bedrock and unshakeable foundation of theology. And the prophet Isaiah confirms this point when he says, ‘If you do not believe, neither shall you understand.’⁵⁵¹

This vivid pedagogical description reinforces Cyril’s emphasis on the necessity of growing in the knowledge of God by strengthening the mind through discipline and faith. Burghardt comments, ‘Specifically, what Cyril sees in the mind of every man born into the world is reason in quest of faith.’⁵⁵² Cyril’s rephrasing of Isaiah advances this argument: ‘Faith comes through knowledge (γνώσεως), in fact, and understanding (σύνεσις) through faith.’⁵⁵³ By pairing these terms, he depicts a profound reception of the knowledge of God—one that exceeds the limits of human reason. His rare use of προεισοικισμένου suggests that faith serves as the foundation for the pursuit of understanding, providing ‘the root for nurturing understanding because it is the beginning of genuine devotion and brings life to those who receive it.’⁵⁵⁴ He envisions a ‘catechesis of the mind’ that leads to a faith resting in the impenetrability of divine mystery, from which, paradoxically, the benefits of understanding from the Spirit gradually unfold.

...this truly great and sacred mystery did not just appear yesterday, nor...the invention of a mind (γνώμης) that loves innovation, but was most ancient,

⁵⁴⁸ Gr.: ἐπίγνωσιν ἀληθείας; cf. 1 Tim 2:4; 2 Tim 2:25; 3:7.

⁵⁴⁹ Gr.: θεωρήμασι τὴν διάνοιαν.

⁵⁵⁰ Crawford notes that Cyril similarly describes the Nicene creed as a ‘bedrock’ (κρηπίς) and ‘foundation’ (ὑπόβαθρα) in *Dial. Trin.* 1.389.15-21; *c. Iul.* 1.24.20-25; translating θεότητος λόγων as ‘theology.’

⁵⁵¹ *c. Iul.* 11.24, cf. Isa 7:9. συνῆτε, Cf. 1 Tim 6.16.

⁵⁵² Burghardt, *Image*, p. 82.

⁵⁵³ *Comm Is.* on 43.10 (PG 70, 896).

⁵⁵⁴ Used only eight times in Cyril’s corpus; it denotes ‘introducing’ or ‘established *before*’ (italics mine). The metaphor of ‘root’ is often used of Abraham; see *GlaPh*. [69, 84]. I discuss this in the next subsection.

existing in the foreknowledge of the divine and pure intellect (τὸν θεῖόν τε καὶ ἀκήρατον νοῦν) before the foundation of the world.⁵⁵⁵

Unlike intermediary ‘gods’ of Neoplatonism, whose ontological deficiencies render them incapable of enriching humanity, the Son *can* and *does* by virtue of his personal subsistence within the divine *ousia*. As Cyril explains, ‘For the Son is the “image” of God the Father, after whom we too have been modeled in an intellectual sense; the nature of humanity has been enriched with this special privilege’ for humans are created according to the image and likeness of the Father and Son.⁵⁵⁶ This is why Moses wrote, ‘Let us make humanity according to our image...’⁵⁵⁷

So, then, our forefather Abraham *was not unaware* (ήγνωκε) that the Craftsman of earth and heaven and the universe...is the one worshiped in the Holy Trinity... Isaac and Jacob, *didn't think any differently*, but followed in the footsteps of their father's virtue and became emulators of his faith. The blessed Moses...says the God of the universe appeared to Jacob...I turn the discussion to the divine Moses himself. For he too proclaims one who is truly God by nature and *was not unaware* of the one through whom all things have been brought into existence...⁵⁵⁸

This interpretation affirms the presence of successive Christophanies throughout the timeline of the economy whereby the patriarchs—along with Moses—were granted revelation of the Trinity. Their recognition that the One God, Creator of all things, is the same God worshipped as the Holy Trinity further substantiates this theological vision.⁵⁵⁹ Given Cyril’s

⁵⁵⁵ *c.Iul.* VIII (PG 76, 860), cf. 1 Pet. 1.20. Cyril stresses that the Son knows the Father as his *Logos*, in contrast to the temporal limits of human knowing. The Son’s generation and knowledge remain ‘inexplicable’ (ἀνεξήγητον). *Comm. Jo.* on Jo. 1.17. (PG 73, 128); cf. Is. 53.8. See also Lois Farag, *Exegesis*, p.107.

⁵⁵⁶ See *Comm. Heb.* on 1.8–9, where Cyril argues that the Son must eternally exist with the Father as Word, wisdom, and power, lest the Father be without wisdom (ἄλογος); citing Ps. 45.7 (44.7. LXX), he identifies the Son as the power through whom creation, the *imago Dei*, and restoration are accomplished. Maxwell, *Hebrews*, p.115; (Pusey III, 375–76); See also. Athanasius, *c. Gent.* on humanity as both corruptible, yet uniquely created according to Christ’s image (κατ’ εἰκόνα), Hill, *Athanasius and the Holy Spirit, the Development of His Early Pneumatology* (Fortress, 2016), p. 13.

⁵⁵⁷ *c.Iul.* II.32, Gen 1:26. Italics mine.

⁵⁵⁸ *Ibid.* II.27-28, cf. Gen 28:13, 20; Jo. 1.3.

⁵⁵⁹ *Comm. Is.* on Is. 26.7 (PG 70, 573). See my fn in § 5.1.a. re: ‘Craftsman.’ He describes Moses and the prophets as ‘foretellers of the mystery to come’ and ‘Spirit-bearers’ who received the revelation ‘of the good way leading to Christ’ through the torch of the Spirit.

emphasis on the preparedness necessary for such revelation, it is reasonable to infer that he extends Isaac's and Jacob's *mimesis* of their father's virtue to encompass moral formation as a progressive deepening of understanding, one cultivated over time through disciplined contemplation of the Son.

Analogous Relationship between Abraham's Faith & Virtue and the Christian Life

As previously discussed, the Incarnation restores the grace of the Son's virtue when the Spirit unites the believer to Christ by participation. The analogy at work here is implicit rather than formally articulated: Cyril does not present Abraham as an explicit model but allows Abraham's progress to illuminate the shape of Christian formation. Cyril exhorts his readers to cultivate a desire for virtuous living, emphasizing that, through Christ, they possess the capacity to do so. He asserts, 'God guides all people to knowledge of the divine by means of those he invited *who are like the root*', referring to Abraham.⁵⁶⁰ Isaac and Jacob, in turn, came to know the mystery of God through the practice of emulating their father's virtue. This idea is further elaborated in Isaiah 41.8, which deepens the connection between moral formation and divine knowledge,

...you sprang from a noble root that was so honored and loved by me, you who are of the line of Abraham, emulate the good reputation of the ancestral virtue, and imitate their godliness...⁵⁶¹

Cyril emphasizes the genealogical connection linking believers to Abraham, whom he identifies as the 'root' sprung from the divine Seed. This relationship allows Cyril to draw an analogy between Christ, the Seed who planted the root, and the believer, who is spiritually strengthened in and through Him. Significantly, this union not only enables believers to desire and emulate Abraham's example but also empowers them to grow in virtue.

⁵⁶⁰ *c. Iul.* III (PG 76, 1050). Cyril will use the same metaphor for those educated in the Law and the prophets, cf. Rom. 11.16-18). Italics mine.

⁵⁶¹ *Comm. Is.* on Is. 41.8-10 (PG 70, 836); Hill, *Isaiah* v. 3, p. 31.

It is fitting ‘to decorate oneself with the propensities’ for a virtuous life, ‘if in fact it is necessary, once we have been adorned...to push within the sacred curtains and to appear thus to the all-pure God.⁵⁶²

It is important to observe the implicit correlation between conceptual and experiential formation. Cyril writes that the human mind is the most productive and fruitful possession of our nature, for it contains within itself the seeds of all virtue; like the earth, it supplies unceasingly from its inner self our desires for everything that is noblest and best, such is the way God has made it.⁵⁶³ Without sustained and consistent practice in the virtues over time, believers remain immature in their faith, retaining only a vague and incomplete grasp of godliness. The divine realities to which these concepts point cannot be comprehended apart from experience and effort that lead to continual growth and maturity.⁵⁶⁴ Given that Son is the ultimate revealer of divine truth, Cyril’s presentation of the economy reflects both the divine superintendence of believers’ growth and a particular regard for the gradual process through which believers are formed into the character of Christ.

Part Two Summary

In this section, I have demonstrated that Cyril grounds his articulation of the doctrine of the Trinity in the framework of incremental progress within the divine economy. This ‘doctrinal scaffolding’ is reflected in Abraham’s evolving understanding of God, which unfolded progressively through successive revelations from the Son concerning Himself.

