The Sanctifying Work of the Holy Spirit: Revisiting Alston's Interpersonal Model

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Abstract: Of the various loci of systematic theology that call for sustained philosophical investigation, the doctrine of sanctification stands out as a prime candidate. In response to that call, William Alston developed three models of the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit: the fiat model, the interpersonal model, and the sharing model. In response to Alston's argument for the sharing model, this paper offers grounds for a reconsideration of the interpersonal model. We close with a discussion of some of the implications of one's understanding of the transforming work of the Holy Spirit for practical Christian spirituality.

1. Introduction

While there is a widespread consensus amongst Christian theologians that the Holy Spirit is the agent of sanctification in believers' lives, there are divergent accounts regarding the manner in which the Holy Spirit brings about such transformation (e.g., see Kärkkäinen, 2012). For instance, one account has it that the sanctifying operation of the Holy Spirit is essentially mysterious (e.g., Kuyper, 1904). And yet, various Biblical passages are suggestive of a sanctifying process that can be positively understood, at least in part, and thereby meaningfully engaged. [1] Indeed, the manner in which believers engage the means of sanctifying grace is necessarily framed by one's understanding of how it is that the Spirit of God utilizes those means. For example, if

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[1] For instance, in Galatians 5:16–25 Paul describes at least a two-stage sanctification process of walking in the Spirit that leads to not gratifying desires to sin (v. 16). And yet, Paul goes on to draw attention to a conflict between the "desires of the Spirit" and the "desires of the flesh" that "keep you from doing the things you want to do" (v. 17). Nevertheless, the Galatians are encouraged to be "led by the Spirit" (v. 18) and "keep in step with the Spirit" (v. 25) now that they have "life in the Spirit" (v. 25), which will bring about the "fruit of the Spirit" (v. 22–23). While the interconnection of these features of sanctification are not explicitly formulated in this passage, the passage is suggestive of a growth process that can at least be partly understood (e.g., conflicting desires) and thereby meaningfully engaged (e.g., walking in the Spirit). For an overview of some of the ways Pauline thought on the Spirit and sanctification has been understood, see Volker Rabens (2013, 253–306).

the process of the Spirit's sanctifying work is, in fact, mysterious, then it will be a mystery as to how engaging Scripture, prayer, and other means of grace interact with the Spirit's work. So coming to a view of the nature of the Spirit's transforming work frames and orients the intentionality involved in spiritual practices.

In a helpful paper, William Alston distinguishes three models of the sanctifying work of the Spirit (Alston, 1988). First, according to what Alston calls the "fiat model," psychological changes in a person are brought about directly by the omnipotent will of the Holy Spirit independent of human activity. Second, according to the "interpersonal model," psychological changes in a person are brought about through the person's receptivity to the Spirit's relational presence. And, third, on what Alston terms the "sharing model," psychological changes in a person are brought about through a participation of the divine life within the person's life. Alston finds weaknesses with both the fiat and interpersonal models that he argues are avoided by adoption of the sharing model. We contend for a reconsideration of the interpersonal model by offering a more developed account of interpersonal relationality that avoids Alston's critiques and takes on board what he sees as the theological and psychological benefits of the sharing model. We conclude with a discussion of the practical significance for Christian spirituality of coming to have a more accurate understanding of the Spirit's sanctifying work.

1.1. Alston's Approach

Alston focuses his discussion on the specific activity of the Holy Spirit that brings about characterological change—i.e., those alterations that transform the Christian into greater conformity to the image of Christ. Alston writes that the Spirit's transforming work

> has to do with personality or character changes, with changes in what we might call "motivational structure." That is, it has to do with changes in one's tendencies, desires, values, attitudes, emotional proclivities, and the like. It has to do with such changes as the weakening of a desire for illicit sexual intercourse, the strengthening of a desire for awareness of God, the weakening of a tendency to be preoccupied with one's status or reputation, and the strengthening of one's interest in the condition of others. The issue is as to just what role the activity of the Holy Spirit has in such changes as these. (126)

Alston's focus is therefore limited to the moral aspects of the work of the Holy Spirit and not to other effects the Spirit of God may bring about (e.g., physical healing, spiritual gifts, inspiration, etc.). Furthermore, Alston rules out such extreme views as ultra-Pelagianism in which natural human capacities alone are responsible for moral change and ultra-Augustinianism in which God literally takes over as the primary agent in a person's life. Alston rightly maintains that these views substantially depart, each in its own way, from "scripture, tradition, and normal Christian experience" (125). He concludes that "any viable answer" to the question of the nature of the

Spirit's transforming work "must recognize both a divine and a human agent, both divine activity and human response" (125; cf. Adams, 2016, 84).

2. The Fiat Model

Alston first considers the fiat model, which is an attractive model of the Spirit's sanctifying due to its simplicity. According to this model, psychological changes in a person are brought about directly by the omnipotent will of the Holy Spirit independent of a person's response to or participation with the Spirit. On this account, the activity of the Holy Spirit in sanctification constitutes the same type of activity as the act of creation. Alston explains:

> [A]ll such changes result from God's simply effecting them directly by an exercise of his omnipotence, without in any way going through natural psychological or social processes, and without in any way evoking a response from the creature in order to carry this out. God just decides that one of my tendencies shall be weakened and another strengthened, and Presto! It is done. (126)

On this view, the believer passively experiences the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit and contributes nothing to the Spirit's work.

