The Life of God's Word in the Theology of Athanasius

by
Fred Sanders

A thesis
submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Divinity (elective hours)
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Abstract

This thesis is an attempt to explicate the systematic center of Athanasius' thought by showing that his critical transformation of the Alexandrian theological tradition's Logos doctrine was the point of departure for his later, fully-developed theology. In rising to the challenge of correcting this central doctrine of Alexandrian theology, Athanasius developed the principles fo a coherent Trinitarian theology based in the history of salvation. Chapter one, the introduction, features a review of literature which concentrates on past attempts to find the central point of Athanasius' thought, and the methods by which his work has been investigated. Chapter two surveys the history of the Logos concept from Heraclitus to Origen, giving special attention to the way Greek ideas tended to gain the upper hand over Christian ideas in the process of the doctrine's appropriation by theology. Chapter three describes how Athanasius radically reconstructed the doctrine, shifting its emphasis from cosmology to soteriology, subordinating the christological title "Logos" to the title "Son," and anchoring all discussion of the Logos firmly to the history of Jesus Christ. Many of the most overtly Platonic ideas, which had been considered central to the tradition, were simply discarded, having been rendered unnecessary by Athanasius' description of God's relation to the world through his Logos/Son. Chapter four shows how Athanasius developed the lessons he learned from his work with the Logos doctrine into a theological system centered on the saving power of the total career of Jesus Christ. His main categories were vicarious victory and vicarious reception of the Spirit by the divine-human savior. By bringing a trinitarian analysis to bear on the story of Jesus, he shifted the focus of christology from the mystery of the two natures to the mystery of the Trinity. The relationship between the Word and the Spirit is given special attention, and the possibility of a Logos-based Spirit Christology in Athanasius is proposed. Chapter five draws out the implications of Athanasius' theology for contemporary systematic theology, in dialogue with recent writings about the Trinity and salvation history.

I, being the Father's Word,
I give to Myself, when becoming man, the Spirit;
and Myself, become man, do I sanctify in Him,
that henceforth in Me, who am Truth
(for "Thy Word is Truth")'
all may be sanctified.

--Contra Arianos I.12

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Preface

Athanasius' *On the Incarnation* was probably the first serious doctrinal work I ever read. I picked it up in 1986, because I had noticed that C. S. Lewis never missed an opportunity to recommend the book and to make use of its ideas. I was immediately attracted to Athanasius' spirit and his way of doing theology, and as my understanding of the issues he addressed has grown, my appreciation of his work has kept pace. It has been suggested that *On the Incarnation* was a private theological exercise Athanasius carried out to refine his abilities as a teacher of doctrine. Edward Hardy even called it "Athanasius' B.D. thesis, so to speak." In devoting my own M.Div. thesis to explicating Athanasius' B.D. thesis, I have been reminded that I cannot approach even a decent fraction of his scope or insight. But at least we share a common motive; to sharpen our skills at teaching Christian theology. Athanasius had a magnificent clarity of vision and expression, and he is deservedly legendary for his ability to see through even the densest terminological confusions. His theology is far from perfect, but he never allowed himself to be fooled by his own words, any more than those of his opponents. This is a skill which I hope can be caught through prolonged exposure to his work.

The frontispiece is a reproduction of the medallion at the top of the dome in the Arian Baptistery in Ravenna, Italy. It is one of the earliest instances in Christian art of what was to become a standard theme, the depiction of the Baptism of Christ. Whatever the Arians in Ravenna may have intended the image to convey, through the centuries Christian artists came to see this event as the best way to display visually the presence of the Trinity in the history of salvation. Accordingly in later versions of the scene (especially in Byzantine art), Christ's hand is raised out of the water to confer a blessing, illustrating nicely the Athanasian insight that "when the Lord, as man, was washed in Jordan, it was we who were washed in Him and by Him." (*Contra Arianos* I:47)

Chapter 1
Introduction

The theology of Athanasius occupies a unique place in the the history of Christian thought, midway between the bold apologetics of the early, persecuted church and the dogmatic definitions of the later ecumenical councils. His theology brings together the simple piety of the common, uneducated believers of his day with the speculative genius of the Alexandrian theological tradition, holding the two in fruitful, mutually-edifying dialogue. While recent decades have seen a steady increase in the investigation of his work by historians and patristic scholars, so far the theology of Athanasius has not been taken up and studied by systematic theologians. Thus the theology of Athanasius has not yet exerted the correcting and strengthening influence on contemporary theology which it has in its power to do. Systematic theology at the end of the twentieth century is nevertheless beginning to show promising signs of coming back around, by various roundabout paths, to some of Athanasius' best insights.

This study is an attempt to give a systematic reading of Athanasius' work, and to set forth his central message in such a way that it illuminates contemporary theological concerns. This is a constructive task because the bulk of his writings were occasional pieces; tracts and histories written in the midst of conflict, or from exile. The goal has not been to superimpose a system onto this material, fitting his ideas into the framework of what would later be considered standard "heads of doctrine," such as "Creation, Anthropology, Fall, Sin, Redemption, Salvation," etc. Instead an attempt has been made to read a system out of the categories Athanasius himself presents. It is only because of the profound interconnectedness of his ideas and his unremitting concentration on first principles that such an undertaking is possible. In the course of this reconstruction of his system, it should become evident that Athanasius deserves the title Möhler gave him, "the father of the church's theology; that is, not of the church's faith, which comes only from Christ, but of the sharp and precise presentation and development of this faith in conceptual form."[1] This paper is an attempt to formulate explicitly the method,

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structure, and dynamic already implicit in his scattered doctrinal writings. The result is a reconstruction of Athanasian systematic theology.

Thesis Statement

Athanasius transformed the logos-doctrine he inherited from the Alexandrian theological tradition by basing it on soteriology and associating it exclusively with the life of Christ. His entire theology is systematically structured around the soteriological and Trinitarian implications of the whole life of Jesus Christ, God's Word, who completed our salvation in his own person and work.

Unpacking this statement will require investigations into three areas: first, the Alexandrian Logos doctrine which Athanasius inherited; then the changes that he wrought on it; and finally the systematic theology which he developed on that basis, including the doctrines of the Trinity, Incarnation, and Salvation. This presentation, combining as it does a developmental view of his theology (his conflict and continuity with his own tradition) on the one hand, with a systematic movement from topic to topic on the other hand, provides the greatest possible purchase on his thought. The centrality of the Logos/Life-of-Christ dynamic in Athanasius' theology was suggested by common conclusions of studies in several related fields: the history of doctrine, the literary structure of Athanasius' works, the content of his pastoral and exegetical thought, and his use of secular philosophy. How these possibilities converge is indicated by the following review of literature.

Review of Related Literature

"The article on Augustine in the new *Religion in Geschichte und Gegenwart* is forty-four times as long as the one on Athanasius," lamented Dietrich Ritschl in 1963.[2] Ritschl, of course, was not challenging Augustine's colossal stature for Christianity, but he was raising a good question: is Athanasius really only a little more than two percent as important as Augustine? While his stature is still generally underestimated, there has been a steady interest through the

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[1]J. A. Möhler, *Athanasius der Grosse und die Kirche seiner Zeit* (Mainz, 1827), 272. Quoted in Friedrich Lauchert, *Die Lehre Des Heiligen Athanasius des Grossen* (Leipzig: Gustav Fock Verlag, 1895), 4.

[2]Dietrich Ritschl, *Athanasius: Versuch einer Interpretation* (Zurich: Evz-Verlag, 1963), 7.

years in the study of Athanasius, and a sizeable secondary literature exists. Duane Arnold, in his careful historical reconstruction of *The Early Episcopal Career of Athanasius*, notes that no definitive bibliography on Athanasius has yet been produced, but his own bibliography lists over 850 secondary sources,[3] which gives some indication of the amount of literature available. But in spite of all of this scholarly activity on the part of patristic scholars and historians, their findings have so far not been taken up and used by systematic theologians, as Charles Kannengiesser notes: "Despite an impressive development of patristic studies and a sufficiently abundant publication of patristic writings in the last fifty years, theologians on the whole have not exhibited a very lively interest in these studies."[4] In part this can be blamed on the fact that no scholar has made available a thorough and reliable monograph on the theology of Athanasius. It is not possible for the non-specialist take a first step toward the subject by going to the shelf and pulling down a good single-volume account, something called *The Theology of Athanasius*, the kind of monographic treatment a major figure in the history of doctrine deserves. The last such published attempt at an account of his entire theology was Friedrich Lauchert's *Die Lehre des heiligen Athanasius der Grosse*, a Catholic reading of Athanasius' thought published in German in 1895. Lauchert attempted, in about 200 pages, to give "eine treue systematische Darstellung der Theologie des hl. Athanasius..., treu in Rücksicht auf den Inhalt und auf die Eigenart seiner Ausführungen."[5] This work, while helpful, can hardly be considered readily accessible, being a hundred years and a foreign language removed from the contemporary american student. There is a clear need for someone to take the risk and effort of producing a comprehensive, synthetic presentation of the doctrine of Athanasius. Theology seems to be in need of a reliable one-volume bridge by which to cross over into the world of Athanasian studies, in order to appropriate the findings of the specialists and allow the theology of

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[3]Duane Arnold, *The Early Episcopal Career of Athanasius of Alexandria* (Notre Dame: 1990), 194-229. Many of these works are of purely historical interest; the number of articles directly concerned with the *theology* of Athanasius is much smaller.

[4]Charles Kannengiesser, "Athanasius of Alexandria and the Foundation of Traditional Christology," *Theological Studies* 34 (1973), 103.

[5]Friedrich Lauchert, *Die Lehre Des Heiligen Athanasius des Grossen* (Leipzig: Gustav Fock Verlag, 1895), iii. Lauchert tried to understand Athanasius nonpolemically, on his own terms: "Die Hauptsache war mir immer die Darstellung des Positiven in der Lehre des hl. Athanasius selbst." *Ibid*, v.

Athanasius himself to begin directly informing systematic theology today.

An overview of the history of Athanasian studies was presented by F L. Cross in his inaugural lecture at Oxford in 1944.[6] Cross concentrated especially on such foundational matters as the transmission of the texts of Athanasius' works, and the printed editions, critical and otherwise. Cross's work is a valuable starting point, but it deals only obliquely with theological issues. More recently, Charles Kannengiesser reviewed over 100 publications from what he called "the Athanasian decade (1974-1984)," which he characterized as a "relentless quest for the true Athanasius."[7] Kannengiesser's review takes in the entire scope of Athanasian studies, including biographical, political, textual, and theological issues. Two other recent reviews of literature focus on more narrow topics. Adolf Ritter reports on striking advances in the study of Arianism and the resulting reappraisal of Athanasius,[8] while Duane Arnold summarizes the debate over Athanasius' character and conduct.[9] These bibliographic reports are valuable in establishing the context of the present review, which is limited to investigations into the *theology* of Athanasius. Since this thesis is an attempt to find the methodological center and systematic unity of Athanasius' thought, the present review of literature surveys previous attempts to do the same. Special attention has been given to the different methods of analysis previous scholars have brought to bear on the subject. The underlying question posed to each publication is, "is this a legitimate productive, and promising way to inquire into Athanasius' theology?" The literature can be broadly divided into seven areas: **(1) Theological Method, (2) Use of Scripture, (3) Symbols and Motifs, (4) Literary Style, (5) Influence of Philosophy; (6) Individual Doctrines, and (7) Place in the History of Doctrine.**

(1) Theological Method. For the student who would read Athanasius in english, there is no better resource available than Volume 4 of Schaff and Wace's *Select Library of Nicene and*

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[6]F. L. Cross, *The Study of St. Athanasius* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1945).

[7]Charles Kannengiesser, "The Athanasian Decade 1974-84: A Bibliographical Report," *Theological Studies* 46 (1985), 524-541.

[8]Adolf Martin Ritter, "Arius Redivivus? Ein Jahrzwolft Arianismusforschung," *Theologische Rundschau* 55 (1990): 153-187. See also Joseph T. Lienhard, "Review Article: Ten Recent Books on Arianism," *Religious Studies Review* 8 (1982): 331-337.

[9]Duane W. H. Arnold, "Athanasian Historiography: A Century of Revision," *Coptic Church Review* 12 (1991): 3-14.

Post-Nicene Fathers, second series, which contains the most complete collection of Athanasius' writings. While Archibald Robertson was directly responsible for the final edition, his work was based on the earlier *Oxford Library of the Fathers*, and thus the translation and notes are principally the work John Henry Cardinal Newman.[10] As a result, the text of the fourth-century bishop is accompanied by a running commentary from the nineteenth-century cardinal. As Robertson points out, "The modern reader sits down to study Athanasius, and rises from his task filled with Newman."[11] One implication of this is that anyone who reads through the LNPNF volume is constantly reminded of what may be called Athanasius' Catholic side; Newman constantly draws attention to the passages which show Athanasius' adherence to ecclesial tradition, the *regula fidei*, and even papal authority. Thus the important role of tradition and authority in Athanasius' theological method is always before us. A more critical presentation of his views can be found in Meredith Handspicker's article, "Athanasius on Tradition and Scripture,"[12] while George Dragas has cited Athanasius as the theoretician of the distinctive Eastern Orthodox understanding of tradition.[13]

Except for these investigations of tradition and authority, Athanasius' theological method is a field of inquiry which still needs considerable plowing. T. F. Torrance describes Athanasius' "scientific method" in theology as growing out of his continuity with the scientific tradition of Alexandria, and credits him with developing what modern science would call "topological language."[14] This is an admittedly anachronistic way of describing Athanasius' fidelity to revelation, and his desire to let the subject of theological science dictate the terms and categories of discourse. Andrew Louth, in a sagacious and concise study, refers to the same tendency as

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[10]See Robertson's Preface, *vi*, for a description of the minor alterations he made to Newman's work.

[11]*ibid*, 304.

[12] Meredith Handspicker, "Athanasius on Tradition and Scripture," *Andover Newton Quarterly* 3 (1962): 13-29.

[13]George D. Dragas, "Holy Spirit and Tradition: The Writings of St. Athanasius," *Sobornost* 1 (1979): 51-72

[14]Thomas F. Torrance, "Athanasius: A Study in the Foundations of Classical Theology," in *Theology in Reconciliation* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1975), p. 242.

"submission to the Logos."[15] The most voluminous study of Athanasius' theological method is Craig Blaising's commentary-style analysis of the *Contra Arianos* "with special reference to method."[16] Blaising is especially attentive to Athanasius' description of the possibility of knowledge of God, and since he follows this theme out in its trinitarian development, his dissertation encompasses a great deal more than just methodological and epistemological concerns.

(2) Use of Scripture. T. E. Pollard has carefully examined Athanasius' use of the gospel of John, which "provided him with his most effective and devastating weapons" in refuting the Arians.[17] Because a handful of Johannine texts serve as Athanasius' "canon within the canon," Pollard's approach enables him to lay his finger on the pulse of Athanasian theology in a singular fashion. Rowan Greer similarly investigates the interpretation of the book of Hebrews in the Arian conflict, but pronounces a much more negative verdict on Athanasius' "imposition of a doctrinal stance upon the text" in question.[18] Both of these works are excellent studies in the history of interpretation, but what is still needed is sustained analysis of Athanasius' hermeneutics. Kannengiesser has drawn attention to the innovative, even revolutionary, way Athanasius developed of interpreting individual passages in light of the complete σκοπος of Scripture: "he was the inventor of what one can call the 'dogmatic exegesis' which became one of the principal forms of biblical interpretation throughout the great controversies of the fourth and fifth centuries."[19] Elsewhere, Kannengiesser asserts that this "striking originality of his hermeneutics" is the secret of his success in the trials of his age: "My conviction is that Athanasius became such a prominent figure on the political and theological scene because of his

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[15] Andrew Louth, "Reason and Revelation in Saint Athanasius," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 23 (1970): 385-396.

[16] Craig Alan Blaising, "Athanasius of Alexandria: Studies in the Theological Method and Structure of the *Contra Arianos* with Special Reference to Method" (Ph.D. diss., University of Aberdeen, 1987).

[17] T. E. Pollard, *Johannine Christology and the Early Church* (Cambridge: The University Press, 1970), 245.

[18] Rowan A. Greer, *The Captain of Our Salvation: A Study in the Patristic Exegesis of Hebrews* (Tubingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1973), 87. Greer is actually a scholar of Arianism.

[19] Charles Kannengiesser, "Athanasius of Alexandria and the foundation of traditional christology," *Theological Studies* 34 (1973), 110.

attitude to Scripture."[20] Some solid research into the details of Athanasius' hermeneutics has been published, mostly in French. Kannengiesser lists these works in his review of the "Athanasian Decade" and goes on to comment, "A rich field of hermeneutical discoveries is still waiting for exploration, if someone would undertake a comprehensive research on the role of the Bible in A.'s thought and writings."[21] Duane Arnold (apparently on Kannengiesser's suggestion) has begun some very promising research on the way Athanasius uses Scripture, as well as other sources, to bolster his arguments.[22]

(3) Symbols and Motifs. One method of sounding out the depths of Athanasius' theology is to isolate and examine prominent motifs which he uses, or symbols to which he takes recourse so frequently that they could be close to the center of his thought. A classic study of this type is Jaroslav Pelikan's *The Light of the World: A Basic Image in Early Christian Thought*, which organizes Athanasius' various doctrines around the single motif of light.[23] Because Pelikan correctly identifies Athanasius' favorite image, he is able to render a remarkably insightful reading of the entire theological system, and has no trouble finding "light"-texts from which to hang his discussion of each doctrine. In fact, Pelikan's little volume (128 small pages) accomplishes its goal so masterfully that it comes close to filling the need for a book on the theology of Athanasius in english (it is too brief, being the published form of a lecture series). A more recent example of careful attention to motifs in Athanasius' thought is Peter Widdicombe's study of the idea of fatherhood in Origen, Eusebius, and Athanasius.[24] This too is a well-chosen topic, since the Father-Son relationship occupies a great deal of Athanasius' attention. Pollard's book on Johannine christology, mentioned above, is also a work of this sort, since it argues that the key to Athanasius' interpretation of John is his ability to keep the motifs

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[20]Kannengiesser, "Athanasius of Alexandria: A Paradigm for the Church of today," *Pacifica* 1 (1988), 95.

[21]Kannengiesser, "The Athanasian Decade 1974-84: A Bibliographical Report," *Theological Studies* 46 (1985), 539.

[22]Duane Arnold, "Excursus on the Athanasian Use of Sources in *De Decretis*," *Patristic and Byzantine Review* 11 (1992): 3-14.

[23]Jaroslav Pelikan, *The Light of the World: A Basic Image in Early Christian Thought* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1962.

[24]Peter Widdicombe, *The Fatherhood of God from Origen to Athanasius* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994).

of Son and Logos in proper balance.

(4) Literary Style. In the wider world of Athanasian studies, all roads eventually lead to literary style. Kannengiesser is certainly right when he asserts that progress in the study of Athanasius' theology is dependent on similar strides in the study of his style:

> ...It is a general neglect of *literary* criticism that weakens the *theological* discussion on Athanasian thought. By "literary" I mean the sort of criticism proceeding from a comprehensive familiarity with A.'s language in order to make explicit the inner logic proper to each of his writings. Only when the original setting of his thought is elaborated in this way can we claim to engage a relevant investigation about A.'s position in his time and in the history of Christian doctrine.[25]

George Dragas, who (almost alone among contemporary critics) would like the two treatises *Contra Apollinarem* to be admitted to the accepted canon, has buttressed his arguments by subjecting Athanasius' writings to a computer-based statistical lexical analysis, on the model of that used in Biblical Studies.[26] Other scholars are engaged in similar analyses, and as these methods are further developed, they will become more useful for theological investigations as well.

As long ago as 1976 G. C. Stead published a study of Athanasius' use of recognized rhetorical canons,[27] and since then it has been broadly acknowledged that careful analysis of Athanasius' rhetorical style is a productive technique. Athanasius' style, with its persuasive appeals to implicit values, is peculiarly transparent to this kind of analysis. Blaising's study of theological method (mentioned above) makes extensive use of rhetorical analysis, as does Ellen Charry's study of Athanasian christology's pastoral implications.[28] The fact that scholars investigating such different topics are converging on this method indicates that more success can be exptected from it in the future.

Equally promising is the analysis of the structure of Athanasius' works, in which several

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[25]Kannengiesser, "Athanasian Decade," 535.

[26]George D. Dragas, *St. Athanasius Contra Apollinarem* (Athens: Church and Theology vol. VI, 1985).

[27]G. C Stead, "Rhetorical Method in Athanasius," *Vigiliae Christianae* 30 (1976): 121-137.

[28]Ellen T. Charry, "The Case for Concern: Athanasian Christology in Pastoral Perspective," *Modern Theology* 9 (July 1993): 265-283.

scholars are engaged. Christopher Smith summarizes the (surprisingly lively) debate over the structure of *De Incarnatione Verbi* before offering his own proposal that the treatise is built around an external framework: the life of Christ[29] In the search for unifying elements in Athanasius' entire theology, such information about how the bishop put together his most systematic writings could prove very valuable. It is, indeed, "inside information" of an especially pertinent sort.

(5) Influence of Philosophy. A perenially thorny issue in Patristics is the question of the interplay between the gospel and the Hellenistic culture in which it was being preached. In discussions of the "hellenization of dogma" (to use Harnack's categories, which for many scholars still set the tone of the conversation), certain figures emerge as heroes and others are routinely painted as villains. Clement of Alexandria is an example of a church father who is normally described as having subtly sold out the gospel to greek conceptions. Athanasius tends to fare much better in this context. In fact, he is often seen as the turning point at which the gospel began to purify itself of pagan elements and to critically reconstruct greek ideas in its own image. E. P Meijering's study of Athanasius' Platonism is the classic work in this area,[30] while his review of literature surveys a great number of other contributions (mostly general works, not focusing on Athanasius).[31] Another exemplary study is C. J. de Vogel's long essay, "Platonism and Christianity: A Mere Antagonism or a Profound Common Ground?" in which Athanasius's use of *apparently* Platonic terms is scrutinized to see if the terms retain their Platonic content. De Vogel's conclusion is that in most cases, the meaning of the words is decisively subverted to Christian purposes.[32]

(6) Individual Doctrines: Some of the best work in the study of Athanasius' theology has taken place in the investigation of single doctrines in his thought. George Florovsky wrote a

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[29]Christopher R. Smith, "The Life-of-Christ Structure of Athanasius' *De Incarnatione Verbi*," *Patristic and Byzantine Review* 10 (1991): 7-24.

[30]E. P Meijering, *Orthodoxy and Platonism in Athanasius: Synthesis or Antithesis?* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1968).

[31]E. P. Meijering, "Zehn Jahre Forschung Zum Thema Platonismus und Kirchenvater," in *God Being History* (New York: Elsevier Publishing Company, 1975).

[32]C. J. De Vogel, "Platonism and Christianity: A Mere Antagonism or a Profound Common Ground?" *Vigiliae Christianae* 39 (1985): 1-62.

classic essay on "The Concept of Creation is Saint Athanasius," in which he pressed through to discuss the Act and Being of God and the contingency of created reality in a truly remarkable way.[33] Florovsky's work is a prime example of the tremendous value of this one-topic-at-a-time method of investigation, although it must be said that only with a firm grasp of the fundamental interrelatedness of many topics in Athanasius' thought could Florovsky have managed such a penetrating analysis. F Stuart Clarke, following a hint dropped by Karl Barth, studied Athanasius' "lost and found" doctrine of predestination, and discovered that it was remarkably Barthian in its Christological grounding.[34] To continue speaking anachronistically, Athanasius' way of presenting the doctrine of election is strikingly dissimilar to the Augustinian (and later Calvinist) presentation. Such studies raise the possibility that Athanasius is an underappreciated source of doctrinal innovation awaiting rediscovery.

It is a commonplace in Athanasian studies that the center of his thought is redemption, and that all his arguments are ultimately based in soteriology. If there is a majority opinion as to what doctrine is at the center of Athanasius' thought, it is the doctrine of redemption. Hermann Sträter analyzed this doctrine at length in 1894.[35] In his *Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics* entry, W Emery Barnes shows with admirable brevity how Athanasian theology can be comprehended from this vital midpoint.[36] To mention only a few of the best studies on this subject, Dominic Unger and Rodolph Yanney have both investigated it[37] George Bebawi's "St. Athanasios: The Dynamics of Salvation" offers several revolutionary theses bearing immediately on the systematic structure of Athanasius' thought.[38] Bebawi's essay, especially, begins to

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[33]George Florovsky, "The Concept of Creation in Saint Athanasius," *Studia Patristica* VI (1962): 36-57.

[34]F. Stuart Clarke, "Lost and Found: Athanasius' Doctrine of Predestination," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 29 (1976): 435-450.

[35]Herman Sträter, *Die Erlösungslehre des hl. Athanasius* (Freiburg: Herder'sche Verlagshandlung, 1894).

[36]W. Emery Barnes, "Athanasius," in *Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics*, ed. James Hastings (New York: Charles Scribners Sons, 1910).

[37]Dominic Unger, "A Special Aspect of Athanasian Soteriology," *Franciscan Studies* 6 (1946): 30-53, 171-194; Rodolph Yanney, "Salvation in St. Athanasius' *On the Incarnation of the Word*," *Coptic Church Review* 11 (1990): 44-54.

[38]George Bebawi, "St. Athanasios: The Dynamics of Salvation" *Sobornost* 8 (1986): 24-41.

liberate Athanasius's doctrine of redemption from the straitjacket imposed upon it by generations of scholars who have assumed that *deification* is to be understood in a platonic sense, and have largely marginalized Athanasius' thought on the subject as exemplifying "the physical theory of redemption."

Other individual doctrines which have attracted scholarly attention are Athanasius' doctrines of the Logos, the Spirit, and the Trinity. These three are examples of individual doctrines with such scope and weight that they naturally tend to gravitate toward the center of any theologian's thought. Certainly any of these three *loci* are broad enough foundations to support a book-length exposition of Athanasius' entire system. In 1880 Leonhard Atzberger undertook just such a task with *Die Logoslehre des hl. Athanasius: Ihre Gegner und Unmittelbaren Vorläufer* (Münschen: Ernst Stahl Verlag, 1880).[39] Athanasian pneumatology has received a great deal of study, as it deserves.[40]

7) Place in History of Doctrine: There is a long tradition in the discipline of the history of doctrine of interpreting Athanasius in the context of Arianism on one side and Apollinarianism on the other. This view of doctrinal development is fond of portraying the progress made in the early Christological debates as a zig-zagging movement from one error to its opposite, a dialectic which finally issues in a stable (if paradoxical) orthodoxy at Chalcedon. This view, of course, owes much to Baur's Tubingen-school type of analysis, which tended to find enlightening dialectical progress even where it did not really exist. However accurate this approach may be for the history of doctrine in general, it has led to an overly-facile interpretation of Athanasius' Christology. He is viewed as over-reacting to Arianism and landing himself dangerously close to Apollinarianism. The specific point at issue is the place of the human soul of Christ in the thought of Athanasius. Aloys Grillmeier is the most significant contemporary spokesman for the older, Baurian view that Athanasius viewed Jesus in a "Logos-

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[39]Reprint, Hildesheim: Georg Olms Verlag, 1975.

[40]Theodore C. Campbell. "The Doctrine of the Holy Spirit in the Theology of Athanasius," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 27 (1974) 408-440; Thomas F. Torrance, "Spiritus Creator" in *Theology in Reconciliation* (London: 1965), 209-228; Helmut Saake, "Beobachtungen zur athanasianischen Pneumatologie," *Neue Zeitung fur Systematische Theologie* 15 (1973): 348-364.

sarx" christological framework which could not affirm that the savior had a human soul.[41] His influence is evident in the more recent monumental work of R. P. C. Hanson, *The Search for the Christian Doctrine of God*,[42] which promises to become the standard treatment of the period for years to come. Hanson's treatment of Athanasius' christology is especially disconcerting because it seems to uncritically presuppose the work of Grillmeier, caricaturing Athanasius as having a "spacesuit Christology" in which a divine being "put on" some removable flesh-clothes. Hanson's book is such a monumental piece of work that it, in turn, is being rather uncritically accepted by a new generation of theologians as accurately pigeonholing Athanasius' christology. At the very least, as G. C. Stead points out, Hanson should have done more to indicate the massive literature which takes the opposite point of view on the question of the human soul in Jesus.[43] Kannengiesser, in his review of literature, recommends that "a promising topic for a doctoral dissertation could be formulated in the frame of the lively current debate on the human soul of Christ,"[44] and no doubt this work is already underway somewhere.

Rather than merely arguing in favor of a real human soul in Jesus according to Athanasius, George Dragas has mounted a vigorous assault on the entire history-of-doctrine tradition stemming from Baur. He engages this tradition at its earliest presuppositions and seeks to refute it generally, but especially with respect to its treament of Athanasius.[45] It should be mentioned that at least two monumental historians of doctrine have avoided the pitfalls of the artificial logos-sarx schema: Dorner and Harnack are, for various reasons, sympathetic enough to Athanasius' theology that they do justice to his thought on its own terms.[46]

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[41]Aloys Grillmeier, *Christ in Christian Tradition*, Volume I (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1975).

[42]R. P. C. Hanson, *The Search for the Christian Doctrine of God* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1988).

[43]G. C. Stead, in a review of Hanson's book, *Vigiliae Christianae* 41 (1990): 1-14. Stead must have had in mind, among other things, his own work on the subject: "The Scriptures and the Soul of Christ in Athanasius," *Vigiliae Christianae* 36 (1982): 233-250.

[44]Kannengiesser, *op. cit.*, p. 539

[45]George Dragas in the above-mentioned *St. Athanasius Contra Apollinarem*. Of course his whole argument is in the service of canonizing the two much-disputed works *Contra Apollinarem*.

[46]J. A. Dorner, *History of the Development of the Doctrine of The Person of Christ*, volume II (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1870); Adolf Harnack, *History of Dogma* volume IV (Boston: Little, Brown, and Company)

Theoretical Framework

This thesis is an attempt to state the theology of Athanasius in positive, nonpolemical terms. The assumption throughout is that it is possible to glean from Athanasius' controversial writings a core of positive principles. This presupposes that (logically, though of course not historically) there is such a thing as Athanasian theology in the absence of Arianism; in other words, that Athanasius was more of a constructive theologian than a reactionary. A thorough understanding of Arianism has been and will continue to be of great benefit to Athanasian scholarship, but it is simply not the case that Athanasius and Arius are inseparably linked together theologically.[47] For this reason, almost no mention of Arianism is made in the course of this study. This approach removes the possibility of an appeal to anti-Arian reaction as the basis for anything Athanasius happens to say. It is my opinion that this appeal has been misused frequently in the past to explain away some of the most distinctive elements of the theology of Athanasius, since it obviates the need to press deeper and find the internal, systemic reasons why Athanasius asks and answers the questions he does. For instance, to say, as many do, that Athanasius did not talk about a human soul in Christ simply because it was not one of the points at issue in the Arian conflict is to ignore the deeper question of how his thinking could cohere without such an idea. Athanasius himself was well aware that theology is responsible for more than just answering the questions its age is asking. Heresies are in fact the mechanism by which the spirit of the age takes over the task of doing theology; by proposing provocative misinterpretations of the faith, the heretics act as the world's instruments to draw attention unnaturally toward the wrong issues and away from the right ones, truncating the church's witness.