The following passage is a fitting summary of the pedagogical features in Cyril’s Trinitarian theology:

...leaving behind the nonsense in these ideas, let us proceed to...the confession that the fullness of the ineffable deity is understood in the holy and consubstantial Trinity. And we ourselves have been formed according to the true and most exact image of the Father, that is, the [Son], and his divine

⁵⁶² EF 27.2 (PG 77, 1093-96).

⁵⁶³ EF 6.8 (PG 77, 17).

⁵⁶⁴ Bradshaw, *Philosophical Theology*, pp. 25-26.

beauty is intimated in our souls through participation in the Holy Spirit.... For ‘the Spirit is the truth,’ This is how the all-wise Moses has truly initiated us (μεμυσταγόγηκε) into these mysteries, and the holy prophets who came after him, with the apostles and evangelists, did not differ from his thinking on these topics. Rather, one and the same mode of theology (θεολογίας) is evident in them all...For with a true inspiration, they speak words from one Holy Spirit. And our Lord Jesus Christ himself does not leave us in any doubt about this matter...⁵⁶⁵

Cyril’s engagement with Hellenic philosophy allows him to argue for the coherence of creation as the work of the co-eternal, consubstantial Trinity. His refutation of misconceptions about the nature of God reinforces his Nicene convictions, affirming both the ineffability of the Trinity and divine consubstantiality, while also asserting the congruence of humanity’s creation through participation in the true image—the Son—by the Spirit. He also uses a familiar Christological phrase, ‘one and the same’ (εἷς δὲ καὶ ὁ αὐτὸς), which is grounded in the historical and mystical reality of the hypostatic union of the Incarnate Son, through whom the Trinity is revealed. Likewise, Cyril insists that Moses, the prophets, apostles, and evangelists collectively share a single, unified theological truth within the unified divine *oikonomia*, ensuring the continuity of revelation across salvation history.

⁵⁶⁵ *c.Iul.* I.1. (PG 76, 509-512).

Part Three: Conveying Eternal Realities Through Materiality

This section builds on the chapter's exploration of how Cyril connects the gradual progression of theological knowledge in the divine economy. By examining his typological interpretations of the material and temporal elements in the covenant-making ceremonies of Genesis 15 and 17, along with the offering of Isaac in Genesis 22, I highlight his reliance on the economy's pedagogical structure. This framework not only informs his Christological arguments but also underscores his insights into the Incarnational design of the economy, which he further illustrates through analogies to the Christian life.⁵⁶⁶ What follows remains oriented to Abraham's covenantal actions, keeping the typological claims grounded in the scriptural actions themselves.

Now the nature that is above all would be seen not by the eyes of the body, but by the inner hidden eyes of the mind,⁵⁶⁷ which focuses its subtle and precise curiosity⁵⁶⁸ on him and takes in the rays of the vision of God⁵⁶⁹ through imagery⁵⁷⁰ transcending sense-perception.⁵⁷¹

As I discussed in section two on the distinctions between *noesis* and *epinoia*, Cyril recognizes the inherent limitations of images yet emphasizes their indispensable role in shaping human perception, especially when engaging with realities beyond the grasp of intellect and reason. As Russell and Boulnois affirm, images function not merely as rhetorical tools for drawing analogies between familiar concepts but as symbolic representations that stand in their

⁵⁶⁶ Farag comments on Cyril's use of τύπος in relation to Christ, seeing no direct reference to any figure in OT as a 'type of Christ', e.g., with Moses' mediatorial role as a type of Christ's ministry. Further, if Cyril's typology does apply to an individual, it was used negatively, e.g., the king of Babylon was considered a 'type' of Satan. *Ador* (I.19), (PGL, 1419). Clement made much stronger connections between type and person, e.g., Isaac was a type of Christ and also wrote that 'what is put forth in type conceals the truth'. *Strom.* 1.7 (PG 8.732). See also Farag, *Exegesis*, p. 230.

⁵⁶⁷ ἔσω ...κεκρυμμένοις τῆς διανοίας ὅμμασιν.

⁵⁶⁸ Περίεργον.

⁵⁶⁹ θεοπτίας ἐλκούσης αὐγάς.

⁵⁷⁰ Φαντασίαι.

⁵⁷¹ αἴσθησιν c. *Iul* I.1.20 (PG 76, 540-544).

place.⁵⁷² This reliance on imagery becomes necessary given the intrinsic inadequacy of human language, which cannot fully articulate divine realities that transcend verbal expression.⁵⁷³ The same applies to sacrifices, though coarse,

...through the rituals performed back then we can see with the eyes of our mind the beauty of the truth [of the mystery of Christ] being formed as if on a canvas.⁵⁷⁴

5.3.a. Genesis 15: Faith and Divine Accommodation to Doubt

This passage occupies a central place within the divine economy, its theological implications extending across the spectrum of Christian doctrine. The discussion here does not attempt to rehearse the full range of doctrinal themes the passage engages. Rather, it isolates the pedagogical claim Cyril advances: that God accommodates human weakness without rendering faith dependent upon sensible proof, and that this accommodation serves to advance Abraham's formation. It signifies a crucial turning point in Abraham's knowledge of (and relationship with) God, marking a decisive stage in his spiritual progression. Jerome comments that by virtue of his exemplary faith in God, Abraham is the first person to put his trust in God.⁵⁷⁵

In chapter 15, Abraham is given a vision of God, hears the divine voice, and receives a prophetic message that all nations will be blessed through him, accompanied by the metaphor of the innumerable stars above. The encounter leads him to demonstrate a justifying faith, through which righteousness is conferred, friendship with God is established, and the covenant is formally enacted—as well as his name changed to Abraham. The presence of ritual elements plays a crucial role in this discussion. Cyril's interpretation emphasizes the material and

⁵⁷² Russell, *Cyril of Alexandria*, p.23, citing Marie-Odile Boulnois' dissertation, *Le paradoxe trinitaire chez Cyrille d'Alexandrie* (Sorbonne, 1994). See also, *Words, Imagery, and the Mystery of Christ: A Reconstruction of Cyril of Alexandria's Christology*, VCSup 55 (Brill, 2000). 23–32.

⁵⁷³ Farag, 202, cf. *Comm. Jo.* on Jo. 4.14 (Pusey II, 246).

⁵⁷⁴ c. *Iul* 10:24 (PG 76, 1045), τῆς ἀληθείας τὸ κάλλος διαμορφούμενον τοῖς τῆς διανοίας ὅμμασι καθορᾶν.

⁵⁷⁵ Jerome, *Commentary on Galatians*, trans. Andrew Cain (CUAP, 2011), p. 127, on Gal. 3.8-9.

symbolic elements of the covenant, including the detailed discussion of the animals and elements involved. The covenant is further ratified by a divine oath and accompanied by a prophecy foretelling the future slavery and eventual deliverance from Egypt but foreseeing the spiritual redemption of Abraham's descendants.

Cyril provides an extensive analysis of this theophany in *c. Iul* to deliver a robust defense against Julian's accusation that Abraham engaged in divination during the ceremony. His introduction is particularly valuable for my argument, as Cyril emphasizes a noetic tension in the form of Abraham's doubt (*ἀπιστεῖσθα*)⁵⁷⁶ regarding the likelihood of producing offspring, and Cyril's rebuttal regarding corporeal means accompanying the divine promise. In the passage below, he counters Julian, writing that God's covenant ceremony represents an accommodation (*oikonomikos*), designed to strengthen Abraham's faith by incorporating familiar elements from Chaldean ritual sacrifices. This interpretive approach highlights Cyril's broader pedagogical view of the economy, wherein divine revelation is progressively adapted to human capacities for understanding:

For the God of the universe had promised to grant to Abraham a land that would soon be full of his offspring and would be suitable as a habitation for them. But since the magnitude of the promise seemed somehow to surpass what could be hoped for—for unexpected events also tend to be disbelieved—he requested a sign, continuing with the words, 'Master, how will I know this?' Now the old man ought not to have doubted in any way at all since it was God who was speaking to him. *Yet because he was still in the initial stages of having faith, God came down to his level*, establishing in him a sturdy basis and foundation for piety and from his inherent and exceedingly great tranquility he decided to confirm the promise with an oath, bestowing on one who was weak something that would remedy faint-heartedness... *Therefore, as I said, the God of the universe actually came down to the level of the old man's faintheartedness and, by way of accommodation* he framed the oath in accordance with the practice of the Chaldeans.⁵⁷⁷

⁵⁷⁶ In *Glaþh*, written 20 years earlier, God is *intercepting* Abraham's 'great dismay' and 'grief' *before* doubt arose: 'He believed and was justified...but a sign was required to confirm the truth (Προσαπαιτεῖ δὲ σημεῖον εἰς βεβαίωσιν καὶ ἀλήθειαν) of the things promised, so God gave an oath, 'not letting him who believed be troubled in any way by uncertainty (διψυχίαν). 69.117.31-34. Above, however, Abraham's distress yields to a 'predictable disbelief 'at the magnitude of the promise, prompting his request for a sign (σημεῖον αἰτῶν). *c. Iul* X.40.17-18.