2.1 Alston's Evaluation of the Fiat Model

In evaluation of the fiat model, Alston first observes that various biblical passages can be naturally read as indicating that sanctification occurs by a direct operation of God's power independent of human response or participation. For instance, 1 Thessalonians 5:23 reads, "May God himself, the God of peace, make you holy in every part, and keep you sound in spirit, soul, and body, without fault when our Lord Jesus Christ comes" (in addition, Alston puts forward Ps 51:10, Ez 11:19–20, Phil 2:12-13, 1 Thess 3:12). Alston also notes that a variety of theologians defend what appear to be fiat models of sanctification (e.g., Augustus Strong and Emil Brunner) and that the model fits well with the New Testament motif of "new creation"/"new birth" in that just as persons play no active part in being created by God or born as infants, they play no active part in their *new* creation or spiritual rebirth (130). Further, the view captures a central aspect of the phenomenological reports of a wide variety of Christians throughout church history in which dramatic change seems to the person in question as "a bolt from the blue" in which "it seems that God alone by his almighty power has effected a fundamental change in his personality" (130).

While Alston admits that God could very well sanctify individuals according to divine decree and that God may do so on some occasions, he has reasons for doubting that fiat-change is God's "normal *modus operandi*" (130). First, Alston notes that a

major theme of the Christian tradition is that God made us for loving, interpersonal interaction with himself and that the fiat model is distinctively impersonal:

> But if God is primarily concerned to enter into interpersonal relations with us, why should he relate himself to us here in such an impersonal manner, treating us as sticks and stones, or at least acting in a way that is indistinguishable from one that is equally appropriate to sticks and stones. (131)

Second, Alston worries that for God to alter another's desires and attitudes without the other's consent would be a violation of the other's personal integrity (131). Third, a striking problem with the fiat model is how to explain the gradual nature of sanctification (e.g., 2 Cor 4:16; Gal 4:19). Alston writes,

> If God is to transform me into a saint by fiat why should he do such an incomplete job of it, at least one that is far from complete at any given moment (up to now!), and why should the transformation be strung out over such an extended period? (153)

The classic Christian response of "the world, the flesh, and the devil" as obstacles to spiritual transformation would provide little explanatory force given that on the fiat model these obstacles will only serve as barriers to growth until God chooses to override their negative influence. On the fiat model there is no available explanation for the slowness of spiritual change apart from God's apparent unwillingness to sanctify his beloved children. To posit this sort of unwillingness on the part of God seems inconsistent with his goodness and love, let alone his desire to bring about human moral transformation (e.g., Lev 20:26 and 1 Pet 1:16).

For these reasons, Alston moves towards a model more in keeping with the personal nature of God and humans. Alston writes:

> Would it not be more appropriate to our God-given nature and to God's intentions for us for God to go about our transformation in a way that is distinctively appropriate to persons, a way that would involve calling us to repentance, chastising us for our failures, encouraging and assisting us to get started and persevere in the way, making new resources available to us, enlivening and energizing us, assuring us with his love, his providence, and his constant presence with us, leaving it up to us whether the desired response is forthcoming. (131)

2.2 Additional Objections to the Fiat Model

But before moving to Alston's consideration of the interpersonal model, we think it is important to reflect further on three additional liabilities of the fiat model in order to more thoroughly motivate the investigation of alternative understandings of the Spirit's sanctifying work. First, the fiat model offers no explanation of the various

passages of Scripture that condition growth on human participation. For instance, Paul's imperative to "walk in the Spirit" results in "and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh" (Gal 5:17). Peter exhorts his audience to "make every effort to supplement your faith with virtue, and virtue with knowledge, and knowledge with self-control…" (2 Pet 1:5–6; cf. 7–10). Passages such as these make it clear that growth involves human participation of some sort. While it could be that God sanctifies by fiat but nevertheless conditions that work on human efforts (e.g., prayer, receiving the Eucharist, scripture meditation, etc.), on such a view human involvement would be fictitious and arbitrary in that it would have no meaningful connection to the transforming work of God. On such a view, God could just as well ask humans to jump on one foot as a condition of his directly bringing about the fruit of the Spirit. Second, the fiat model does not provide any rationale for the *indwelling* presence of the Holy Spirit. Certainly, God could change human personality by his omnipotent will without personally inhabiting the human personality and so there is no theological rationale on this view for the indwelling ministry of the Spirit of God. What is the point of Jesus not leaving us as orphans and sending the Spirit to guide us into truth if transformation occurs independently of that reality (cf. John 15:27)? Lastly, some biblical statements appear to directly contradict sanctification by fiat. For instance, Jesus tells his disciples to go and "make disciples…and teach them to do all that I have commanded" (Matt 28:20). Elsewhere, Jesus prays "Sanctify them by your truth, your word is truth" (John 17:7). Teaching someone to keep the commands of Jesus and asking the Father to sanctify persons by truth (not by divine decree) appears inconsistent with sanctification by fiat.

So, on the basis of Alston's initial reasons to reject the fiat model as well as our additional objections, the fiat model understood as a comprehensive model of the role of the Holy Spirit in sanctification appears false.