Although it intentionally marginalizes the formative impact of Arianism, this thesis does not attempt to study Athanasius in a total vacuum. Instead of taking Arianism as Athanasius' primary dialogue partner, as has been the standard approach, this study examines the theology of Athanasius within the context of his struggle to correct the Alexandrian theological tradition.

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[47]Kannengiesser asserts that they "can hardly be studied separately," but this is not because they are polar opposites locked in direct, face-to-face combat. Rather, they belong to the same theological tradition, in Kannengiesser's view, although to different generations within that tradition. "Preface," in *Arius And Athanasius: Two Alexandrian Theologians* (Brookfield, Vermont: Variorum Reprints, 1991), ix.

As such, it takes the main stream of the Alexandrian tradition as Athanasius' most determinative dialogue partner. Investigating the continuities and discontinuities between Athanasius and the tradition he was proud to belong to allows for a more comprehensive understanding of his theology, since he is best understood as a reformer engaging in critical dialogue with the mainstream of theological tradition. As Rebecca Lyman has pointed out, what is distinctive about Athanasius is that his theology is an attempt to define Christian identity in the perplexing new age of Imperial approval, and as he faced this task he operated not as "an apologist in dialogue with a majority culture, but an authority in conflict with his own tradition."[48]

Concentrating on the Alexandrian tradition, as opposed to the total Christian tradition, is an unfortunately necessary restriction of scope in the interest of brevity and manageability. Without some such restriction, a study like this could easily balloon into a full history of doctrine (according to Loofs, Harnack's massive *magnum opus* is actually an essay on the fourth century which got out of hand[49]). Reining in the study so severely has taken its toll on the completeness and accuracy of many issues discussed. I am especially aware that the spectre of Irenaeus haunts this document and demands to know why he was not given the credit due him for influencing Athanasius on page after page. I will have to make it up to him later.

Another assumption that this thesis makes is that development is a fairly minor issue in Athanasius' theology; that there is not an appreciable difference between the early and late Athanasius. That this is the case will partly be borne out in the course of the argument, as the same basic principles that Athanasius learned in his criticism of the Logos doctrine are seen applied to broader areas of theology, with increasingly systematic rigor. Harnack claims that the theology of Athansius underwent no development whatsoever, but this is something of an overstatement. It does seem that the earlier works move more in the thought-world of Platonism, while the later works become gradually less speculative. Still, overall there is no sharp division to be found. Athanasius came to grips with a speculative, Platonic tradition in order to rectify certain problems, and having set the situation straight he went on to grow

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[48]Rebecca J. Lyman, *Christology and Cosmology: Models of Divine Activity in Origen, Eusebius, and Athanasius* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), 128.

[49]Cited in Jaroslav Pelikan, *Historical Theology* (New York: Hutchinson, 1971), 61.

progressively more trinitarian, more scriptural, and more pastoral. As H. E. W. Turner wryly

remarks, "Athanasius was not the last theologian to become more Biblical, the older he grew."[50]

Finally, much of the argument, which traces Athanasius' line of thought from the initial

reconstruction of the Logos doctrine through to his complete trinitarian theology, seems to

depend on an early dating for the *Contra Gentes/De Incarnatione*. Quasten maintains that this

work was composed as early as 318, before the outbreak of Arianism, when Athanasius was a

mere twenty years old.[51] It is often objected that such a young man could not have produced

such a masterpiece, but G. C. Stead's reconstruction of the interesting possibility of an even

earlier Athanasian work, the *henos somatos* connected to Bishop Alexander, hobbles that

objection.[52] Actually what is important to my argument is not that the *CG/DI* was written early

in Athansius' life, but only that it was written well in advance of his other major works. That

this is the case, very few scholars even question.[53] Thus the assumption of an early *CG/DI* is not

likely to be overturned on the basis of any available evidence. If such a reversal were to happen,

the argument of this thesis would be somewhat undercut, but many of its findings could still be

reconstructed solely on the basis of logical relationships from one doctrine to another, with no

reference to historical development or "lessons learned" from earlier conflicts.

Methodology

The range of Athanasian writings dealt with in this paper will be restricted in two ways:

1. Only doctrinal writings will be used, and 2. Several documents will be omitted because their

authenticity is widely contested.

The first criterion is the more difficult, since all of Athanasius' work is doctrinal in some

way. The distinction to be made, however, is between those works which are primarily designed

to expound doctrine, either positively or in controversy against heresy, and those works which

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[50]H. E. W. Turner, *The Patristic Doctrine of Redemption* (London: Mowbray & Co., 1952), 90.

[51]Johannes Quasten, *Patrology* Volume III (Westminster, Maryland: Christian Classics, 1992), 25.

[52]G. C. Stead, "Athanasius' Earliest Written Work," *Journal of Theological Studies* 39 (1988): 76-91.

[53]Robert W. Thompson, *Athanasius: Contra Gentes and De Incarnatione* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971), xii.

are primarily historical reportage (even though these report the history of doctrinal disputes). Quasten calls the second type "Historico-Polemical Writings,"[54] and includes among them such documents as the *Apology against the Arians*, *Apology to the Emperor Constantius*, *Apology for his Flight*, and the *History of the Arians*. In addition to these, Athanasius wrote a number of smaller historical works, mostly in the form of epistles. Quasten also lists a category of "Ascetical Writings," but of these only the *Life of Antony* can be called genuine with any certainty.

The question of authenticity is only a serious issue with regards to a few of the important works. Charles Kannengiesser has articulated good reasons for rejecting the fourth book of the *Contra Arianos* as spurious, and since this conclusion has gained wide acceptance I will work only from the first three. Only a minority of scholars would even think to question the authenticity of the *Contra Gentes* and *De Incarnatione*, and no convincing case has been made for rejecting them. The arguments of George Dragas in favor of admitting the two books *Contra Apollinarem* into the *corpus athanasianum* are powerful and deserve serious consideration.[55] I will not use these two books, though, for two good reasons and one bad one: 1. Most scholars still reject the *Contra Apollinarem* as spurious, so 2. arguing in favor of them and using them would weaken the effect of the doctrinal argument which can be made on the basis of broadly-accepted works, and 3. they have never been translated into English and Athanasius' Greek is too difficult for me to work through.

This leaves the following major works as the basis of this study:

● *Contra Gentes/De Incarnatione*
● *Contra Arianos I-III*
● *Letters to Serapion* (concerning the Holy Spirit)
● *De Decretis* (defense of the Nicene Council)
● *Tomus ad Antiochenos*
● *The Festal Letters*

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[54] Johannes Quasten, *Patrology* (Westminster, Maryland: Christian Classics, Inc.: 1992), Vol. III, p. 34.

[55] George D. Dragas, *St. Athanasius Contra Apollinarem* (Athens: Church and Theology vol. VI, 1985).

Of these, the first two (*Contra Gentes/De Incarnatione* and *Contra Arianos I-III*) are the most comprehensive and detailed statements of Athanasius' theology, and therefore they receive the most careful attention in this thesis. A number of minor works which enjoy solid reputations will also be used, and the *Life of Antony* will be referred to occasionally, but the works listed above are the core of this investigation.

Reference was made above to the fact that this study has not been carried out in the original language. Athanasius' Greek is a few steps more difficult than New Testament Greek, and my skills with even *that* are minimal. Since Thompson's edition of the *Contra Gentes De Incarnatione* is printed with Greek and English in parallel, I have been able to develop a limited sense of Athanasius' Greek vocabulary and usage in that work. Occasionally I have quoted phrases in the original, when that seemed especially illuminating (for instance, there is simply no satisfactory translation of αυτολογος, αυτοθεος, αυτοδυναμις in CG 46). Important technical terms and awkward translations, especially in the *Contra Arianos*, have been consistently checked against Migne's *Patrologia*. Of course, even Migne's edition is not a definitive critical text; all of which points to the fact that this investigation is a Master's level investigation into the theology of Athanasius. For all practical purposes, the textual basis for this study is Robertson's edition in the *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, supplemented by Thompson's *CG DI* (which is a superior translation to the nineteenth-century NPNF version of Newman/Robertson and prints the Greek in parallel) and Shapland's *Letters to Serapion* (not in Robertson).

The method of analysis is basically nothing more celebrated than careful reading, but the documents themselves call for *a certain style* of careful reading. Recognizing the style of reading demanded by a text is a vital first step in any process of interpretation. Every reader imposes on the text some kind of presupposition about the fundamental categories of the author's discourse; a good reader discovers the proper categories by taking clues from the author. It is helpful to consciously formulate these categories as far as possible, in this case as a kind of general guide on How to Read Athanasius. Charles Kannengiesser, in describing the rationale behind his lifetime of studying Athanasius, indicated that it seemed to him that the careful study of Athanasius' style of expression (especially in his more personal writings) was

"the indispensable path to the vital core of Athanasian scholarship."[56] It seemed to Kannengiesser that in order to make serious advances in the field, the most important task was to develop an ear for the *ipsissima vox Athanasius*. The following principles are an effort toward that end.

Three elements of Athanasian style stand out as clues to guide interpretation. They must be stated very generally here, although each of them could be illustrated by a great number of specific instances. These three characteristics should be borne in mind when reading Athanasius; they are in evidence throughout his writings and help guide his exposition. Athanasius' mode of discourse can be characterized as *rhetorical*, *visual*, and *relational*.

Rhetorical. To call Athanasius' writing style rhetorical is to draw attention to the fact that his work is characteristically persuasive; it is designed to convince, prove, and motivate. Athanasius was probably constitutionally incapable of writing in any other mode (descriptively or exploratively, for instance), since his historical works, including the Life of Antony, are just as riddled with rhetorical devices as his polemical works. He fills his books with appeals to the basic values of his readers; these appeals lurk behind his arguments and give them their force. The appeals are obvious in most passages, and wherever they are not apparent, it is worthwhile to ask where and how they are concealed, because they are almost always there. G. C. Stead published in 1976 a very helpful study of recognized rhetorical canons in Athanasius' works; he illustrates Aristotle's list of 28 methods of argument with quotations from Athanasius.[57] Stead is ultimately disappointed in Athanasius' use of rhetoric, judging it to be manipulative and, ironically, unworthy of a sensitive Logos-theology: "Is it too much to say that Athanasius, influenced by rhetorical convention, often treats the spoken and written word as an instrument of persuasion, and fails in the respect which is due to words as divine gifts to mankind and images and instruments of the divine Word himself?"[58] Stead's verdict indicates that he has a rather low view of rhetoric itself. The ancient world, as evinced in Plato's *Phaedrus*, was capable of understanding persuasive speech as an expression of love, not coercive force. The

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[56]Kannengiesser, p. xi.

[57]G. C. Stead, "Rhetorical Method in Athanasius," *Vigiliae Christianae* 30 (1976): 121-137.

[58]*ibid*, 133.

modern world, in which the term "rhetoric" is ususally employed pejoratively, has lost the ability to see this connection, and Stead seems to have fallen victim to this tendency. His essay is a valuable contribution to Athanasian scholarship, but it ends by imposing the biases of a later age on the rhetoric of Athanasius.

Ellen Charry has pressed the analysis of Athanasius' rhetorical methods quite a bit further by showing how they are related to his overall motives, especially his pastoral concerns. She points out that in the bishop's works, "the most important appeal made to the reader...is to the paired fears of death and corruption and the desire for pleasure and happiness."[59] Athanasius presents these alternatives and shows how they inform whatever point is currently at issue. Charry draws attention especially to his use of the purpose clause: "Purpose clauses take the reader outside the event and into God's therapeutic plan. They provide distance on the economy of salvation such that the reader may observe how God goes about plotting our rescue. The assumption herein is that Athanasius believed that God is clear-headed, thoughtful, and decisive."[60] It is true that Athanasius never misses a chance to provide a purpose statement to explain the reason for a theological event. Closely connected to this is the use of the purpose clause to begin a narrative which reveals a reason; Andrew Hamilton refers to these as "aetiological narratives," and they are common and important in Athanasius.[61] The very fact that Athanasius' writings are rhetorical in nature gives us some important clues about the mind that produced them. It is not surprising that for Athanasius the world, as a place in which the logos is pervasive, is a place where reasons can be given for God's actions, and where we can talk to each other as reasonable people who will respond to rational appeals.

In terms of the *content* of his arguments, it is easy to see that Athanasius regards the appeal to salvation as the final court of appeal: "In none of his larger works has Athanasius omitted to base his anti-Arian christology on the thought of redemption, and wherever he gives

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[59]Ellen T. Charry, "The Case for Concern: Athanasian Christology in Pastoral Perspective," *Modern Theology* 9 (July 1993), 266.

[60]*ibid*, 267.

[61]Andrew Hamilton, S J., "Narrative in the Theology of St. Athanasius," *Colloquium* 10 (1977) 6-13

this as the basis one feels that he is adducing what is his most telling argument."[62] But it is not just in the content of his arguments that Athanasius reveals the cast of his mind; he also tells us something about himself in the *form* of his argumentation. Richard Weaver has pointed out that authors tend to have favorite argument forms, distinctive styles of proof to which they habitually take recourse in making a point: "The reasoner reveals his philosophical position by the source of argument which appears most often in his major premise because the major premise tells us how he is thinking about the world. In other words, the rhetorical content of the major premise which the speaker habitually uses is the key to his primary view of existence."[63] When we scrutinize Athanasius' writings for his favorite argument-forms, we find that he tends to use what Weaver calls the argument from definition; that is, he prefers to argue downward, from the definition of the thing, instead of backward, from consequences that follow from it. The clearest example of the argument from definition is found in, or rather throughout, the *Contra Arianos*. Athanasius accuses the Arians of deceiving their foolish followers to the point that "they think bitter sweet," and he sets out to convince them of the truth, so that they they can repent of the heresy and "understand that darkness is not light, nor falsehood truth, nor Arianism good."[64] This seems to be the main point which the *Contra Arianos* sets out to make, and to which Athanasius recurs constantly: Arians are not Christians any more than light is darkness.[65] One of the many reasons Athanasius repeatedly questions the sanity of his Arian opponents is that they are acting out of line with the true definition of what they are. Being Arians, they claim to be Christians, and thus they recuse themselves from the sphere of rationality, as far as Athanasius' definition-centered mind is concerned. Weaver describes those who prefer to argue from definition as believing that the essences of things are the most fundamentally real, and that these essences transmit their reality to particular instances. They are thus, in a rough usage of the

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[62]Harnack, *History of Dogma* IV, 26.

[63]Richard M. Weaver, *The Ethics of Rhetoric* (Chicago: Henry Regnery Company, 1953), 55.

[64]*Contra Arianos* I.1.

[65]Craig Blaising analyzes the Contra Arianos as following a *confutatio-confirmatio* apologetic/rhetorical pattern, in which the *stasis* is, "Arians are not Christians." Craig Alan Blaising, "Athanasius of Alexandria: Studies in the Theological Method and Structure of the *Contra Arianos* with Special Reference to Method" (Ph.D. diss., University of Aberdeen, 1987), 9-11.

term, idealists, and if living in the middle ages they would argue for the reality of universals.
This mental habit, in a disciplined mind, leads necessarily to an ability to gain perspective on
situations. As Weaver says, "To define is to assume perspective; that is the method of
definition. Since nothing can be defined until it is placed in a category and distinguished from its
near relatives, it is obvious that definition involves the taking of a general view. Definition must
see the thing in relation to other things, as that relation is expressible through substance,
magnitude, kind, cause, effect, and other particularities. It is merely different expression to say
that this is a view which transcends: perspective, detachment, and capacity to transcend are all
requisistes of him who would define."[66] Thus Athanasius' rhetorical mode of discourse is the
secret to his widely-acknowledged ability to get to the heart of a complex controversy.

Visual. This is an inexact term to describe a characteristic of Athanasius' discourse, but
no better term is available. What it means is that Athanasius seems to think primarily by getting
a clear image of what he wants to describe fixed in his mind, and then setting out to find words
to describe it. This primacy of a non-verbal reality held in the imagination is the reason he can
move so freely from one metaphor to another, or allow his well-intentioned semi-arian
opponents to either use or neglect important technical terms like *homoousios*. Athanasius is
always ready to accept an alternative way of expressing something, provided it can be shown
that it really points back to the same *something*. Related to this is his ability to explain the sense
of Scripture even in places where conflicting terms are present. His frustration with the Arian
exegesis of Scripture results from their tendency to fixate on the apparent literal meaning of a
word, at the expense of forcing a change in the theological referent. For instance, when
Hebrews 3:2 describes Christ as "faithful to Him who *made* him," the Arians assert that the
word "made" dictates that Christ is created. To Athanasius' way of thinking, it is absurd to
change all that we know about Christ from other contexts (the σκοπος of Scripture, the
tradition, Nicea, etc.) just to make it fit with one term. Instead we should intperpret the word in
a way which is permitted by the non-verbal, fixed knowledge of the true nature of Christ: "The
words do not take away the nature, but rather the nature transforms the words by drawing them

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[66]Weaver, *Ethics of Rhetoric*, 108. Weaver chooses Abraham Lincoln as an illustration of such a thinker.
It is interesting to note that he also cites as an example John Henry Newman, who owed so much to Athanasius.

to itself."[67] Andrew Louth has described this way of thinking, giving priority to the subject instead of the terms, with the rather difficult phrase "the analogical predication of attributes." "The key to his theory seems to be that terms must be attributed according to the nature of the subject."[68] Athanasius' power of concentration and his attendant verbal flexibility make the isolation of technical terms in his writings a very touchy affair. The mere presence or absence of any term is sometimes scarcely a clue as to whether the same truth is being affirmed, or even as to whether the same issue is being discussed. The word-concept fallacy is an especially imminent threat in reading Athanasius.

That the basic mode of Athanasius' thought is not only not verbal, but specifically visual, is suggested by the recurrence of certain images in his writings. Sunlight is the most prominent example. What is telling about his use of this image is that it means many different things for him. Primarily he likes to use it to describe the way the Son is generated from the Father: essentially, inseparably, eternally. But he also uses it to describe the way the knowledge of God covers the earth, and the power of faith in Christ, the omnipresence of the resurrected Christ, the self-evidence of truth, and many other things.[69] This is a cast of thought characteristic of many poets (William Blake is a good example), who inexplicably fixate on an image and then describe it in different words, in different poems, and to illustrate different ideas. The mind just seems to be drawn to a beloved image *qua* image, and it can be brought into play and associated with completely contradictory rational concerns.

David Chidester has ventured an analysis of the Arian controversy in terms of the difference between the Athanasian preference for visual imagery (light from light) on the one hand and the Arian preference for auditory terminology (God's word spoken forth from him) on the other. He builds his argument on the distinction between Greek culture's fundamentally visual orientation and Hebrew culture's fundamentally auditory orientation, which he admits is "a kind of cliché of cultural history." This view was expressed by Herman Graetz: "To the pagan,

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[67]Contra Arianos II.3, as cited and explained by Rowan A. Greer, *The Captain of Our Salvation: A Study in the Patristic Exegesis of Hebrews* (Tubingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1973), 95.

[68]Andrew Louth, "Reason and Revelation in Saint Athanasius," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 23 (1970), 393.

[69]Jaroslav Pelikan, *The Light of The World* (New York: Harper, 1962).

the divine appears within nature as something observable to the eye. He becomes conscious of it as something seen, in contrast to the Jew who knows that the divine exists beyond, outside of, and prior to nature. God reveals Himself through a demonstration of His will, through the medium of the ear. The human subject becomes conscious of the divine through hearing and obeying. Paganism sees its god, Judaism hears Him; that is it hears the commandments of His will."[70] It is interesting that this compelling, but admittedly facile way of describing the difference between the Greek and Hebrew minds puts Athanasius, with his predilection for the visual, on the Greek side rather than the Hebrew. To further complicate the matter, Athanasius was perhaps more Coptic than Greek, and the native Egyptian mind has a completely different set of loyalties than either the Greek or the Hebrew. At any rate, no serious issues can be resolved at the level of such general characterizations. Athanasius' mode of discourse reveals that he was primarily a visualizer, who moved from that solid nonverbal base of operations to carefully interpret sacred texts, and to book after book with masterful skill.

Relational. Finally, Athanasius' discourse is profoundly relational. What this means is that he tends to juxtapose well-defined realities very closely with each other, but not to integrate them into a single unit. He does this with the Logos' relationship to creation, and insists that the two things be thought of as distinct and together at the same time. He does it again with the coming together of the Word and the flesh. Underlying this cast of thought is the notion that real relatedness demands self-differentiation. It is probably misleading to call this way of thinking dialectical, but that word does describe something of his style. This tendency of Athanasius must be borne in mind, or the reader will gradually become annoyed that he apparently refuses to carry his thought through to the level of synthesizing the two things into one. He does not intend to bring the two together to form a third thing; he intends to hold two things in relation and leave them that way. Their separate existences, taken together with their perpetual relatedness, is exactly the point he wants to make. The theological implications of this are obvious, but what is at issue here are the stylistic and discursive implications. Athanasius often juxtaposes and refuses to resolve two ideas or arguments, leaving them instead to stand in

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[70]Cited in David Chidester, "Word against Light: Perception and the Conflict of Symbols," *Journal of Religion* 65 (1985), 47.

a relationship to each other. Often the right question to ask in reading Athanasius is not, "what is he talking about," but "what plus what is he talking about?"

Organization

1. Introduction. This includes a review of literature which concentrates on past attempts to find the central point of Athanasius' thought, and the methods by which his work has been investigated. Also included is a short description of his style of discourse.

2. The Logos Doctrine of the Alexandrian Theological Tradition. Athanasius worked in the context of a well-defined theological tradition to which the idea of God's Logos was central. The Alexandrians took the idea of the Logos, already combined with biblical ideas by Philo and christianized by the Apologists, and developed it into a kind of paradigm for systematic theology. Clement and Origen, the masters of Alexandrian theology, are given special attention as thinkers who interpreted the Logos-Doctrine cosmologically and universally. As such, they brought the doctrine to the brink of its crisis and reconstitution.

3. The Athanasian Transformation of the Logos Doctrine. Athanasius completely overthrew the Alexandrian tradition by returning the doctrine of the Logos to its Johannine context, stripping away its cosmological meanings and reorienting it toward soteriology. Many of the more explicitly Platonic ideas associated with the Logos (World Soul, *kosmos noetos*, etc.) were simply discarded, while others (especially the Logos as Educator of the human race) were transformed and given new meanings. The most decisive change was the anchoring of all discussion of the Logos to reflection on the life of Christ.

4. The Life of God's Word. This chapter shows how Athanasius developed the lessons he learned from his work with the Logos doctrine into a theological system in which salvation is brought about by the Trinity and perfected in Christ through his mediatorial work as God and Human. The exposition proceeds by following the events of the life of Christ, and describing their soteriological and trinitarian implications. Athanasius' main themes are vicarious victory, revelation, and vicarious reception of the Spirit. The relationship of the Word and the Spirit is given special attention, and the possibility of a

Logos-based Spirit Christology in Athanasius is proposed. The final stage of the career of the incarnate Logos is his continuing victory in the lives of his people.

5. Athanasius and Contemporary Theology. Chapter five briefly draws out the implications of Athanasius' theology for contemporary systematic theology, in dialogue with recent writings about the Trinity and salvation-history.

Justification for Study

Athanasius was one of the greatest theologians the church has produced. Historians of doctrine have assigned him a strategic place in dogmatic development, and Harnack and Dorner in particular had great respect for his theological accomplishments, devoting many pages to careful exposition of his doctrine. The thought of Athanasius deserves to be taken up and reconsidered again in this generation. It is a goldmine of resources for the work of present-day theologians, filled with insights bearing directly on contemporary problems. His thought belongs to that great early period of Christian history, before the division of dogmatics, pastoral theology, and biblical theology, before the splitting of *oikonomia* from *theologia*, and before the division between East and West. His presuppositions were a catholic confidence and simple sincerity to which we can only come near by means of a disciplined synthetic effort. But it came naturally for Athanasius.

The larger discussion taking place right now involves the re-evaluation of the fourth century theological ferment which issued in the classical doctrinal formulations from Nicaea to Chalcedon. In this ongoing discussion, many valuable things are being accomplished, but in many ways the Arians are coming out looking better than they deserve to theologically. Several of the "assured results" of the specialists are beginning to filter out into the minds of theologians and ministers, and are appearing in contemporary theology: Arians were trying to do justice to a suffering God; Arians thought in terms of volition, not substance; Arians took the human side of Jesus more seriously than did the orthodox; Arians were nicer than Athanasius. It may soon be necessary for someone to offer a more penetrating criticism of this emerging consensus than has been attempted so far. But even more importantly, now that we are finally learning to hear the voice of the Arians, it is imperative that we hear the voice of Athanasius afresh also. What is

needed is a massive and coherent positive restatement of his doctrinal system. This paper is a first step in that direction. Athanasius can hardly be said to have monopolized the conversation, when the last such monograph on his theological system was published in 1895.[71]

And his voice needs to be heard not merely for the sake of keeping the historical reconstruction of the fourth century balanced, but because what he tells us about is the very character of Christianity. He exposes profound theological truths with a powerful immediacy, in a form which hardly needs any translating at all to go straight to the pulpit, or the counsellor's office, or the graveside. His voice brings warnings and exhortations, and hints toward a theological method which is less disjointed and abstract than any we have grown used to. His message is full of praise for the victorious Christ whose life is his one theme, and he reminds an age which has become accustomed to being ashamed of Christian conduct that Christ's victorious life continues in the lives of his people. This is the voice of Athanasius, and it deserves to be heard in this generation.

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[71]Lauchert, *Die Lehre des Heiligen Athanasius des Grossen* (Leipzig: Gustav Fock Verlag, 1895).

Chapter 2
The Logos Doctrine of the Alexandrian Theological Tradition

Athanasius worked within a well-defined theological tradition, the speculative tradition of the catechetical school of Alexandria. By the time he got his theological training under Bishop Alexander and began to grapple with questions about God and the world, there was a complete vocabulary of philosophical theology, a rigorous system for interpreting Scripture, and a profound mystical tradition already in place in Alexandria. The Alexandrian theologians before Athanasius, especially Clement and Origen, had made the concept of the *logos* absolutely central to their speculations, and developed it into a kind of paradigm for systematic theology. The *logos*-doctrine thus became a hallmark of the Alexandrian theology; yet *logos*-speculation did not originate in Christian Alexandria. These Alexandrian theologians were themselves inheritors and developers of a long and prestigious history of theological speculation about the *logos*, speculations which began nearly at the dawn of philosophy. The theologies of Clement and Origen were in many ways the high-water marks in this tide of *logos*-theology, turning it into the central principle of Christian thought about God, the world, and salvation. By the fourth century, it was evident that any theology which wanted to be considered even remotely scientific or comprehensive was required to work with the *logos*-concept. This requirement dictated certain categories and presuppositions, establishing fairly clear parameters for rising theologians. Athanasius was not content to work with the inherited doctrine as it came to him, however. He perceived deep flaws in the Alexandrian *logos* theology, and saw that it was necessary to offer a vigorous and creative reinterpretation of the whole tradition. The argument of this paper is that his solution to the problem of the traditional *logos* doctrine provided him with the principle for a new kind of systematic theology. In order to understand how Athanasius transformed the doctrine, it is necessary to examine in some depth the traditional form of the doctrine, and the problems which came to be associated with it in the course of its critical appropriation from Greek thought by Christianity.

Pre-Christian Origins

Logos is, first of all, a common Greek word with many possible everyday meanings: speech, account, proportion, plea, argument, law, principle, reason, sentence, and, of course, word. Normally, *logos* was a general and amorphous term, "as old as the Greek language itself,"[1] and its occurrence in a text does not signify anything very weighty. But in the history of Greek philosophy, it was also sometimes elevated to the status of a technical term with a very special content: cosmology. As such, the *logos*-concept was the traditional vehicle for hellenic attempts to interpret the world as a rational, understandable place. Whenever Greek philosophy grappled with cosmological questions, it found close at hand the idea of the *logos*. In the words of R. B. Tollinton,

> The *logos* runs through all Greek philosophy, from Heraclitus to the Stoics, from them to Philo, and so... to its last phase in Neo-platonism. It was, as Harnack says, "Greek philosophy *in nuce*." It contained substantially what the mind of the Hellene could contribute to the explanation of the cosmos. In its different stages it was the first and last word of the most serious pagan thinkers.[2]

Therefore an investigation of the meaning and significance of the term *logos* involves an overview of the high points of Greek philosophical cosmology, and whoever understands the *logos* understands something essential to the Greek mind.

Precisely because of its widespread use and rich suggestiveness for the Greeks, *logos* refused to be held to any single meaning. It took on a variety of connotations, signifying many different things to many different ages. Every major thinker who took up the idea gave it a different nuance. Harnack says of the term, "This conception could be adapted to every change and accentuation of the religious interest, every deepening of speculation... It revealed itself gradually to be a variable quantity of the most accommodating kind, capable of being at

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[1] Jean Pepin, "Logos" in *The Encyclopedia of Religion*, Mircea Eliade, Editor in Chief. Vol. 9, p. 9.

[2] R.B. Tollinton, *Clement of Alexandria: A Study in Christian Liberalism*, 2 volumes (London: Williams and Norgate, 1914), volume 1, p. 357.

once determined by any new factor received into the theological ferment."[3] Thus it would be misleading in the extreme to suggest that there is a single, monolithic meaning for the term *logos*, or a *logos*-doctrine among Hellenistic thinkers. Especially in the Neoplatonic thinkers there is a baffling profusion of *logos*-concepts, and no two are exactly alike. Fortunately, there is a large enough domain of agreement among the various treatments that some simplification and generalization is justifiable.

Before we investigate the historical development of the term, it will be helpful to list three categories of meaning which are traditionally assigned to it. At its semantic minimum, *logos* can signify any of three things:

A) Objectively: the basis of rationality, a **reason**.

B) Subjectively: the power of thought, **reasoning**.

C) Expressively: the thing thought or spoken: a **word**.

All of the specialized meanings which we will see assigned to *logos* take at least one of these three senses as their point of departure.

In the history of the term's Hellenistic development, there were, broadly speaking, two basic types of *logos*-doctrine: the Stoic and the Neoplatonic. We will use these two schools of thought as opposite poles, the two viable alternatives in the pre-Christian usage of the term. The Stoic doctrine of the *logos* was the first to become systematic and influential.