⁵⁷⁷ *c. Iul*.X.40.13 -25, italics mine.

The purpose of this discussion in *c. Iul.*, and Cyril's engagement with Abraham's doubt, lies in his direct response to Julian's challenge to Paul's account of Abraham's justifying faith.⁵⁷⁸ Julian accuses Abraham of practicing theurgy, arguing that the patriarch's Chaldean background led him to manipulate divine action through ritual means. By making this claim, Julian seeks to sever Christianity's continuity with Judaism and to challenge the legitimacy of Gentile Christians' identification as Abraham's children by faith. According to Julian, the Genesis narrative does not support Paul's conception of faith (*πίστις*); rather, he contends that the fulfillment of the promise hinges on what he deems 'unnecessary gestures', first toward the stars, and then toward the land. For Julian, these acts constitute divinatory practices, rendering faith insufficient unless accompanied by material validation.

Furthermore, to Julian's statement that 'Faith in the absence of the truth seems to be a sort of folly and madness,' we say, first of all...what is taken on faith must not be subjected to scrutiny. For how could something subjected to testing still have been a matter of faith? Nevertheless, the quality of truth had been added to his faith. For the descent of...detestable birds upon the sacrifices was not something even better than oaths; rather, his faith was more steadfast as a result of being accompanied by the certainty arising from the oaths.⁵⁷⁹

Here Cyril restates Julian's claim that faith without tangible reality is absurd, insisting that a 'clear sign' (*ἐναργὲς σημεῖον*) is necessary to confirm a prophecy. Cyril, keen to respond to Julian's epistemic concerns, directly counters this premise. He argues that Abraham's difficulty in grasping the promise does not undermine faith but reinforces it as the basis for theological knowledge. By inverting Julian's claim that faith without tangible proof is irrational, Cyril asserts that the visible⁵⁸⁰ confirmation granted to Abraham was not the precondition to his belief, but a divine accommodation to human weakness. In other words, it was a *supplement* to his faith, not the *ground* of his faith. Faith, therefore, precedes and

⁵⁷⁸ Ibid. Cyril's exegesis contrasts with Augustine, who denied Abraham's doubt and read the ceremony in allegorical fashion. (*De civ. Dei* 16.24).

⁵⁷⁹ For Cyril the stars are merely illustrative, not spiritual: *c. Iul.* X.41 (PG 76.738): '...the stars were taken as a clear illustration of this immeasurable multitude.'

⁵⁸⁰ Used substantively, *τὸ ἀληθές*, trans. 'the real'; or 'the true', referring to visible elements.

transcends empirical validation. This distinction allows Cyril to uphold Paul's doctrine of justification by faith while dismantling Julian's contention that divine truth must always be substantiated by sensory evidence.

The knowledge of the divine mysteries is revealed to those who believe in and obey Christ, and the will of God the Father is explained by the Son, who knows it...Abraham believed God and that his faith was reckoned to him 'as righteousness' and he was called a friend of God...Therefore because of his obedience...the divinely inspired Abraham was...clothed with the boast of [a] righteousness...[by] faith has become his basis for freedom before God.⁵⁸¹

This passage helps to close out this portion of the discussion. It reveals key theological priorities for Cyril: the relationship established through faith is initiated by the Son's pre-Incarnate self-revelation, who, by virtue of his consubstantiality with the Father, communicates the divine will to unveil the mystery of the Trinity by grace, for Abraham and all those counted among his children are made righteous by faith.⁵⁸²

As Keating and Fairbairn demonstrate, for Cyril, justification and sanctification are not discrete stages but integral aspects of a single work of redemption.⁵⁸³ Thus, justification by faith holds a multifaceted significance for Cyril, encompassing knowledge of the Father, the transformation in relationship with God, deliverance from his wrath⁵⁸⁴, adoption⁵⁸⁵, and regeneration into 'the gospel way of life.'⁵⁸⁶

⁵⁸¹ *Glaph.* (PG 69, 116), on Jo. 8.33, 15.14-15 (PG 73, 579-80). Maxwell, *John*, v. 2, p. .232.

⁵⁸² Fairbairn, *Justification*, 123-46. On Jo. 8.33, he argues that that Cyril sees justification not as an act bestowing righteousness but as mediated through faith in Christ, with faith serving as the channel of justification provided Christ is the object of faith, and nurtures understanding within the economy's pedagogy.

⁵⁸³ Keating, *Participation*, pp. 141, 192. See also Morgan, 2014. 'Circumcision and Soteriology in Cyril of Alexandria's Old Testament Commentaries', *Perichoresis* 12 (2): 206, n. 9.

⁵⁸⁴ Jo. 12.47

⁵⁸⁵ Rom. 4.1-2; 1 Jo. 1.12.

⁵⁸⁶ Wilken, *Early Christian Mind*, 76.

The focus now turns from the broader polemical horizon back to Abraham's formation within the ritual act itself, since Cyril treats the rite's material elements as the means by which Abraham is instructed to perceive Christological reality.

Corporeal Elements of the Covenant Animals, and Divine Realities

What follows does not offer an exhaustive treatment of each element, but keeps the narrative question in view: what, in Cyril's reading, is Abraham being taught to recognize through these material signs? A key aspect of Cyril's spiritual interpretation is the Incarnational paradigm of the divine economy. This is evident not only in his direct references to the pre-Incarnate Son within the Old Testament narrative, but also in the way eternal realities are mediated through material elements. Such mediation underscores Cyril's conviction that Christ's appearing in the flesh serves as the ultimate means by which divine mysteries are revealed through his humanity, made especially evident in Genesis 15 (and echoed in chapters 17 and 22) where Cyril interprets the various material elements within the sacrifice. My discussion will not attempt a comprehensive analysis of each sacrificial element but will focus on Cyril's most significant Christological observations.⁵⁸⁷

Cyril's discussion of the sacrifice in *Glaph*. prioritizes demonstrating how each animal reflects the mystery of Christ and how the ceremony illustrates the salvific effects of the Incarnation. Addressing both the Son's ineffable generation and his Incarnation, Cyril shows the paradigmatic pattern of the Incarnation within the long arc of the economy,

This is the profundity of the divine economy—we both make separate and take as one, thereby imparting knowledge to those who do not understand this mystery. Although our consideration of him has become twofold, however, he himself is wholly one, not capable of being divided into two following his union with the flesh.⁵⁸⁸

⁵⁸⁷ His discussion of the Gen. 15 ceremony in *c. Iul* focuses on the validity of faith, while *Glaph*. offers more detail on its Christological typology. (PG 69, 120, 128-33).

⁵⁸⁸ Some variants add, 'with regard to the hypostasis, he cannot be separated...' Lunn, p.146 n. 62. Cf. Ps 16.10 (15:10 LXX); 89.22 (88.23 LXX).

Given the imprint of the Incarnation and the prominence of the covenant-making ceremony, Cyril, no doubt thinking of Nestorius, carefully articulates the individuated components and their relation to the hypostatic union. While certain distinctions—such as animals being cut in two, or the contrast between the male bull and the female heifer—highlight specific features of each nature, Cyril emphasizes their role in conveying a unitive Christology.⁵⁸⁹ While Christ subsists in two distinct natures, it is essential to confess him as one person, not two.⁵⁹⁰

Two additional points emerge in this discussion. First, from a pedagogical perspective, Abraham's progress in knowledge is evident in his recognition of the figurative significance of the animals. His act of driving away the birds of prey which seek to consume the offering symbolizes his grasp of the heretical implications of dividing the offering into two distinct entities, an act that would corrupt the integrity of the hypostatic union.⁵⁹¹

Second, Cyril extends the typology for his readers by expounding on the kinship motif that results from justification by grace. Because Christ is signified by the sacrificial ram, dove, and turtle dove, he is depicted as both the innocent chief shepherd of his sheep who sacrificed his life, and the celestial birdsong that, through the gospel, summons humanity to good pasture. Cyril's discussion of Christ as the true shepherd in John 10 adds more contour to the image, writing that Christ first knows them, *then* is 'known by them.' Because all are strangers to the covenants, by grace he reveals himself and 'calls people everywhere to the knowledge of God,' setting before them the knowledge that leads to the true communion with the Father.⁵⁹² This is

⁵⁸⁹ Ibid. The list of animals: a heifer, goat, ram, two birds, turtledove, dove. The bull was introduced because 'it serves on occasion as a fitting likeness to Christ's deity,' due to its might in battle, and a male's ruling status. The heifer signifies the Son's kenotic self-offering, thus his human nature depicted in the secondary status of females; humanity under the Mosaic Law. *Ador. I* (PG, 69, 128).