3. The Interpersonal Model

Alston next considers the interpersonal model. On this model, psychological changes in a person are brought about through the person's receptivity to the Spirit's relational presence. Alston explains that there are interpersonal activities that the Spirit could utilize to influence the believer towards holiness "without stepping in and directly producing such a character structure by fiat" (132). First, God can call the individual to voluntary repentance, obedience, and life in the Spirit and these divine communications, even when not voluntarily responded to, can have effects on an individual's likes, desires, and attitudes. Second, God could affect the "ideational processes" of the believer by bringing "it about that facets of the person's present life appear to him in an unfavorable light and the life of *agape* appears to him as highly attractive" even though the individual is not conscious of this being a communication from God (132; cf. Moser, 2014, 36–42). Third, God could present himself to the individual as a "role model" by making his "love and providence for the individual more obvious, more salient in the person's mind, thereby evoking responses of gratitude and yearning for closer communion" (132). And fourth, God could make

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"new resources" available: "new resources of strength of will, of energy for perseverance in the face of discouragement, of inner strength that enable one to avoid dependence on the approval of one's associates" (132). In these ways God would be using his extraordinary personal powers to influence human persons *qua* persons "seeking to evoke responses, voluntary and otherwise from the other person, somewhat as each of us seeks to evoke responses from each other" (132).

While Alston believes that the interpersonal model more adequately fits the personal nature of God and humans than the fiat model, that various biblical texts utilize this sort of terminology (e.g., John 14:23, 14:26, 15:27, etc.), and that the model coheres fairly well with the "phenomenology of sanctification," he nevertheless thinks there is an inadequacy with the interpersonal model that pushes the discussion in favor of the sharing model (131, 133). The inadequacy, Alston maintains, is that there is a disanalogy between the externality involved in interpersonal relationships and the special mode of internality involved in the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. This is what Marilyn McCord Adams (2016) calls the "internality problem" (83). Alston writes:

> The distinctive thrust of the interpersonal model lies in its construal of the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit on the analogy of moral influence one human being can exert on another, by speech, by provision of a role model, and by emotional bonds. But all this leaves the parties involved external to each other in a fundamental way; they are separate, distinct persons, each with his or her own autonomy and integrity. (137)

Alston recognizes that at times we use interpersonal language that evokes the internality of the other, such as, "I carry some of you around with me wherever I go" (137). But Alston thinks this sort of language is figurative in the domain of interpersonal relationships and that the notion of indwelling of the Holy Spirit needs to be taken literally. If Alston is right about this disanalogy, then the interpersonal model falls short as an adequate understanding of the Spirit's sanctifying work due to its relative externality.

4. The Sharing Model

Alston's externality objection to the interpersonal model moves him to his preferred view, the sharing model. According to this view, psychological changes in a person are brought about through a literal merging or sharing of the divine life with the person's life. It is in partaking of and participating in the divine nature—not the mere moral influence of God—that the believer is sanctified (2 Peter 1:4; see also 1 Cor. 1:9). Alston writes:

> To my mind, all the talk of being filled, permeated, pervaded by the Spirit, of the Spirit's being poured out into our hearts strongly suggests that there is a literal merging or mutual interpenetration of the life of

> the individual and the divine life, a breaking down of the barriers that
> normally separate one life from another. (141)

Being filled with the Spirit is, Alston asserts, "like being plugged into a source of electricity, or being permeated by a fog, or, closer to the etymology, being inflated by air pressure, or being filled with a liquid" (138). Alston recognizes that these material analogies are too impersonal and that the believer is, after all, in a personal relationship with the Spirit. But, nevertheless, Alston writes:

> the wide consensus on the appropriateness of this language of filling
> and permeating indicates that the indwelling of the Holy Spirit is of a
> fundamentally different character from the relationship of two human
> persons, however intimate, different by reason of being much more an
> internal matter. (138)

It is important to note here that Alston's sharing model includes an interpersonal dimension; it is just that the sort of interpersonal relationship between believers and the Spirit is importantly disanalogous with that between two human persons in virtue of its being uniquely internal: "We realize in our life and, to some extent, in our consciousness, the very life of God himself" (139).

In an effort to explain this disanalogous internality, Alston has us imagine that two persons are connected by a "neural wiring hookup" such that person A's reactions, feelings, thoughts, and attitudes are as immediately available to person B as B's own reactions, feelings, thoughts, and attitudes and hence person A's mental life influences person B's thinking, feeling, and behavior in the same way as person B's mental life influences B's thinking, feeling, and behavior. Likewise, the same is true of person A with respect to person B's mental life. Consequently, person A's mental life will be influenced by access to person B's mental life and person B's mental life will be influenced by access to person A's mental life. Person A and B share each other's lives. The gist of the idea is that the believer's sharing in the divine life amounts to the believer having first-person access, both consciously and unconsciously, to the life of God: his affections, desires, attitudes, values, dispositions, and so on (for Alston's other attempts to fill out the notion of life-sharing, see 142–143; cf. Adams, 2016, 89–91).

With this account of human participation of God's mental life in place, Alston develops two pictures of how such participation would bring about characterological change: a cognitive picture and a conative one. The cognitive picture is that in sharing the divine life believers are immediately aware of, for instance, God's loving tendencies towards others in a "maximally direct and vivid fashion" (145). This would provide a sense of what it is and what it feels like to love others as God loves them and persons could then make choices to engage in the requisite psychological processes to bring about the same sort of loving tendencies for others as God has. Alston explains,

> On this picture of the matter, the divine contribution is largely cognitive,
> the presentation in a specially vivid and intimate way of a role model;

the actual changes in the individual's own motivational structure come
from responses, voluntary and involuntary, to these models. (146)

In addition to this cognitive life-sharing, the conative picture of life-sharing is that
God introduces into human motivational structures fragile tendencies for good (e.g.,
to love others). These tendencies leave room for the believer's own agency to either
build them up or refuse to do so (146). Combining these two pictures, in sharing the
divine life persons come to have an immediate, cognitive awareness of God's
tendencies to desire, feel, and act for the good as well as their own divinely implanted
tendencies to desire, feel, and act for the good. Believers indwelt by the Spirit are then
in the position to build (or not) upon these implanted tendencies with a keen
awareness of God's tendencies.