The Stoics. Stoicism was one of the schools of Hellenistic philosophy which, having begun in Greece, was transplanted to Rome and flourished there. The first Stoics seem to have been greatly influenced by Heraclitus, whose obscure utterances they interpreted in a distinctive manner. Whether the Stoic interpretation of Heraclitus is historically accurate is an open question, but the impact of Heraclitus' philosophy on later ages is chiefly due to his survival as the inspiration of the Stoics. Certainly one element of his thought illuminates the whole of Stoic doctrine: the law of fire. He characterized the world as a constant flux of fire, ceaselessly changing as it is kindled and extinguished in varying measures. Yet within this constant change, there is a guiding law: the logos, or reason, which determines the changes. Heraclitus had a vision of reality which allowed him to confess the ephemeral

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[3]Harnack, *History of Dogma* III, 7-8.

nature of the things we perceive, and the primacy of becoming over being, while at the same time emphasizing that the final truth is order. He was the first *logos*-theologian.

The Stoics took up this idea of a universal *logos* and developed from it their cardinal ethical demand: people should live lives which follow the laws of nature. For this reason, Stoicism has been tersely defined as "that Hellenistic philosophy which sought to make the personal and political lives of men as orderly as the cosmos."[4] As Stoicism developed, this simple idea of a life according to nature took on rigorous systematic meaning, and generated the entire Stoic philosophy. According to the Stoics, philosophy has three parts: logic, physics, and ethics. One Stoic thinker compared the ordering of these three components to the layout of an orchard: Logic is the garden wall which protects what is inside, while Physics is the trunk of the tree, which supports and nourishes Ethics, the fruit of philosophy.[5] In this way, Stoicism could prove what sort of place the world was, and show what a life in accordance with it should be. All of this is obviously a harmonizing of two of the three main meanings of the word *logos*: the objective rational structure of the universe on one hand, and the human power of reasoning on the other. The *logos* of a human life should be determined by the *logos* of the universe. Humans participated in the Logos by means of a seed of rationality, the *logos spermatikos*, which each person had within.[6] The Stoic Logos was thus a powerful principle for combining the objective and subjective implications of rationality, and holding them together as the way and means of an ethical life. This center of Stoic thought was elevated to the status of divinity: the Stoics taught that the Logos was God.[7] This God, however, was long on immanence and short on transcendence. The Stoics were thoroughgoing materialists and conceived of the Logos as a very fine substance which could interpenetrate other substances (the "fire" or "air" of Heraclitus). The God-Logos, therefore,

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[4]Philip P Hallie, "Stoicism" in *The Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, Paul Edwards, editor-in-chief. 1967 Macmillan and the Free Press, NY: v. 8, p. 19.

[5]Moses Hadas, editor. *Essential Works of Stoicism* (New York: Bantam Books, 1961), p. x. The citation is from Diogenes Laertius.

[6]*Logos Spermatikos* also had a more cosmological meaning; that is, the rational principle of each individual thing, the inherent teleology of which would unfold and evolve toward its final meaning.

[7]E. Vernon Arnold, *Roman Stoicism* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd., 1911), p. 161.

was precisely coextensive with the world, and his being was exhausted therein. Their theology was basically refined pantheistic materialism, in which the highest terms and key words are synonymous and interchangeable: "God, Zeus, creative fire, ether, the logos, reason of the world, soul of the world, law of nature, providence, destiny, and order."[8]

Nevertheless, Stoicism always carried with it a profound religious sensibility, and even from the earliest period (and especially later in the Roman world), the doctrines could be expressed in warmly pious ways. Cleanthes' *Hymn to Zeus* is a striking example:

> Chaos to thee is order: in thine eyes
> The unloved is lovely, who did'st harmonize
> Things evil with things good, that there should be
> One Word through all things everlastingly.
> One Word--whose voice alas! the wicked spurn;[9]

Among religious-minded Stoics, the idea of a life in harmony with the nature of the orderly world passed over into a full-blown doctrine of Divine Providence.[10] The Logos was therefore the immanent rational structure of the world, the underlying organizational principle which allowed the universe to make sense, and although it was conceived pantheistically, it could be the object of prayer and devotion.

One more element of the Stoic Logos doctrine must be mentioned. In Stoic psychology, the inner power of reasoning was distinguished from the expressions which came forth from that power. Thus it became customary to make a distinction between the inner Logos (*logos endiathetos*) and the spoken Logos (*logos prophorikos*). For this reason, when the Roman Stoics tried to translate *logos* into Latin, they often resisted choosing a single word, and instead inserted the phrase *ratio et oratio*, commingling the ideas of reason and speech.[11]

In summary, the tensions among the three meanings of the word *logos* signify the

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[8]Hallie, p. 21.

[9]Cleanthes, "Hymn to Zeus," in *Essential Works of Stoicism*, Edited and with an introduction by Moses Hadas,New York: Bantam Books, 1961. p. 51.

[10]Arnold, p. 202.

[11]Arnold, p 37

breadth of the Stoic Logos-doctrine: their Logos is 1) The rational structure of the universe, 2) the inherent reasoning ability of humanity, which should correspond to the external Logos, and 3) the verbal expression of this reasoning.

Neoplatonism. As Hellenistic culture became more unified, the lines between the philosophical schools blurred. Later Stoicism was influenced by Platonic elements, and Platonists took up Stoic themes. Skeptics, Cynics, Epicureans, Peripatetics, and Platonists of various kinds jostled against each other in the marketplace of ideas, in a general climate of syncretism and eclecticism. The Neoplatonic synthesis which finally emerged as the last word of Hellenistic philosophy involved a radical rethinking of the Logos doctrine. While Platonists could affirm many parts of the Stoic doctrine of the Logos, they found the idea of real divine immanence abhorrent. The Platonist God is utterly transcendent, raised up to such a height that he cannot be thought to have any contact with the mutable, transient, visible, material world. Creation is delegated by the highest God to a lesser divinity, the Demiurge, who is low enough to get his hands dirty putting materials together, and fallible enough to do it wrong sometimes. In their philosophy as well as their theology, Platonists in every age have been bedeviled by the problem of relating the transcendent Absolute to the concrete particulars of existence; the ideal to the real: "The problem of Platonism was to build a bridge from the *Many* to the *One*."[12] As Platonisms developed and multiplied, various "second Gods" were posited (The Nous, or Mind, and also the World Soul) as divine instruments or intermediary beings through whom the One God related to the world. Inevitably, the Logos became one of these intermediary beings, thus passing over from the status of cosmic principle to that of a distinct being.

This popular idea of the Logos as a distinct entity rather than a pervasive principle is perhaps the greatest contribution of Platonism to the doctrine of the Logos. As Erwin Goodenough says, "like the popular philosophizing of the Greeks, the tendency of the Semitic mind, because of its instinctive concreteness in thought and expression, would be to personalize cosmic forces."[13] This drive to hypostatize divine attributes was a distinctive

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[12]C. N. Cochrane, *Christianity and Classical Culture* (Oxford University Press, 1944), 428.

[13]Goodenough, *Theology of Justin Martyr* (Amsterdam: Philo Press, 1968), 51.

proclivity of the Hellenistic imagination under the influence of Near Eastern thought forms, a mental habit akin to mythmaking. Whenever an attribute of God became clearly conceptualized and much discussed among philosophers, it would take on personality as a hypostatically distinct emanation from the divine substance.[14]

To summarize the contribution of Platonism to the history of Logos-speculation, there were two main advances. 1) The radically immanent Logos-principle of the Stoics was assimilated into a worldview which had above it a transcendent God. Thus the Logos, while remaining the principle of rationality inherent in created things, became the instrument of the One God in his dealings with the world. 2) At the same time, the Logos became personified, pictured as an entity not identical with God; in a word, hypostatized. We begin to see here the elasticity of the Logos-concept, Harnack's "variable quantity of the most accommodating kind" it could make itself at home in a system of pantheistic materialism (Stoicism), and it could also make itself useful in a dualistic system which drew the sharpest possible distinction between God and world (Platonism, especially Middle Platonism). It tends in Greek thought to be a valuable tool for describing God's dealings with the world, regardless of how the terms "God" and "world" are construed.

Having surveyed the roles the Logos played in Hellenistic philosophies, we turn now to an examination of the way in which Christians took up the concept to help them in their tasks of evangelizing the Greek world and explicating the faith.

Christian Appropriation

Philo. Philo was a Jewish writer who worked in Alexandria around the time of Christ. While it may seem strange to begin the discussion of the Christian appropriation of the Logos by referring to the work of a Jewish writer, it is not unwarranted.[15] Philo's thought

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[14]See Helmer Ringgren, *Word and Wisdom: Studies in the Hypostatization of Divine Qualities and Functions in the Ancient Near East* (Lund, 1947). Cited in Pepin, p. 10. The tendency of principles and attributes to be hypostatized and personified reaches comic proportions with the Valentinian Gnostics. Irenaeus mocks them ("Utter Vacancy and Pre-Free Rambler brought forth Cucumber and Melon") in *Adv. Haer.* 1.2:4.

[15]Henry Chadwick, "Philo," Chapter 8 in A. H. Armstrong, editor, *The Cambridge History of Later Greek and Early Medieval Philosophy* (Cambridge: The University Press, 1967), p. 137: "The history of Christian philosophy begins not with a Christian but with a Jew, Philo of Alexandria..."

was eagerly adopted by Christian thinkers, who found it profoundly sympathetic to their own aims[16] An early tradition reports that Philo made a trip to Rome, where he was converted to Christianity by no less an apostle than St. Peter[17] This tradition became so well established that Jerome includes Philo in his list of the Church Fathers![18] Unlikely as it may be that Philo was ever actually baptized into the faith, his theology definitely was. For the purposes of this investigation, the work of Philo is certainly at home among the Church Fathers, since his goal and theirs was largely the same.

Philo was a thoroughly Hellenized Jew who had received a Greek education and thus knew Hellenistic philosophy from the inside. He belonged to that class of Jews known as the Hellenistic Diaspora, whose effort to live an orthodox Jewish life in the centers of Greek culture called forth the production of the Septuagint. These Jewish thinkers[19] believed that Judaism was the universal religion, and attempted to persuade the Gentiles that the Law of Moses was the true philosophy. They were even bold enough to assert not only that Moses and Plato taught the same things, but that where they disagreed, Moses was superior to Plato. In doing so, they made use of the popular allegorical method of interpretation[20] to explain the philosophical and scientific implications of their Jewish faith. This program of critical engagement with pagan philosophy is exactly the program which the later Christian Apologists took up. By the time Justin and the other Christian Apologists began their argument with the philosophers, they already had in front of them, in Philo and Hellenistic Judaism, a powerful model. "For this reason, it is better to say that Christians entered into a

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[16]Thomas H. Billings, *The Platonism of Philo Judaeus* (New York: Garland Publishing Company, 1979), p. 1. Eusebius regarded Philo "as teaching the Christian doctrine of the Trinity."

[17]Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History* II:17.1.

[18]*De Viris Illustribus* II.

[19]Philo's works are by far the most plentifully extant, having been preserved mainly by appreciative Christians For a good comparison of Philo with previous Hellenistic Jewish thinkers, see Erwin R. Goodenough, *The Theology of Justin Martyr* (Amsterdam: Philo Press, 1968), pp. 40-44. Goodenough demonstrates that Philo is "no unique figure in Jewish theology."

[20]Billings, p. 9, explains that Stoics, for instance, allegorized Homer and Hesiod to show that profound philosophical truths were concealed in the sometimes embarrassing mythological stories.

conversation which had been going on in one form before they came upon the scene."[21] This is why any discussion of the dialogue between the Biblical faith and the Greek spirit must begin with the Jewish-Alexandrian theology, and its most prominent spokesman, Philo.

The axiom with which Philo begins is the transcendence of God, which he believed to be a major point of agreement between Moses and Plato. Biblically, he recurs frequently to Numbers 23:19, "God is not as a man," which he interprets along Platonic lines as meaning that God is "the active cause...superior to virtue and superior to science, superior even to abstract good or abstract beauty."[22] But the God Philo worshipped in the synagogue was more than just the Platonist transcendent Cause: He was also intimately involved with the world. To communicate this idea, Philo had to part company with pure Platonism and bring in the idea of Providence from the religious Stoics. "It is quite correct to think of him as a Greek philosopher who was trying to express Greek ideas in terms of Old Testament mythology,"[23] but the agenda for his eclecticism was set by fidelity to the God he found revealed in the Septuagint. Philo picked and chose among the philosophical options open to him, selecting only those elements which he believed did justice to the God of the Jews. Undertaking to explain how a radically transcendent Deity could also involve himself with the world below, Philo found close at hand a ready-made philosophical tool: the Logos doctrine. "The Logos came into general popularity because of the wide-spread desire to conceive of God as transcendent and yet immanent at the same time; the Logos as variously described in the Schools made possible such a twofold and contradictory conception of God."[24]

Philo did more than just join the chorus of those already talking about the Logos. His combination of Platonism with Old Testament exegesis was a philosophical dynamo which pushed the Logos doctrine to new heights of speculative inquiry. "The doctrine of the Logos, considered as an endeavour to bridge the chasm which separates God and the

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[21]Richard A. Norris, *God and World in Early Christian Theology* (New York: The Seabury Press, 1965), p. 41.

[22]*De Opificio Mundi* 8.

[23]Goodenough, 45.

[24]Goodenough, 139.

universe, finds its fullest expression in the writings of Philo."[25] The Logos was central to his thought; the word occurs more than 1400 times in his writings.[26] He personifies the Logos so concretely that it is all but impossible for Christian ears to hear him without echoes of the Trinity in the background:

> To his Logos, his chief messenger, senior in rank, the Father who created all things has given as a pre-eminent gift the privilege of standing on the frontier of being to separate what has been created from the Creator...The Word rejoices in this gift and exulting in it describes it in these words: "I stand between the Lord and you" (Deut. 5:5)[27]

In spite of this personal language, we do not do justice to Philo's rigorous monotheism if we think of the Logos as a being actually distinct from God. For Philo, the Logos is *God's* Logos, his Mind, a figurative way of describing the actions of the One God in his relations to the world. This cast of thought is in part to be explained by Philo's close reading of the Hebrew Scriptures. Behind the word "logos" in the Septuagint, Philo could hear the echoes of the original Hebrew word: *dabar*. The *dabar Yahweh* in the Hebrew Bible was the active, creating, covenant-making word of God; God's way of working in the world. By his *dabar* the Lord created the heavens and the earth; the Lord sent forth his *dabar* and it did not return to him void; the *dabar* of the Lord came to his prophets; the *dabar* of the Lord endureth forever. The transformation of this Hebrew motif into a Greek one, however far-reaching it may have been, was never completely accomplished. Philo's *logos* always remains part *dabar*. Philo is thus to be understood (apparently contradictory passages notwithstanding)[28] as intending the Logos to be "not a demiurge who acts for or instead of God, but...God's own rational energy acting upon matter."[29] If this is the case, then passages like the one above, in which he personifies the Logos and makes it speak in the first person of its mediatorial role,

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[25]James Drummond, *Philo Judaeus: or The Jewish-Alexandrian Philosophy* (London: Williams and Norgate, 1888), 27.

[26]James Dunn, *Christology in the Making* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1980), 220.

[27]*Quis Rerum Divinarum Heres* 205-6.

[28]"Few details of his system are not in some passage contradicted." Goodenough, 50.

[29]Drummond, Vol. II, 193.

are to be interpreted along these lines: "Within the totality of the divine Being there is an acknowledgment by the merciful Creator of the plight and needs of the creature."[30]

There is one further element of Philo's Logos doctrine which we must examine. The Logos, as God's reason, is identified with Plato's "intelligible world," the higher realm of Ideas which is the pattern for our lower world of imitations. Philo, in fact, was the first (so far as surviving documents show) to use the term *kosmos noetos*, which would be so influential in later Platonism, and the first to assert that this world of Ideas resided in the mind of God.[31] The world itself is

> nothing else but the reason (*logos*) of God, already occupied in the creation of the world; for neither is a city, while only perceptible to the intellect, anything else but the reason of the architect, who is already designing to build one per-ceptible to the external senses, on the model of that which is so only to the intellect--this is the doctrine of Moses, not mine.[32]

This was an essential step in the production of the Neoplatonic synthesis: it showed how Plato's Idealism could be best understood within the context of the personal God of Christian theology. The World of Ideas in the Mind of God: this is Philo's Logos doctrine. James Drummond shows how Philo integrated this bit of speculation into his Jewish theology:

> A place filled with ideas readily lends itself to the notion of a book, and Philo has no difficulty in finding his whole ideal theory in the words, "This is the book of the genesis of heaven and earth, when they were made." (Gen 2:4) By "book" is denoted "the Logos of God, in which are inscribed and engraved the constitutions of all other things." The description of "heaven and earth" leads him to make a broad classification of the intelligible cosmos, heaven indicating symbolically the idea of mind, and earth the idea of sensible per-ception.[33]

In summary, Philo used the Logos doctrine to explain how the transcendent Deity of Moses and Plato related to the world: On the Hebrew side, Logos is Philo's name for God in

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[30]Ronald Williamson, *Jews in the Hellenistic World: Philo* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 121.

[31]Williamson, 110.

[32]*De Opificio Mundi* 24-5.

[33]Drummond, Vol. II, 162. Philo is quoted from *Legum Allegoriae* I:8-10.

relation to the world, the *dabar Yahweh* poetically personified. On the Greek side, the Logos is also identified with Plato's *kosmos noetos*, the sum total of the Ideal Forms, "the archetypal model, the idea of ideas, the Reason of God"[34] The Logos is thus described simultaneously as an aspect of God and the plan of the world. With his eclectic theological integration of Hebrew faith and Greek philosophy, Philo gathers up in his system all previous speculation on the Logos. His apologetic strategy prefigures the work of the Apologists, and because of his treatment of the Logos, both in the promise it shows and the problems it raises, he is, as C. J. DeVogel calls him, "the αρχηγος of the Alexandrian theological tradition."[35]

The Gospel of John. The first Christian writer to use the word *logos* in something like its technical sense is John, who begins his Gospel with the striking formulation:

> In the beginning was the Word,
> and the Word was with God,
> and the Word was God.
> He was in the beginning with God.
> All things were made through him, and without him was made nothing that
>   was made.
> In him was life, and the life was the light of men.

With this Prologue, the Christian appropriation of the Logos doctrine begins, and the agenda for patristic theology is largely set. T. E. Pollard has persuasively argued the thesis that John's Prologue was determinative for the formation of early Christian doctrine: "I believe that it was St. John's Gospel, with its Logos-concept in the Prologue and its emphasis on the Father-Son relationship, that raised in a most acute way the problems which led the church to formulate her doctrines of the trinity and of the person of Christ."[36]

Having just studied the development of the Logos in Hellenistic philosophy, we are

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[34]*De Opificio Mundi* 25.

[35]C. J. De Vogel, "Platonism and Christianity: A Mere Antagonism or a Profound Common Ground?" *Vigiliae Christianae* 39 (1985), 3.

[36]T. E. Pollard, *Johannine Christology and the Early Church* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1970), ix. Pollard's first section is very important to this paper, although he deals with the *logos* exclusively from the angle of the history of the exegesis of John's Gospel, while this study is concerned with the history of a philosophical doctrine's impact on the Church.

tempted to find in John's words some echoes of the meanings which *logos* had for the Greeks, and to interpret the whole Gospel with those meanings in mind. The consensus of modern scholarship, however, warns against doing so.[37] The decisive argument against a Greek philosophical understanding of John's Logos is the fact that the word only appears with its "heavy" meaning in the Prologue, after which John lets the concept drop away, never to be mentioned again. If John had meant for the Logos to be the central category for interpreting Jesus' mission, he would surely have unpacked its implications more clearly. But he does not. He uses the "highly resonant term"[38] only to establish contact with his readers, to indicate the cosmic implications of the coming narrative. John must have known, at least in some vague and indirect way, how much the word *logos* connoted in terms of philosophical and mystical meanings. He could not have been wholly ignorant of its wide-spread use in metaphysical discussions and mystery religions.[39] But he seems splendidly indifferent to the sprawling spiderweb of meanings through which he is hurling his Prologue. If his point of departure is the Stoics, he ignores them. If he is thinking of Neoplatonism, he gives no clues. And if he is basing his doctrine on the Hellenistic Jewish exegesis of someone like Philo, he does so "with sovereign freedom that renders Philo virtually unrecognizable."[40] He uses the Logos as a cipher, a place-holder, an empty container whose content is the remainder of the Gospel. Karl Barth, in a passage worth quoting at length, uses another image to explain why John calls Christ the Logos:

> It was because his interest focused on Jesus Christ, the content of his Gospel, for whom in this mysterious and provisional way he substitutes this concept in the prologue, and who is for him the Revealer. For John, all the other things fade away which undoubtedly echo in the Logos concept, and of which we might still catch an echo if we have a taste for speculation. In John Logos

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[37]Pollard summarizes the literature, op. cit. pp. 6-12.

[38]Rudolf Schnackenburg, *The Gospel According to St. John*, Vol. 1 (New York: Seabury Press, 1982), p. 482.

[39]Rudolf Bultmann argued powerfully for a "Gnostic" background to John's Logos-concept; a mythological constellation of descending Redeemer-figures who reveal God to initiates. This discussion is outside of our concerns. For a summary and critique of it, see Oscar Cullmann, *The Christology of the New Testament* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1963), 249-269.

[40]Karl Barth, *Witness To The Word* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986), 25.

means Word. As an ideogram it can stand there like...the *x* in the equation whose value will appear only when the equation is solved. The prologue first sets out the equation. It gives the unknown factor its place, its relation to the other numbers. What is the place of the Word in the economy of the whole complex of God, the world, humanity, the witnesses, believers? What role does it play? What is, what takes place, where it is spoken and heard? Finally, at the climax, who is the Word? But this brings us to the point where the concept has served its turn, where the reality of Jesus Christ that is concealed in the proclamation of the Evangelist takes its place with power, where the equation is solved.[41]

It is in this sense that Pollard can say that "in reality St. John has no doctrine of the Logos."[42] Nevertheless, we cannot help but admire the courage and zeal of John in laying hold of such a loaded term in contemporary discourse and pressing it into the service of the Gospel. As James D. G. Dunn says, "the simple opening phrases of the Johannine prologue expose us to a Christianity able and eager to speak in language familiar to the religious and philosophical discussions of the time."[43] The optimistic and adventuresome missionary spirit of the early Church is clearly evident in these verses, along with the healthy conviction that anything true must be compatible with Christian doctrine; that all truth is God's.

The Apologists. This spirit lived on in the second century, in a handful of Christian writers who attempted to defend the faith against slanderous rumors, and even to recommend Christianity as a doctrine and way of life to which pagans should consider converting.[44] The writings grouped together as "the Apologists" are remarkably diverse in their assessments of the value of Greek philosophy, and highly independent in their personal visions of how best to explicate the Gospel in contemporary terms.[45] Because they were the first to engage in

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[41]ibid, 25-7.

[42]Pollard, 13.

[43]James D. G. Dunn, *Christology in the Making* (Philadelphia, Westminster Press, 1980), 213.

[44]Danielou, *Gospel Message and Hellenistic Culture* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1973) demonstrates the evangelistic intent of the Apologists, something which has not always been appreciated by scholars.

[45]Robert M. Grant, *Greek Apologists of the Second Century* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1988).

dialogue with the wisdom of the heathen, the Apologists are often suspected of being the main culprits who smuggled Greek ideas into the Christian faith: their work is the crux of the debate over hellenization. They are also, of course, the first Christian thinkers to unpack the implications of the Logos doctrine. Two of them in particular, Justin Martyr and Theophilus of Antioch, made extensive use of the Logos in their work.[46]

Justin Martyr was the greatest of the Apologists, "the first Christian philosophical theologian."[47] After trying to find fulfillment in various schools of Hellenistic philosophy, he was converted to Christianity. After joining the Church, he continued to wear the pallium of the philosopher, and as a philosopher he defended the faith he had received. Ragnar Holte has pointed out the two aspects of Justin's work which combine to make his apologies so valuable: On the one hand, his unreserved attachment to the Christian doctrinal tradition (*theological traditionalism*), and on the other hand, his intention to appropriate, on behalf of Christianity, the occasional truths found by the philosophers (*philosophical eclecticism*).[48] Like Philo, Justin knew the fundamentals of his faith because he was a worshipping member of a living religious community, and he felt free to shop around in the marketplace of ideas for those arguments which supported his faith. He had the keenest eye for points of agreement between Christianity and Hellenistic philosophy. In his first Apology, he addresses the rulers thus:

> If, therefore, we agree on some points with your honored poets and philoso-
> phers, and on other points offer a more complete and supernatural teaching,
> and if we alone produce proof of our statements, why are we unjustly hated
> beyond all others? When we say that God created and arranged all things in
> this world, we seem to repeat the teaching of Plato; when we announce a final
> conflagration, we utter the doctrine of the Stoics; and when we assert that the
> souls of the wicked, living after death, will be sensibly punished, and that the

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[46]Other Apologists exhibit similar tendencies in their Logos theologies: Justin and Theophilus were chosen because they especially set the stage for an understanding of Alexandrian developments. An excellent treatment of the crisis of Logos paradigm in the theology of Tatian can be found in Alasdair Heron, "Logos, Image, Son: Some Models and Paradigms in Early Christology," in *Creation, Christ, and Culture: Studies in Honor of T. F. Torrance* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1976), 56-58.

[47]*ibid.* 59.

[48]Ragnar Holte, "Logos Spermatikos: Christianity and Ancient Philosophy according to St. Justin's Apologies" (*Studia Theologica* XII:1958), 112.

souls of the good, freed from punishment, will live happily, we believe the same things as your poets and philosophers.[49]

Having noted these significant areas of agreement between Christianity and Pagan philosophy, Justin undertook to explain them. He offered three explanations of how the Greeks could have stumbled into their partial truths. First, the earliest Greek philosophers probably read Moses and the prophets, and stole their ideas.[50] Second, demons spied out the mysteries of Christianity and filled the pagan world with twisted counterfeits, to deceive men (this explains the fragmentary and distorted nature of philosophical conceptions).[51] Finally, the universal ground of human reason in which all thinkers have participated is the same reason, the Logos, which became incarnate in Christ.[52] This third explanation, the sweeping appeal to the highest possible court of cosmic rationality, is certainly the most startling proposition. The distinctively Christian notion of an incarnation of reason itself is not at all in line with what a Hellenistic listener might have been expecting as "reasonable," and Harnack confesses that "Justin nowhere tried to soften the effect of this conviction or explain it in a way adapted to his readers."[53]

This use of the Logos is distinctly reminiscent of the Johannine use: the Logos is invoked as a point of contact with the pagan audience, and then given a strange new meaning ("the Word became flesh and dwelt among us"). Justin dares to move even further into his audience's conception of the Logos, though. He asserts that all those who at any time have lived according to the Logos were "Christians before Christ," and includes among this number not only the Israelites Abraham and Elijah, but the Greeks Socrates and Heraclitus![54] For Justin, the idea of the Logos is in every sense a bridge; he uses it to connect the full truth of

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[49]Justin, *First Apology* 20.

[50]Justin, *First Apology*, 44. Holte's "Logos Spermatikos," op. cit., contains a very good discussion of these three theories and their coherence, 159-168.

[51]ibid, 56.

[52]ibid, 5 and 46, and *Second Apology* 10.

[53]Harnack, *History of Dogma*, Vol. 2, 181.

[54]Justin, *First Apology*, 46.

Christianity with the islands of truth in the pagan world. Having built this bridge, his hope was, of course, that the Gospel could march across into the Hellenistic world and convert the heathen just as it had converted him. Justin was probably as surprised as anyone to find Greek ideas marching back across the bridge toward him.

That the traffic was in fact moving in both directions becomes apparent when we examine the cosmological role played by the Logos in Justin's thought. Justin clearly has John's Logos in mind; a Son who mediates creation, revelation, and salvation from the Father, the living God. But when he attempts to explicate the doctrine, he reverts to something resembling Philo's Logos; a Logos who necessarily mediates all interaction between a radically transcendent Absolute and a world which he is too pure to deal with directly.[55] This led Pollard to assert that "Justin's God is the God of the philosophers and the problem he seeks to solve is the philosophical problem of transcendence."[56] Indeed, it is because Justin begins with the presupposition of radical transcendence that his Logos-doctrine is doomed to be dominated by cosmology. "He is one of the first Christian theologians to ask for this trouble, of relating such a remote deity to his creation, but he does not well appreciate what is at stake."[57] On the one hand, he identifies the Logos with the Logos Spermatikos, the Stoic idea of cosmic rationality broadcast evenly throughout all things, but especially present in humans. On the other hand, he equates the Logos with the Platonic World Soul,[58] the life-principle of the cosmos itself. Justin's Logos-doctrine sometimes seems to be solidly within the Christian conception of the Word of the living God, but his Platonic way of conceiving God's transcendence makes it necessary for him to employ the Logos primarily as a part of his explanation of how the world works.

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[55]On God's transcendence conceived Platonically, see *First Apology* 10, *Second Apology* 6, and *Dialogue with Trypho* 60 and, decisively, 127.

[56]Pollard, 38.

[57]Joseph C. McLelland, *God the Anonymous: A Study in Alexandrian Philosophical Theology* (Philadelphia: Philadelphia Patristic Foundation, 1976), 46.

[58]In a single passage, *First Apology* 60. This is a very confusing passage, and its argument depends on misinterpretations of both Plato and Exodus. Nevertheless, the equation Logos = Son of God = World Soul is indisputably taught here, and the cosmological cast of thought it reveals is evident elsewhere.

Having allowed his Logos-concept to become so thoroughly determined by cosmological issues, Justin began to let the world-logos equation work its way back into the rest of his theology. In the second Apology, when Justin attempts to explain the significance of the name "Christ," he offers this explanation: "And His Son, who alone is properly called Son, the Word...is called Christ, in reference to His being anointed and God's ordering all things through Him."[59] For some reason, even the title "Christ" is supposed by Justin to take its meaning from the Logos' world-ordering activities. Justin's use of the Logos-doctrine was a great achievement of the missionary spirit of the early church. It had great persuasive power, it was a point of contact with Hellenism and a bold assertion of the universality of the Gospel, and it helped to meaningfully explicate the faith. Nevertheless, Justin's use of the doctrine made it possible for cosmology to encroach into the doctrines of God and Christ. His failure to critically evaluate these results of his appropriation of philosophical language portended great complications in the theology of the later church.[60]

The situation worsens immediately in the Apologist Theophilus of Antioch. He was perhaps the first to use the Logos-concept as not just a point of contact, but a master concept for developing theology itself. It is astonishing that Christianity owes to him the initial use of the word *trias* (the Greek equivalent of *trinitas*) in describing the Godhead, and that he had in mind not the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit of the ancient Baptismal Formula, but "God, His Word, and His Wisdom."[61] This Logos was, of course, conceived along Platonic and Stoic lines. Theophilus resurrected the distinction between *logos endiathetos* (indwelling reason) and *logos prophorikos* (uttered word) from Stoic psychology, and used it to explain the relation of the Logos to God. Before the creation, Theophilus explained, the Logos was *endiathetos*, a property of God, "but when God wished to make all that He determined on, He begot this word, uttered (*prophorikos*), the first-born of all creation, not Himself being

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[59]Justin, *Second Apology* VI.