⁵⁹⁰ See McKinion's study on Cyril's use of images and figures to oppose heresy and to depict the Incarnation so as to have a proper picture of Christ, as well as his analysis of the Greek philosophical modes of union (*παράθεσις*, *μίξις*, and *κράσις*) and why Cyril rejects them. McKinion, *Words and Imagery*, 84.

⁵⁹¹ *Ador. I* (PG 69, 131).

⁵⁹² *Comm. Jo.* on Jo. 10.14-16 (PG 73, 234-35), cf. Eph. 2.11-13; Heb. 2.16-17. Italics mine.

not mere acquaintance but is indicative of a knowledge borne out of intimacy, which establishes kinship (κοτὰ γένος) and nature, as well as participation (ἐν μεθέξει) of grace and honor.⁵⁹³

If you understand ‘knowledge’⁵⁹⁴ to mean relationship or kinship, then we say this: it was not we who initiated this [knowledge] but the only begotten God, who is from God....we did not pursue the divinity above our nature, but he who is by nature God laid hold of the seed of Abraham...and became human in order to become like his brothers in all things except sin..⁵⁹⁵.

The reference to Abraham’s seed (σπέρμα) extends the kinship imagery, denoting believers as the offspring of God. Cyril writes that being drawn into a familial relationship is to share by grace in the Sonship Christ has by nature.⁵⁹⁶ This kinship (and therefore knowledge and intimacy it entails) expresses the interplay of divine agency and human response of faith, both of which are granted by grace. For Cyril, it is not by Christ’s will alone, but through faith that believers are truly joined to him.⁵⁹⁷ Echoing Paul, Cyril emphasizes the unity of the Son and Spirit through the ontological union that joins believers to Christ on the basis of faith, yet even faith itself is a provision initiated by the Spirit and therefore, ‘a gift coming down from the divine beneficence.’⁵⁹⁸

An ethical dimension is also at work: for Cyril, kinship with Christ is moral, and is marked by a ‘readiness to listen and believe.’ In his discussion of the ascension of Christ and the descent of the Spirit, Cyril writes that believers are reshaped into a God-pleasing way of life. As participants in the divine nature, they ‘set their minds on Christ’s thoughts’ and resolve to live piously. The Spirit aids this resolve by helping them ‘shape their minds to his will’, and

⁵⁹³ Ibid.

⁵⁹⁴ νοομένης τῆς γνώσεως.

⁵⁹⁵ Ibid. Jo. 16.

⁵⁹⁶ Ibid. Jo. 10.26-28 (PG 73, 297-300).

⁵⁹⁷ Ibid. Jo. 10.14-15 (PG 73, .232).

⁵⁹⁸ *Glaph.* in Pent. (PG 69, 116); cf. Eph 2.8-9; Rom 3.24.

they, in turn, show themselves to be truly kin (*συγγενεῖς*) by progressing ‘in likeness and similitude to Christ’⁵⁹⁹ and advancing ‘in all virtue.’⁶⁰⁰

Hagar and Sarah: While the women are obviously not sacrificial elements, they nonetheless hold a significant typological and pedagogical role within the economy of salvation, with their covenantal distinction made abundantly clear to Abraham,

The divine Abraham, being overcome by the natural law of fatherly love, changed his mind about Ishamel. But when the Deity addressed him in an oracle, telling him to devote himself to Isaac alone as the one to whom the promise pertained, Abraham dismissed Hagar and ordered her, together with the child to leave the home of her mistress. In this the law was foreshadowing a type of the mystery concerning Christ.⁶⁰¹

Both mothers serve as typological representations of two covenants. Hagar, associated with Sinai, corresponds to the covenant that gives birth to those enslaved under the Law, while Sarah signifies the ‘Jerusalem from above,’ whose children are born through the promise and partake in the freedom of the covenant of grace.⁶⁰² This distinction functions as a profound pedagogical lesson for Abraham, and by extension, all those who become his descendants through faith.⁶⁰³ For Cyril, it marks a crucial theological distinction between that which is born of the flesh and that which is brought forth through the grace of the Spirit, thereby reinforcing Paul’s argument for justification by faith. This foundational antithesis between flesh and Spirit is traced throughout the economy, shaping Cyril’s soteriology and reinforcing his view of the Incarnation as the paradigmatic pattern of the divine economy. For Cyril, the very grace that precedes sin is itself constitutive of the Incarnation, so that the historical coming of the Son in the flesh manifests in time the grace already purposed in the divine economy. Thus, the contrast

⁵⁹⁹ *Comm. Jo. on Jo. 8.37* (Pusey II, 72) The same Greek term is used to denote both ontological and moral kinship, cf. Gen 22.17; Jer. 29.32, Matt. 3:9, and Rom. 9.6; cf; § 2.2.c.

⁶⁰⁰ *Ibid. Jo. 16:8-11* (Pusey, II.620)

⁶⁰¹ *Ador. I* (PG 69, 124).

⁶⁰² cf. Gal 4.24-5.

⁶⁰³ Jerome expands on this, writing that Ishmael’s ‘blessing’ to be fruitful and increase is distinct from a promise accompanied by a covenant, as is the case with Isaac. *On Gal 4.22-23*, Cain, trans. *Galatians*.184.

between carnal and spiritual mindedness, so central to the typological lesson and logic to the economy, also proves pivotal to Cyril's exegetical method, particularly when interpreting the Law, and to his doctrinal formulations.

5.3.b. Genesis 17: Spiritual Circumcision and Unitive Christology

This discussion explores Cyril's insights on the gradual progression of theological understanding within the divine economy, highlighting the divine pedagogy that guides humanity's growth in recognizing the Incarnational role of material means in conveying eternal realities. For Cyril, the circumcision event in Genesis 17 is an extension of Genesis 15, serving as a pivotal pedagogical moment within the economy. Here, Cyril clarifies from Paul that Abraham was made righteous while he was still uncircumcised. The sign functions as a seal of righteousness, marking the family of God and setting them apart from unbelievers. This is the source of his ire against Jews who believe the mere observance of the practice makes them righteous.⁶⁰⁴ Cyril interprets this pericope through a soteriological lens, seeing it as intrinsically tied to justification by faith. Furthermore, it foreshadows the Resurrection, signifying a transition to new spiritual status. The physical act of circumcision serves as a corporeal sign prefiguring the spiritual and immaterial circumcision of the heart by the Spirit.⁶⁰⁵

A key aspect of my argument is the divine pedagogical reference when Cyril asserts that Abraham 'was clearly taught' (ἐδιδάσκετο σαφῶς) that the circumcision of the heart would find its fulfillment in the Incarnation. This indicates that the patriarch received divine

⁶⁰⁴ Rom. 4.9-10; cf. Jo. 8.39, 56; 12.44; Matt. 3.9; Gal. 3.8-9.