Alston sums up the advantages of the sharing model as follows. First, the
sharing model "makes an important place in sanctification for human response and
human effort, while at the same time recognizing the divine initiative as absolutely
critical" (147). Second, it recognizes "a mode of internality that goes beyond any
interpersonal intimacy" (147). Third, it offers an explanation of how such internality
can bring about change. Fourth, it reveals the goal of sanctification to be full
communion with God—"the fullest possible sharing in the divine nature"—and not
just moral improvement (147). Finally, the sharing model offers a satisfactory
account of initial regeneration, understood both as a decisive divine act that
"fundamentally transforms the human condition" and "as something that in itself
leaves the individual with a lot of work to do" (147).

5. The Sharing Model Reconsidered

We find Alston's paper an excellent example of the sort of careful analysis needed in
discussing the nature of sanctification and we are deeply indebted to his work. Indeed,
we agree with Alston's denial of the Fiat Model in favor of the interpersonal model.
We equally agree with his shift from an interpersonal model, understood as external
moral influence between two persons, towards a model of sanctification that does
justice to both the internality of the indwelling Spirit as well as the biblical language
of permeation/filling by the Spirit. Having said that, we believe Alston too quickly
abandoned an interpersonal framework in favor of a shared-life framework. For one,
the sharing model seems to fail at some of the very points Alston claims it succeeds.
Second, a reworking of the interpersonal model avoids these difficulties and can take
on board Alston's rightful emphasis on internality and the language of
permeation/filling. The remainder of this section and the whole of the next will be
devoted to developing these responses to Alston's position.

Two of the advantages that Alston enumerates for the sharing model are: (1)
it explains how the internality of the Spirit is essentially involved in the divine work
of sanctification and (2), in so doing, it makes "full communion with God" the goal of
sanctification as opposed to the goal being mere moral improvement (147). But we

argue here that on closer analysis the sharing model falters at precisely these two important points.

First, while the Spirit of God is certainly internal to the believer and is essentially involved in sanctification on the sharing model, the internal Spirit does not actually bring about on-going characterological change. Recall that the indwelling Spirit performs two tasks on the sharing model: one cognitive and the other conative. In virtue of sharing in the divine life, the believer has immediate cognitive awareness of God's tendencies to act which serves as an extremely intimate model of the kind of life to which he calls believers. But Alston makes clear that this cognitive access in and of itself does not transform the believer. He writes, "the actual changes in the individual's own motivational structure come from responses, voluntary and involuntary, to these models" (146). Alston goes on to posit the Spirit's conative task that is apparently accomplished by fiat. He writes, "Why shouldn't we think of participation in the divine life as consisting, in part, in the introduction into my conative system of initially weak, isolated, and fragile tendencies" (146). Alston does not make clear how participation in the divine life "introduces" these initial, weak tendencies. His analogy of one person's neural wiring being hooked up to another's neuro-anatomy explains by analogy how one person could have cognitive access to God's mental life, but it does not explain why that person's own desires, feelings, and tendencies would thereby change in the sort of immediate and fragile way Alston posits. It appears, then, that these weak tendencies are brought about by God by fiat (cf. Adams, 2016, p. 92). Importantly, this introduction by fiat would not run afoul of the objections to the fiat model considered earlier due to Alston's view that the implanted tendencies only weakly (that is, non-deterministically) influence human behavior. Nonetheless, the point here is that however these weak tendencies come about, Alston makes it clear that actualizing them is up to the believer, with God only acting as the originator of the tendencies and a highly accessible role model for how to develop them. Alston writes, "there is plenty left for the individual to do, by way of building up the motivational system from the rudimentary beginning supplied by God" (146). It is precisely this "rudimentary beginning supplied by God" and the "plenty left for the individual to do" that makes it clear that the believer's on-going sanctification is not brought about through participation with the divine nature. At most the indwelling Spirit makes sanctification possible; the Spirit is the enabler and inspiration for sanctification but not the transforming power of sanctification. On-going sanctification is brought about by the believer's choices in response to the Spirit's regenerating work and vivid role modeling. But this result seems out of step with the Christian notion that the Spirit *is* the empowering/transformational agent of on-going sanctification (e.g., Gal 5:16–24; cf. Porter, 2014). It appears that one could say of this model what St. Paul says of Galatian spirituality: "Having begun by the Spirit, are you now being perfected by the flesh?" (Gal 3:3).