[60]This debate is far from closed. For a good bibliographic summary, see Charles Nahm, "The Debate on the Platonism of Justin Martyr," *The Second Century* 9 (Fall 1992), 129-151. While Justin is commonly seen as being too philosophical and thus over-rationalizing the Gospel, Goodenough argues persuasively that his real problem is his philosophical dilettantism (Goodenough, 292-294).

[61]Theophilus, *Ad Autolycum II:15*. Pointed out in Pollard, p. 40.

emptied of the Word, but having begotten Reason, and always conversing with his Reason."[62] It is understandable that this seemed very helpful to Theophilus at the time, since it made possible the distinction between God's own being for himself, and his activity in creating. But it did so at the cost of associating the creator-Logos, who acts to carry out God's will, more with the creation itself than with God, for all practical purposes making of the Logos itself a creature. It also introduced the notion of two stages into the pre-incarnate existence of the Logos, which made necessary the idea that the Logos was generated at some point within time. This in turn called into question the divinity of the Logos in a new way, causing theological confusion for centuries to come. A recurring weakness of the Logos Christology, a tendency toward subordinationism, is first evident in Theophilus.

In these two Apologists we see the beginnings of the problems that beset the Christian appropriation of the Logos doctrine. The Johannine idea of Christ as Mediator is subtly transformed into the Platonic idea of an Intermediary Being who is the Absolute's instrument in dealing with matter. The Logos becomes a subordinate being or even a cosmological principle, an explanation of how the world works. These tendencies are curbed by the theological traditionalism of someone like Justin, but in the hands of a Theophilus, who never mentions Jesus Christ, the cross, or the incarnation, they are unchecked. The older histories of dogma were nearly unanimous in finding here the first rumbles of later conflict, and this judgement continues in more recent studies: "The coming Arian struggles are no more than the consequences of the error which was introduced at the time of the Apologists."[63] As G. L. Prestige says, "The doctrine of the Logos, great as was its importance for theology, harboured deadly perils in its bosom."[64] This Greek idea was proving to be a real Trojan Horse.

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[62]Theophilus, *Ad Autolycum* II.22.

[63]Grillmeier, *Christ in Christian Tradition* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1975), Vol. I, p. 110.

[64]G. L. Prestige, *God in Patristic Thought* (London: William Heinemann, Ltd., 1952), p. 129.

The Alexandrians

Clement of Alexandria. The Alexandrian logos-theology takes up where that of the later Apologists leaves off,[65] and the first major theologian in that school is Clement. Up to the time of Clement, Christian thinkers had progressed from using the *logos* as an evangelistic point of contact with hellenistic thought (John's Prologue), to using it as a bridge to connect the two conceptual worlds of the greek mind and the biblical faith (Justin), and then to using it as a positive principle for refining and explaining doctrine (Theophilus). Clement of Alexandria takes the next step of making it not merely one principle among several, but the central concept and unifying theme of his sprawling theological system. Of course, Clement's theological output is more *sprawling* than it is a *system*. He was a broadly educated and unrepentantly eclectic thinker; a dilettante whose theology had a little bit of everything in it. As R. B. Tollinton points out, "in so far as this abundance of material is ever unified into a system, this unity, never perfectly attained, is secured through the doctrine of the Logos...Here, as elsewhere, Clement is not original; here, as elsewhere, he has had forerunners to prepare his way. But no one had seen the full measure of the potentialities of this doctrine for Christianity till Clement taught and wrote."[66]

Where previous theologians had modelled their *logos*-concepts after the philosophical forms of Platonism prevalent in their eras, Clement took as his pattern a different brand of revived Platonic philosophy: the peculiar form of mystical/religious speculation current in Alexandria at his time, known as Gnosticism.[67] Clement's life work was an effort to appeal to the cultured and educated citizens of Alexandria, to win them to Christ by making Christianity attractive to them. Gnosticisms of various kinds were immensely popular among

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[65]A complete history of the logos-doctrine would have to include several factors omitted in this study. Tertullian and Irenaeus, who both made substantial contributions to the doctrine, are notably absent from the preceding account, because their work is not essential for understanding the Alexandrian form of the doctrine. It is generally agreed that a clear line of development runs from Justin through Theophilus to Clement; see Dorner, vol. I, p. 285 and Harnack , vol. II, p. 326.

[66]R. B. Tollinton, *Clement of Alexandria: A Study in Christian Liberalism*. II Volumes. (London: Williams and Norgate, 1914), Vol. I, 334 and 338.

[67]"The pestilent outgrowth of *pseudo-Platonism*," sneers A. Cleveland Coxe, in his *Elucidations* of the *Stromateis*, in Ante-Nicene Fathers vol. 2, 342.

this class of people, and Clement (himself a convert from paganism) found a way to appeal to their appetite for secret knowledge and metaphysical speculation, in order to woo them into the church. He did this by developing the idea of Christianity as the *true* Gnosis, the real and reliable knowledge of God and reality, in distinction from *false* Gnosis, such as was taught by the likes of Basilides and Valentinus. With this preemptive strike, Clement outflanked the false Gnostics; "He will not concede to them the name of Gnostics, but wrests it from them," says A. Cleveland Coxe.[68]

Clement's greatest literary work is a trilogy in which the Logos figures as the unifying theme. The three books are the *Protrepticus* (Exhortation to the Greeks), the *Paedagogus* (The Teacher), and the *Stromateis* (Miscellanies). In each of the three, the Logos is described as carrying out a different ministry of teaching. The *Protrepticus* is a book in which the Logos calls out to the heathen, exhorting them to come to salvation. The Logos invites the nations with a call that is actually a song, "the new song, which has made men out of stones, men out of beasts."[69] This "deathless strain" is the same song which "is the support of the whole and the harmony of all, reaching from the centre to the circumference, and from the extremities to the central part, which has harmonized this universal frame of things...according to the paternal counsel of God."[70] In the *Paedagogus*, the Logos is the teacher of little children in the faith, guiding them practically in how they should be self-controlled in all things. The book is a remarkably detailed guide for Christian life, conceived along cultured, respectable, Stoic lines. Finally, in the longest and most difficult work, the *Stromata*, the Logos is pictured as the one who teaches the Christian Gnostics the mysteries of the faith, and initiates them into the hidden knowledge. Thus Clement's thought is built around the idea of the Logos as the Teacher, who calls the heathen, guides the faithful, and above all, instructs the true Gnostic.

As a result, Clement's *logos* doctrine is only partly to be understood as a philosophical

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[68]*ibid*, 342

[69]*Protrepticus* I.

[70]*ibid*. This is probably a reference to the cross-wise placement of the World-Soul in the creation, from Plato's *Timaeus*. Justin had already identified this cross-shaped World-Soul with the Logos.

construct based on platonic metaphysics. It is at least equally important to view it as a form of Christian intellectual mysticism wherein the worshipper seeks unity with God by a contemplative ascent from the sense-world below to the realm of eternal forms above. In this kind of mysticism, the absolute transcendence of God is so strictly construed that God is beyond naming, beyond describing, and in a very real sense beyond knowledge itself. For Clement, this radical transcendence is axiomatic; the Father is "not capable of expression by the voice, but to be reverenced with reverence, and silence, and holy wonder, and supremely venerated."[71] The reason such a God cannot be the object of knowledge is his absolute Oneness. He cannot be described discursively by the fragmented, time-bound human mind, and he cannot be representationally held as a form in the human intellect. Referring to this absolute first principle, Clement says "If we name it, we do not do so properly, terming it either the One, or the Good, or Mind, or Absolute Being, or Father, or God, or Creator, or Lord." These names are permissible, but inadequate, "for each one by itself does not express God; but all together are indicative of the power of the Omnipotent."[72] Since salvation is equated with contemplative ascent to this unknowable Deity, Clement is in need of a mediator to make saving knowledge of God possible. It is in this connection that he brings in the Logos as mediator of knowledge of God, citing John 1:18, "No on has seen God at any time. The only-begotten God, who is in the bosom of the Father, He hath declared Him." Clement interprets this passage in the following way: John is "calling invisibility and ineffableness the bosom of God. Hence some have called it the Depth, as containing and embosoming all things, inaccessible and boundless." He adds, "It remains that we understand, then, the Unknown, by divine grace, and by the word alone that proceeds from Him."[73] This reading of the Father/Son relation is already becoming distorted by the Logos doctrine. But Clement really gets into trouble when he attempts to explain the reason the Son is able to be the object of knowledge, in distinction from the ineffability of the Father's bosom. The Logos-Son can function as the revealer of the Father by virtue of the fact that he

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[71] *Stromata* VII.1

[72] *Stromata* V.12

[73] ibid.

does not share the absolute unity of the Father:

> God, being indemonstrable, cannot be the object of knowledge. But the Son
> is Wisdom, Knowledge, Truth, and all other such things. He is a proper
> object of proof and argument. All the powers of the Spirit, combined in a
> single reality, converge in one sole being, the Son. His powers can never be
> numbered...Thus, then, the Son is not absolutely one as a monad (εν ως εν),
> nor is he many as a number of parts (πολλα ως μερη), but he is one as
> being all things (ως παντα εν). . . That is why he is called the Alpha and the
> Omega.[74]

As Jean Daniélou summarizes this point, "Clement's picture is fairly clear: between the pure

Monad, which is the Father, and the pure Many, which is the world, there is an intermediate

order, that of the One-Many; and this is the order of the Logos. The contamination from

philosophy is palpable."[75]

One of the many things Clement has in common with Philo is the nearly inscrutable

character of his thought. He describes his teachings as "purposely scattered" throughout his

books, so that his greatest work, the *Stromata*, is "promiscuously variegated like a

meadow."[76] To establish Clement's opinion on any specific doctrine, some proof-texting and

leaping from context to context are inevitable. As a result, there is substantial debate over

exactly what he taught concerning the nature of the Logos.[77] It is safe to assert this much,

however, as a solid concensus of opinion: Clement calls on the concept of the Logos to do

so many things in his theology that there is a tendency for it to split apart into multiple *logoi*.

This tendency is evident in a famous passage from the *Excerpta Ex Theodoto*, in which

Clement attempts to distinguish between several meanings of *logos*:

> "And the Logos became flesh" not only by becoming man at his Advent, but
> also "at the beginning" the essential Logos became a son by circumscription

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[74]*Stromata* IV, 25. Cited in Jean Daniélou, *Gospel Message and Hellenistic Culture* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press,1973). 370. I have cited Clement's text as it stands in Daniélou's book, because his translation is much less wooden than that in the *Ante-Nicene Fathers*.

[75]*ibid.*, 370.

[76]*Stromata* VI, 1.

[77]Salvatore Lilla, in *Clement of Alexandria* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1971), 199-212, interacts well with previous thought, and summarizes many debates concisely.

and not in essence. And again he became flesh when he acted through the prophets. And the Saviour is called an offspring of the essential Logos... Paul calls the Logos of the essential Logos "an image of the invisible God," but "First-born of all creation." Having been begotten without passion he became the creator and progenitor of all creation and substance, for by him the Father made all things. Wherefore it is also said that he "received the form of a servant," which refers not only to his flesh at the advent, but also to his substance, which he derived from its underlying reality, for substance is a slave, inasmuch as it is passive and subordinate to the active and dominating cause.[78]

At the very least, Clement wants to distinguish between 1) The inborn Logos which is God's reason ("the essential Logos"), and without which, if such were possible, God would be irrational; and 2) The active Logos which fulfills God's will ("the son of the essential Logos" and even "the Logos of the essential Logos", a kind of Logos-twice-removed).[79] Alongside these roles, however, there are several other possible *logoi*: 3) The world-soul of the Platonic Cosmos;[80] 4) The *kosmos noetos*, the realm of intelligible ideas. Henry Wolfson proposes a four-stage theory in which the Logos exists in the mind of God, is generated as a distinct being who acts, then becomes incarnate, and functions as the reasoning faculty immanent in humans.[81]

With all these possible *logoi* in Clement, there is a tendency for him to err on both sides of the question. On the one hand, his Logos is so totally identified with the Father that it cannot possibly be self-distinguished in any way. This makes personhood inconceivable, and retards the growth of a real trinitarian conception of God. On the other hand (and this became Clement's more dangerous legacy), the Logos with whom we have to do in creation or salvation is separated from God by an infinite distance, and becomes far more like one of the creatures than like the one God. The distance between these two poles is a major flaw in

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[78]*Excerpta Ex Theodoto* 19.

[79]R.P Casey. "Clement and the Two Divine Logoi," *Journal of Theological Studies* 25 (1924), 47.

[80]Jean Daniélou, *Gospel Message and Hellenistic Culture* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press,1973), 374

[81]Henry Wolfson, *The Philosophy of the Church Fathers* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press. 1964), 211

Clement's thought. It establishes an unrelieved tension which threatens to tear the *logos-doctrine* down the middle.

Clement's problems are very similar to those of Justin and Theophilus. Both of those Apologists had interpreted the *logos*-doctrine Platonically, making the Logos a mediating being who necessarily did the dirty work of the Absolute. Clement, however, is a much broader thinker, and therefore complicates the matter by introducing many more factors, including the thought that the Logos has some multiplicity within itself. By making the Logos fulfill all the needs at the heart of his eclectic philosophical program, Clement brings it closer to its moment of crisis.

Origen. In Origen we find a theologian who was born to Christian parents and raised in the Alexandrian Church, ordained a presbyter and a teacher in the catechetical school. We also find a theologian who was philosophical to the core, one of the founding fathers of classic Neoplatonism (he studied under Ammonius Saccas, who was also the teacher of Plotinus himself). His place in Christian tradition is by no means a settled issue: he and his works have been variously exiled, excommunicated, and banned from time to time throughout the centuries. Henry Chadwick notes the ambivalent testimony to Origen's influence:

> The Western writers say, "Where Origen was good, no one is better, where he was bad, no one is worse." Our Asian divines say on the one hand that "Origen is the whetstone of us all," but on the other hand, that "he is the fount of foul doctrines."[82]

He was a spiritually incisive exegete and an unrivalled speculative philosopher. But while his devotional writings, meditations, and exhortations may spring from unfeigned Christian experience, his theology in most cases plays submissive handmaid to his philosophy. Middle Platonism (classically expressed in Plotinus' *Enneads*) was obsessed with bridging the gap between the One and the Many. Acordingly, Origen's theology was dominated by the question of God's creation and governing of the world, construed metaphysically.

Given this framework, his Logos-doctrine could only be the theology of a necessary

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[82]George Scholarius, cited in Henry Chadwick, *Early Christian Thought and the Classical Tradition* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984), 95.

Intermediary between the Absolute and the lower world. Origen is more Neoplatonic than any previous theologian, and thus his Logos is to a greater extent conceived as the mediator between the One and the Many. As such, the Logos is necessarily of a different nature from the Father, or else he would be just as incapable of dealing with the Many as is the Father (the One). Origen was even more explicit than Clement in finding the difference between Father and Son in their respective natures as One and Composite: "The Father is purely and simply one, is absolutely simple, whereas there is multiplicity in our Saviour."[83] Origen was forced into subordinationist conclusions such as this by the demands of his philosophy.

But as the Church has been forced to admit repeatedly, Origen is at least as good as he is bad. In thinking through his concept of the Logos as mediator, Origen came to the conclusion that the Logos could not be a creation, nor in fact could he be an entity generated temporally by God. Still less can the Son be thought of as an emanation cut off from his source. The logic of the Logos as an intermediary demands that the Father begets the Logos eternally: "it cannot be said that the Father begat the Son, then allowed him to live as a being separated from him; on the contrary, he continually gives existence to him...the Savior is always being begotten by the Father."[84] Thus we see Origen's philosophical system, normally a hindrance to his spiritual insight, in this case impelling him forward to his greatest contribution to orthodoxy: the doctrine of the Eternal Generation of the Son.[85] Having hit upon this idea, Origen went on to make great use of it, employing many different arguments to demonstrate that the Son had to be thought of as eternally with the Father. Origen uses the argument which will later become a favorite of Athanasius, that since "the Son of God is his Wisdom hypostatically existing," it is impossible to "suppose or believe that God the Father ever existed, even for a moment of time, without having generated this Wisdom."[86]

Unfortunately, he immediately applies this same turn of thought to God's role as creator as well. Not only can God not be thought apart from his Wisdom, but for Origen

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[83]Origen, *Commentary on John* I, 23.

[84]Origen, *Hom. Jer.* IX.4.

[85]Pollard, 95, points out the irony of this situation.

[86]*De Principiis* I.2

God cannot be thought apart from his creation. This follows from the fact that God designates himself as omnipotent, and "even God cannot be called omnipotent unless there exist those over whom He may exercise His power; and therefore, that God may be shown to be almighty, it is necessary that all things should exist...But if there never was a time when He was not omnipotent, of necessity those things by which He receives that title must also exist."[87] Basically, Origen's doctrine of the Eternal Generation of the Son is somewhat undercut by the fact that the same principle also establishes, in his thought, the eternity of the world. The eternity of the world, or at least of all spiritual beings in it, is a basic element of Origen's thought, and he conceives of these beings as having the forms of their existence, their *logikoi*, in the Logos of God. Thus Origen brings the NeoPlatonic idea of the *kosmos noetos*, the intelligible world, into the Christian faith, and associates it very closely with the second person of the Trinity. Within this theological scheme, the Logos seems to be more closely identified with the world than with God, and the *kosmos noetos* is almost constitutive of the Logos. As A. Lieske concludes, "The cosmological significance of the Logos is the most serious threat to the mystery of the divine sonship within the Trinity, and the most powerful counterblow of Neo-Platonist thought against trinitarian speculation."[88] That even a thinker as brilliant as Origen could not control these tendencies inherent in the Logos-doctrine is a warning to theology: the Logos-doctrine, if interpreted mainly cosmologically, is necessarily at odds with orthodoxy.

Another important facet of Origen's theological work is that he was a skilled exegete, and as such he was not completely insensitive to the tension between contemporary philosophy and the proclamation of the evangelists. He knew that while in his philosophy it was necessary to describe Christ as the Logos, the New Testament witness was more determined by the idea of Christ as the Son. Accordingly, he lays down as an interpretive principle the demand that all titles assigned to Christ must be explicated in terms of the basic title *Son*. He formulates this canon in his attempt to explain the meaning of the various titles

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[87]ibid.

[88]A. Lieske, *Die Theologie der Logosmystik des Origens* (Münster, 1938), p. 186. Cited in Jean Danielou, 381.

given to Jesus in John's Gospel: Light, Resurrection, Way, Truth, Life, King, Vine, Bread, Door, Shepherd, etc..

> One must say, therefore, that, as in the case of each of the titles spoken of before, it is necessary to unroll the notion of the thing named from the naming and to adapt it, demonstrating how the Son of God is described by this title, so also one must act when he is called the Logos.[89]

In other words, if we are to be true to the Biblical conception of Jesus, the title *Son* must be the Christological master-concept, and *Logos* must become only a subordinate idea. By acknowledging this, Origen tames the Logos-idea's speculative and cosmological tendencies, and re-orients it back toward a Johannine perspective. Although Origen was keen enough to understand this need, he did not live up to his own high standards. In his system, it is the Logos-christ who plays the decisive role, not the Son-christ. In fact, Pollard points out that even in his exegesis Origen could not consistently dethrone the Logos-concept. In explicating the Johannine titles mentioned above, Origen interpreted each in terms of the Logos-concept rather than the Son-concept: for instance, Christ is Light because he brightens the rational beings, or he is called Shepherd because he guides those without Reason.[90] Origen failed to keep the Son-concept central in his Christology, but he was the first to see that it needed to be done, and to assert the priority of *Son* over *Logos*. The problems inherent in the Logos theology were probably worse in Origen's system than in any previous thinker, but Origen at least was insightful enough to glimpse the nature of the problems.

Summary

By the end of the third century, the Logos-doctrine in Alexandria had come to a point of crisis in at least four areas. First of all, it had simply been pressed to mean too many different things in too many different systems. Its ability to resonate in mutliple contexts had been the very reason it was attractive to John the Evangelist, but it now set off so many echoes that it sounded more like noise than music. Secondly, the Alexandrian Logos-doctrine was inextricably enmeshed with Platonic cosmology. The Logos was thought of as

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[89]*Commentary on John* 1.23.

[90]Pollard, 98.

a mediator necessary to the world-system, an intermediary being lower than God but higher than creation. This necessarily entailed ontological subordination, and usually meant that the Logos was created and composite. When a thinker of Origen's stature managed to maintain the eternal generation of the Logos, it was only by linking it to the eternal creation of the world. Thirdly, the Logos concept, interpreted philosophically, had a tendency to attract more attention and importance than more thoroughly biblical categories like the Son concept, thus alienating theology from Scripture, and widening the gulf between the ordinary believer and the Church's increasingly speculative theology. Finally, and perhaps most dangerously, the connection between the Logos and Jesus Christ was often not even a topic of discussion, and when it was asserted, it was strangely accidental, with the Logos being the determinative reality. Pollard has framed the entire question in terms of the gradual alienation of the Logos-doctrine from its original Johannine perspective, and while that is something of an oversimplification, it is fundamentally correct. When the Logos-theologians were asked to explain their meaning, they no longer pointed to John 1, except superficially, as a proof-text. Instead they pointed to Plato, or to whatever form of Platonic or Stoic cosmology was prevalent in their day. The world was never absent from their description of the Logos, but Jesus Christ often was. This was the Logos doctrine which Athanasius was to inherit, and these were the problems which he had to address before he could even begin to move forward as a teacher of Christian doctrine.

Chapter 3.

The Athanasian Transformation of the Logos Doctrine

When Athanasius began his work in theology, he found the Logos doctrine in an ambivalent state. On the one hand, it was well-attested by Scripture, and had been a part of the Church's teaching for more than two centuries. It was absolutely central to the Alexandrian theology, the tradition of the catechists and bishops in which Athanasius was trained. Further, it was the only viable conceptual tool available which could explain the relation of God to the world, to humanity, and to Jesus, comprehensively. The Logos doctrine, in short, had impeccable credentials: it was recommended by Scripture, tradition, and reason. On the other hand, its limitations, as outlined in the previous chapter, were becoming impossible to overlook. The term had come to stand for so many divergent concepts that grave misunderstandings were all but inevitable. The theologian who attempted to state the doctrine clearly took his reputation for orthodoxy in his hands. The period of the Arian heresy has been aptly referred to as "the crisis of the Logos theology." The Logos doctrine was in such a state that it was a heresy waiting to happen; Arius was merely the first to become its occasion.

Athanasius, accordingly, viewed the Logos doctrine as both promise and problem simultaneously. In his earliest work, the *Contra Gentes-de Incarnatione*,[1] he faced squarely the challenge presented by the Logos-doctrine. Athanasius evidently thought that his first task as a theologian was to develop a coherent argument directed *against the heathen*, concerning *the incarnation of the Logos*. In the process of working out this argument (which was really more catechetical than it was apologetical, more to educate the faithful than to convert the heathen), he developed a distinctive theological method. *He thoroughly reworked the Logos doctrine, subordinating it to the idea of Sonhood, shifting its basic import from cosmology to soteriology, and anchoring it to the incarnate presence of Jesus*

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[1] See above, p. 11.

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Christ as its authoritative interpretation. This critical transformation of the foundational concept of Alexandrian theology was Athanasius' first great theological labor. It became his point of departure in developing an entire theology. By the time he had finished with the transformation of the Logos doctrine, he had in hand the principles and methods of a new type of systematic theology. That systematic theology is the subject of Chapter 4.

This chapter examines the dynamics of the Athanasian transformation of the Logos doctrine. The exposition proceeds by describing how he rearranged the meanings traditionally associated with the term *logos*, and then analyzing the assumptions and latent theological methodology which informed his decisions. In each of these decisions, his underlying goal is to impose three basic changes on the doctrine: To subordinate the Logos concept to the Son concept; To subordinate cosmology to soteriology; and To interpret the Logos doctrine on the basis of the history of Jesus Christ.

Too Many Logoi

The rich and complex history of the Logos doctrine has already been reviewed briefly. Each thinker tended to concentrate on a different aspect of the doctrine, yielding nearly as many logos-theologies as there were logos-theologians. The term *logos* thus accrued a vast number of divergent meanings. This multitude of *logoi* can be reduced to about ten distinct conceptual units; or ten possible referents any time the term *logos* is used. The ten major concepts associated with the term are as follows:
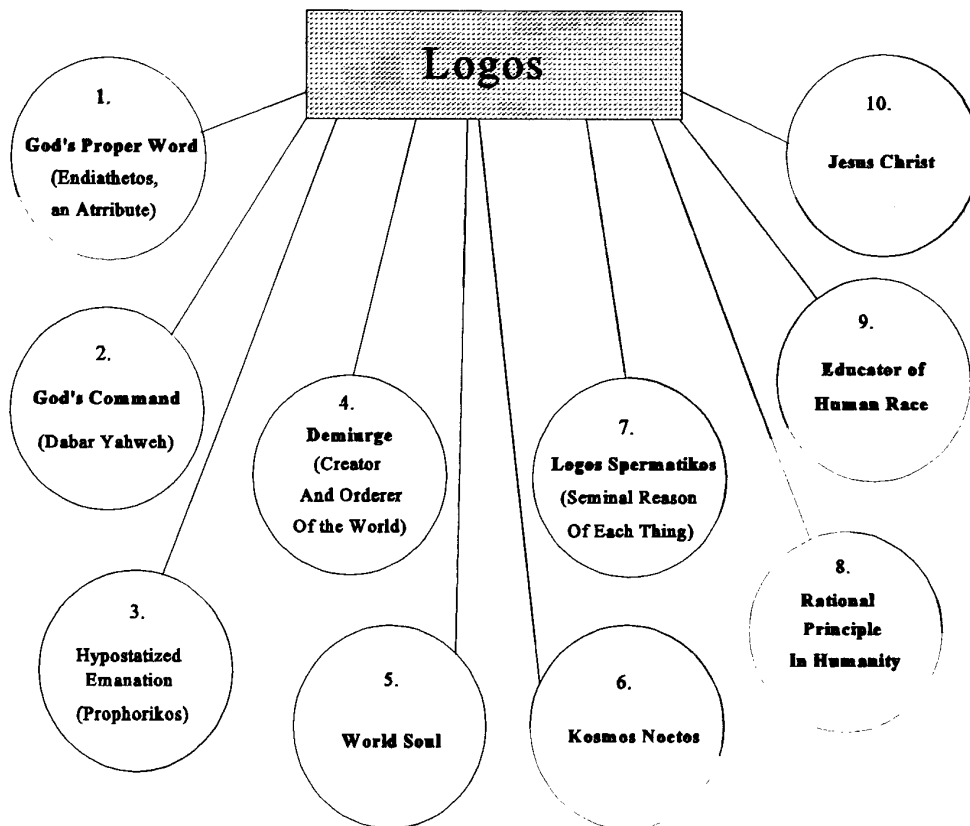
Each of these ten designations has a certain amount of independent conceptual coherence and clarity, so that each can be discussed individually without undue overlap into the territory of the other nine. Nonetheless, no theologian was ever a pure type who defended exclusively *one* of these concepts: everyone taught a Logos who was some combination of the ten (Clement, for instance, tended to emphasize number nine, the Logos as Educator of the Human Race; but so vast and eclectic was Clement's system that he probably made room for all of the other nine ideas as well). The origins of each of the ten concepts, and the ways in which they were developed by various theologians, can be gleaned from the historical overview in the previous chapter. Here is a brief recapitulation of each:

1. *God's Proper Word*. Concepts 1-3 are concerned with God's unity. This is especially the
    case with # 1, which refers to God's indwelling power of reason, and can be thought

of as either the one God or a personal attribute of the one God. This Logos is God's

own proper (ιδιος) power, residing in Him and inseparable from Him. God cannot be

thought of as ever deprived of His Logos, because he would then be *alogos*,

irrational. It is not to be considered as differentiated from Him in any way. Given the

conceptual tools available to the pre-Nicene (or for that matter, pre-Chalcedonian)

church, it was not possible to describe precisely how this Logos was to be

distinguished from God. It was not yet possible to refer to God's proper Logos as a

distinct *hypostasis* or *prosopon* without inviting the misunderstanding of bringing the

divine unity into question. Some of the Apologists, as we have seen, attempted to

clarify the matter by distinguishing between the inner or mental word (*logos

endiathetos*) and the uttered word (*logos prophorikos*). If these terms are accepted,

then the *endiathetos* is God's Proper Word, concept # 1, and the *prophorikos* is an

emanation, concept # 3.

2. *God's Command (Dabar Yahweh)*. The Old Testament idea of God's Word as his

   command entered the Alexandrian discussion through the Hellenistic Jewish

   community and Philo (although Philo ultimately tended to give more weight to other,

   more Platonic concepts). The Hebrew *Dabar*-concept is jealously monotheistic; this

   Logos is not a distinct entity, but rather *God Himself considered as active* in his

   decisive commands and communications. God acts through his Command, and

   creates by giving His Word. When a thinker like Irenaeus described God's Word and

   Wisdom as His two Hands, he was using a (rather Hebraic) anthropomorphism to

   describe God as active, and the Word and Wisdom as the means by which He acted.

   Such a usage is in line with the logic behind the *Dabar*-concept.

3. *Hypostatized Emanation*. This concept is the most ambiguous of the ten. It describes (or

   attempts to describe) the Logos as a distinct entity in some way to be distinguished

   from God. But even the word "entity" gives too much specificity to the concept.

   Most theologians instinctively knew that the Logos had to be distinguished from God

   somehow; this much was evident from the fact that the Logos in John 1 was not only

God, but "*with* God." The first five centuries of the history of dogma can be seen as the search for the right way to describe this distinction of God from His Word. Even Augustine would later admit that he was driven to use the word "persona" so he would have something to say in reply to the question, "three *what*?"[2] Concept # 3, "Hypostatized Emanation," is intended to be broad enough to include all of the various answers given to that question, from the most primitive Gnostic emanationism to the careful, orthodox distinction of persons which would finally be developed for describing the pre-existent Son. This concept was sometimes indicated by the term "*logos asarkos*," the fleshless Logos or pre-flesh Logos, by theologians looking back from the incarnation and postulating the personal, pre-existent condition of the One who became flesh.

4. *Demiurge (Creator and Orderer of the World)*. Concepts 4-7 are primarily cosmological. *Demiurge* is a term borrowed from Greek philosophical cosmology to describe the maker of the world. Closely connected to this is the idea of ordering and providential governing of the world's affairs, although each thinker could describe providence in a different way. The Logos as Demiurge could be the One God Himself (#1). Theophilus described the *logos prophorikos* as an emanation from God (# 3) which was put forth specifically for the purpose of creating the world. Going further in this direction, the Logos-Demiurge could be thought of as a distinct mediating being, itself a creature, who ordered existing material, doing the high God's dirty work of interacting with matter. The minimum content of this concept is the Logos as creator, whatever else may be said about him.