⁶⁰⁵ Rom 2.28-29; 4.9-12; Col. 2.8-15. It is a topic of debate in *c. Iul* X.32-33 (PG 76, 725-726) and is discussed in Cyril's theological discourse in *Gla*ph. and commentaries. To the Jews, the heart was undifferentiated as the seat of the sensitive, affective and intellectual life. By the time of the LXX, *kardia* no longer designated intelligence or man's psychic faculties. Paul maintains the semitic meaning, where 'the heart is intelligence.' Despite the varied Greek philosophical tradition, Cyril appears to adopt a similar stance to Paul where the heart not only signifies the physical organ but is immaterial, where the *nous* dwells, and where divine grace is active. See K. Ware, *The Soul in Greek Christianity*, and Bradshaw, *Mind and the Heart in the Christian East and West*.

revelation, recognizing that circumcision in the flesh functioned as a foreshadowing of the spiritual circumcision to come—one that would ultimately be expressed in spirit and in truth.⁶⁰⁶

Corporeal Element of Circumcision and Divine Realities

Before summarizing Cyril’s theological insights from the covenant decree, I first examine his response to Julian’s critique of Christianity as illegitimate for failing to uphold this covenant. Julian challenges the basis on which Christianity can justify abandoning this practice, given Christ’s declaration that he came not to abolish the law but to fulfill it.⁶⁰⁷ In his remarks below, Cyril delves into the material and immaterial elements of circumcision emphasizing the theological distinctions between flesh and spirit. His use of epistemic language serves to reinforce his Christological claims, further supporting my argument,

Is the foreskin superfluous or needful? Necessary to keep from dirt as some say? No... the actual source of contamination is not in the organ... Instead it is beneficial, provided you believe it is a type of an intelligible reality⁶⁰⁸...it indicates the removal of inordinate desires and pleasures *that have to do with human mind*⁶⁰⁹, which Christ brought about in us through the Holy Spirit. Innumerable pleasures *bewitch the human mind*⁶¹⁰, with some of them diverting it to the fleshly devotion...to sum up, every kind of perverse action which even the divine law itself has denounced. It is from all these that the grace of the Holy Spirit frees us as it inhabits our mind and cuts away every form of uncleanness; this is the circumcision that God desires most of all...⁶¹¹

Cyril’s response not only aims to refute Julian’s claims but also shows how material elements convey eternal truths, strengthening his defense of justification by faith while incorporating Trinitarian references. As Crawford observes, Cyril employs a rhetorical strategy

⁶⁰⁶ *Ador.* I (PG 69, 133).

⁶⁰⁷ Cf. Matt. 5.17.

⁶⁰⁸ Gr.: πράγματος νοητοῦ.

⁶⁰⁹ Gr.: ἐπιθυμιῶν τε καὶ ἡδονῶν, αἴπερ ἀνεῖν εἰς νοῦν τὸν ἀνθρώπινον.

⁶¹⁰ Gr.: νοῦν καταγοητεύουσιν – (LSJ cheat; blind by trickery); (LXX Macc. 11.39 ‘murmur against’).

⁶¹¹ Τούτων ἀπάντων ἡμᾶς ἡ τοῦ ἀγίου πνεύματος ἀπαλλάττει χάρις ἐνοικισθεῖσα τῷ νῷ καὶ ἀποκείρουσα πᾶν εἶδος ἀκαθαρσίας. Iul. 10.32-34; cf. 1 Cor 7:19.

of arguing from the lesser to the greater. He begins by questioning whether the Creator,⁶¹² in instituting circumcision, added unnecessary and superfluous features to the human body, or whether this would imply that the body was not created properly. If there is no inherent physical rationale for the procedure—thus refuting Jewish claims that it was instituted for hygienic reasons—then the practice *must* serve as ‘an image of an intelligible reality’ ($\pi\tau\alpha\gamma\mu\alpha\tau\omega\varsigma$ $\nu\sigma\tau\tau\omega\tilde{\nu}$). Its true significance, Cyril, argues, lies in faith, as it symbolizes the removal of the mind’s corrupt attachment to fleshly devotions. Only through complete liberation from the passions can someone be ‘circumcised to God rather than the flesh.’ Cyril maintains that this ultimate liberation is found solely in Christ. This conviction informs one of his most significant theological themes within Abraham’s covenantal experience—his correlation between circumcision, Christ’s resurrection, and the gift of the Holy Spirit,

God gave the law that circumcision should be carried out, foreshowing, I believe, the spiritual things through fleshly figures...it foreshows circumcision in spirit and truth. It was performed on the eighth day, the same as when Christ came back to life from the dead. And it was the occasion of partaking of the Holy Spirit and receiving circumcision in him...not removing the filth of the body but freeing us from the diseases of the soul.⁶¹³

Cyril employs the Law’s eighth-day motif as a typological reference to the resurrection, integrating it with John 7.39, where Christ breathes the Holy Spirit upon the apostles. In doing so, Cyril directs knowledge beyond the temporal sequence of the Law toward its fulfillment in the resurrection, a completion that exceeds human capacity to grasp. This movement reflects the distinction between *epinoia* and *noesis*, as Cyril frames Abraham’s reasoning toward the resurrection. His spiritual interpretation of numerical associations is used to disqualify Ishmael,

⁶¹² ‘Craftsman’ (See section 1, fn 13 for context..) Crawford’s unpublished notes on 10.33, fn. 2517. cf. c. *Iul.* 1.29.15-24; 1.33.6; 2.28.15. Julian’s accusations are similar to Trypho’s, where Christians are perceived as despising the covenant, and claiming to know God, do not keep the circumcision and sabbath laws. Justin Martyr, *Dialogue with Trypho* (Trans. ANF 1:200), See also Aug., *Tract. adv. Jud.* 1-5, see also Ep. 196 *Ad Asellicum*. See Roukema and Amirav, eds., *The ‘New Testament’ as a Polemical Tool*, (Peeters, 2018), see ch. 3 where Martin Albl provides an overview of the *adversus Judaeos* literature within early Christian writings.

⁶¹³ *Glaphe* in Gen. (PG 69, 133).

who being thirteen years old when he was circumcised, ‘refused to accept the saving proclamation of the Resurrection’ that occurred on the eighth day. Faith, not genetics, marks familial belonging, exposing Ishmael as an unbeliever and concretizing his status as a slave. Isaac, by contrast, is identified with the faith bound to the eighth-day Resurrection: the free son of the free woman, enriched by the resurrection of Christ. Thus, free children are released from death and are ‘transported into the life of Christ.’⁶¹⁴ Through Christ’s death and resurrection, participation in the Spirit is extended as a divine gift to all who, like Abraham and the apostles, are justified by faith. As Morgan observes, ‘Jesus’ bestowal of the Spirit is tantamount to circumcision of the Spirit.⁶¹⁵ Within this framework, true circumcision is not of the flesh but of the Spirit, signifying participation in the intimate communion of the divine life of the Trinity.⁶¹⁶

In addition, the knowledge of the divine mysteries is revealed to those who believe in, and obey Christ, and the will of God the Father is explained [to them] by the Son, who knows it.⁶¹⁷

By grace through faith, believers experience a new spiritual condition, marked by a transformation of the mind that enables them to ‘see God.’⁶¹⁸ Thus, they become Christ’s portion and constitute the ‘spiritual Jerusalem’—the Church. The new people of God are depicted as enjoying intimacy with Christ, possessing true knowledge of the Trinity as those who both learn and obey the will of the Father, as revealed by Christ.⁶¹⁹

⁶¹⁴ *Comm. Jo. on Jo. 7.24* (73, 634) cf Gen 17.25; Gal 4.25-26. In Jo. 7, Cyril provides a lengthy discursis on victory over evil in the Exod. 4.24-26 account of Zipporah using a stone to cut off her son’s foreskin.

⁶¹⁵ Morgan, *Circumcision*, pp. 212-13. Cf. *Comm. Jo. on Jo. 7.39* (PG 73, 695) cf. Jo. 20.22.

⁶¹⁶ Ibid.. Participation in the divine nature is central to Cyril. See Meunier, *Le Christ*, pp. 163-169; Burghardt, *Image*, pp. 66-80; Keating, *Appropriation*, pp. 146-62; Fairbairn, *Grace and Christology*, pp. 63-132; Russell, *Deification*, pp. 191-203; Blackwell, *Christosis*, pp. 71-98.

⁶¹⁷ *Comm. Jo. on Jo. 7.17* (PG 73.579).

⁶¹⁸ *XII Prophe. on Zech. 10.5-6* (PG 71, 385-88).

⁶¹⁹ Ibid., cf. Zech 2.12; 10.5-6 (PG 71, 245-49; 385-88).

5.3.c. Genesis 22: Test of Friendship and the Revelation of the Only-Begotten

Unlike previous divine directives to Abraham which required obedience, such as leaving Ur (Genesis 12), or being circumcised (Genesis 17), this event stands apart as a unique pedagogical event for the progression in knowledge, which is explicitly framed as a test from God for Abraham to offer his ‘only begotten son.’⁶²⁰ Cyril’s account in *Glaph.* is notably rich in emotive detail, capturing the gravity of the command and the Christology it points to, when the Father ‘did not spare his own son, but gave him up for us all...’⁶²¹ I will begin by examining how Cyril understands Abraham’s spiritual habituation for this event, followed by an analysis of how the material aspects of the offering function within communicate the mystery of Christ.