It needs to be mentioned here that Ray Yeo (2014) has developed a "modified Alstonian partial life sharing model" through a fruitful integration of Alston with Jonathan Edwards' account of infused grace (225–227). But it appears that Edwards' influence pushes Yeo's modified Alstonian view back towards an interpersonal model in order to explain how sanctification occurs through life sharing. For instance, on Yeo's view what the Spirit shares with believers is "the human loving disposition of

Christ…consisting of a certain motivation for union and a good-seeing tendency towards God" (225). Notice that what is shared is the incarnate Jesus' interpersonal, relational orientation of loving union towards God. If it is the believer's sharing of Jesus' interpersonal orientation towards God that brings about transformation, then this would seem to require an interpersonal understanding of the sanctification process. That is, coming to have a loving, interpersonal union with God can be understood as transformational by analogy to the way in which loving, interpersonal union with human others brings about characterological change. Yeo's modification of Alston's view is a substantial departure from seeing God as a vivid role model of perfect goodness. In our judgment, then, Yeo's modification of Alston's view is best understood along interpersonal lines and not in accord with the sharing model.

In summary, our first charge against Alston's preferred view is that the sharing model does not explain, in the end, how the internality of the Holy Spirit brings about on-going characterological change. Rather, it reduces the transformational work of the Spirit to a weak initial change by fiat and then an intimate role modeling that leaves on-going progress in sanctification entirely up to the believer's efforts.

Another relevant problem is whether Christians experience such an intimate awareness of the divine life. Adams (2016) worries that many Christians have either never or only occasionally had the sort of vivid, conscious awareness of God's mental life as of their own that Alston proposes (92–93). Adams (2016) charges that on the road to sanctification this immediate awareness of God "can't be the whole story or probably even a necessary component, because such vivid cognitive access does not seem to be available to everyone who is commonly thought to be in the process of becoming a saint" (92-93). Presumably, there is some sort of cognitive awareness of God's desires, thoughts, and beliefs on the part of the believer, but a more occasional and limited awareness fits well with an interpersonal model in which God communicates such ideas to the believer (much of the time below the threshold of conscious awareness) as a means of transformation.

This brings us to consider a second purported advantage of the sharing model; viz. that on the sharing model the goal of sanctification is "full communion with God" (147). Since Alston's sharing model leaves on-going characterological change up to human willpower, it is far from clear how the goal of sanctification is full communion with God. Rather, once the believer has the implanted tendencies and (for the sake of argument) vivid cognitive access to the mind of God, the only unrealized goal is to make choices to strengthen those feeble tendencies for good. On such an understanding, increasing communion with God is sidelined and personal, moral effort takes center field. The "fullest possible sharing in the divine nature" might put more pressure on the individual to conform to God's tendencies, but, again, it would seem that the goal is for the individual believer to rightly respond to that pressure.

A final challenge for the sharing model is that it privileges the filling/permeating language of the sanctifying work of the Spirit over and against the interpersonal language of sanctification. Alston writes, "the appropriateness of this language of filling and permeating indicates that the indwelling of the Holy Spirit is of a fundamentally different character from the relationship of two human persons, however intimate, different by reason of being much more an internal matter" (138). The problem here is that a model of the sanctifying work of the Spirit would do better

if it could do justice to both the organic/materialistic metaphors (i.e., filling/permeating) and the interpersonal metaphors. This is because while believers are to be *filled* with the Spirit (Eph 5:18), they are also to *keep in step* with the Spirit (Gal 5:25); while believers are to *ingest the bread* of life (John 6:35), they are also to *follow the good shepherd* (1 Pet 2:25); while believers are to *abide in Jesus* as a *branch abides in a vine* (John 15:4), they are also to *take Jesus' yoke upon them* and *learn from him* (Matt 11:29); while believers are to be *filled up* with all *fullness* of God (Eph 3:19), they are also to *know the love of God* that surpasses knowledge (Eph 3:19); while the Spirit is *poured out* on believers in *full measure* (Tit 3:6), the Spirit also *pours out* the *love of God* in believers (Rom 5:5), and so on. Inasmuch as the sharing model is developed in a manner that makes the believer's relationship with the Spirit disanalogous with interpersonal relationships, the sharing model is at odds with the interpersonal metaphors of sanctification.

Another way to put this point is that the interpersonal metaphors of sanctification cannot be explained by and subsumed under the organic/materialistic metaphors while the organic/materialistic metaphors of sanctification can be explained by and subsumed under the interpersonal metaphors. To see this, note that it makes sense to say that a loving interpersonal relationship can nourish, fill, or permeate a person, but language is strained in saying that a nourishing, filling, or permeating thing loves a person. Nourishing, filling, permeating things ooze but they do not necessarily love, while loving persons can, perhaps necessarily, nourish, fill, and permeate another with their love. This points towards a conceptual priority of the interpersonal language over the organic/materialistic language. And yet, Alston's sharing model wants it the other way around.

This is particularly troubling given the dominance of interpersonal language in Scripture as the primary description of believers' relationship with God. For instance, Jesus refers to God as Father over 165 times in the Gospels, but in comparison only rarely characterizes relationship with God in an organic/materialistic manner. It is in the gospel of John that we find the most references to relationship with God as organic (e.g., bread, water, vine), but in John alone Jesus refers to God as *Abba* over one hundred times. In these ways, there is a clear dominance of the interpersonal metaphor in Scripture. Indeed, the Pauline letters describe God as Father over 40 times including the report that the Spirit of God is crying out in human hearts "Abba, Father" (Gal 4:6; cf. Rom 8:16). In elevating the organic/materialistic metaphors of filling/permeating above the interpersonal metaphors, the sharing model distances itself from the biblical witness.