5. *World Soul*. In its original form in the NeoPlatonism which developed around Plato's *Timaeus*, the world was conceived as being a body with a soul. The body was the four elements in due proportion, and the World Soul was the life of that universal body. This living soul is practically identical with movement, especially the circular movements of the planets. Most importantly, the World Soul occupies a strategic

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[2] Augustine, *De Trinitate* VIII.1.

place as mediator between the realms of Being and Becoming, having been compounded by the Demiurge out of materials from both. Justin and Clement both identified the Logos with the World Soul, though neither developed this identification thematically. But any time the Logos is described as the being who is midway between God and World, necessarily mediating between the two, the World Soul concept is in the background.

6. *Kosmos Noetos*. The Logos could also be described as *the intelligible world*, the spiritual patterns and ideal forms after which the sensible world (*kosmos aesthetos*) is modelled. Philo's favorite illustration is the plan of a building in the architect's mind, which exists completely before the physical, sensible building is constructed. "Having resolved to create this visible world of ours, he fashioned first the intelligible world, in order that in fashioning the physical world he might be able to use an immaterial and most godlike model."[3] The *kosmos noetos* can thus be thought of as the blueprint for the world. It is the sum total of all forms, not just *existing* in the realm of Ideas, but actually *constituting* exhaustively the realm of Ideas; it is the Idea of Ideas. In Philo and in Christian forms of Neoplatonism, this archetypal model has a real and perfect existence in the mind of God. As such, it is the acknowledgement of earthly reality within the awareness of God. The Logos as *kosmos noetos* is the ideal world existing in God; another type of necessary mediating structure.

7. *Logos Spermatikos*. The Stoic idea of rationality broadcast throughout all things, the *logos spermatikos* is the seminal, indwelling reason of each real thing. It is this special connection with *each individual real thing* that makes the logos spermatikos distinctive. Each thing has a set of potentialities and a teleological orientation which determines its growth or decay. The universe itself has such an inner potentiality, which comprehends all of the individual ones. There is therefore a harmony between the rational structure and direction of every object and the universal rationality of the world. The Logos as *spermatikos* usually refers to the totality of the seminal *logoi*

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[3]Philo, De *Opificio Mundi* 16.

sown throughout the universe, or even to the being who did the sowing.

8. *Rational Principle in Humanity.* Concepts 8 and 9 are anthropological. This concept can be seen as the application of the idea of *logos spermatikos* to the special subject of humanity. Humans are not only characterized by an indwelling set of potentialities and laws to which they are subject (physical, biological, etc.), but have minds and the capacity of reason. This constitutes a special communion with the Logos of God, however that is conceived. That such a rational capacity exists in humankind, and that it is somehow linked with the divine Logos, hardly any theologian has questioned. The question of the nature and significance of the linkage differs greatly from one thinker to another, however.

9. *Educator of Human Race.* The Logos can be described as a being who guides individuals into truth, and in revealing truth reveals Himself. Especially when this Logos-Educator is seen as the teacher of the entire race, bringing all of humanity to a greater knowledge of God through the course of human history, this concept takes on a distinct anthropological reality of its own. The Logos as Educator of the race was important for Justin and some of the other Apologists, as well as for Eusebius of Caesarea. For Clement of Alexandria, this concept was the dominant one.

10. *Jesus Christ.* From John's Prologue on, the Logos was confessed to have become flesh. By definition, every Christian theologian taught that the Logos was to be connected with the historical person of Jesus Christ. However, each theologian had to work out the meaning of this identification. Was the *logos asarkos*, who became flesh, to be identified *with* Jesus Christ, or *as* Jesus Christ? The content of this concept is thus on the one hand the most clear and distinct of the ten, but on the other hand the most subject to interpretation.

Each of these ten concepts contained within itself theological difficulties which cried out for resolution. But before they could be addressed, there was the initial challenge of simply being able to think clearly about such a heavily-loaded term. Most people are easily led astray by overlaps between words and meanings; a word triggers an accidental association

and the mind follows along, jumping off its track and changing to an unrelated subject. When this happens, the first subject and the second are thought of as being logically related to each other, when in fact they have only been externally associated by the accidental overlap of a term. Many of the complications of Logos-theology can be accounted for by this phenomenon. The words of John's Prologue inevitably reminded Greek-trained theologians of the words of Plato or the Stoics, and the two ideas were instantly associated with each other. The Logos-theologians did not step back and question those associations critically enough; most of them seemed unaware that the similarity of terms had led them to make a leap between ideas at all. It takes a trained mind to notice when this has happened, and a disciplined mind to question the association and maintain concentration on the subject at hand. Athanasius had such a mind. He lived and worked in a time when orthodoxy was of necessity becoming more dependent on creeds, formulas, and carefully-phrased distinctions, and yet he was able at council after council to accept any term which could be shown to have an orthodox sense, and to exclude heretical interpretations. "One of the characteristic points in Athanasius is his constant attention to the *sense* of doctrine, or the *meaning* of writers, in preference to the words used."[4] Athanasius would make good use of this ability to keep the thing itself before his mind's eye in all the theological conflicts of his life. It is worth noticing, however, that he perfected the skill in the process of coming to grips with the Logos-doctrine. He would argue later against the Arians that they used Logos-terminology to its full extent, but in doing so excluded the Logos himself from their theological system. What he said in rebuking the Arians he could just as well have directed as a criticism of the Alexandrian Logos-theologians: "they make the most of the name of the Word...and framing to themselves others, they deny the true Word of God."[5] Athanasius' accomplishment was seeing through the words to the Word.

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[4]Footnote 3, p. 156, of Robertson's NPNF v. 4.

[5]*Or. con. Ar* II:39

Soteriology Over Cosmology

Athanasius' first move in transforming the Logos doctrine is determined by the basic dedication of his theological thinking to the question of salvation. It is an unquestioned axiom of Athanasian scholarship that the overriding concern of his theology is redemption. For him, Christ is above all "the Savior of the world," and theology is a systematic explication of his saving actions on our behalf. Athanasius was relentless in his resolution to show the centrality of redemption for all theology, to interpret all doctrine in terms of salvation, and to subordinate all other concerns to this one. When he argues against his opponents, he always brings the subject back to this goal: to secure the theological basis for the redemption of humanity in Christ. If he can draw out the soteriological implications of a heretical teaching, and show that it undercuts the possibility of salvation, he has played his trump card and ended the game. Any system of thought must be rejected as false if it can be shown to result in the conclusion "therefore we are not saved. QED." Athanasius leaves plenty of room for mystery and the unknowable in his theology, but one certainty serves him as absolutely foundational for all subsequent reasoning: we know that Christ has saved us.

Of course all the fathers of the early church were deeply concerned with salvation. Maurice Wiles described the whole movement of patristic theology in general, and the ecumenical councils in particular, as being determined by the two axioms, "the work of salvation can only be effected by one who is fully divine" and "that which is not assumed is not healed."[6] But with the more speculatively-oriented of the fathers (and that means the Alexandrians above all), other concerns were given independent consideration as well. Origen, for instance, was so fascinated by cosmology that he was incapable of keeping it from coloring all of his doctrines, including the most explicitly trinitarian doctrines like the Eternal Generation of the Son. The interest in salvation was by no means lost, but every doctrine was pulled between that pole and the pole of cosmological speculation. Accordingly, his thought, like Justin's and Clement's, had multiple foci: sometimes he was doing theology, sometimes he was doing philosophy. But "with Athanasius we are all the time doing

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[6]Maurice Wiles, "Soteriological Arguments in the Fathers," *Studia Patristica* XI (1967), p. 322.

theology. If we do a little philosophy on the way, this is never the important thing."[7] He had something to say about all doctrines, but none were given independent consideration apart from soteriology. Athanasius showed no signs of being interested in cosmology for its own sake; he did not have a speculative bone in his body. "He was capable, perhaps alone among his contemporaries, of freeing himself from the enticing but damaging tendency to speculation about the relation of the pre-existent Son to the Logos of the philosophers."[8]

As a result, Athanasius' basic strategy in the reformulation of the Logos doctrine was to identify the proper Word of God and the person of Jesus Christ as closely as possible. The way that he will deal with concepts 2-8 on our diagram is determined by this basic commitment of his to bring together concepts 1 and 10 first and foremost. This move was dictated by his soteriological commitments, in obedience to what Wiles referred to as the first axiom of patristic arguments: "the work of salvation can only be effected by one who is fully divine." Athanasius had to know that it was God himself acting to save us in Christ, and not any sort of mediating lesser being. This move already put Athanasius at odds with much of the internal logic of the Logos-concept, which from earliest times had been conceived as a mediating entity or principle. As R. B. Tollinton explains, the basic question the Logos doctrine had been brought in to answer was,

> How are we to bridge the gap between the One and the Many, between Being
> and Becoming, between the motionless, self-contained quiescence of eternal
> Reality and the ever-shifting flux of Nature and the mind of Man? [...] Out of
> this fundamental problem of theological thought all systems of mediation take
> their rise. The Ideas of Plato, the Angels of simpler or of more developed
> Hebraism, the Wisdom of the Hokmah Literature, Greek Demons, Stoic
> Logoi, the Powers of Philo, the Aeons of Gnosticism, the Virgin and the
> Saints of the mediaeval Church, have one and all their *raison d'etre* in this
> primary difficulty of the relation of the Absolute. In any system that is
> severely logical such intermediate agencies do not really help.[9]

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[7]Andrew Louth. "Reason and Revelation in Saint Athanasius," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 23 (1970), 388.

[8]Hanson, *Search for the Christian Doctrine of God* 422.

[9]R.B. Tollinton, *Clement of Alexandria: A Study In Christian Liberalism* (London: Williams and Norgate, 1914), Vol. 1, 37-8.

By bringing together God and Christ in the interest of salvation, Athanasius cut against the

grain of the Logos-idea, declaring it, like all "systems of mediation," to be invalid and

unnecessary. That God was not in need of a mediator to create or govern the world will be

discussed below, in connection with the cosmological role of the Logos. What is at issue

here is the fact that God did not need or use a mediating being in order to effect our

salvation. Athanasius wanted to make use of the Logos-doctrine, but first he had to make it

clear that the Logos was not one of those mediating beings thrown into the gap between God

and humanity. This basic move, cutting out the middle man, rendered meaningless the

mediatorial implications of the original Logos doctrine, and accounts for the vast difference

between the Athanasian and Arian Logos-doctrines:

> Arian theology tended to see the Son as a safeguard against God the Father
> coming into dangerously close contact with the world, and they had behind
> them a long and respectable tradition of Logos-theology, borrowing from
> contemporary philosophy. Athanasius believed that the Son was, on the
> contrary, a guarantee that God had come into the closest contact with the
> world and with humankind.[10]

Contrasting Athanasius' Logos-doctrine with that of the Arians makes possible a

further clarification of the thought of Athanasius. The difference between the two systems is

sometimes described as a conflict between a high Logos-theology, in which God's Word is

coessential with God himself (Athanasius), and a low one, in which the Word is a created

being (Arius). This is not the case, however. The Arians, according to Athanasius, had a

very high Logos-theology, describing the Logos as God's own proper indwelling reason. But

they taught a distinction between this proper Logos in God and the created Logos who in

turn created the world and then became incarnate in it. It was this distinction between God's

proper Word and the person of the Savior which Athanasius found intolerable. His

accomplishment was not that he developed a high doctrine of the *logos asarkos*, which was

not lacking in the first place, and is at any rate a rather abstract goal which leaves salvation as

something still to be negotiated. His accomplishment was to bring together God's proper

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[10]Hanson, 424

Word (# 1) and Jesus Christ the Savior (# 10) as closely as possible.

That the essential unity of God and Christ is the basic content of Athanasius' Logos doctrine is evident in his use of the term logos in the *Contra Gentes*. Of all the ways Athanasius could introduce the topic of the Logos, the first thing he chooses to tell us is that "he who ascended the cross is the Word of God and the Savior of the universe."[11] He goes on in the same paragraph to identify this crucified Word as "God and the Word of God,"[12] a striking and characteristic formula which equates "God" and "Word of God" through an epexigetical "and." So the Logos is presented as the crucified one, and at the same time as God. Athanasius is very careful, especially in the early part of the book, to always combine the word *logos* with explanatory formulations, and these formulations identify the Word as "God the Word" on the one hand, and on the other as "the Word, our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ." There is, throughout the *Contra Gentes*, a constant flipping back and forth between equating the Word with God Almighty and with Jesus Christ, remniscent of the way striking phrases are juxtaposed in the Epistle to the Hebrews, or in Melito of Sardis. By defining the Logos as God and as Christ, Athanasius obviated all need for intermediary constructs in his theology. In Christ, it is God himself acting directly to save us, not a mediating being of any kind; this was the whole meaning of the Nicene *homoousios* for Athanasius. Whatever nuances may be developed later in distinguishing the persons of the Trinity, they will in no way blunt the meaning of God's direct saving action on our behalf.

Son Over Word

This directness of God's action in Christ has certain affinities with the idea of the word as a command (concept # 2), which pictures God's Word as God himself, considered as active. Athanasius was capable of using the *dabar*-concept in describing God's work in the world, especially when exegeting Scripture: "In times past the divine Word forewarned the

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[11] *Contra Gentes* 1

[12] *ibid.*

Jewish people to abolish idols."[13] It certainly fit well with his unitary way of conceiving of

the Jesus-Logos-God event. But Athanasius did not develop this line of thought, because he

was concerned that to describe the Logos mainly as God acting by a command might rob the

Logos of its own real existence. It should be noted that what Athanasius objects to is not

really the Old Testament notion of the *dabar Yahweh*, but to the overly-literal interpretation

of it as paralleling the divine Word with human words. The *dabar Yahweh* is a Word *sui

generis*; it is always efficacious, accomplishing what it commands (as in "Let there be light").

Similarly, Athanasius wanted to ensure that the Logos was not pictured as a word which is

spoken and then fades away, or an action which is performed and then stops. To guard

against this misinterpretation, he critically compared human words with God's Word:

> Man's word is composed of syllables, and neither lives nor operates anything,
> but is only significant of the speaker's intention, and does but go forth and go
> by, no more to appear, since it was not at all before it was spoken; wherefore
> the word of man neither lives nor operates anything, nor in short is man.
> ...But God's Word is not merely pronounced [προφορικος], as one may say,
> nor a sound of accents, nor by His Son is meant His command [προσταξαι],
> but as radiance of light, so is He perfect offspring from perfect.[14]

God's word continues in existence, unlike human words, and does more than just reveal the

speaker's intention before vanishing. Interestingly, after noting this shortcoming of the

command-concept, Athanasius goes on to propose a supplementary concept to correct it: the

anthropomorphic equivalent of God's Logos is not the human word, but the human hand.

This is because "man's words avail not for operation; hence man works not by means of

words but of hands, for they have being [υπαρκουσιν], and man's word subsists not [ουκ

υφισταται]."[15] If we are to speak of God's Logos as his command, we should bear in mind

that human commands do not accomplish anything in themselves ("avail not for operation"),

but God's command, his Logos, does. When God speaks, it is as if he puts forth his hand and

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[13]*Contra Gentes* 45.

[14]*Contra Arianos* II:35.

[15]*ibid.*

accomplishes what he says: "The Father, as by a hand, in the Word wrought all things."[16]
More precisely,

> He spoke, not that, as in the case of men, some under-worker might hear, and
> learning the will of Him who spoke might go away and do it. [...] God only
> said, 'Let it become,' and he adds, 'And it became;' for what He thought good
> and counselled, that forthwith the Word began to do and to finish.[17]

The inadequacies of the *dabar*-concept can be seen most clearly in the *Contra
Arianos*, when Athanasius addresses the question whether God could not have brought about
the redemption of the world by simply speaking, thus undoing the curse. If God had done so,
as was certainly within his power, humanity would have stood before God free from the curse
and forgiven by the unbreakable divine command. But this would have been a merely
external and forensic transaction, and would have left humanity in need of constant and
repeated commands of God to free them from the new sins they would fall into every day
because of their weak flesh:

> If God had but spoken, because it was in His power, and so the curse had
> been undone, the power had been shewn of Him who gave the word, but man
> had become such as Adam was before the transgression, having received grace
> from without, and not having it united to the body...and, ever sinning, would
> have ever needed one to pardon them.[18]

A command is not enough to rescue humanity; the Word of God must be made flesh, to do
this work from the inside. By the time God's Word is conceived in this way, the *dabar*-
concept has been left far behind, superseded by personal categories which will make
necessary the development of the doctrine of the Trinity.

It is worth pausing at this point to notice the implicit methodology behind Athanasius'
work with the possible meanings of *logos*. There is a remarkable combination of freedom
and fidelity in the way he takes up biblical images and employs them in his theology. The

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[16]*Contra Arianos* II:31.

[17]*ibid.*

[18]*Contra Arianos* II:68 See also R. C. Moberly, *Atonement and Personality* (London: John Murray,
1917), 352-353, where he points out how different this view of atonement is from later views.

Logos-concept is proposed by Scripture, and so he sees it as an appropriate and authoritative way of describing the Savior. Yet he understands it as an imperfect analogy, and when its overly-literal interpretation threatens to confuse the issue, he points out its shortcomings, or more often than not, supplements it with another image. This approach to rational interaction with revelation is summarized in his saying, "behold, we take divine Scripture, and thence discourse with freedom."[19]

According to Athanasius, we would be completely unable to talk about God without blaspheming, except that he has revealed certain images and metaphors which we are invited to use. "For such illustrations [παραδειγματα][20] and such images [εικονας] has Scripture proposed, that, considering the inability of human nature to comprehend God, we might be able to form ideas even from these however poorly and dimly, and as far as is attainable."[21] These revealed images are not perfectly suited to the reality they describe; instead they are suited to our meager ability to think about God. Their inadequacy, however, is not a justification for the theologian to ignore them and invent new ones. Without these divinely-given images, limited though they are, there would be no possibility of responsible theology at all. They have been given to us as the only secure basis from which we can "speak more plainly, speak without danger, and think legitimately."[22] It would be "unseemly and most irreligious, when Scripture contains such images, to form ideas concerning our Lord from others which are neither in Scripture, nor have any religious bearing."[23] Instead, we are to work with the biblical images, bearing in mind that since they are accommodated to our human understanding, they are not perfectly descriptive of the ineffable things they refer to.

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[19]*Contra Arianos* I:9.

[20]The term παραδειγματα is connected with a precise philosophical meaning in Platonic thought; this is rehearsed well by Shapland (*Letters of Athanasius Concerning the Holy Spirit*, p. 108, note 3). That Athanasius made the term his own, an exegetical rather than a philosophical idea, is demonstrated by Pelikan (*Light of the World*, p. 27ff).

[21]*Contra Arianos* II:32.

[22]*Ad Serap.* I:20.

[23]*De Decretis* 12.

When we reach the edge of an image's usefulness, we should take leave of that image and switch to another biblical image which supplements and completes the previous one. This is what Athanasius did with the Word-concept. When the logic of that illustration seemed to suggest that God's Word was merely spoken forth to express his will, and then vanished, Athanasius suggested that a better way to think of God working was on the analogy of a man working with his hands. In another place, Athanasius corrects the biblical image of Word by not only bringing in the biblical image of Hand, but piling up one image after another to show how their meanings overlap to reinforce the same lesson about the Son's relation to the Father: "The Son of God, as may be learnt from the divine oracles themselves, is Himself the Word of God, and the Wisdom, and the Image, and the Hand, and the Power; for God's offspring is one, and of the generation from the Father these titles are tokens."[24]

Not all biblical images are equally authoritative and useful for Athanasius. Some are so limited in their explanatory power and so prone to misunderstanding that they must be used only in conjunction with others. "Hand," for instance, is among the least independent of images, since its natural tendency is so strongly modalistic. "Power" and "Wisdom" likewise need to be used especially critically to safeguard against Sabellianistic misinterpretations. But of all the παραδειγματα, two stand out as especially capable of bearing extensive elaboration: Son and Word. Son, in fact, is such an appropriate and authoritative image in Scripture that it almost transcends the category of image; the Father-Son relationship is very close to being a literally true description of the nature of God. The problem is that it also refers to a creaturely reality, and therefore when we think of Christ as God's Son we tend to superimpose earthly sonhood onto him. This can distort doctrine in several ways, but the problem it caused for Athanasius was that it suggested that the Father's existence preceded the Son's, and that the Father somehow underwent a passion, at which point in time the Son was divided from the Father's substance, as a portion of it. In the Greek thought-world especially, talk of a Son of God was reminiscent of the crudest and most anthropomorphically erotic theogonies. Athanasius' first argument against this sort of thinking is that it pushes the

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[24]*ibid.* 17

analogy beyond its intended use. The Father generates the Son in an ineffable manner, "without passion or partition." His begetting is thus beyond our ability to comprehend, since it shatters the Father/Son metaphor by transcending any analog in our experience. His second and more methodologically revealing response is to bring in the idea of Word to supplement the idea of Son:

> For the Word of God is His Son, and the Son is the Father's Word and Wisdom; and Word and Wisdom is neither creature nor part of Him whose Word He is, nor an offspring passibly begotten. Uniting then the two titles, Scripture speaks of 'Son' in order to herald the natural and true offspring of His essence; and, on the other hand, that none may think of the Offspring humanly, while signifying His essence, it also calls Him Word, Wisdom, and Radiance, to teach us that the generation was impassible, and eternal, and worthy of God.[25]

The Son-terminology is to be preferred, because it comes closest to doing justice to the nature of the generation, but it must be corrected by the idea of the Word, which excludes any "severings and effluences and influences."[26]

The mutual criticism of these two main παραδειγματα, Son and Word, is an important dynamic which gives shape to Athanasius' thought. It is certainly the case that the Son-concept is the more basic of the two in Athanasius' fully-developed theology,[27] since it comes to be the content of his mature soteriology, when deification comes to be defined in terms of adoption, and θειωποειω gives way to υιοποιειω. The idea of the Logos is conditioned to so great an extent by the idea of Son, that in some passages Athanasius almost seems to accidentally say "Word" when he means to say "Son." This is evident in one of his favorite formulations, especially in the *Contra Gentes De Incarnatione*, "Word of the Father," where it is not semantically obvious that a Father should have a Word, but that he

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[25]*Contra Arianos* I:28.

[26]"τομας και απορροιας και επιρροιας" *Contra Arianos* I:20.

[27]"The main weight of Athanasius' argument rests upon the Father-Son analogy, though of course with the proviso that the divine parenthood is exempt from human limitations, so that the divine Son is inseparable from his Father and the Trinity therefore indivisible." G C. Stead, *Divine Substance* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977), 262. Pollard, Widdicombe. Harnack, or Robertson could also be cited.

should have a Son. But of course it is not an accident; Athanasius means to affirm the identity of Word and Son, and to play the two images off of each other to correct each other. There is no dividing them, for "how can they be Christians who say that the Son is one, and the Word of God another?"[28] As a responsible theologian, Athanasius held the two images together, and correlated them with other, less comprehensive images, to speak definitively about what has been revealed about the Savior. This method, the critical use of the revealed παραδειγματα to refine and correct each other, has been referred to by Jaroslav Pelikan as "the collation of biblical images."[29] It is another example of a lesson Athanasius learned from his work with the Logos-doctrine which would shape his entire theology. It is also a point at which his conflict with the Alexandrian tradition is based on a more basic agreement. In the last chapter we saw how Origen perceived the inadequacies of the various παραδειγματα, and endeavored to make the Son-paradigm primary. C. G. Stead is right in pointing out that Athanasius stands in this tradition: "his use of theological terms is controlled by the long-standing Alexandrian principle that human analogies are imperfect and must be interpreted 'in an intellectual and spiritual sense.' Thus the second Person can be described, both as 'Son' or 'Offspring,' and also as 'Word' or 'Wisdom'; and Alexandrian theologians feel no embarassment in switching abruptly from one analogy to the other, using both 'intrapersonal' and 'multipersonal' terminology with great freedom."[30] For Alexandrians from Philo to Origen, this awareness of the inadequacies of all human analogies led to the practice of allegorical interpretation. For Athanasius, however, the same awareness led instead to the critical use of multiple revealed images to correct each other. Thus, while recognizing the weakness of the letter as opposed to the spirit, just like all good Alexandrian thinkers, Athanasius was able to keep his thought more Biblically controlled and accessible to the less educated.

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[28]*Letter LIX. Ad Epictetum.*

[29]Pelikan, *Light of the World*, 28-29.

[30]G. C. Stead, *Divine Substance* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977), 261-262.

Since the Son is a Word and vice versa, the question can be raised concerning how Athanasius conceived the differentiation of the Logos from God. The Alexandrian tradition made available the model of emanation for describing this differentiation, but like the Logos doctrine itself, the idea of emanation came with strings attached. Plotinus had used the idea to describe the relationship between the One and the levels of reality which flowed out of it; he was fond of using the metaphors of a fountain and its stream, or light and its radiance.[31] Athanasius was also drawn to these metaphors, because they expressed the natural character of the generation of the Son from the Father, but without misleading biological or temporal associations. But the NeoPlatonic model of emanation was fundamentally unacceptable to Athanasius for two reasons. First, Plotinus used the idea of emanation to describe several transitional zones in the structure of reality, and made no distinction between the way the emanations such as Mind and Soul came from the One, and the way the world came from God. This blurring of the line between God's essence and his creation was intolerable for Athanasius, and his effort to draw the line as clearly as possible will take us into the heart of his cosmological thought. Secondly, each emanated reality (Mind, Soul, World) was of an inferior ontological order than its source, having less unity and more diversity. Even the Mind, the first emanation from the One, was a second order being. This conception was completely at odds with the intent of the doctrine of the *homoousios*, and constitutes the main reason Athanasius ultimately rejected the idea of emanation. The images of a river flowing from a fountain, and especially of brightness streaming from light, remained among his favorite illustrations, but to guard against misunderstanding, he tended to invest more of his thought in a more comprehensive Scriptural image.

When grappling with the question of the distinction between God and his Logos, Athanasius prefers to work mainly within the parameters of the Son-concept, and to speak of the generation of the Son from the Father. On this point he tends to cling to Scriptural language, and never advances far beyond it. None of the technical terms which would later be established for distinguishing between the persons of the Trinity are to be found in

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[31]A. Meredith, "Emanation in Plotinus and Athanasius," *Studia Patristica* 16 (1985): 319.

Athanasius, or rather they occur without any of their later precision. Much remains unclear and undefined in this area. As Harnack points out, "He had no word by which to describe Father and Son as different subjects, and indeed he never felt it necessary to seek for any such word."[32] It seems that Athanasius was content to call them Father and Son, and not to seek out the next step in terminological precision. Even the nature of the generation of the Son remains something of a mystery in Athanasius; he is begotten "ineffably and incomprehensibly."[33] This is taken to be the meaning of Isaiah's question (53:8), "Who shall declare his generation?"[34] That the generation of the Son was a mystery was a point on which Athanasius and his opponents agreed. Unfortunately, Arians and Semi-arians used the inscrutability of this generation to claim that nothing could be affirmed or denied of it at all, either positively or negatively, and on these grounds they rejected the word *homoousios*.[35] Athanasius, on the other hand, wanted to leave as much room as he could for the mystery of the divine generation, but he believed that it was possible to explain how that mysterious begetting differed from other relationships. In other words, he wanted to develop, at the very least, a negative content for the concept of the generation of the Son. We may not be able to declare positively what the generation is, but we are obligated to distinguish clearly between it and creation, for instance. Athanasius was determined to push his investigation into the revealed images as far as he could, because he was convinced that whatever God had chosen to reveal admitted of becoming genuine conceptual knowledge. In other words, divine mysteries, once given, could and should be handled as reliable information. Athanasius believed that subjects like the generation of the Son and the mystery of the incarnation were "not dark sayings but divine mysteries."[36] Their opacity related to their actual natures, not to their obscure expression. The business of the theologian is to work with the Scriptural

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[32]Harnack, *History of Dogma* IV, 35.

[33]*Expositio Fidei* 1

[34]*ibid.*

[35]Athanasius reproduces a semi-arian creed in which this argument is made, *De Synodis* 28.

[36]"...ουκ εστιν αινιγμα, αλλα μυστηριον θειον." *Contra Arianos* I:31.

παραδειγματα, not with αινιγματα, which, since they result from a confusion of words and ideas, are more human than divine. If revelation is to give us any concepts at all, they have to be distinguishable from other concepts, and it has to be possible to translate them into other words and to indicate at the very least what they do *not* mean.

Cosmological Commitments

The main thing Athanasius wanted to distinguish from divine generation was the idea of creation. The emanation-model of Neoplatonic thought did not offer any way of making this distinction. It pictured a series of emanations descending from the One, each alike in kind and differing only in degree, with each successive emanation being less unified and therefore less real than the previous one. Athanasius wanted to establish a qualitative difference between the generation of the Son and the creation of the world, to show that the two were "not merely as great compared with small, but the one differing from the other in nature."[37] The existence of a gulf between God and creation was assumed by all the participants in the theological debates of the fourth century. No one denied the existence of such a *chorismos*, an "ultimate and radical cleavage or hiatus between the absolute Being of God and the contingent existence of the World."[38] But the nature of that *chorismos* was ill-defined, and the question of which side of it the Logos-Son occupied was one of the main flashpoints of the Arian struggle. Athanasius clarified the nature of the *chorismos* by introducing the distinction between God's being and his will, and describing God's being as necessary, but his will as contingent.[39] Everything connected directly with God's being is on the far side of the *chorismos*; it is necessary (could not *not* exist) and eternal. Everything that God produces by an act of will is on the creation side of the *chorismos*; it is contingent (could have not existed) and had a beginning in time. In a characteristic formulation, Athanasius

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[37]*Contra Arianos* 1:59.

[38]Georges Florovsky, "Creation in St. Athanasius," *Studia Patristica* VI, 1962, p. 45.

[39]*Contra Arianos* III.61.

distinguished between God's "framing will" (or "demiurgic will")[40] and his "proper Essence," or "that in God which lies above the will. Now it is a something that surpasses will, that He should be by nature."[41]

With these categories established, Athanasius declared that the mysterious generation of the Son belonged on the far side of the *chorismos*, within the eternal nature of God. This is why Athanasius defended the intent of the Nicene *homoousios* so vigorously, and insisted that God's production of his Word be described in substance-terminology. The second the generation of the Logos-Son was described in terms of an act of the Father's will, the Word was immediately thrust below the *chorismos*, and became a created, temporal, contingent being. Thus the generation of the Son remained ineffable and mysterious, but Athanasius had framed the debate in a way that enabled him to distinguish sharply between two kinds of production: essential and volitional.[42] The Son is generated, creation is made. The Logos belongs to God's essence, but the world is created out of nothing by an act of divine will. Athanasius develops this further in the differentiation of begetting from making:

> What is according to nature transcends and precedes counselling. A man by counsel builds a house, but by nature he begets a son; and what is in building began to come into being at will, and is external to the maker; but the son is proper offspring of the father's essence, and is not external to him; wherefore neither does he counsel concerning him, lest he appear to counsel about himself. As far then as the Son transcends the creature, by so much does what is by nature transcend the will.[43]

Having made this distinction between being and willing, begetting and making, Athanasius was committed to keeping them clearly separate. For this reason, he was suspicious of any theology which attempted, out of supposed humility, to avoid using substance-terminology to

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[40]"δημιουργικης βουλησεως," *Contra Arianos* II:2 and many other places.