First, how does Cyril frame Abraham’s spiritual readiness for this moment? His reflection on John 15.15 (‘I know longer call you servants’) offers a key, as it highlights Abraham’s status as a friend of God, and having been formed in faith, he is prepared to face this test with trust and obedience:

What kind of faith did he have, and why was he called a friend of God? ...when he was directed to sacrifice his only begotten son as a type of Christ, he was taught (ἐδιδάσκετο) the hidden purpose of God⁶²²... ‘Abraham your father rejoiced to see my day; he saw it and was glad.’... Not only that but he was deemed worthy of the divine word, and he knew the will of God⁶²³ that would be accomplished in the end times. At the close of the ages, Christ died for us—the truly sacred and holy sacrifice that takes away the sins of the world.⁶²⁴

Following the divine promise and phenomenological display in Genesis 15, Cyril suggests that this test represents the height to which Abraham attained. The dignity of friendship with God that Abraham enjoys is further elevated in believers, who being indwelt

⁶²⁰ Cyril discounts the biological elder son and sees Isaac as signifying the Son as the Only-Begotten.

⁶²¹ Rom. 8.32. Cf Is 53.4 ‘wounded for our transgressions’ in Is 53.4-6 (PG 70.1189-92).

⁶²² Greek full phrase: τῷ Θεῷ κεκρυμμένον ἐδιδάσκετο σκοπόν.

⁶²³ Gr.: βουλὴν ἔγνω Θεοῦ.

⁶²⁴ *Comm. Jn.* on Jo. 15.14-15 (Pusey II, 579.23-80.3), Maxwell, *John*, II p. 232, cf. Gen. 15.6; Jo. 8.56.

by the Holy Spirit, are elevated by Christ to a glory beyond their nature.⁶²⁵ However, Cyril highlights that this exalted status does not exempt them from trial. Rather, the divine pedagogy requires similar testing for all believers, in which they identify with Christ by mirroring his sacrifice—offering up their bodies as living sacrifices and surrendering their worldly plans and attachments to him.⁶²⁶

Within the gradual trajectory of the divine instruction, Abraham's trial represents, at least within the bounds of earthly existence, the pinnacle of his knowledge of God. Here, the contours of the Incarnation, which Abraham has come to understand progressively, reach their culmination as he perceives within the offering of Isaac the mystery of the Incarnation. Abraham is taught the heavenly Father offered up his Only-Begotten Son to die for the sins of the world and learned 'the astounding wonder of the resurrection of the dead which surpasses all reason.'⁶²⁷ In the passage below, Cyril wrestles with the question of how such a profound mystery was disclosed to Abraham,

How or when should we think the blessed Abraham has seen the day of Christ our Savior, that is, the time of his advent in the flesh? This statement is not easy... Nevertheless, we will consider the relevant issues as well as we can... God revealed his own mystery⁶²⁸ to Abraham just as to one of the holy prophets. Or we will propose that he truly saw⁶²⁹ the day of the Lord's slaughter...when he was directed⁶³⁰ to offer his only begotten firstborn son, that is, Isaac, as a sacrifice as a type of [Christ]....As he was carrying out this priestly act, the clear and precise meaning of the mystery⁶³¹ probably came to him at that time in the form of the type that he was performing.⁶³²

⁶²⁵ Jo. 1.12 (Pusey, I, 133). The patriarchs are not depicted as being indwelt by the Spirit, as believers enjoy.

⁶²⁶ Rom. 12.1.

⁶²⁷ *Gaph .on Pent. II* (PG 69, 145).

⁶²⁸ Gr.: ἐαντοῦ μυστήριον.

⁶²⁹ θεάσασθαι ἀληθῶς.

⁶³⁰ Gr.: ἐπετάττετο (LSJ, 'put upon as duty' Maxwell interprets it as 'instructed' here, but 'commanded' for προσετάττετο in John 15. The imperfect dilutes imperatival intensity, thus, 'directed').

⁶³¹ σαφῆ τοῦ μυστηρίου τὴν ἀκρίβειαν.

⁶³² *Comm. Jo. on Jo. 8.56* (Pusey II, 130.1-15).

Cyril presents two possible explanations: either Abraham received divine revelation in a manner akin to the prophets, or he was granted a vision of Christ's crucifixion while acting as a priest in the sacrifice of Isaac. While both possibilities are plausible to Cyril, and because the Spirit's inspiration is featured in both options, I am persuaded that Cyril favors the latter. Most prophets were not typically engaged in priestly functions (with the notable exception of Moses), but Abraham holds a unique position as the direct recipient of God's covenantal promises. Moreover, Cyril has already suggested the pre-Incarnate Son's direct instruction, further supporting the notion that Abraham's revelation was distinct due to his role as a participant in the sacrificial act. Cyril moves quickly beyond the literal sense to unveil how Christ is prefigured in the text. By emphasizing the love of the Father for the world in not sparing his Son, Cyril affirms the Son's divinity.

In the following discussion, I will first highlight noetic references that bolster his point. Following this, I will shift to the material and immaterial aspects of Moriah, and Cyril's interpretation of the vicarious nature of Christ's death, and Abraham's understanding of the resurrection of the dead.⁶³³

Regarding the first theme, Cyril makes two observations about Abraham's grief. First, it serves as an analogy for the Father's own ineffable love for the world and the lament in sending the Son to die for it. Although God remains impassible, the Father's offering is framed to express the divine sorrow accommodating the greater good that Christ's redemptive death accomplishes. Second, in his discussion of the sacrifice itself, Cyril speculates about Abraham's state of mind when told to sacrifice a much longed-for son, narrating the profound inner turmoil that must have consumed him, perhaps even bitter and turbulent thoughts

⁶³³ Cf. Is. 53.4, cf. Heb. 13.12; Rom 8.32.

ravaging his mind. Yet, the divine Word persuades him, compelling Abraham's 'unwished-for readiness' to obey.⁶³⁴

Within this discussion, Cyril offers an epistemic insight into his interpretation of the two servants who accompanied Abraham. He uses this tension to highlight the significance of his Christology by showing how the episode confirms the necessity and meaning of the Incarnate Son.⁶³⁵ By representing the people of Israel and Judah, the servants embody a condition of spiritual deficiency that impedes recognition of Christ's divine nature and results in failure to acknowledge him as the Son and rightful heir prefigured by Isaac.⁶³⁶ Cyril writes:

What was not evident to all, and especially to the profane Jews, who only see fleshly things, was that [Isaac] was to be considered as a certain somebody. In a way knowledge concerning him exists in a measure proportionate to the understanding that people have.⁶³⁷ This knowledge is found to be little among the little, but great among the great.⁶³⁸

This aligns with an argument I developed in my chapter on Israel, where I examined Cyril's suggestion of noetic dynamism. This confirms his conviction that both believers and unbelievers move either toward greater illumination or deeper ignorance, depending on their moral and spiritual orientation.⁶³⁹ By that I mean that for the faithful, this entails a progression in strength and clarity of perception, while for the unbeliever, it manifests as increasing rigidity or obstinacy, even in response to divine correction. Cyril further suggests that rationality itself is not immune to this trajectory; even those who believe they are pursuing the good may

⁶³⁴ (LSJ, 'desire' to obey), *Ador.* (PG 69, 145)

⁶³⁵ Cyril identifies a 'noetic tension' to frame his Christology and eschatological discussion. Israel's irrationality is symbolized by the donkey used by the two servants. Abraham's promise to return with Isaac prefigures Christ's return at the end of the age, when following the Gentiles, all Israel will be saved', *Ador.* I (PG 69, 143); cf. Rom. 11.25-26.

⁶³⁶ *Ador.* I (PG 69, 140-141).

⁶³⁷ ταῖς ἀπάντων διανοίαις ἡ περὶ αὐτοῦ γνῶσις.

⁶³⁸ *Ibid.*, (PG 69.141.1-3).

⁶³⁹ See § 4.1.c. 'a Priori Resistance'; cf. *Comm. Jo.* on Jo. 14.15 (PG 73, 463).

unknowingly harden themselves, demonstrating how the intellect remains subject to the inclinations of the will.⁶⁴⁰

In the passage above, Cyril adds that those who draw near God ‘by means of considerable mental application’ come to perceive His greatness and majesty.⁶⁴¹ He further notes that even Paul labored over his followers so that the divine attributes would be ‘gradually molded into their minds,’⁶⁴² underscoring the progressive nature of theological understanding. This process not only helps them cultivate correct thinking about Christ, but it also guards against misconceptions about His divine identity and salvific work.