This final critique of the sharing model contains within it a way to advance the discussion. If it makes sense to think of a loving relationship with another person as nourishing, filling, or permeating, could a revamped interpersonal model do justice to the internality of the Spirit's work? Remember that Alston briefly considered the notion that interpersonal relationships can be spoken of as internal to one's life ("I carry some of you around with me wherever I go"), but he maintained that this sort of talk is only figurative language and that the filling/permeating language of Scripture is literal. But perhaps this move by Alston was too quick (cf. Adams, 2016, 95–97). We turn now to a reconsideration of the interpersonal model.

6. The Interpersonal Model Reconsidered

It is important to note that Alston's analysis of the interpersonal model does not clearly distinguish between different levels of interpersonal influence. For instance, while another person can externally influence you for the better through truthful communication, encouragement to do the right thing, helping you to see a crucial point about your situation, role-modeling, and the like (i.e., mere moral influence), relationships with others can also impact your experience of yourself, others, and the world such that your feelings, attitudes, and desires are impacted by the relational interaction. For instance, we often say that what mattered most about someone's help in a time of need was not so much what they said or did, but simply that they were there. Personal presence, especially personal presence that manifests love, acceptance, commitment, faithfulness, care, understanding, challenge, and so on, can leave its mark on us internally. Our feelings, attitudes, desires, thoughts, values—our overall sense of self—can be influenced, positively and/or negatively, by the meaningful presence of others. No doubt we have all had some experience of being soothed, comforted, energized, or strengthened by interaction with another, or alternatively, we might experience someone's presence as anxiety producing, discomforting, draining, or disempowering. This is deeper than mere moral influence in that as the relational presence is received it alters the way we feel and perceive our situation. In other words, interpersonal relationships, however intimate, can have an internal effect on us.

Moreover, psychological theorists talk about how this internal experience of other persons can be *internalized* in an individual such that the meaningful presence of others continues to exert its influence even when we are no longer consciously aware of the other. We might think here of a child who is able to be physically separated from her mother while still maintaining the sense that her mother cares and is available to her. Using the language of psychologists John Bowlby and Mary Ainsworth, we can say that the child is "securely attached" to her mother and is thereby able to regulate her emotions in the mother's absence due to the inner sense that she has not been abandoned (Bowlby, 1969; Ainsworth, 1982; for an overview of attachment theory, see Bretherton, 1992). In a very real way, the child carries with her the meaningful presence of her mother and it continues to exert an influence on her even after the mother's departure. Some theorists speak of this interpersonal dynamic as an "internalized object" (e.g., Fairbairn, 1952) while others use the language of an "internal working model" (Bowlby, 1969). This latter notion, an internal working model of relationships, can be understood as incorporating "two discrete yet interrelated cognitive schemas: a model of the self containing basic perceptions of one's own worth, competence, and lovability and another model embodying core expectations regarding the essential goodness, trustworthiness, and dependability of important others in one's social world" (Lopez, et al, 1998; cf. Thompson, et al, 2003 and Bowlby, 1969). The point here is that the internalization of another's relational care forms an individual's sense of self-worth, competence, and

lovability as well as the individual's confidence that significant others are available and competent to help.

It is important to highlight that this inner experience of worth, competence, lovability, and confidence that one is securely attached to dependable, caring others is morally significant (e.g., Dwiwardani et al., 2014). For instance, it is a common experience that anxiety and fear can be lessened by experiencing or recalling the presence of trusted, competent, caring others (this is sometimes called "affect regulation," see, e.g., Hill, 2015). Since anxiety and fear are often at the root of impatience, discontent, anger, manipulation, and the like, one's dispositions to respond in these ways can be undermined by the lessening of anxiety and fear due to the internalized competent care of others. In the absence of fear, anxiety, discontent, and the like, a person who is receptive to the internalized competent care of others is in a position to experience increasing peace, joy, and contentment. Out of such a state of being, one is primed to respond with patience, generosity, self-control, compassion, forgiveness, kindness, and so on (see Porter, 2012). While there is much more to say about the emotional and attitudinal underpinnings of virtuous dispositions and moral behavior, much of the recent work on moral emotions is relevant to this dimension of our discussion (see, for instance, Haidt, 2003 and Roberts, 2015).

What we have attempted to do here is develop a conceptualization of interpersonal human relationships that has the required sense of internality to offer a helpful analogy of the indwelling ministry of the Spirit and how such relational interaction can bring about spiritual transformation in a manner that exceeds external, moral influence. We might put the relevant point as follows: just as receptivity to a human person's love can decrease anxiety and fear and bring about increasing peace, joy, and contentment which can then prime dispositions to be patient, generous, self-controlled, etc*., so too* receptivity to a divine person's love can decrease anxiety and fear and bring about increasing peace, joy, and contentment which can then prime dispositions to be patient, generous, and self-controlled. Indeed, divine love is unlimited, perfect, and constantly available, and is thereby capable of the eradication of worry and fear and the consistent production of peace and joy. Akin to how human relationships can be internalized and play a role in one's sense of self even when the human other is not consciously attended to, so too the indwelling Spirit is an internalized other that continues to exert an influence on one's sense of self even when the believer is not consciously attending to the Spirit. This view sees the indwelling ministry of the Spirit as a form of knowledge by acquaintance (see Rickabaugh, 2014) and is akin to Eleonore Stump's (2010) work on second-person or Franciscan knowledge of God (75-77).