[41]*ibid.*

[42]Florovsky brings this out very well. He summarizes, "It is not the same thing, even for God, 'to be' and 'to act.' This was the deepest conviction of St. Athanasius." ("Creation in St. Athanasius," p. 57) Athanasius might have blushed to hear his work described so abstractly, but Florovsky has a point.

[43]*Contra Arianos* III:62.

describe the generation of the Son.[44] "Substance is the only category he will permit in discussing the relationship of Father and Son."[45] Nevertheless, he was sympathetic with the *simplicores*, the uneducated believers who still longed to hold to nothing but Scriptural terminology, and their discomfort with the Platonically-influenced substance language. Acordingly, he occasionally admitted that it was in fact possible to describe the relation of the Word to the Father in terms of will-categories alone. This could be done by totally identifying God's will with his Word: "If He has the power of will, and His will is effective, and suffices for the consistence of the things that come to be, and His Word is effective, and a Framer, that Word must surely be the living Will of the Father, and an essential energy, and a real Word."[46] Of course this was the same thing as saying that God's Will itself belongs to his essence, while the individual acts of will, and the results produced from them, do not.

Thus Athanasius answered one of the most pressing questions of the early period of theology: Where does the Logos stand in relation to the *chorismos* between God and creation? Athanasius placed the Logos decisively on God's side, and spelled out the implications of this placement by distinguishing between God's essence and will. The next question, which brings Athanasius' thought right to the brink of cosmological questions, is how the Logos mediates between the two realms. The Alexandrian tradition had long shown a weakness for making the Logos an intermediate being who was less than God and more than creation, and thus could bridge the gap as a third kind of being interposed between the two sides. This was especially expressed in the idea that God was too lofty to deal directly with creation, so he generated an intermediary being to do the actual dirty work of manipulating matter on his behalf. Athanasius objected to this scheme for three reasons: 1. it is logically inconsistent, 2. it degrades the Logos, and 3. it insults the Father. First, it is logically inconsistent because it ignores the fact that God is condenscending in the very act of creating the mediatorial being, who is of a lower nature than God. If God could not lower

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[44] Like the Semi-arians of the councils of Arminum and Seleucia, *De Synodis* 28-41.

[45] Rowan Greer, *Captain of Our Salvation* (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1973), 73.

[46] *Contra Arianos* II:2; also III:64.

himself to create directly, how could he lower himself to create a being low enough to do so? As Athanasius observed regarding this mediator,

> there must have been some medium before him, for his creation; and that Mediator himself again being a creature, it follows that he too needed another Mediator for his own constitution. And though we were to devise another, we must first devise his Mediator, so that we shall never come to an end. And thus, a Mediator being ever in request, never will the creation be constituted, because nothing originiate, as you say, can bear the absolute hand of the Unoriginate.[47]

This argument also reveals Athanasius' second objection, that if the Logos is considered an intermediary being, he must be so because of his inferiority to the Father. In other words, the logic of essential mediation demands ontological subordination. As he tersely noted in what could be almost a summary of his critique of the Logos-doctrine, "to speak thus of the Word of God, is not the part of Christians but of Greeks."[48] Athanasius taught that the Word was in fact the medium of God's actions in the world, but not because he was inherently of a lower order of being. The Word, being God, is himself infinitely removed from creation, and if he acts directly in creating and sustaining the world, it is because he voluntarily humbles himself to do so:

> The Word, when at the beginning He framed the creatures, condescended to things originate, that it might be possible for them to come to be. For they could not have endured His nature, which was untempered splendour, even that of the Father, unless condescending by the Father's love for man He had supported them and taken hold of them and brought them into existence.[49]

This "condescension of the Word" [συγκαταβαντος του Λογου] is the mode of the Word's creative activity, and not a sign of any ontological subordination to the Father. Athanasius also perceived that if the Logos is a mediating being by nature, his *raison d'etre* is summed up in that activity. But if the Logos were generated for the sole purpose of creating the

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[47]De Decretis 8. The same argument appears in *Contra Arianos* II:26: "thus tracing back and following out, we shall invent a vast crowd of accumulating mediators."

[48]*Contra Arianos* II:28.

[49]*Contra Arianos* II:64

world, then the world would be logically prior to the Logos, as the reason for his existence. If this were the case, then "the Son appears rather to have been for us brought to be, than we for Him, but He is made for us; so that He owes thanks to us, not we to Him."[50] Once the Logos is thought of as a mediator by nature, he is on his way to becoming not only less than the Father, but less than the creation itself.

Finally, Athanasius rejected the idea of the Logos as mediating being because concealed within it is an insult against the Father. There are only two possible reasons why God would find it necessary to commit to an assistant the work of creating and sustaining the world: Either he is too weak to do it Himself, or too proud. Of course God is neither, and Athanasius mobilizes a great number of Scriptures to demonstrate this.[51] Athanasius brushes aside the notion of weakness in God as simply ludicrous, whether it is thought of as a lack of the necessary energy to carry out the large task of creating, or as God's inability to hold back his excessive power, as if he were a clumsy oaf who smashed what he intended to create. But Athanasus finds the idea of pride (or jealousy) in God especially repugnant. It does not fit with the Father who Jesus described as being intimately concerned with the fate of sparrows and grass, and who numbers the hairs of our heads. The Alexandrians who lowered the Logos to a mediatorial station were trying to safeguard the majesty of God, but Athanasius believed that in doing so they actually insulted him, because "he who dishonours the Son dishonours also the Father."[52]

Another way in which denigration of the Son "makes the blasphemy recoil upon the Father"[53] is that it calls into question the perfection and completeness of the divine essence. Athanasius is adamant about describing the divine essence as καρπογονος η ουσια, fruitful in itself. The only alternative is a God who is "barren," which is as inconceivable as a fountain which gives no water or a light which gives no brightness: such a view does away

[50]*Contra Arianos* II:30.

[51]*Contra Arianos* II:26.

[52]*Contra Arianos* I:18.

[53] *Contra Arianos* I:25.

with "the perfection and the plenitude of the Father's essence."[54] "But God is deficient in nothing!" objects Athanasius, "Perish the thought! For He Himself has said, 'I am full' (Isaiah 2:11)."[55] Unless the Son is ομοουσιος with the Father, the Father cannot be "fruitful by nature," but must have been unfruitful at first, and then at a later time became fruitful. The exact nature of the "fruitfulness of the divine essence" is also important for Athanasius, and again he is most concerned to distinguish this fruitfulness which is proper to God from the divine productivity manifested in the creation of the world. Both the generation of the Son and the creation of the world have their origin in the divine fruitfulness, but only the first is actually constitutive of that essence. If God is not fruitful by nature, then he cannot be the creator, as is made clear when Athanasius refers to the Son as "the Father's framing will." But it does not follow that the creation of the world is the direct or necessary manifestation of his fruitfulness. The direct manifestation of the the Father's fruitfulness is the Son, and it is the Son without whom the Father would be barren. It is not God's nature to create the world, but to generate the Son, and hence for Athanasius the Son is the eternal correlate of the Father, while for Origen the world itself had threatened to usurp the role of the second person. As Etienne Gilson said, "it is quite true that a Creator is an eminently Christian God, but a God whose very existence is to be a creator is not a Christian God at all."[56] For Athanasius the creativity of God is anchored in his intratrinitarian self-sufficiency. The dependence runs in one direction, with the possibility of creation presupposing the fullness of the Father-Son relationship. As Anna Maria Aagard summarizes: "Dass etwas existiert, was nicht Gott ist, kann nur verstanden werden durch ein Bekenntnis zum Logos als dem, der als Gottes inneres Leben der Schöpfung Anteil gibt am Sein, an dem Überfluss an Leben, das

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[54]"το τελειον και το πληρες της του πατρος ουσιας," *Contra Arianos* I:20. Stead distinguishes between this Athanasian terminology and similar Gnostic terms: "When Athanasius says that the divine essence is 'fruitful' (καρπογονος η θεια ουσια), this looks not unlike the Gnostic description of it as 'fertile' (γονιμος). But any notion that the Nicene theologians could have regarded the Valentinians with *sympathy* is of course fanciful. G. C. Stead, *Divine Substance* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977), 256-7.

[55]*Contra Arianos* II:29.

[56]Etienne Gilson, *God and Philosophy* (Yale University Press, 1941), 88.

Gott in sich selbst ist."[57]

Athanasius was trying to accomplish two ends with this one doctrinal clarification. Probably uppermost in his mind was the first goal: To draw as sharp a distinction as possible between God and the world, to show exactly where and how the Divine and the mundane were different. But the second goal was also very important, and that was to understand the world as God's creation, the work of the Logos, and to hold all the ground gained by earlier thinkers in orthodox christian cosmology. Athanasius accomplished both ends in one movement, by describing the Father's fruitfulness as being perfectly expressed in the generation of the Son, and then grounding the creation of the world in that same generative nature. Thus he gave the Trinity priority over all cosmological concerns, and secured the world's place in theology by grounding it in the trinitarian relations.

> The Trinity, so envisaged, becomes for the Christians what the divine cosmos was for the Greeks, the perfect self-expression of divinity. The Christian theologians insist as much as the Greeks that God in his perfection cannot be sterile and unproductive. If the Arians were right, says St. Athanasius, in their assertion that there was a time when the Son did not exist, then "the light was once without its shining and the Source was sterile and dry." But for the Christians the outpouring of divine productivity, the self-giving of divine love, reaches its unbounded term, its infinite fulfillment, within the Trinity. The created universe then appears as an "extra," a magnificent and purely superfluous expression of pure disinterested generosity, in the image and for the glory of the eternal Logos; and not, as it was for the pagan Platonists, the descending stages of divine self-expression.[58]

But the superfluity of the world does not weaken its existence, it rather establishes it more securely within the trinitarian nature of God's creative expression. The world is more than ever a product of God's will, because it can no longer be confused with an extension of his Being. The Trinitarian vision and the concept of creation in the thought of St. Athanasius

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[57]Anna Marie Aagaard, "Christus wurde Mensch, um alles menschliche zu überwinden," *Studia Theologica* 21 (1967), 173

[58]A. H. Armstrong and R. A. Markus, *Christian Faith and Greek Philosophy* (New York: Sheed and Ward), 23.

belonged closely and organically together.[59]

Athanasius, we have seen, had three reasons for rejecting the idea that the Word necessarily mediated creation. First, it was logically inconsistent; second, it denigrates the Son; and third, it insults the Father. For these reasons Athanasius set aside the notion of the Word as a special middleman, and replaced it by the Father's own gracious act of condescension, carried out through the medium of his own proper Word. This entailed the complete rejection of the more overtly NeoPlatonic motifs in the Alexandrian Logos-tradition, such as the World Soul, the Kosmos Noetos, and the Logos Spermatikos (# 5 through # 7 on the diagram). They are simply swept out of the picture as uneccesary for an adequate explanation of God and World, and since they were never thought to shed any light on the question of salvation, they are left with no place to stand in Athanasian theology. As T. F. Torrance says, Athanasius "entirely rejected the cosmological and epistemological dualism of Hellenism, Gnosticism, and Origenism...He set aside the philosophical notion of the Logos as an impersonal cosmological principle, and rejected along with that the Stoic notion of the logoi spermatikoi."[60] There is very little overt polemic against any of these ideas, and in fact Athanasius occasionally uses language which seems to have originated in these contexts. But the living God whose living Word was the content of Athanasius' Logos-theology left no room for these mediating structures. Athanasius makes this very clear in one of the rare passages in which he does address these ideas explicitly:

> By Word I do not mean the word involved and innate in every creature, which some are accustomed to call seminal; it has no life of its own neither can it reason or think, but it acts merely by an extrinsic art according to the skill of him who set it in the creature. Nor do I mean the word of human kind which is composed of syllables and expressed in the air. But I mean theliving and acting God, the very Word of the good God of the universe, who is other than created things and all creation; he is rather the sole and individual Word of the good Father, who has ordered all this universe and illuminates it by his

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[59] Georges Florovsky, Georges, Collected Works Vol. 8, *The Byzantine Fathers of the Fifth Century*(Vaduz: Buchervertriebsanstalt, 1987), 130.

[60] T. F. Torrance, *Theology in Reconciliation* p. 224.

providence. He is the good Word of the good Father, and it is he who has established the order of all things.[61]

It is in keeping with the personalistic character of Athanasius' theology that he did away with all static mediating structures, all duly constituted mechanisms which simply performed as they were designed to do, and returned theology to the idea of a living God who acted through his living Word to make, care for, and redeem his creatures. As R. P. C. Hanson says, "He refused to use the pre-existent Christ as a convenient philosophical device."[62] A philosophical device or mediating structure does not require praise, but the living God is to be adored and thanked for his gracious action. This was a major reorientation, a much-needed corrective to the tradition of Logos-theology.

There is therefore still a kind of mediation through the Word going on in Athanasius' Logos-theology, but it is active and personal instead of static and impersonal. This is not, however, the only change Athanasius brought about in his description of the Logos' mediatorial work. There is also the question of the instrumentality of the mediating act. The greater part of the Alexandrian tradition had described the Logos himself as the instrument of God's mediation of creation, as well as redemption. Athanasius could not agree with this idea, since it did not seem to get around the ascription of weakness to God, if he "provided for Himself an instrument [οργανον]."[63] The connection of the rather "loaded" word οργανον to the person of the Logos seems to have made Athanasius uncomfortable, and he avoided it. Instead, he preferred to use *organon* to refer to the body which the Logos took up in the Incarnation. To redeem creatures who existed in bodies, the Word used an appropriate instrument, the instrument of his body [το σοματικον οργανον].[64] Describing the body of Christ as the instrument of mediation which God used to reconcile humanity,

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[61]*Contra Gentes* 40.

[62]R. P. C. Hanson, *The Search for the Christian Doctrine of God* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1988), 423.

[63]*Contra Arianos* I:26.

[64]*de Inc.* 9, see also 44

Athanasius again made it clear that the Logos was not inherently low and creaturely, but did what he did as an act of condescension in order to effect salvation. As Hanson notes, "Athanasius placed the mediating activity of the Son, not in his position within the Godhead, but in his becoming incarnate. This was a new, indeed revolutionary, theological idea and one entirely consonant with Scripture."[65] The importance of this decision for Athanasius' doctrine of the Trinity will have to be assessed in the next chapter, but what it did for his Logos doctrine was to free it from necessary connection to the world, and attach it more firmly to the nature of God.

Athanasius clearly has a strong doctrine of creation by the Word, securing "Logos as Demiurge" (concept # 4) as an important part of his thought. The world evinces orderly construction and a harmonious interplay of its parts; this is the burden of much of the argument in the long middle section of the *Contra Gentes*. He also argues that since the world is orderly (λογικος), it must therefore have been made by the Logos, in a stunning appropriation and domestication of the basic theme of the Stoic logos-doctrine. The one who contemplates creation contemplates its order, and in contemplating the order, it glimpses the orderer, the Logos, through whom in turn is revealed the Father.[66] This is a fascinating revision of natural theology, since beholding the world is essentially beholding the Son. Athanasius interprets Romans 1, "The visible things of Him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal Power and Godhead," in the light of Scripture's teaching that Christ himself is the Power of God. If this is the case, then what is visible in creation is "His eternal Power, the Son." In this way, Athanasius affirms that God can be known from creation, yet binds that "natural knowledge" to the existence and manifestation of the Son, God's ordering Power. He then goes on immediately to urge caution: "If indeed the creation is sufficient of itself alone, without the

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[65]Hanson, *Search for the Christian Doctrine of God*, p. 424. One reviewer called this sentence "a theological judgment that is crucially important, one that might be called the principal thesis of the book." Joseph T. Lienhard, Book Review, *Theological Studies* 51 (June 1990), 336.

[66]*Contra Arianos* I:12.

Son, to make God known, see that you fall not, from thinking that without the Son it has come to be."[67] When Philip asked Christ to show him the Father, Christ did not reply, "Behold the Creation," but "He that hath seen Me, hath seen the Father."[68] This Athanasian inversion of natural theology deserves further study. Andrew Louth has noted that "much of the contents of the *Contra Gentes* is similar to what passes in later ages for natural theology: demonstrations of the immortality of the soul, proofs of the existence of God, and of man's natural capacity to know this God. But it is not quite the same." Somehow the whole context and aim of the arguments are different, as Louth says, since they have been "glossed in a Christian sense by his unshakable conviction that the Word in creation is none other than the Son, our Lord Jesus Christ."[69] Essentially what Athanasius offers can be called a christological natural theology, although it is unclear how, if at all, he would develop it further. In the sections of the *Contra Gentes* which follow his description of this general revelation through the Logos, he is concerned to show how humanity has neglected its ability to perceive the Word in creation, thus necessitating the incarnation.

While a strong doctrine of creation is by no means absent, it is subordinated at every point to the concerns of soteriology. The Logos is more than ever the agent of creation, and creation is the work of the good God. But Athanasius makes salvation central, and infers back from it to the doctrine of creation. The word who made the world came to save it; this is the central thread of reasoning for Athanasius' theology of creation. Only the Word who created humanity can effect our salvation. The word made our world and then came to his own, who nevertheless received him not. This represents a major reorientation of the Logos doctrine: without abandoning cosmology, Athanasius has moved it to the periphery of his concerns. "The doctrine of creation through the Logos-Son becomes but the first step in the

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[67]ibid.

[68]ibid.

[69]Andrew Louth, "Reason and Revelation in Saint Athanasius," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 23 (1970), 387.

mystery of the Gospel, but it is no longer the key to the gospel."[70] He does not withdraw

into a private sphere of personal religious communion between the Christian and his Savior,

completely forsaking any truth-claims in the sphere of cosmology. But the Logos-Demiurge,

and its cosmological implications, find their place in an arc of thought which begins and ends

with salvation.

A very important aspect of the Logos-theology which Athanasius inherited from the

Alexandrian tradition was the idea of the Logos as the rational principle in humanity (# 8 on

the diagram). His treatment of this theme is especially telling, since it reveals both his

standard method in working with difficult ideas, and also betrays a slight element of

development in his thought. In the *De Incarnatione*, Athanasius stresses the continuity

between the Logos and the *logikoi*, the "rational race" of humans, created in his image. The

logikoi are not only similar to the Logos, they are actually given a share in his nature:

> He did not barely create man, as He did all the irrational creatures on the
> earth, but made them after His own image, giving them a portion even of the
> power of His own Word; so that having as it were a kind of reflexion of the
> Word, and being made rational, they might be able to abide ever in
> blessedness, living the true life which belongs to the saints in paradise.[71]

Athanasius's concern is to show that humanity was created to partake of the Word, but fell

away from that ability, thus calling forth the merciful incarnation of the Word itself. But

there is some ambivalence evident in his terminology, as he attempts to make it clear that the

logikoi, while depending on their share in the Logos to make them truly human, have that

share nevertheless by grace and not by nature. This seems to be what Athanasius means to

affirm, however: that human nature is designed to be incomplete without a gracious partaking

in the Divine life. The difficulty comes in describing just how the *logikoi* have their gracious

share in the Logos: does the Logos himself indwell them? Or is the logos which renders

them rational "as it were a kind of reflexion?"

Apparently the problem was insoluble, because a certain amount of unclarity and

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[70]Pollard, p. 133.

[71]*De Incarnatione* I.3.

equivocation marks the earlier writings on the subject, and in later writings Athanasius
decides to replace the Logos-terminology with terms drawn from another biblical
παραδειγμα: the set of ideas which are associated with the term *image*. Using image-
terminology enables him to clarify how the Son and the creatures are related. The Son is
God's proper Image, "not delineated from without, but God Himself has betoggen it, in which
seeing Himself, He has delight."[72] Having given the term "Image" such a high and exclusive
meaning, Athanasius consistently reserves it for the second person of the Trinity. Humanity
can no longer be called the image of God; instead they are described as having been made
"according to the Image of God." "It was Athanasius who first fixed the two terms. Image
(eikon) as applicable only to the Divine Logos and "according to the Image" (kat'eikona) as
referring to human beings."[73] The Word, who is also the Image, impresses its own likeness
onto created beings. George Florovsky has noted that this "impress" language sounds very
similar to NeoPlatonic ideas, but he points out the difference: "According to Plotinus,
Intellect imprints itself on unqualified matter and remains in it. For Athanasius, the
origination and existence of creation is based on the presence of the Word within it. He
rejects the Stoic concept of "seminal" words, λογοι σπερματικοι. The source of the order
of the world is the Word of the Father."[74] Just as he did with the concepts of generation and
creation, Athanasius has distinguished two things in order to unite them: by affirming that
humanity is not the Image, but has its being *in* the Image, he underlines the fact that the
Word is the one who creates humanity.

The Life of Christ as Formal Principle

The most decisive change Athanasius wrought on the Logos-doctrine was to anchor
all discussion of it to the life of the historical Christ. A besetting problem of the Alexandrian

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[72]*Contra Arianos* 1.20.

[73]George Maloney, *Man: The Divine Icon* (Pecos, N.M.: Dove Publishers, 1973), 92-93.

[74]Georges Florovsky, *Collected Works* Vol. 7, *The Eastern Fathers of the Fourth Century* (Vaduz: Buchervertriebsanstalt, 1987), 43.

tradition's Logos-theology was its tendency to focus attention on philosophical descriptions

of the Logos. It is true that all the theologians in the tradition wanted to explicate the basic

claim of John's Prologue, that the Logos became incarnate and dwelt among us, and

accordingly they always affirmed a close connection between the Logos and Jesus Christ.

But when asked to point to a definition of the Logos, the apologists and catechists tended to

point to Plato's works, or rather to some philosophical construct derived from contemporary

Platonism. This procedure was the exact opposite of John's Gospel. John made the

connection between the Logos and Jesus Christ in a few verses, and then went on to describe

the career of Jesus Christ in great detail. The Johannine movement was from the universal

point of contact to the story of Jesus, so that the question, "What is the Logos," was

answered by a Gospel. The Alexandrian tradition, including the Apologists, tended to move

in the opposite direction, by posing the question of the identity of the Logos and then fixing

attention on philosophical and cosmological concerns. Wolfhart Pannenberg has indicated

this tendency as one of the major failures of the whole Logos tradition:

> A second weakness of the Logos Christology is the precarious loosening of
> the connection of the Son's divinity with Jesus of Nazareth, God's historical
> revelation. Tatian, for example, could develop his whole Logos doctrine
> without saying anything at all about Jesus Christ. [...] One is often astounded
> at the way these theologians know how to say everything about Jesus' divinity
> without reference to the historical Jesus. This results from their taking a point
> of departure primarily from a philosophical theme in order to develop the
> concept of the Logos as a middle being between God and the world, with
> rather superficial appeals to New Testament assertions about Christ as the Son
> of God, the image of God, the Mediator of creation, and the Logos."[75]

Athanasius returned the Logos doctrine to the Johannine context, and once again

elevated the career of Jesus Christ as the definitive locus of all discussion of the Logos. Of

course Athanasius is much more explicit about what he means by identifying the Lord with

the Logos than was John, and he develops the philosophical and cosmological implications

further than the evangelist did. He is, after all, attempting to show that faith in Christ is not

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[75]Pannenberg. *Jesus--God and Man* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1968), p. 165.

alogos, and thus cannot shrink from his responsibility to explain the legitimate cosmological claims of the gospel. But the identification is made, and immediately Athanasius rivets his attention on the life of Jesus Christ as his explanation of the meaning of the Logos. As we saw above, the first use of the term *logos* in the *Contra Gentes* is the very historical assertion, "he who ascended the cross is the Word of God and savior of the universe."[76]

Defining the Logos by reference to the life of Christ is more than just a change in the *content* of the Logos doctrine for Athanasius. It becomes for him a new *formal principle* for systematic theology, determining the shape of his doctrine and establishing norms for interpretation. Just as the material principle of Athanasian theology is the *person* of Christ, so the formal principle is the *work* of Christ, or his career among us, for our sakes. To identify the life of Christ as the formal principle of his theology is not to disregard the claims of other norms. Athanasius is firmly committed to Scripture and tradition, of course, but his interaction with both is determined by a more basic commitment. He fixes his attention on the life of the Word among us, and wraps his theology around this narrative. When he is forced to move out into uncertain theological territory, to define or speculate beyond the area clearly marked out by tradition, he takes his compass readings from this reality and thus gets his bearings in relation to it.

There is probably no better illustration of the way Athanasius builds his theology around the life of Christ than the careful reading of the *De Incarnatione* given by Christopher Smith in a recent article.[77] In attempting to resolve the debate over the literary structure of the *De Incarnatione* which has engaged such scholars as Meijering, Kannengiesser, and D. Ritschl in the recent past, Smith is led to propose the thesis that internal concerns alone, such as the logical order of the argument or a sequential refutation of Jews and Greeks, are not sufficient to explain the shape of the work. These earlier scholars had all had difficulties fitting the work into a comprehensive structure, especially as the section 20-32 tended to

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[76]*Contra Gentes* 1; see above, p. 64.

[77]Christopher R. Smith, "The Life-of-Christ Structure of Athanasius' De Incarnatione Verbi," *Patristic and Byzantine Review* 10 (1991), 7-24.

stick out of any framework and defy classification. Not long before Smith's article, Karen Jo
Torjeson had proposed a new rationale for the argument in 20-32. She claimed that it was
dictated by Athanasius' attention to the Logos' teaching function, and that three distinct
stages of the Word's educational program for humanity were described in the section in
question. First the Logos taught us through the ministry and miracles he performed in his
body, then he taught us through his very visible, public death and resurrection, and now he
continues his teaching through the lives of saints and martyrs as the true faith spreads.[78] Thus
Athanasius unites the Logos-as-Educator motif (# 9 in the diagram) with the person of Jesus
Christ, and interprets it exclusively in light of the incarnation. This is a very helpful
explanation altogether in line with the overall character of Athanasius' theology, and it shows
that the development of the argument in the *De Incarnatione* is determined not merely by
logical considerations, but is also made to correspond with the chronology of the Word's
ministry. Smith comes to the same conclusion, but goes further than Torjeson by showing
how the chronology of the Word's ministry is the deciding factor in the structure of the work.
The way Athanasius orders his material can be accounted for by the fact that he makes his
argument conform, not to an internal logical outline, but to an external framework: "To state
the matter simply, in this work, Athanasius focuses on the events of the soteriological career
of Christ in chronological order, explaining the theological significance of each in turn."[79] To
substantiate this thesis, Smith proposes the following outline of the work:

> Introduction (Chapter 1)
> Christ's pre-existent creative acts (2-7)
> Christ's assumption of mortal flesh (8-10)
> Christ's life lived in the body (11-19)
> Christ's death (20-25)
> Christ's resurrection (26)
> Christ's post-resurrection life (27-32)
>   = ultimate answer to Jews (33-40)
>   = ultimate answer to Greeks (56-57)
> Christ's second coming/Conclusion (56-57)

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[78]Karen Jo Torjeson, "The Teaching Function of the Logos: Athanasius, De Incarnatione XX-XXXII," in *Arianism*, ed. by Gregg., p. 213-221.

[79]Smith, p. 13

It it not self-evident that Smith is justified in calling this whole movement "the soteriological career of Christ," since much of the narrative is devoted not to the work of the incarnate Christ, but to the *logos asarkos* and the ascended Christ. Twenty-five sections are given to the birth, ministry, death, and resurrection of Jesus, but thirty-nine sections discuss the work of Christ on either side of the incarnation (or perhaps only sixteen, depending on how we count the less narrative section from 33-55). The *logos asarkos* is not, however, the central character in this narrative. The focal point of interest is the historical Jesus Christ, whose public ministry and incarnate presence reveal God to us and reconcile us to God. Athanasius wrote the work, as he tells us, to "tell of the incarnation of the Word and expound his divine manifestation to us."[80] To put this gospel in its full theological context, he must begin the story at the creation and finish it at the consummation, but all of this is by way of clarifying the meaning of the incarnate work of the Lord for our salvation. The Word's work in creation has a prominent place in the *De Incarnatione* because that creative work is the crux of Athanasius' soteriological argument that the same Logos who made the world is the one who must renew it. The work of the post-resurrection Christ is vitally important in the development of the treatise precisely because it is an extension of his work in the flesh, especially of his triumph at the resurrection. But Athanasius attaches these two ministries as extensions, in a logical sense, of the incarnate ministry: redemption by the Word logically presupposes creation by the same, and the victory of the Savior must be ongoing to be relevant. As Athanasius asks, "Perhaps you are wondering why, when we proposed to speak about the incarnation of the Word, we are now treating of the beginning of mankind. But this is not irrelevant to the purpose of our exposition. For we must, when speaking of the manifestation of the Saviour to us, speak also of the beginning of mankind, in order that you may know that our own cause was the reason of his coming, and that our own transgression called forth the mercy of the Word, so that the Lord came even to us and appeared among men."[81] Thus Athanasius describes the saving career of the Word made flesh, and from this central point he develops a comprehensive theological vision which includes the ministry of

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[80]*De Incarnatione* 1

[81]*De Incarnatione* 4

the *logos asarkos*.

It cannot be insignificant for Athanasian studies that in his most systematic and least polemical work, he built his theology around this narrative Christological center. The argument of this paper is that Athanasius continued to develop his theology from the same principles he established in his earlier works in which he was undertaking a total reorientation of the Logos doctrine. As he expanded his range of concerns and took up topics not dealt with in the *Contra Gentes/De Incarnatione* (especially the doctrines of the Spirit and the Trinity), he continued to use the life of Christ as the formal principle in his theology. The implications of this method will be especially evident in his soteriology and his doctrine of the Trinity in the next chapter, and its relation to certain trends in theology today will be evaluated in the concluding chapter.

Transformation, Reduction, or Concentration?

I. A. Dorner, in 1870, evaluated the importance of the Logos-doctrine for Athanasius thus:

> What engaged his attention above all things else, was the Logos. His existence he presupposed, firstly, as the faith of the Church; secondly, as conceded by the philosophy of the day; lastly on historical grounds. He does not, it is true, enter into a closer investigation of the relation of the Logos to the Father, and to the unity of God; he does, however, examine His relation to the *world* in all the three aspects, of creation, preservation, and incarnation.[82]

Harnack, on the other hand, offers a quite different evaluation:

> It is very characteristic of Athanasius' way of looking at things that with him the Logos in general retires into the background, and further that he expressly declines to recognise or to define the divine in Christ from the point of view of his relation to the world.... *God is the creator in the directest way.* This, however, implies that the Logos is discarded. If spite of this Athanasius not only retained the name, but also recognised the function of a mediator of creation and type of all rational beings, the reason was that he understood Scripture as implying this, and because he was not able wholly to free himself

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[82]Dorner, *History of the Development of the Doctrine of the Person of Christ*, vol. II, trans. D.W. Simon (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1870), p. 249

from the influence of tradition.[83]

This is an amazing thing: there seems to be a complete disagreement between two of the most accomplished and influential of the historians of doctrine. They cannot both be correct; there is a world of difference between a Logos-doctrine which "engaged his attention above all things else" and one that "retires into the background" and "is discarded." It seems to me that this disagreement is evidence of how Athanasius totally transformed the Logos-doctrine. The two historians seem to have in mind two different phases of the doctrine. When Harnack speaks of the Logos-doctrine, he means the classical Alexandrian version, complete with its total orientation toward cosmology, which was the subject of the previous chapter. Concerning this doctrine, Harnack is right: it is effectively discarded and set aside by Athanasius. When Dorner speaks of the Logos-doctrine, he has altered his terminology to reflect the new constellation of issues and priorities, as set out by Athanasius. Concerning this Logos, Dorner is right: it engages Athanasius' concern above all else. The point is that there is a huge difference between the two Logos-doctrines, because of the profound transformation which Logos-theology has undergone at the hands of Athanasius.