Corporeal Elements of Isaac’s Offering, and the Mystery of the Cross

I shift now to Cyril’s interpretation of Abraham’s offering on Moriah. Weinandy shows that the preposition ‘for’ holds particular interest for Cyril,

Rightly then the prophet says: ‘This one was stricken’, for he knew that he was to bear our infirmities...and he suffered *for* us...was wounded *for* our sins and bruised *for* our iniquities. It is apparent that the prophecy is speaking about the one who suffered ‘*for* our salvation’ and that the one who suffered ‘did not know sin’. He suffered *for* us, and he died *on our behalf*.⁶⁴³

While Isaac (previously signifying Christ as the heir of the Father) carried the wood, it is the ram, provided by God, that is ultimately offered. This act signifies the Word, who, through his own body, willingly takes upon himself suffering and death, offering himself as a pleasing aroma to the Father.⁶⁴⁴ Cyril underscores the Son’s essential unity with the Father, highlighting their inseparable will, impassibility, and immortality according to the divine nature. He also emphasizes the Son’s voluntary choice to suffer according to his human nature,

⁶⁴⁰ See § 3.2.b. on ‘Ignorance’; cf. *Comm. Jo. on Jo. 6.45* (73, 508).

⁶⁴¹ *Glaoph* (69, 141), οὐς ἐγγὺς αὐτοῦ γεγονότας διὰ πολλὴν ἄγαν ἀγχίοια.

⁶⁴² *Ibid.* ήρέμα διαπλάττοιντο νοῦν.

⁶⁴³ *Comm. Is on Is. 53.4-6* (PG 70, 1173-76) trans. by Weinandy in *Theology of St. Cyril*, p. 8. Italics reflect Weinandy’s emphasis.

⁶⁴⁴ *Ador. I* (PG 69, 144), cf. *Lev.* On the ‘pleasing aroma’ fulfilled in Christ who accomplishes the purpose of the divine economy; see also *Ps. 40.6-8* (39.7-9 LXX); *1 Cor. 11.3*.

asserting that the authority of the Godhead governs the sacrifice, rather than being imposed upon him by Pilate.⁶⁴⁵

The principle of human sacrifice figures prominently in Julian's criticism of Christianity. He points to what he sees as a contradictory interpretation of the Law in the example of Isaac, arguing that, despite the substitution of a ram, the episode still affirmed the legitimacy of the offering. He also points to the absence of fire from heaven, typically seen in Old Testament sacrifices as a sign of divine approval.⁶⁴⁶ Cyril's rebuttal interprets the ram and fire of Genesis 22 within the context of the mystery of Christ. Cyril explains that the ram, which God provides as a substitute for Isaac, prefigures Christ, the true Lamb of God, offered for the sins of the world. The fire, historically a symbol of God's presence and purification, is no longer a material manifestation, as it was in the Old Covenant. Instead, with the true sacrifice fulfilled by Christ's death, the fire is immaterial and spiritual, representing the purifying presence of the Holy Spirit. In this way, Cyril reframes the concept of sacrifice in Christian terms, showing that the fulfillment of God's plan for salvation does not require the outward signs of Old Testament sacrifices but rather the inward transformation brought about by Christ's atoning death.

I conclude this section by examining how Cyril frames knowledge in his interpretation of Abraham's offering of Isaac. Cyril moves between God's foreknowledge of the outcome⁶⁴⁷ and Abraham's own knowledge before and after the offering, then shifts to the knowledge ($\gamma\omega\sigma\epsilon\sigma\iota$) future readers of Scripture are meant to acquire through contemplation of this act of

⁶⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁴⁶ Cyril cites remark likely from Julian, suggesting that Abraham brought fire for Isaac's sacrifice, *c. Iul* X.25 (PG 76, 716); see Crawford trans. n. 2461. Julian argued that the absence of heavenly fire, once seen as a divine sign of accepted sacrifice (e.g. 1 Ki.18), proved that Christianity abandoned the divinely ordained sacrificial system and forfeited its legitimacy.

⁶⁴⁷ Gr.: $\dot{\gamma}\gamma\omega\eta\kappa\epsilon\omega\iota$, 'we should not suppose that God *did not know* what would happen.'

faith.⁶⁴⁸ Central to this account is Abraham's confidence in God's promise: despite the prospect of his son's death, Abraham proceeds with the offering, 'knowing that God did not lie,'⁶⁴⁹ and 'not doubting the promises'⁶⁵⁰ that through Isaac he would become a father of many nations.⁶⁵¹

Within this framework, Cyril presents Abraham's faith as transforming his understanding of divine action. Abraham reasons that God will raise Isaac from the dead in order to fulfill the promise, arriving at a judgment that exceeds earlier modes of divine accommodation. Cyril's emphasis on Abraham's 'not doubting' marks a movement beyond the uncertainty evident in Genesis 15, signaling a maturation in Abraham's perception of God. The trial thus becomes, for Cyril, a piercing ($\pi\epsilon\rho\alpha\varsigma$) through which Abraham was 'profitably taught' the surpassing and ineffable love most fully demonstrated in the Father's willingness to not spare his own Son.⁶⁵² Through this pedagogy, Abraham's formation is extended to the Church, drawing believers into participation in the resurrection life of Christ.

Analogous Relationship: Material, Eternal, and the Christian Life

In Cyril's portrayal of Abraham as a key figure for articulating his pro-Nicene formulations, what comes into view is the design of the divine pedagogy, by which humanity is guided through stages toward a deeper knowledge of God. As with Christians, Abraham is drawn forward gradually, so that the inner eye of the mind may become accustomed to the true content of faith. This section examines Cyril's discussion of Abraham in *c. Iul.* as a case study in which he draws an implicit analogy between preparatory stages of understanding in which material elements convey eternal realities across the unfolding economy, and the formation that believers undergo in coming to know Christ.

⁶⁴⁸ *Ador* (PG 69, 144-5), cf. Job 38.2; Is. 46.9.

⁶⁴⁹ ἢδει καὶ ἀψευδοῦντα πρὸς τοῦτο Θεόν.

⁶⁵⁰ οὐκ ἐν ἀπογνώσει γεγονὼς τῶν ἐπηγγελμένων, cf. Gen 21.12.

⁶⁵¹ *Ador* (PG 69,145).

⁶⁵² Gr.: χρησίμως...έδιδάσκετο.

In his rebuttal to Julian concerning the validity of Christian worship, Cyril grounds his argument in a spiritual interpretation of the Old Testament sacrificial elements, including Genesis 22, showing how these rites function as shadows whose fulfillment is realized in Christ. Within this defense, he draws deliberate parallels between Abraham's obedience and the sacrificial form of the Christian life, reconfiguring the Law's sacrifices in terms of virtue and spiriting worship, writing:

For those descended from Israel used to offer to God cattle, sheep, turtledoves...but we...have put away such coarse service and have been commanded to celebrate a service that is subtle and sharpened⁶⁵³, intelligible and spiritual. For 'as a pleasing aroma' to God we offer every kind of virtue—faith, hope, love, justice self-control, obedience, and tractability, ceaseless doxologies, and the other virtues. For this is a supremely immaterial sacrifice that is suitable for God, who is by nature simple and immaterial, and the habits of true well-being are offerings of intelligible 'aroma'.

For Cyril, this description articulates the essence of the 'gospel way of life,' understood as faith ordered toward friendship with God,' and marks the formation of a new spiritual people preserved as God's own possession.⁶⁵⁴ Cyril views Abraham as a prefiguration of the disciples; whereas Abraham was the founder of the fleshly race of Israel, the disciples have become the first fruits of a holy nation, a royal priesthood, and fathers of a new spiritual race.⁶⁵⁵ He emphasizes the transition from external material offerings to an interior Spirit-based sacrificial life—one rooted in Christ, and motivated by faith, hope, and love.

The saints, having adorned themselves with faith, 'offer not others, but themselves,' embodying the self-giving devotion that characterizes true friendship with God. Cyril uses the sacrificial analogy of Abraham's departure from Ur for the pilgrimage of Christians. Such renunciation of worldly affections includes a similar call to 'go from your country,' knowing

⁶⁵³ Gr.: ἀπεξεσμένην. Crawford, commenting on c. Iul 2.12, (his n. 224), 'this verb can mean "to polish" or "to scrape to a point" and is one of Cyril's favorite metaphors.' Cf. c. Iul. 4.16.28; 4.44.18; 5.8.9; 7.30.18; 8.27.3; 10.6.19; 10.24.16.

⁶⁵⁴ *Comm. Jo.* on Jo. 15.14-15 (PG 73, 579-80), Maxwell *John*, II, p. 232.