Knowing more propositions about the Spirit and the sanctifying process does not itself sanctify one in that it does not bring one into contact with the Spirit. As Dallas Willard observes, "Knowledge 'at a distance,' knowing certain 'facts' about something, doesn't amount to knowing it. It therefore does not have the same power over life . . . Only the latter [knowledge by acquaintance] is the interactive relationship, the 'reality hook,' that gives us a grasp of the person or the thing 'itself'" (Willard, 2009, 141). Interpersonal knowledge, knowledge by acquaintance between persons, requires personal encounter and cannot be gained by propositional knowledge. It is in virtue of the attentive experience of another person that we come to know them,

which if one is receptive, can bring about characterological change. This is at the heart of the interpersonal model.

Alston might object that the notion of relationality developed here is still disanalogous to the indwelling of the Spirit in that an internalized human person is not actually present within the individual in the way that the Spirit is actually present within the individual. While the latter claim is true, this does not make the interpersonal model problematically disanalogous to the Spirit's indwelling. The point of appealing to internalized relationships is to demonstrate that human persons can influence the inner life of an individual whether or not the individual is consciously attending to the person in question. This is the relevant sense in which there is an analogy between human interpersonal interaction and divine-human interpersonal interaction. The main disanalogy with the Spirit's indwelling is not that the Spirit has a different type of relational influence on a human person but that the Spirit of God is continuously present to the believer and exerting his meaningful influence. The influence of human others is finite, imperfect, and inconsistent, while the influence of the Spirit is infinite, perfect, and constant.

One benefit of this revised interpersonal model is that it makes room for the organic/materialistic metaphors of sanctification. The loving presence of God is psychologically life-giving—it fills, permeates, and nourishes the human person. Moreover, this model can allow for a similar kind of vivid awareness of God's mental life as Alston's sharing model. It is consistent with an interpersonal relationship that God impresses on believers' minds a vivid awareness of his thoughts, desires, values, and tendencies. Also, the interpersonal model can account for the instantaneous change that occurs at regeneration in that it seems quite plausible that a human person coming into intimate contact with the third member of the Triune Godhead would bring about some immediate improvement to a psychological system that was previously arranged in opposition to God. That is, just as entering into a new relationship with a human person can bring about an immediate psychological shift in one's self, so we might imagine, *a fortiori*, entering into a new relationship with God would bring about an immediate psychological change in one's self. Lastly, there is still a role for the believer to play in sanctification, except that on this model, the goal of the believer's efforts is truly full communion with God. As the believer makes efforts to actively receive more and more of the love and goodness of God in growing communion with and dependence upon him, the believer is transformed by God's loving presence. Believers can quench and grieve the Spirit (1 Thess 5:29 and Eph 4:30) or make steps to draw near to God (James 4:8) and abide in his love (John 15:9). In this way the interpersonal model provides a way for sanctification to be wholly a work of God's power and yet sensitive to human receptivity.

One might worry that this model depends on contemporary psychological theory regarding the manner in which personal relationships influence human psychology. While our description of the model referred to some contemporary psychological theory, the sort of relational influence discussed seems easily supported by careful reflection on common relational experience. Indeed, long before contemporary psychology, the biblical writers seemed to utilize interpersonal metaphors of God's presence to describe the sort of transformational influence alluded to above. For instance, David famously says that "Even though I walk through

the valley of the shadow of death, I fear no evil, for You are with me; Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me" (Ps 23:4). Yahweh declares through Jeremiah that,

> Blessed is the man who trusts in the Lord and whose trust is the Lord. For he will be like a tree planted by the water, that extends its roots by a stream and will not fear when the heat comes; But its leaves will be green, and it will not be anxious in a year of drought nor cease to yield fruit. (Jer 17:7–8)

Jesus teaches that anxiety about the basic necessities of life can be eradicated due to the reality that "your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things" and that God competently cares for those he values (Matt 6:25–33). Paul testifies that in a particularly troubling situation "the Lord stood by me and strengthened me, so that through me the message might be fully proclaimed and all the gentiles might hear it" (2 Tim 4:16–17). Moreover, the writer of Hebrews states,

> Make sure that your character is free from the love of money, being content with what you have; for He Himself has said, "I will never desert you, nor will I ever forsake you," so that we confidently say, "The Lord is my helper, I will not be afraid. What will man do to me?" (Heb 13:5–6)

In these and many other passages, we can clearly see a connection between the meaningful presence of God and characterological changes such as decreasing fear, comfort, decreasing anxiety, strength, boldness, and contentment.

7. Implications of an Interpersonal Model

We conclude by turning to a discussion of whether conceptualizing the transforming work of the Spirit in terms of an interpersonal relationship makes an important practical difference in one's practice of Christian spirituality. One might think that as long as believers take part in their tradition's prescribed means of grace (prayer, Scripture meditation, receiving the Eucharist, etc.), God will bring about their sanctification by his grace even if their understanding of the dynamics of sanctification is faulty or incomplete. Wouldn't a loving God transform his children whether they understand his sanctifying work as mystery, fiat, sharing in the divine nature, or interpersonal relationship? While we would never want to bet against God's gracious generosity to his children, there are some reasons to think that having a more accurate understanding of the sanctifying work of the Spirit does make a significant difference in one's sanctification.