Harnack characterized Athanasius' contribution to the history of doctrine as an ability to strip away distracting accumulations from the essential content of the faith: "Athanasius' greatness consisted in *reduction*...like every reformer, he *reduced*, he first secured a sphere of its own to the Christian religion on the soil, already won, of Greek speculation, and he referred everything to the thought of redemption."[84] Technically, Athanasius' way of transforming the tradition should not be described as *reduction* so much as *concentration*. Walter Kasper characterizes the nature of theological concentration as paying attention to what is most central in theology, and ascertaining that all other doctrines are orbiting that vital center and not developing independent centers of gravity. "Concentration does not here imply a reduction or an elimination, nor does it point to a demythologizing attempt to produce an insipid essential formula by means of distillation. It is much more a question of

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[83] Harnack, *History of Dogma*, Vol. IV, trans. Neil Buchanan (Boston: Little, Brown and Co, 1907), p. 30

[84] Harnack, *History of Dogma* vol 3, p. 140.

making the one faith clear in the many articles of faith and of distinguishing what is peripheral from what is central."[85] This is what Athanasius did with the Logos doctrine. He relativized the cosmological concerns of the doctrine by subordinating them to soteriology. He integrated the meanings of the christological titles Word and Son, and gave the term Son the determinative significance. He correlated the chasm between God and creation with the distinction between God's essence and his will, and on this ground maintained that the Word was *homoousios* with the Father. He radically identified God's proper Word with the historical person Jesus Christ, and focused on the theological implications of the Word's incarnate presence. When the Logos doctrine left his hands, it was a stronger, more essential, and clearer piece of theology than it was when it came to him. Brunner called Athnasius' version of the Logos doctrine "the finest of all" because of its "systematic, and at the same time non-speculative character."[86] Reforming the doctrine had produced in Athanasius' theology a christological concentration which he developed in his work on questions of the Trinity, the Holy Spirit, and redemption.

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[85]Walter Kasper, *An Introduction to Christian Faith* (New York: Paulist Press, 1980), p. 102.

[86]Emil Brunner, *The Mediator* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1947), p. 229.

Chapter 4
The Life of God's Word

The Word of God, the epistle to the Hebrews tells us, is living and active. When Athanasius interprets this saying, he understands it (not surprisingly) as referring to the second person of the Trinity, especially in his ongoing victory over the world. Since this person, who is our Lord Jesus Christ, can appropriately be called either Word or Son, Athanasius takes the liberty of departing from the text and ascribing the qualities of ζων και ενεργης to the Son: "For the Son of God is alive and active, and every day works and effects the salvation of all."[1] This Word/Son, who subsists and acts and is alive,[2] is the focus of Athanasius' attention in all of his writings. Indeed, Athanasian theology is a theology of God's living, active Word. That living Word became incarnate among us and lived out a saving career for our sakes, effecting our redemption and revealing God's nature to us. The life of the Christian is likewise the same life of the Word, as the Word's own power and activity goes on through his saints. As Edward R. Hardy summarizes the theology of Athanasius, "His chief concern is with the power of the new life in Christ which we share; his divinity makes his life mighty and his humanity makes it ours."[3]

This chapter describes the soteriological and trinitarian implications of the life of Christ in the theology of Athanasius, and attempts to show how that subject is the center of his complete theological program. The first section describes the dynamics of the salvation effected in Christ's incarnate work, and proceeds by taking up the events of that ministry chronologically and explaining Athanasius' treatment of them. The second section shows

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[1]*De Incarnatione* 32; cf. also *Expositio Fidei* 1. Athanasius quotes Hebrews 4:12 twice in the *Orations Contra Arianos* (II:35 and II:72) and both times refers the life and activity to the Word rather than the Son, which is evidence of the ease with which he equated the two terms.

[2]*Contra Arianos* II:35, contrasting God's Word with human words.

[3]Edward R. Hardy, *Christology of the Later Fathers*, general intro p. 18.

how Athanasius derives from these very concrete historical details a coherent trinitarian theology. The third section turns its attention to the continuing display of the life and activity of Christ in the work of the church. The sequence of the three sections can be described as the life of the Word in Christ's history, the life of the Word in the Trinity, and the life of the Word in the church. It is hoped that this structure corresponds to the internal logic of Athanasius' theological method: he begins with the historical revelation in Christ, develops from it a trinitarian analysis, and then finds our place in relation to it.

The Total Career of Christ

Athanasius was one of the first thinkers in Christian history to ask and answer the important question, "Why did God become Human?" with systematic rigor. He answers the question in several different ways, all of which are essentially variations on the Nicene phrase, "for us and for our salvation." At least eleven distinct reasons for the Incarnation can be found in his writings: The Word became flesh "to restore the knowledge of God, to destroy sin, to merit immortality, to put an end to idolatry, to liberate us from Satan, to restore trust in God, to reconcile us with God, to deify us, to perfect us, to unite us with God."[4] Athanasius brings out one after another of these motives as he describes the career of God's incarnate Word. Because he has such a wealth of ideas to draw from on this question, his soteriology is complex and multifaceted. What is distinctive about Athanasius (although to a lesser extent it is also true of many other Fathers, especially in the east) is his refusal to limit himself to any one or two of the available theories of how Christ saves us; he vigorously espouses and elaborates on all of them in turn. This becomes especially evident in the *De Incarnatione*, where his procedure is to move chronologically through the major moments of "the Savior's sojourn here among us." As this story unfolds, Athanasius explains the saving power which is especially to be associated with each event: Christ was born to unite the nature of God with human nature; baptized to supply humanity with the Spirit[5]; did miracles

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[4] J. A. Möhler, *Athanasius der Grosse und die Kirche seiner Zeit* (Mainz: Kupferberg, 1884), 163-165. Cited in Dominic Unger, "A Special Aspect of Athanasian Soteriology," *Franciscan Studies* 6 (1946), 189.

[5] Athanasius does not actually treat the baptism of Christ until later, in the *Contra Arianos*

to teach us who he is; died to destroy our death; and was raised to conquer all enemies and fill us with his own power of life.

This concentration on the saving power of the entire life of Christ is the theological reason why Athanasius refuses to choose from among the multiple reasons for the incarnation. If he were to single out the atonement for sins as the main reason for God taking a body, he would be forced to emphasize the crucifixion as having more efficacy in our salvation than, for instance, the resurrection. Likewise, if the main purpose of the incarnation is to teach us about God, then the cross seems superfluous. Athanasius steadfastly refused to isolate any single event or series of events in Christ's career as being the locus of salvation. Instead, he insisted that the entire life of Christ must be taken as a whole, and that this total event is what constitutes our salvation. This indivisible character of Christ's total career for our salvation has been brought out well in George Bebawi's article, "St. Athanasios: The Dynamics of Salvation." Bebawi points out that "if we want to do justice to Athanasios, we must realise that he is concerned with the whole life of Christ, from his place in the bosom of the Father, to his birth in Bethlehem, his baptism in Jordan, his crucifixion, resurrection, ascension and second appearing....there is no particular moment or event that endows the work of the incarnate Logos with more power or effect than any other."[6] Athanasius is able to construct a balanced, well-rounded theology because the center of his system is not an isolated doctrinal point. "In Athanasios the life of Christ as a whole brings salvation,"[7] and this serves as a broad foundation on which he can build an imposing structure. This is one reason Athanasius' theology cannot be summarized adequately in a very brief statement; the theology of Athansius has an uncommonly large center. It takes a whole Gospel for him to get the story of our salvation out.[8]

Before proceeding with the exposition of the events of the life of Christ, we should

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[6]George Bebawi, "St. Athanasios: The Dynamics of Salvation," *Sobornost* 8 (1986): 29, 32.

[7]*ibid*, 29.

[8]This "large center" in Athanasius' thought explains how so many competent scholars can disagree so widely as to what single point ought to be regarded as central for him. See Appendix 1, "What is the Center of Athanasius' Thought?" Especially helpful are Bebawi's comments, reproduced there, on Athanasius' writings as being "far from systematic in the Western sense of the term."

ask the question, how does Athanasius regard the events of Christ's history? He certainly

does not consider their primary importance to be "historical" in the modern sense of the term.

Of course he believes that the whole story really happened, and he is close enough to the

particularities of Christ's geographical and historical biography that he can express excitement

at the thought that the baby Jesus passed through his native Egypt. But Athanasius' interest

in the life of Christ is completely soteriological. "In short, Athanasius does not recognize a

'Jesus of history' over against a 'Christ of faith', a Christological distinction which appears

anachronistic for his theology."[9] Alvyn Petterson characterizes the tenor of Athanasius'

presentation as "liturgical," to indicate that it is aimed at awakening a worshipful response

from a believing Christian by confessing the events of the Savior's life.

> In the *De Incarnatione*, Athanasius expounds the life, death, and resurrection
> of the Logos that the believer 'may have even greater and stronger piety'
> towards the Christ. (*DI* I:13-14) For by reciting the saving work of the Christ
> and by expounding the grace and goodness of God, reverential awe is excited.
> ...Indeed, throughout the narration of the acts of God's saving initiative a
> sense of grateful praise and worship, and a realization of humble dependence
> is wrought in man before his Saviour God. ...In making this memorial, the
> Christian is seeking God's present salvation and looking forward to his final
> redemption at the end of the age. By remembering the Christ, he is
> encountering the redeeming Christ and availing himself of the redemption
> which he wrought once-for-all but offers perpetually. With these other
> Christians the readers identify, and so enter with them, into that common
> recalling of the Christ event.[10]

It is interesting to note that F. L. Cross perceived a similar force at work in Athanasius'

Festal Epistles, and the theology of the Easter Feast described there. He points out that

since no elaborate Christian calendar had yet been developed, all the theological meanings

which would later be dispersed throughout an entire year of special observances, including

the eschatological awe connected with the Paschal event, were concentrated on one day.

Thus Easter sets forth "in dramatic form the whole Economy of Salvation as wrought out for

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[9]A. L. Petterson, "Christ's Death: A Liturgical Event for Athanasius of Alexandria?" *Downside Review* 102 (1984), 22.

[10]*ibid*, 27-28.

man through the Incarnate Christ."[11] Cross goes on to connect the liturgical, dramatic retelling of the life of Christ in the Easter celebration with the theological argument put forth in the *De Incarnatione*:

> The different aspects of the Divine Economy which the Church in later times associated with Christmas, Good Friday, Easter, and Ascension Day --the Condescension of Bethlehem, the Redemptive Death on Calvary, the Triumphant Victory of the Resurrection, and the Glorious Return of the Redeemer to the Heavenly Places --were all commemorated in a single feast. ... The *Festal Epistles* bring vividly before their reader how the fullness of the Lord's Redemptive Work could be commemorated in a single festival. The feast as here set forth is the liturgical couterpart of that close association of the Incarnation, the Redemption, the Resurrection, and the Ascension, so familiar in its theological form to readers of St. Athanasius in the *De Incarnatione*.[12]

So Athanasius was not concerned to write a biography of Jesus, or some historical tract which described details of his character or history for their own sake. Instead he was presenting something more like a confessional statement, a commentary on the Apostle's creed, or even a worship service.

The first major topic in Athanasius' soteriology (*De Incarnatione* 2-7) has already been discussed in connection with the Logos and his role in creation. Athanasius is very fond of making the point that if God's creation has been spoiled by the fall, it is "fitting that its renewal was effected by the Word who created it in the beginning. For it will appear in no way contradictory if the Father worked its salvation through the same one by whom he created it."[13] Nothing more needs to be added to those remarks except to emphasize that for Athanasius the saving career of Christ is rooted in his pre-incarnate activities, and thus the story of our salvation begins before the incarnation. Because of this expansive view of the saving career of Christ, Athanasius is able to describe majestically the "fittingness" of God redeeming us in Christ. For the same reason, there is no possibility of opposing the Father to

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[11]F. L. Cross, *The Study of St. Athanasius* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1945), 17.

[12]*ibid*. 17-18.

[13]*De Incarnatione* 1. Same argument restated often throughout 2-7.

the Son as regards our salvation, since they are together in carrying out the same plan. For just as "God is good and loves men [αγαθος γαρ ων και φιλανθρωπος ο Θεος], and cares for the souls he has made,"[14] so also "our own transgression called forth the mercy of the Word [του Λογου την φιλανθρωπιαν]."[15] The "philanthropic" God saves us through his own "philanthropic" Word. It is owing to Athanasius' concentration on the full range of the Logos' activity on our behalf, his inclusive conception of the life of Christ, that his theology admits no possibility of a sharp disjunction between creation and redemption.

The Incarnation Proper. *De Incarnatione* 8-10 deals with the incarnation proper, the actual assuming of flesh by the Logos. This is of course a very rich topic, and in addressing it Athanasius brings into play almost all of his ideas about salvation in the space of a few short chapters. The Word "condescended to come and be made manifest" because "it would have been absurd for the law to be dissolved before it was fulfilled;" because of "the impropriety...that the creatures he himself had made should perish;" because men "were gradually increasing in wickedness;" and because of "the liability of all men in regard to death."[16] For these reasons he took a body like ours "as an instrument in which to be known and to dwell;" in order to "surrender it to death on behalf of all" and "offer it to the Father." Athanasius has many models available for describing the saving power of the incarnation, and he overlaps them all in this passage: the demands of the law, revelation, the renewal of creation, the restraining of sin, a vicarious surrendering of the body, and even an offering to the Father! It is evident that the elements of Athanasian soteriology are all so closely connected that to attempt to isolate any single one of them brings all the others rushing to it. Again, this phenomenon can be accounted for by the basic commitment of Athanasius to the saving power of the total life of Christ: to describe the saving efficacy of the moment of Christ's birth he must also invoke the obedience of Christ's life, the atoning sacrifice of his death, and the renewing power of his resurrection.

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[14]*Contra Gentes* 35.

[15]*De Incarnatione* 4

[16]*ibid.* 8

Nevertheless, while all of these themes are inescapably present, there is one soteriological theme which seems to figure most prominently in Athanasius' description of the incarnation proper: the coming together of the divine and human natures in Christ. This is set out quite concisely in *De Incarnatione* 9, which is worth quoting at length:

> For since the Word realized that the corruption of men would not be abolished in any other way except by everyone dying -- but the Word was not able to die, being immortal and the Son of the Father -- therefore he took to himself a body which could die, in order that, since this participated in the Word who is above all, it might suffice for death on behalf of all, and because of the Word who was dwelling in it, it might remain incorruptible, and so corruption might cease from all men by the grace of the resurrection. Therefore as an offering and sacrifice free of all spot, he offered to death the body which he had taken to himself, and immediately abolished death from all who were like him by the offering of a like. For since the Word is above all, consequently by offering his temple and the instrument of his body as a substitute for all men, he fulfilled the debt by his death. And as the incorruptible Son of God was united to all men by his body similar to theirs, consequently he endued all men with incorruption by the promise concerning the resurrection. And now no longer does the corruption involved in death hold sway over men because of he Word who dwelt among them through a body one with theirs.[17]

The Word could not, of itself, die; and the body could not, of itself, live. For this reason the Word took on the body, borrowing its death and lending it his life. The main point Athanasius is making here is that the Word combined his own nature with human nature in order that the two natures could minister to each other the things necessary for human salvation. This combining of two distinct elements in the person of Christ is the dynamic behind Athanasius' whole understanding of how the incarnation works. Athanasius is of course decades ahead of the time when councils will formally decree a "two natures" Christology, and we must be careful not to read such standards back onto his work. The way he is handling the doctrine in *De Incarnatione* (in terms of Word, body, participation, similarity, and dwelling-among) is in fact the foundation for what will develop later, as terms take on more technical rigor (nature, person, essence, etc.) What is clear in Athanasius is

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[17]*De Incarnatione* 9. Although this passage was chosen to describe the two-natures theme, it is equally valuable as an illustration of how the various themes overlap each other.

that the divine nature of the Word has certain attributes, such as incorruptibility, which make it impossible for the Word to die. Likewise, human nature has opposite attributes which make it impossible for it to live. The two parties must come together, not by forming a hybrid which is half of one and half of the other, but by actually combining the characteristics of both in one single person. "The Word was not able to die...therefore he took to himself a body which could die...that because of the Word who was indwelling it, it might remain incorruptible."[18] The mortal body, "through the coming of the Word into it, was no longer corruptible according to its nature [κατα την ιδιαν φυσιν], but because of the Word who was dwelling in it, became immune from corruption. And the two things occurred simultaneously in a miraculous manner: the death of all was fulfilled in the Lord's body, and also death and corruption were destroyed because of the Word who was in it."[19] The Word remains incorruptible, just as the body remains corruptible, when considered as themselves. But because they are united in Christ, they are able to take from each other what is needed to accomplish salvation.

The tension involved here is obvious; one wants to say that the body has *become* incorruptible and the word is *now* capable of dying, but Athanasius will not allow this to even be suggested. The heart of his Christology is the unremitting tension of two natures which remain themselves and retain all their own properties, but participate in each other because of the incarnation. It is a fundamentally relational way of looking at the question of Christ's nature. Thompson points out that Athanasius can use a variety of terms to describe the nature of the relationship between the Word and his body. All of these terms emphasize the prior distinction between the two elements: ιδιοποιεισθαι, λαβειν, αναλαβειν, ενδυεσθαι, συναφη, επιβασις.[20] This is a distinctive turn of Athanasius' way of thinking which we also saw in his reconstruction of the cosmological role of the Logos: he insisted on a relationship between the Logos and the world, but rejected any description which made the

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[18]*De Incarnatione* 9.

[19]*De Incarnatione* 20.

[20]Thompson, *Athanasius: Contra Gentes/De Incarnatione* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971), 175 n. 1.

Logos seem as if he were a part of the world which belonged to it by its nature, or by his. Karl Barth, whose work is also characterized by a tendency to hold intimately-related realities in crystal-clear conceptual distinction, describes this as a difference between a synthetic view (God *into* world) and an analytic view (God *in* world) of the relationship.[21] The Word takes the body synthetically, but cannot be said to be in the body analytically, as if he were by nature a part of it. This synthetic relationship is the fundamental category of Athanasius' incarnational Christology. When Athanasius focuses on the saving efficacy of the actual moment of incarnation, it is the coming together of the incorruptible Word with corruptible flesh that he is thinking of.

But it is above all at this point, in describing the saving power of the taking on of human nature by the Word, that it is most important to keep in mind the indivisible character of Christ's total career for our salvation. Just as Athanasius refused to isolate any single moment of Christ's life as the real center of saving power, he rejected the idea that Christ's very presence and existence as the one who combines the two natures in himself was the single key to salvation. An undue focus on the saving power of the coming together of the two natures would mean that humanity was saved by the infant in the manger more than by the Savior on the cross, or the Lord risen from the dead.

It is a common criticism of strongly incarnational Christologies that the cradle is in fact exalted over the cross, and the person over the work, of Christ. Harnack, for instance, criticizes Irenaeus for lapsing into this error, claiming that so much is said about the two natures of Christ that "his *acts* are thrust more into the background; his work is contained in his constitution as the God-man."[22] Closely connected to this criticism is the tendency to describe the resulting soteriology with the apparently pejorative term "physical redemption." Athanasius, because of his fondness for the term "deification," is frequently criticized for holding to a "physical" theory of redemption. Trevor Hart, though his goal is to defend

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[21]Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics* I:1, 342.

[22]Harnack, *History of Dogma* II:293.

Irenaeus against the charges of Harnack, does an admirable job of summarizing the standard criticism.

> Thus the incarnate Word of God is in effect the metaphysical bridgehead through which this condition enters the race, the 'point of contact' through which humanity is given to share in the attributes of divine substance in a 'deifying' act. Redemption is consequently seen as *complete* in the very joining of manhood to Godhead in the person of Christ, the *acts* of Christ being obscured by a concentration upon his *nature*, and the incarnation usurping the place of the cross as the focal point of Christian soteriology.[23]

It should be obvious that Athanasius, holding as he does to his central idea of the saving power of the total career of Christ, can hardly be accused of erring in the direction of seeing redemption as "complete in the very joining of manhood to Godhead in the person of Christ." Such a conception cuts directly against the grain of his whole program. But R. P. C. Hanson's 1991 summary volume on the Arian Crisis, *The Search for the Christian Doctrine of God*, which, because of its comprehensive scope and general reliability, is already showing signs of exerting great influence on the theological community, nevertheless dredges up the old charge of "cradle supplanting cross." After giving an invidiously one-sided reading of Athanasian christology ("spacesuit christology"), Hanson goes on to draw the following conclusions about his theology of the Incarnational:

> One of the curious results of this theology of the Incarnation is that it almost does away with a doctrine of the Atonement. Of course Athanasius believes in the Atonement, in Christ's death as saving, but he cannot really explain why Christ should have died. When in chapters 19 and following of the *De Incarnatione* he begins trying to explain the necessity of Christ's death, he can only present a series of peurile reasons unworthy of the rest of this treatise. The fact is that his doctrine of the Incarnation has almost swallowed up any doctrine of the Atonement, has rendered it unnecessary. Once the Logos has taken human flesh on himself, in a sense, certainly in principle, redemption is accomplished.[24]

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[23]Trevor A. Hart, "Irenaeus, Recapitulation, and Physical Redemption," in *Christ in Our Place: Essays Presented to James Torrance*, ed. Travor Hart and Daniel Thimell (Exeter: Paternoster Press, 1990), 155.

[24]R. P. C. Hanson, *The Search for the Christian Doctrine of God* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1988), 450.

This is a tragic, almost a total, misunderstanding of Athanasius' theology. That Hanson has failed to understand the dynamic behind *De Incarnatione* 19-25, concerning the death of Christ, will be made apparent in the upcoming treatment of that section. To assert that the Athanasian account of the Incarnation has "swallowed up" and "rendered unnecessary" the doctrine of the Atonement is to flout the entire drift of his thought, as well as to rule his own testimony inadmissible. Athanasius does indeed place great emphasis on the Incarnation in his book by that name, but he does it with an eye toward securing a solid base for the entire career of Christ. At the most, the incarnation might be described as logically prior to the other elements of Christ's life on our behalf, since it answers the question of who carried out the actions which saved us. The question of the identity of the Logos, and his relation to the human person Jesus Christ, was of course the flash-point of the fourth century, and the defense of the Gospel demanded a close definition of the person of Christ in order to safeguard his work. Athanasius perceived, rightly, that the cross and resurrection could in fact be rendered meaningless if the identity of the baby at Bethlehem were brought into question, and therefore he devoted much energy to securing that baby's identity. Ultimately, however, the doctrine of the Incarnation only secures the ground on which the saving work of Christ could be carried forward.

This profound unity between the acts and being of the savior, far from being a weakness in Athanasius' theology, is in fact one of its greatest strengths. The inability of western theologians and historians of dogma to really appreciate the characteristically eastern motif of incarnation/deification is a sign of the fragmentation of the doctrine of redemption in the West. This fragmentation reaches its clearest expression in the hegemony of forensic and judicial descriptions of redemption and atonement in western theology. A thinker who can condescendingly describe Athanasius as subscribing to a "physical theory of redemption" probably has not developed the categories necessary to hold together incarnation and atonement in an essential, internally coherent way. The alternative tends to be a description of a courtroom drama in which a judge transfers a fungible quantity of guilt from one party to a designated third party, who is himself inexplicably related to the judge. While the judicial imagery is enlightening, and helpful, and even biblical, it is not a sufficient basis for a

theologically coherent soteriology. Athanasius speaks fairly often of a debt which required payment, and seems to equate it with a legal requirement for the death of all,[25] but he seems to use such language as an alternate way of expressing what he has already said more accurately in other terms, usually terms invoking life/death imagery. The subordinate place of the judicial metaphor is apparent in the fact that Athanasius never explicitly spells out who owes what to whom, or who passed the sentence, etc., as later thinkers would do. Instead he assumes that "debt" and "sentence" are helpful, biblical ways of describing the loss of life incurred by humanity in turning away from the source of life. R. C. Moberly saw in Athanasius the promise of a theology which could escape the dead-ends and popular misunderstandings of penal substitution theory:

> The phrase 'vicarious punishment', if it is not at all points wholly irrelevant to the Athanasian language, or wholly unrelated to the truth, has, at best, a relevancy so faint that it can do much to mislead, and comparatively little to illuminate, the thought that is content to be based upon it. What is it then? It is a Divine act, profound and many-sided. It is an at of almost inconceivable condescension, and goodness, and love. It is the self-identification of God with humanity.[26]

When a forensic explanation of redemption attempts to become the foundational idea of soteriology, it is very difficult to relate all the other parts in an organic way. The best part of the western tradition, including the Reformers, has always managed to maintain a fairly balanced theology, even when legal language is given the upper hand in salvation. But there is always something disjointed and even artificial about the relationship between atonement and other doctrines in such a context, much as sinner and savior are related only externally and judicially. This may explain in part why the standard way of writing theology in the Reformation traditions was the *loci* method instead of a more organic, systematic method. Of course the best representatives of the tradition pushed through the *loci* framework and comprehended the complete flow of a system of Christian doctrine, but to the extent that they did so, they also found broader foundations for their doctrines of reconciliation. Calvin, for

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[25]*De Incarnatione* 20.

[26]R. C Moberly, *Atonement and Personality* (London: John Murray, 1917), 364.

instance, tapped into the more expansive "union with Christ" concept, which made possible a comprehensive treatment not accessible to those who cling to legal metaphors alone.

Athanasius bases his idea of redemption on the most comprehensive possible foundation, the saving power of the entire life of Christ. As a result, his theology flows so smoothly from topic to topic that it scarcely resembles a structured system at all; it flows more like the life story that it is. This contextualizes his doctrine of the Atonement, making it the central point, but not a central point which robs all other points of their meaning. As Rodolph Yanney points out, it is possible to exaggerate the doctrine of the Atonement to such an extent that any other doctrine seems superfluous, including even the doctrine of the Holy Spirit. It is as if the cry, "It is finished!" has been interpreted to mean that God is done working with his people, and theologians should be done with all other doctrines. But Athanasius' point of departure keeps him from this error. "He holds the biblical and patristic Tradition before him that does not separate Incarnation from Redemption, but it looks at salvation as brought by the whole life of Christ, from his conception to his second coming. Athanasius describes the road to God the Father as one which we take not only *through* but *with* Christ and *in* the Holy Spirit."[27]

In short, Athanasius' basic theological commitment to the saving power of the whole life of Christ allows him to stay on a strong middle course between two errors which could otherwise beset soteriology. On the one side is the "mystical" error of exalting the cradle over the cross and proclaiming redemption to be complete in the mere existence of a God-Man. On the other side is the error of emphasizing the cross as a courtroom in which an external, forensic judgement was rendered. Athanasius' starting point ensures that neither of these errors is even a remote possibility for his theology, since the long arc between the cradle and the cross is not only thought of as a single movement, but is itself comprehended in a larger unity which begins with creation through the Word and ends with our sharing in his resurrection.

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[27]Rodolph Yanney, "Salvation in Athanasius' On the Incarnatione of the Word," *Coptic Church Review* 11 (1990), 46-47.

Vicarious Victory. Athanasius discusses the major events of the life of Christ, especially his death and resurrection, mainly in terms of a vicarious victory; a victory won by the Word on our behalf. In this respect, Athanasius is one of the clearest representatives of what Gustav Aulén called the "dramatic" theory of the Atonement, "the dominant idea of the Atonement throughout the early church period."[28] Aulén summarized this theory as "the idea of the Atonement as a Divine conflict and victory; Christ -- Christus Victor -- fights against and triumphs over the evil powers of the world, the 'tyrants' under which mankind is in bondage and suffering, and in Him God reconciles the world to Himself."[29] In Athanasius' presentation of this victory theme, the main opponent Christ defeats by his death and resurrection is death itself. Once he is resurrected, Christ goes on to conquer all enemies, including idols and demons and earthly kingdoms.

Because victory is the main theme of the life of Christ as Athanasius tells it, the crucifixion tends to be discussed only in very close connection with the resurrection. In discussing the possibility of the Word accomplishing our salvation without enduring the cross, Athanasius remarks, "it would have been unfitting to avoid death lest the resurrection be prevented."[30] Athanasius never stops to dwell for long on the horror or ignominy of the cross, because he is so caught up in the complete scope of the savior's activity that he always has in mind the ultimate reasons for the cross, and its ultimate outcome. This is not to say that the crucifixion is in effect stripped of its horror by its close connection to the resurrection, as if knowing the end of the story destroyed the serious nature of the suspense. On the contrary, Athanasius is singularly capable of drawing out the cosmic horror of the crucifixion, as creation itself was shocked and frightened by the contradiction of the Word being crucified: "The sun turned back, and the earth shook, and the mountains were rent, and all were terrified; and these things showed that Christ who was on the cross was God, and that the whole of creation was his handmaid and was witnessing in fear to the coming of her

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[28]Gustav Aulén, *Christus Victor* (New York: MacMillan, 1951), 6.

[29]*ibid,* 4.

[30]*De Incarnatione* 21.

master."[31] But because of the larger perspective that Athanasius always maintains, in which the crucifixion and resurrection are closely united, the cross itself is transformed into the symbol of Christ's victory. For this reason, when he comes to describe the death of Jesus, "the chief point of our faith,"[32] he has to interrupt himself in mid-sentence to point out the true meaning of the event: "Even at his death -- or rather at the victory over death, I mean the cross..."[33] Athanasius believes that "particularly from this Christ is known to be God and the Son of God,"[34] and therefore takes glorying in the cross to be the mark of the Christian life. For this reason he begins the *Contra Gentes* by pointing out that the heathen are wrong to mock the cross, "because in slandering the cross they do not see that its power has filled the whole world, and that through it the effects of the knowledge of God have been revealed to all."[35] Indeed, "the cross was not the ruin but the salvation of creation....now that the cross has been set up, all idolatry has been overthrown, and by this sign all demonic activity is put to flight, and only Christ is worshipped, and through him the Father is known, and opponents are put to shame while he every day invisibly converts their souls..."[36]

Of course the death of Christ can only be described as a victory because of the resurrection, and Athanasius' narrative passes immediately from the cross to the resurrection. "Now that the Saviour has raised up his body death is no longer to be feared, but all believers in Christ tread on it as something non-existent and would rather die than deny their faith in Christ."[37] Athanasius is very fond of pointing out the attitude of Christians toward death now that Christ has been raised. He mentions it time after time between chapters 26 and 55 of *De Incarnatione*. "By nature man is afraid of death and of the dissolution of the body. But what

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[31]*De Incarnatione* 19.