⁶⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

they are strangers on the earth since their citizenship is above. Having left the land of their birth, ‘as far as their God-loving thoughts are concerned’, they desire the mansions above.⁶⁵⁶ His metaphors of subtlety, sharpening, and intelligibility relate to the concept of worshiping in spirit and truth, a central theme in his works, achieved through the cultivation of every virtue.⁶⁵⁷ This signals the necessity of continual refinement and doctrinal catechesis and sacramental participation to gain a ‘trustworthy, irreproachable knowledge of that which is really good’ and to diligently orient the mind to contemplate the superlative glory of Christ.⁶⁵⁸

Conclusion

By concluding this thesis with Abraham, I argued that Cyril presents the patriarch as the ‘culminating exemplar’ who embodies the Christological remedies to ignorance of the knowledge of God through faith, knowledge, and virtue. Even at this stage, Abraham is not elevated into a doctrinal norm. Rather, Cyril’s portrayal of Abraham gathers the thesis’s claims by narrating formation as revelation deepens. I demonstrated this by showing, first, in Parts One and Two, that Cyril’s pro-Nicene convictions shaped his portrayal of Abraham in Genesis 12, where the patriarch exemplified virtue by rejecting pagan polytheism in favor of the one true God. I showed that Cyril’s soteriology resolves the tension between Abraham’s status as a sinner and a virtuous seeker by situating both within a coherent account of Cyril’s soteriology through the functional use of epistemic language. In Genesis 14 and Genesis 18, Abraham’s perception of God as the ‘Most High’ and as Triune is depicted through the lens of the pedagogy of the economy’s unfolding revelation, and the use of the antithesis of knowledge and ignorance, setting Abraham in contrast to his own descendants and to the inconsistencies of Greek philosophy. As the recipient of the pre-Incarnate Son’s revelation, Abraham embodies

⁶⁵⁶ *Glaphyra* on Gen. 22, cf. Gen 15.6, Jas.2.23; Gen. 12.1; Jn 8.56; Heb. 13.14, 11.10; Jo. 14.3.

⁶⁵⁷ Jo. 4:23-24. This is a prominent theme in Cyril’s theology, inspiring *Ador. I* (PG 68, 133-1125); cf. *c. Iul IV.14* (PG 76, 282).

⁶⁵⁸ *c. Iul. IV* (PG 76, 282).

Cyril's conviction that correct theological understanding is inseparable from God's self-disclosure in Christ throughout the economy. For Cyril, revelation is divinely initiated, and when received by faith, establishes union through the Spirit who restores the mind and draws believers into an understanding and confession of the Trinity.

In Part Three, I showed that Cyril interprets the covenantal rites of Genesis 15 and 17, together with the offering of Isaac in Genesis 22, as training readers to perceive sacrificial and material elements as mediations of divine reality. These rites anticipate their fulfillment in the life-giving flesh of the Incarnate Son, presenting the Incarnation as the organizing principle of the divine economy, and illustrating how faith matures as outward rites give way to inward transformation through the Spirit. Cyril's argument draws attention to the noetic tensions that mark this movement, from shadow to substance, from material mediation to spiritual apprehension, and from conceptual understanding to communion with Christ. In this way, Abraham functions as an implicit analogue for the believer's formation in faith and understanding, while his doubts and hesitations remain intact, rendering his development as descriptive rather than as a transhistorical proto-Christian.

For Cyril, true knowledge is inseparable from Christ, and this knowledge entails ethical transformation. Understood in this way, the distinction between *epinoia* and *noesis* disciplines the claim by clarifying how Abraham's knowledge can be both genuine and advancing without implying unmediated comprehension of God. By highlighting Abraham's virtuous faith as well as his receptive understanding of divine revelation, Cyril presents a pedagogical exemplar for the Christian life: the Son, through the Spirit redeems and transforms believers, restoring their minds to perceive divine truth and shaping them into a people whose life of faith and virtue express the knowledge of God once revealed to Abraham and fulfilled in Christ.

Conclusion

This thesis has shown that Cyril of Alexandria consistently relies on noetic language both to frame his pro-Nicene formulations and to form the minds and habits of his readers, in whom true knowledge of God is realized through participation in Christ and expressed in a life of virtue. While the themes of knowledge and virtue stand in continuity with earlier Alexandrian traditions, Cyril's Christology reconfigures these concerns by locating them decisively within the Incarnational economy. The study began with Cyril's Christological formulations, demonstrating how claims about knowing arise from and remain governed by them. Knowledge is rooted in the life of the Trinity and communicated through the Incarnate Son, who is both revealer and the content of divine truth. Christ's single subjectivity, the ineffability of the divine essence, and the inseparable operations of the Trinity together establish the conditions under which God is known and confessed.

From this Christological orientation, the thesis traced how knowledge matures by grace within a reciprocal divine-human interplay that progresses as believers are incorporated into and actively participate in Christ's life. Growth in understanding unfolds incrementally, as faith responds to enabling grace and is sustained through obedience. Knowledge advances through participation rather than abstraction, and its vitality is confirmed through faithful response.

The sacraments emerge as privileged sites in which participation in Christ is enacted and perception is formed. Through baptism and the Eucharist, believers can be habituated toward the mind of Christ as divine life is communicated corporeally and spiritually, though the effects of this participation vary according to noetic disposition. As participation deepens, believers come to recognize their union with Christ and with one another, while its absence or distortion is rooted in disordered perception and practice. The effects of rightly-received participation are displayed in ethical life, where virtue manifests the reception of grace and confirms the formation of understanding.

Cyril's reading of Israel further intensifies this account. Building on Pauline patterns, he interprets the Law as a pedagogy that trains perception through priesthood, sacrifice, feasts, and the tabernacle. These scriptural forms function as a noetic grammar that both veils and reveals, guiding the Church to discern in types and shadows what is given in substance in the Incarnate Word and communicated in the sacraments. Cyril's spiritual interpretation demonstrates how right knowledge of God is ecclesially mediated, regulated, safeguarded and cultivated, thus shaping judgment through movement from letter to Spirit and from shadow to fulfillment.

Throughout this pedagogical process, Cyril relies on the antithesis of knowledge and ignorance as an exegetical and formative strategy for ordering theological judgment and training perception. Israel thus functions both as a constructive grammar and as a site of exposure: the same economy that educates receptive minds also exposes resistance. This pairing of knowledge and ignorance serves both methodological and diagnostic roles, centering the Christological economy while revealing the pathology of unbelief when Scripture is read apart from Christ.

The study culminated with Abraham as an exemplar of formation. In Cyril's exegesis, Abraham is an implicit analogical figure for believers whose gradual progress in the knowledge of eternal realities illustrates the pedagogy of the divine economy at its most personal. Faith seeks understanding as the promises of God disclose their Christological content through gradual formation. Abraham advances in apprehension through obedience, conceptual instruction, material mediation, and moral growth, revealing a pattern in which virtue emerges in cadence with faith and understanding. His life provides an example without becoming an idealized template, as Cyril preserves Abraham's doubts and hesitations while showing how right knowing is shaped by the Incarnational economy.

Cyril's rhetoric, including its polemical severity, belongs within this formative and diagnostic framework. His use of antithesis reveals disordered perception and its causes, highlighting their remedy in Christ. Polemic in this context functions pedagogically, guiding the faithful toward Christological clarity and sustaining mystagogical habits that strengthen judgment and correct knowledge of God within the Church.

In summary, this thesis advances Cyrillian scholarship by providing a cohesive account of how epistemic language functions within Cyril's theology as an integrating and formative logic. It shows how Cyril's theology cannot be fully understood by separating doctrinal claims from the formative and ecclesial processes through which they are learned, embodied, and discerned. By illustrating how participation in Christ governs perception, judgment, and virtue, this study explains why Christological confession carries sacramental, pedagogical, and ethical significance simultaneously. Christology thus orders the conditions under which knowing takes shape, while sacramental participation, scriptural interpretation, and teaching shape perception and discernment. In this framework, rhetoric and polemic function diagnostically to identify misrecognition, redirect toward faithful mystagogical habituation, and uphold doctrinal boundaries. Virtue, grounded in the character of Christ and cultivated through the mystagogical spectrum of experiential, affective, and communal knowledge, reflects the reception of grace and the disposition transformed by the Spirit. Virtue's presence or lack reveals the success or failure of formation.

By examining these elements together, this thesis clarifies the unity of Cyril's pro-Nicene theology as a lived and enacted practice of knowing God in Christ, in which theological confession, ecclesial formation, and faithful life remain inseparably ordered. While materially distinct, these domains function together within a single economy whose aim is the formation of right perception and faithful participation in Christ. On this reading, Cyril may be considered a theologian and pastor whose Christology is both formative and coherently unitive.

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