A first clue in this direction is that the Biblical witness strongly suggests that understanding how the Spirit sanctifies believers is crucially important. For example, Paul goes to some length in his letters to the Galatians, Colossians, and Corinthians to correct their respective mistaken views of life in the Spirit. It appears that he does so

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because he thinks their continued development depends on their having a more accurate understanding of the Spirit's work. The Galatians, for instance, have been bewitched into foolishness that has robbed them of the life-giving benefits of being in Christ (Gal 3:1–6). It does not look like their foolish spirituality puts them in danger of losing their salvation, but it does appear that it is forestalling their sanctification (see Gal 4:8–11, 19).[2]

But this just presses the question as to why a good and gracious God would condition his sanctifying work on a believer having a more accurate understanding of how such sanctification takes place? One way to get at this is to make clear what the consequence would be if God allowed believers to be sanctified no matter their understanding of how sanctification occurs. Believers would be graciously transformed, but as a result of that transformation, whatever view of sanctification they possess would be experientially confirmed and reinforced by their growth. For instance, if I engage my tradition's prescribed means of grace thinking that I am meriting God's approval and I experience characterological change under that description, my understanding of God's love as something I can earn will be confirmed and reinforced by my experience. I will increasingly utilize meritorious means to earn God's approval and I will teach those around me to do the same. Because spiritual formation existentially validates our views of the spiritual life, it is loving of God to withhold formation from us when to bring about our formation would only confirm and reinforce a distorted understanding of himself, ourselves, and what a maturing relationship between human persons actually involves.

Presumably there are developmental stages of the Christian life during which God graciously allows our formation to occur when our understanding of his work is faulty and incomplete. But we contend that in order to develop certain aspects of spiritual maturity, God at times chooses to condition his sanctifying work in accordance with our coming to have a more accurate understanding of sanctification. By analogy, when my (Porter) son was a two-year-old he could turn from the kitchen table and stammer out, "Daddy, get me wa-wa," and I would go out of my way to provide that cup of water in response to his developmentally appropriate request and thereby reinforce his view that his "Daddy" is available to be called upon to help meet his needs. But when at age ten, my son turned from the kitchen table and clearly articulated, "Daddy, get me wa-wa," I said in response, "Excuse me?" To provide him

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[2] The problem for the Galatians was fundamentally a problem about how one is sanctified. For instance, Thomas R. Schreiner (2010, 184) writes of the Galatians that "the inception of their Christian life was marked by the reception of the eschatological Spirit of promise…But the Galatians were considering a new strategy, thinking that they could improve on relying wholly upon the Spirit. They were attracted to being 'perfected by the flesh'….[Paul] assumes that the Galatians are Christians, and thus he describes their desire to be circumcised as a misguided attempt to make progress in the Christian life on the basis of the flesh instead of the Spirit. We see here as well that the Christian life follows the same course whether the issue is justification or sanctification. It is not as if justification is through the Spirit by faith, and sanctification is by works and human effort." Hence, Paul is at pains to correct their seeking out their sanctification according to "weak and worthless elementary principles" (Gal 4:9). This view of sanctification apart from the Spirit is frustrating their growth in Christlikeness. Paul, James Dunn (1993, 240) explains, "had not realized the process of spiritual formation of his converts would be so long drawn out and involve such further pain and anxiety on his part."

the cup of water in response to that developmentally inappropriate request would only reinforce a distorted understanding of my availability to him and what a maturing relationship between he and I actually involves. If I want my son to mature in his relationship with me, I will need to condition my meeting of his needs on him coming to a more mature understanding of what it means to interact with me.[3]

On the plausible assumption that God does believers a great good by helping them have an increasingly accurate understanding of himself, their own selves, and what it is to live in a transformational relationship with the Spirit of God, having an increasingly accurate view of the Spirit's sanctifying work seems crucially important. In this respect, it is hard to imagine how one could do better than the interpersonal model in terms of the view of God, one's self, and the divine-human relationship that is experientially confirmed and reinforced when sanctification occurs on this understanding of growth. Since the interpersonal model views spiritual growth as coming about through increasing receptivity to the love of God, when one experiences growth under that description, what is reinforced is the idea that God is lovingly available and that his love is transformational when received. Of course, what also becomes evident on this model of sanctification is that God's loving presence challenges the dimensions of human persons that are resistant to his love (see Moser, 2014 and 2013). Since the various strategies of resisting loving, personal presence are well-known at the level of human interaction, another practical benefit of the interpersonal model is that it provides a fruitful way of conceptualizing the psychological dynamics of resisting or grieving the Spirit. This, of course, helps explain the slowness of change that Alston notes in his paper. On a relational model, the gradual nature of sanctification is at least partly explained by deeply ingrained relational resistance to the Spirit and the resultant habits of autonomous living apart from God (see Porter, 2014), which can then be addressed through the utilization of various relationally-informed spiritual practices.

8. Conclusion

In conclusion, we have sought to address the nature of the transformational work of the Holy Spirit. In so doing, we have argued that Alston's defense of the sharing model moves too quickly over the rich resources available on a nuanced articulation of the interpersonal model. We contend that this nuanced version of the interpersonal model offers a more accurate treatment of the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit and that taking on a more accurate view is conducive to furthering one's sanctification in that it enables one to interact with God more fully as he actually is.

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[3] Jesus' teaching regarding giving to the needy, prayer, and fasting in Matthew 6:1–18 is a correction of a misinformed way of engaging these spiritual practices. Jesus' general point is that hypocrites who engage these practices in order to be seen by others "have received their reward" (vs. 2, 5, and 16) and that his disciples are not to practice under that description. Instead, Jesus gives his disciples a different understanding of how these practices interface with his Father's kingdom and it is based on that understanding that the practices align one with God (i.e., "And your Father who sees in secret will reward you" Matt 6:4, 6, and 18).

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