[32]*ibid.*

[33]*ibid.*

[34]*ibid.*

[35]*Contra Gentes* 1.

[36]*ibid.* Note the *Christus Victor* theme.

[37]*De Incarnatione* 27.

is most wonderful is that he who has put on the faith of the cross scorns the things of nature, and is not afraid of death because of Christ...He who does not believe in the victory over death, let him accept the faith of Christ and come over to his teaching, and he will see the weakness of death and the victory won over it."[38]

Christians are able to scorn death not just because they happen to have heard the news that someone has conquered it, but because we are all implicated in the victories wrought by the Word through his body. We do not share Logos-hood in common with Christ, we share embodiment in common. All that he did in the body he did on our behalf. In his early work Athanasius explains how this happens by means of referring to the common human nature which the Word has taken up residence in. For the Word to live in a human body is like "when a great king has entered some great city and dwelt in one of the houses in it; such a city is then greatly honoured, and no longer does any enemy or bandit come against it, but it is rather treated with regard because of the king who has taken up residence in one of its houses."[39] This explanation is helpful as far as it goes, but it seems to lack a certain specificity. Athanasius only developed a more thorough account of how Christ's triumph applies to us in his later works, when he reworked the idea in light of the Holy Spirit and the Trinity, as will be shown below. But from the beginning, he always understood the victory accomplished in Christ as a battle fought and won on our behalf; a vicarious victory. As Edward Hardy has admirably summarized Athanasius' theology: "His chief concern is with the power of the new life in Christ which we share; his divinity makes his life mighty and his humanity makes it ours."[40]

Revelation. Alongside the theme of vicarious victory, the other major theme of Athanasian soteriology is revelation. It is a rich theme, by which he connects the universal teaching function of the Logos[41] to the earthly teaching ministry of Jesus Christ. The need of

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[38]*Contra Gentes* 28.

[39]*De Incarnatione* 9

[40]Hardy, *Christology of the Later Fathers,* 18.

[41]See above, p. 91

humanity was not just for the renewal of the principle of life among them, but for the renewal

of the knowledge of God; indeed, the two things, life and knowledge of God, are inseparable.

> He saw the creatures' complete lack of understanding and knowledge of him
> who made them. So having pity on the human race, in that he is good he did
> not leave them destitute of knowledge of himself, lest even their own
> existence should be profitless for them. For what advantage would there be
> for those who had been made, if they did not know their own Maker?[42]

It is not an impermissible paraphrase of Athanasius' thought to extend this argument to the

salvation of the race: "What advantage would there be for those who had been redeemed, if

they did not know their own Redeemer?" Therefore Christ took on flesh and lived the life he

did in order that we could not only be redeemed, but be made aware of our redemption, and

that God himself had effected it.

Emphasizing this theme enables Athanasius to make constructive theological use of

the actual three-year ministry of Jesus in a singular fashion, uniting it with the overall purpose

of God in creation and redemption. "For it was the task of him who by his providence and

regulation of the universe teaches about the Father, also to renew the same teaching."[43]

Athanasius finds revelatory significance in three aspects of the ministry of Christ. First and

most obvious is the actual teaching which he did; second are the signs with which he

accompanied his teaching; and third are the actual events of his life. Athanasius takes care to

show how in each of these areas Christ was discharging his eternal task of revealing to the

world the nature of the Father. The revelatory power of Christ's teaching is not difficult to

discern, and cannot occupy our attention in this study. It is important to notice that

Athanasius tends to focus on the sayings of Jesus which indicate his relation to the Father or

the Spirit, or those which explain the nature of the work Christ accomplished. A red-letter

edition of Athanasius would bring out quite nicely his tendency to quote mainly those sayings

of Jesus concerning the Father/Son relationship. Because of his concentration on the unity of

the Father and the Son, Athanasius was uniquely qualified to hear this side of the witness of

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[42]*De Incarnatione* 11

[43]*De Incarnatione* 14.

the Gospels, and he enriched the Church's understanding of these texts greatly. It may be the case that Athanasius so focussed on his favorite theme that he underemphasized the more ethical and prophetic side of Jesus' message.[44] At any rate, Jesus' characterization of himself as the Son, and his proclamation of the kingdom of his Father, was the earthly form of the Logos' eternal office of revealing the Father. With these few remarks, we can turn our attention to the other two aspects of the revelation in Christ's ministry: the miracles and the saving actions themselves.

Athanasius has a distinctive teaching concerning the revelatory content of the miracles of Jesus. He understands them as signs, or pointers accompanying the teaching of Christ, which underline and reinforce his message. Since the message of Christ was, for Athanasius, a proclamation of his Sonhood and an explication of the saving work he came to accomplish, the miracles are to be understood as indicators of the eternal Logos-hood of Christ. This interesting understanding of the miracles of Christ has not received much scholarly attention, but it was brought out quite eloquently by C. S. Lewis:

> There is an activity of God displayed throughout creation, a wholesale activity
> let us say which men refuse to recognize. The miracles done by God
> incarnate, living as a man in Palestine, perform the very same things as this
> wholesale activity, but at a different speed and on a smaller scale. One of their
> chief purposes is that men, having seen a thing done by personal power on the
> small scale, may recognize, when they see the same thing done on the large
> scale, that the power behind it is also personal -- is indeed the very same
> person who lived among us two thousand years ago. The miracles in fact are
> a retelling in small letters of the very same story which is written across the
> whole world in letters too large for some of us to see.[45]

Each miracle performed by Christ was a sign of his Logos-hood. They were all miniature, sensible versions of the actions which the Logos is always carrying out on the universal level. Lewis points out that this character of the biblical miracles sets them apart from many other supposed miraculous occurences. Instead of being merely abrogations of the laws of nature,

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[44]The subject of how Athanasius' interpretation of these passages (for instance, the Sermon on the Mount) fits into his whole theological program would repay closer scrutiny. To my knowledge no scholar has posed the question in this way, nor collated the information necessary to answer it.

[45]C. S. Lewis, "Miracles," in *God In The Dock* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1970), 29.

the miracles of the incarnate Logos were supernatural concentrations of those very laws. Christ made bread, fish, and wine multiply inexplicably fast, and without the normal process of propagation; but this was a small version of the multiplication of life which the Logos makes possible everywhere at all times. Since they seem to operate according to this principle, the miracles of Christ did not have the arbitrary and capricious character of a gesture such as turning stones into bread --a miracle Christ expressly refused to do. Lewis may draw more implications out of the doctrine than Athanasius himself did, but he has indeed picked up on the basic orientation of Athanasius' thought: the miracles underline the similarity between the actions of Christ and the universal activity of the Logos.

As such, they are God's attempt to condescend to those whose minds have become so submerged in sensory experience that they are no longer able to behold universal providence and order. "Those who were unwilling to know him by his providence and government of the universe, yet by the works done through the body might know the Word of God who was in the body, and through him the Father."[46] Thus the teaching ministry of Jesus Christ is identical with the teaching ministry of the Logos, but it is localized and temporalized, in order to set an unmistakable lesson before the eyes of the short-sighted. "The merciful and universal Saviour, the Word of God, took to himself a body and lived as a man among men, and took the senses of all men, in order that those who supposed that God was in corporeal things might understand the truth from the works which the Lord did through the actions of his body, and through him might take cognizance of the Father."[47] The Logos condescended to become incarnate as a way of accomodating his revelation of the Father to the senses which had gone astray, and his miracles no less than his teaching served this end.

The revelatory theme of redemption is also evident in Athanasius' presentation of the major events of Christ's career, the death and resurrection. Athanasius is concerned to show how fitting and appropriate were the details of the manner of death and resurrection the Word underwent. His way of demonstrating this is to pose to himself a series of questions in

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[46]*De Incarnatione* 14.

[47]*De Incarnatione* 15.

De Incarnatione 20-26, such as why the cross was necessary instead of just a sickness, or why the body remained dead three days instead of rising instantly. His answer to all of these questions is the same: the details of the Word's death and resurrection were all chosen by him for maximum revelatory effect. Actions undertaken on our behalf should be open to our observation; they had to be thoroughly public, and verifiable beyond doubt. For this reason a private death caused by a sickness would have been inappropriate, and instead the Word chose a death in which he was lifted up for all to see. "How then could the end of death have been demonstrated and the victory over it, unless in the sight of all he had summoned it and proved it to be dead and thenceforth rendered void by the incorruptibility of his body?"[48] Similarly, Christ remained dead for three days because this is a reasonably long period of time; no one could suppose that after three days Christ had only seemed dead. Corruption would certainly have set it if he were not the very Word of God; this would not be the case if he had only waited overnight, or been raised instantly.

A unique combination of the themes of vicarious victory and revelation occurs in *De Incarnatione* 24, where Athanasius asks and answers the question of why the Word did not arrange for himself a less humiliating death than that of the cross. Could the Word not have fashioned for himself a more appropriate death, rather than subjecting himself to the cross which his enemies devised for him? Athanasius answers that the Word intentionally let his enemies set the agenda for him, in order to maximize the demonstration of his victory and its overwhelming force. As an illustration, Athanasius compares Christ to a mighty wrestler who takes on all challengers:

> Just as a notable wrestler who is great in intelligence and strength does not
> choose opponents for himself lest he should give cause for suspicion that he is
> afraid of some opponents, but gives the choice to the power of the spectators,
> and especially if they are unfriendly, in order that when he has overthrown the
> one with who they match him he may be believed to be superior to all; even so
> the life of all, our Lord and Saviour Christ, did not himself contrive death for
> his body lest he should appear frightened of a different death, but accepted
> and endured on the cross that inflicted by others, especially by enemies, which
> they thought to be fearful, ignominious, and horrible, in order that when it had

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[48]*De Incarnatione* 23.

been destroyed he might be believed to be life, and that the power of death be completely annihilated.[49]

Athanasius is careful to unite the two themes: the wrestler defeats his opponent and does so in the most obvious and public way possible. The emphasis which Athanasius places on the revelatory power of the life of Christ cannot be considered an independent basis for soteriology; it must be the revelation of a vicarious victory, and not merely a theophany of some general sort. He takes great care to make it clear that the incarnation involves much more than revelation: "He did not wish...merely to appear, for if he had wished only to appear he could have made his theophany through some better means."[50] And again, "the Lord came not to make a display, but to heal and teach those who were suffering."[51] Thus in the *De Incarnatione*, Athanasius describes the saving career of Christ in terms of the *revelation* of a *vicarious victory*, in which we are all implicated because of our likeness of nature to the body which the Word assumed. "For in two ways our Saviour had compassion through the incarnation: he both rid us of death and renewed us; and also, although he is invisible and indiscernible, yet by his works he revealed and made himself known to be the Son of God and the Word of the Father, leader and king of the universe."[52]

Redemption In The Trinity

Athanasius' later work is characterized by an increasingly thorough trinitarianism. The basic outlines of his theology are not changed by this development, but its content is immeasurably enriched and deepened. Some of the areas left vague in his earlier work (for instance, the application of the vicarious victory of Christ to individual believers) are given much greater specificity by the trinitarian analysis which Athanasius brings to bear on the saving life of Christ. In fact, the Athanasian breakthrough to a coherent, sustained, trinitarian

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[49]*De Incarnatione* 24.

[50]*De Incarnatione* 8.

[51]*De Incarnatione* 43 Newman's chapter summary is apt: "He came to save, not to impress."

[52]*De Incarnatione* 16.

mode of thought is one of the decisive turning points in the history of both doctrine and exegesis, and one that has not been recognized often enough. As always with Athanasius, this theological breakthrough came about through close attention to the earthly work of Jesus Christ. Athanasius began to pose to himself more probing questions about the humanity of Christ, and undertook to integrate the witness of Scripture to Christ's humanity into his theology more thoroughly.[53] In accomplishing this task, Athanasius took recourse to trinitarian ways of thinking about the saving power of the life of Jesus Christ.

Vicarious Reception. The theological challenge of accounting for the full humanity of Christ within an incarnational framework is a problem which makes itself especially evident in connection with certain of Jesus' activities which are characteristically human rather than divine: growing, being ignorant and then learning, hungering, crying, etc. Athanasius dealt with each of these activities in turn, but he also pressed beyond the exegetical details and comprehended all of them under a more general, theological question: How can the Son of God be said to receive anything? The Scriptures say in various places that he did receive grace, and promotion, and exaltation, and a name above all names, and many other things, but how can this be true of the perfect and eternal Son of God? Athanasius frankly admits that there is a tension between these kinds of statements on the one hand, and the passages which ascribe eternity and fullness to Christ on the other. He is profoundly aware that a sincere and pious reader of the Bible (and not merely the standard Athanasian straw man, the heretic seeking occasion to blaspheme!) could make a long list of passages which seem to teach contradictory truths about Jesus: in one column those which describe him as receiving, capable of growth, or subject to pain, and in the other the ones which characterize him as God's own fullness, eternal and all-powerful.[54]

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[53]Of course it was the demands of confronting Arianism which posed these questions for Athanasius, and the *Contra Arianos* proceeds by way of refuting standard Arian interpretations of key passages of Scripture. I am trying to emphasize the complementary fact of the internal coherence of Athanasius' thought, and that his need to deal with these texts was generated by the trajectory of his own theology, rather than mere reaction to external demands.

[54]See *Contra Arianos* 1:53, where he acknowledges, in a very oblique way, the force of the Arian objections, but counters them by challenging the Arians to harmonize their favorite texts with his own favorite, "The Word was made flesh."

To resolve this tension, Athanasius proposes a principle for the interpretation of Scripture which is broad enough to integrate both columns, but sharp enough to distinguish clearly between them. He refers to this exegetical principle as interpreting passages in harmony with "the scope and character of Holy Scripture," by which he means finding the meaning of an individual passage in the total context of the Scriptural witness to Christ.

> Now the scope and character of Holy Scripture, as we have often said, is this: it contains a double account of the Saviour; that He was ever God, and is the Son, being the Father's Word and Radiance and Wisdom; and that afterwards for us He took flesh of a Virgin, Mary Bearer of God, and was made man. And this scope is to be found throughout inspired Scripture, as the Lord Himself has said, 'Search the Scriptures, for they are they which testify of Me.'[55]

It belongs to the very scope and character [σκοπος και χαραχτηρ] of Scripture that it deals with the Lord in two ways ["double account" = διπλην ειναι την περι του Σωτηρος επαγγελιαν]: as Eternal Son and Word in the first place, and then as human. Of course Athanasius is simply applying to the Scriptures his understanding of the two natures in Christ, and making it an exegetical principle that certain apparent contradictions are to be resolved by referring them respectively to the two natures:

> Though human things are ascribed to the Saviour in the Gospel, let us, considering the nature of what is said and that they are foreign to God, not impute them to the Word's Godhead, but to His manhood. For though the Word became flesh, yet to the flesh are the affections proper; and though the flesh is possessed by God in the Word, yet to the Word belong the grace and the power.[56]

The force of this analysis lies in the fact that the distinction is introduced by the incarnation, and its having taken place "for us and for our salvation." Athanasius is unremitting in his use of "for us" language throughout the *Contra Arianos*, the bulk of which consists of applying this twofold scope and character of Scripture to one passage after another. We are to understand the human things ascribed to Jesus as belonging, not to his eternal being, but to

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[55]*Contra Arianos* III:29.

[56]*Contra Arianos* III.41.

his ministry to us, among us, and for us, in the dispensation of God's plan:

> Whatever, and however often, is said, such as, 'He became' and 'become,' should ever have the same sense: ...we should not conceive any original becoming of the Word, nor in any way fancy from such terms that He is originated, but should understand Paul's words of His ministry and Economy [διακονιας και οικονομιας] when he became man.[57]

Thus Athanasius distinguishes clearly between the eternal being of God the Son and the ministry of Christ in the economy of salvation. The two are of course intimately related to each other, the latter being grounded in the former, but unless they are conceptually distinguished, the confusion of attributing human frailty to the Essence of God will result.

Athanasius brings this understanding of the scope of Scripture to bear on the general question of how Jesus can be said to receive. The answer is that he receives humanly: the Son of God, who is God's own fullness, does not properly receive anything; rather the human Christ is the one who receives, and since the Word is joined to him, it can be said that the Word receives (though not *as* Word). But because the scope and character of Scripture revolve around the ministry of Christ for us, there is a direct soteriological motive for the receiving. Christ receives grace and exaltation and promotion *for us*, on our behalf. He is the vicarious recipient of our blessings for us, uniquely qualified both to *receive* grace -- according to his human nature --and to receive it *perfectly*. Humanity had already demonstrated that it was incapable of retaining the divine gifts; it had lost them through sin and could do so again. Every day God showers grace on people who are unable and unwilling to receive and acknowledge it. What is redemptive about the incarnation is that God did not simply add more grace to a foundation which was already demonstrably unable to bear it; instead God provided a new foundation within humanity on which his grace could establish itself securely. Christ is the vicarious recipient of our grace and our deification; he receives the gifts of God perfectly and holds them for us from his location within humanity. What Adam could not do, Christ has done.

The idea of Christ as the vicarious recipient of God's grace, which is a very important

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[57] *Contra Arianos* 1:63.

principle of Athanasian soteriology, seems at first glance to be in conflict with another principle of his theology: "What the Father gives, he gives through the Son." This principle was the natural corollary of Athanasius' understanding of the Son as the Image and Power of the Father, the expression of his essence and will. "It is impossible, if the Father bestows grace, that He should not give it in the Son, for the Son is in the Father as the radiance in the light."[58] Athanasius does not avoid the tension between the two principles, but rather reaffirms both and moves immediately to interpret each in light of the other. He maintains that both things are true at the same time of the same Saviour: "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever, remaining unalterable, and at once gives and receives, giving as God's Word, receiving as man.[59]" That the Son should receive what is given only through him is a subject of amazement for Athanasius, and he describes it not with the reticence of someone avoiding an embarassing incongruity, but with the relish of someone to whom the mystery is opening itself:

> He receives after the manner of men from the Father, and is exalted by Him, as has been said. And it is plain, nor would any one dispute it, that what the Father gives, He gives through the Son. And it is marvellous and overwhelming verily; for the grace which the Son gives from the Father, that the Son Himself is said to receive; and the exaltation, which the Son bestows from the Father, with that the Son is Himself exalted. For He who is the Son of God, became Himself the Son of Man; and, as Word, He gives from the Father, for all things which the Father does and gives, He does and supplies through Him; and as the Son of Man, He Himself is said after the manner of men to receive what proceeds from Him, because His body is none other than His, and is a natural recipient of grace, as has been said.[60]

The mystery which is becoming apparent to Athanasius in this movement of his thought is no longer just the interplay between the two natures in Christ, although that is indeed a mystery, and it is indeed in evidence here. But in posing the question of Christ's ability to receive what can only be given through himself, Athanasius has crossed a very

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[58]*Contra Arianos* II:41.

[59]*Contra Arianos* I:48.

[60]*Contra Arianos* I:45.

important line. He is no longer focussing on the problematic of the constitution of the God-Man as such, but on problems posed by the relationship between the Father and the Son, especially the Son incarnate. This is at once a more biblical and a more trinitarian mode of thought. In reading patristic discussions of the two natures of Christ, whether from the Pre-Nicene period or the conciliar formulations following Nicea, one is often struck by their pervasive vagueness, and the remoteness from Scripture and Christian experience which characterize them. As valuable as they were and are, they are asking and answering questions which are several steps removed from the thought-world of the biblical witness. Athanasius' theology began in dialogue with that tradition, but was on a trajectory toward a less static, more salvation-historical frame of reference. It was also, as has been said, more biblical: the Johannine fascination with the relationship of the Father to the Son, the Son walking among us, came to dominate Athanasius' thinking more and more. Thus the mystery of the Trinity came into view, and Athanasius' theology began to conform itself to more profoundly and instinctively trinitarian patterns of thought than previous theologies had been capable of.

The Spirit Given and Received. If the understanding of the Son as both the divine giver and the human recipient led Athanasius to take the first few decisive steps into consistent trinitarianism, then his consideration of the actual content of what God gives us in salvation carried him the rest of the way. The divine gift which effects our salvation and sanctification is the Spirit of God.[61] By partaking in the Spirit, humanity is sanctified and renewed in the image of God, and made partakers of the divine nature, temples for God's habitation.[62] Just as Scripture says of Christ that he received grace and exaltation, it testifies of him that he received the Holy Spirit, and even claimed it as the mark of his messianic ministry: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me, because the Lord hath anointed Me."[63] To interpret this saying properly, Athanasius says we must immediately ask whether it applies to the eternal essence of the Son, or to his "ministry and economy among us." The answer is

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[61]*Ad Serapionem* I:23 states this explicitly and uses it as a proof of the Spirit's divinity

[62]*Ibid*, 23-27.

[63]Athanasius cites this and several other "spirit" passages from both testaments in *Contra Arianos* I:47.

obviously that it must apply to the latter, and in fact we are even able to pinpoint the exact moment in the ministry of Jesus Christ when he was able to say, humanly, "The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me:" "When then were these things spoken of Him but when He came in the flesh and was baptized in the Jordan, and the Spirit descended upon Him?"[64] This was the moment at which Jesus received the Spirit vicariously for us, and Athanasius sees it as a kind of proto-Pentecost. "The Spirit's descent on Him in Jordan was a descent upon us, because of His bearing our body....When the Lord, as man, was washed in Jordan, it was we who were washed in Him and by Him. And when He received the Spirit, we it was who by Him were made recipients of It."[65] In other words, the theological basis of the human capacity to receive the Spirit is not to be found in human nature itself, but in the event of the vicarious reception of the Spirit by the incarnate Son:

> Through whom then and from whom behoved it that the Spirit should be given but through the Son, whose also the Spirit is? and when were we enabled to receive It, except when the Word became man? ...We had not been redeemed and highly exalted, had not He who exists in form of God taken a servant's form. So David also shews, that no otherwise should we have partaken the Spirit and been sanctified, but that the Giver of the Spirit, the Word Himself, had spoken of Himself as anointed with the Spirit for us. And therefore have we securely received it, He being said to be anointed in the flesh.[66]

Once again, as Athanasius stresses the vicarious reception theme, he is compelled by his principles to push through it to explain the dual role of the Son as giver and receiver of the Spirit. In the above quotation Athanasius affirms a truth that is axiomatic for him; that the Word is by nature "the giver of the Spirit," and that "the Spirit should be given through the Son, whose also the Spirit is." The Son cannot be described as partaking of the Spirit, rather the Spirit partakes of that which belongs to the Son.[67] Thus he turns again from a

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[64]*Contra Arianos* 1:47.

[65]*Contra Arianos* 1:47.

[66]*Contra Arianos* 1:50.

[67]*Contra Arianos* 1:15. See also 1:8.

simple reflection on the two natures of the God-Man to a genuine investigation of the

relationships and dealings between the persons of the Trinity. The Father gives the Spirit

through the Word; this is the trinitarian mystery made manifest in baptism. In Christ's

baptism, this mystery is combined with and made known through Christ's vicarious reception

of the Spirit on our behalf, the basis of our sanctification. Athanasius drives this point home

by putting this explicit and developed trinitarian analysis into the mouth of Christ himself, in a

remarkable extended paraphrase of John 17:18:

> I, being the Father's Word, I give to myself, when becoming man, the Spirit;
> and Myself, become man, do I sanctify in Him, that henceforth in Me, who am
> Truth (for 'Thy Word is Truth'), all may be sanctified.[68]

Thus Athanasius pressed his theological analysis of the saving life of Christ until it

yielded a profound understanding of the entire Trinity's activity in the Incarnation. It cannot

be emphasized enough that what Athanasius contributed to theology was this ability to bring

a sustained, coherent, trinitarian analysis to the history of salvation. Athanasius is

remembered and studied mainly as a theologian engaged with the question of the relationship

between the two natures of Christ. It is quite true that he devoted much energy to this

question. He was the first to formulate it as the key for dogmatic exegesis, and this helped

subsequent generations over countless difficulties. Certainly he stands as the Father of

Orthodoxy at the head of the age of those ecumenical councils which would refine and define

the two-natures Christology as closely as humanly possible. But this was not the question

which primarily engaged his attention. Rather than being a two-natures theologian,

Athanasius was primarily a trinitarian theologian. He was interested in the question of the

constitution of the God-Man only in so far as it helped him establish a conceptual framework

for the vicarious reception which Christ performed for our salvation, but no further. Once he

had established this framework, he went on to pose questions about the presence and work of

the three persons of the Trinity in our salvation. Athanasius' true legacy is the ability to focus

on the life of Christ and ask "what is the Trinity doing in this life?"

It is important to bear in mind that Athanasius is more concerned with the mystery of

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[68]*Contra Arianos* I 46. See Appendix I for Athanasius' use of such first-person devices.

the Trinity than with the mystery of the two natures. So much of the writings of the Fathers is consumed by various forms of the two-natures debate that the temptation is to read it into even those places where it is not under discussion. This is an especially besetting problem in studying Athanasius, because he differs in a striking way from his contemporaries. For instance, in the third *Oration against the Arians* he puts another theologically dense sentence into the mouth of Christ: "The salvation of men is perfected in Me."[69] This is sometimes cited as a perfect expression of the kind of incarnational theology which sees redemption as complete in the very coming together of the two natures in the God-Man, although only someone who already expected Athanasius to be discussing two-natures Christology could misinterpret this sentence in that direction. In fact, the immediate and extended contexts show clearly what Athanasius intends: the salvation of men is perfected in the entering into humanity of the unity which belongs to the three persons of the Trinity:

> I am Thy Word, and since Thou art in Me, because I am Thy Word, and I in them because of the body, and because of Thee the salvation of men is perfected in Me, therefore I ask that they also may become one, according to the body that is in Me and according to its perfection.[70]

In unpacking this saying, Athanasius once again plunges right in to the heart of a trinitarian analysis of salvation, this time in terms of indwelling. He begins with the incarnation as the point of redemptive contact: the Word is in us because of his body. Thus the Father is in the Word and the Word is in us, and in this way our salvation is effected. But because the Father and the Word mutually indwell each other, Athanasius is also free to explicate our redemption in terms of a reversal of the direction of the indwellings, describing us as being in the Word and the Word as being in the Father. We cannot be in the Father immediately, as the Word himself is. Instead, we are united to the Father by the Spirit, who is given through the Word: "We, apart from the Spirit, are strange and distant from God, and by the participation of the Spirit we are knit into the Godhead; so that our being in the Father is not

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[69]*Contra Arianos* III:22.

[70]*Contra Arianos* III 22.

ours, but is the Spirit's which is in us."[71] Pressing even further, Athanasius argues that even

the Spirit is not in the Father immediately, but through the Word by which he is given:

> For since the Word is in the Father, and the Spirit is given from the Word, He
> wills that we should receive the Spirit, that, when we receive It, thus having
> the Spirit of the Word which is in the Father, we too may be found on account
> of the Spirit to become One in the Word, and through Him in the Father.[72]

Without missing a beat, Athanasius summarizes this new theme in his soteriology thus: "That

Spirit is in us, which is in the Word which is in the Father."[73] This soteriology of telescoping

indwellings is theologically and terminologically dense almost to the point of absurdity; what

is astonishing is that Athanasius spins it out of thin air almost as an afterthought in the course

of exegeting a controverted passage of Scripture. That he was able to do so is a sign of how

thoroughly trinitarian his patterns of thought had become by the time he wrote the third

Oration against the Arians. He is capable of moving freely and gracefully about in a thought-

world of which few theologians had even guessed the existence.

The preceding exposition has skirted two questions which, while not central to

Athanasian theology, are the subject of much debate in our own time. Because they are

important questions, they must be addressed, but because they are not central to this

investigation, they must be addressed *briefly*. First is the question of the *Filioque*, and the

difference between the eastern and western views of the Trinity. Which side is Athanasius

on? Both sides have claimed him at various times, because his position is open to

interpretation. He seems to work consistently with a formula which is neither eastern nor

western. His way of describing the origin of the Spirit is "from the Father, through the Son."

This is not quite the same as "from the Father and the Son," since it does not view the Father

and Son simply as a single source, as the west would prefer. Neither is it procession from the

Father alone, as the east has maintained. The Son, he tells us, is *homoousios* with the Father,

and the Spirit is *homoousios* with the Son. What is determinative for Athanasius is the

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[71]*Contra Arianos* III:24.

[72]*Contra Arianos* III:25.

[73]*Contra Arianos* III 25.

revealed economy of their relations, and thus he views the Son and Spirit as successively more humble, more witness-bearing, and more self-subordinating than their sources (although of course all ontological subordination is excluded without consideration). The diagram suggested is more linear than triangular:

FATHER

↓

SON

↓
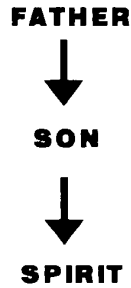
SPIRIT

What is interesting in Athanasius' exposition is that even when the Incarnation and its attendant economic subordination "for us and for our salvation" is taken into account, he insists on the same order, so the Son must give himself the Spirit:

FATHER

↓

SON

↓

SPIRIT

↓

Jesus Christ
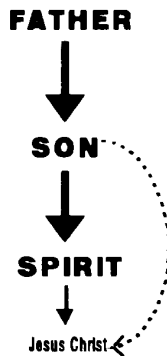
At any rate, the Athanasian scheme of "from the Father through the Son" remains a viable possibility for ecumenical dialogue, and was indicated as such by the World Council of Churches Faith and Order Paper # 103, "Spirit of God, Spirit of Christ."[74]

Probably the most hotly-debated and demanding question in Athanasian scholarship is

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[74]*Spirit of God, Spirit of Christ: Ecumenical Reflections on the Filioque Controversy* (London: SPCK, 1981

the question of Athanasius' theological neglect of the human soul in Christ. Barrels of ink have been spilled over this question, and several scholars have expressed their opinion that the problem is insoluble. It is becoming increasingly obvious that the question can not be meaningfully answered because it is posed in terms completely alien to the main concerns of Athanasius' theology. It is wrongheaded to force on an ancient author categories with which he did not operate. However, if the point at issue is related to a very important doctrine (and it seems that the human soul of Christ qualifies as such), it is perfectly legitimate to ask how any theologian was able to frame a coherent theology in the absence of such a concept, or at least some equivalent to it. What is at stake in the debate about Christ's soul is the question of the theological importance of the full humanity of Christ. Athanasius chose not to address this concern in terms of a detailed analysis of the mechanics of the body/soul/Word complex which constituted the person of Christ. Instead he focussed on the relationship between the Father, the Holy Spirit, and the Incarnate Son. His understanding of Christ's vicarious reception of the Spirit demands a true, full humanity of Christ. Instead of spelling out in static terms the constitution of the God-Man, Athanasius opted for a more dynamic, salvation-historical way of explicating the saving power of Christ's humanity. By concentrating on the relations between the persons of the Trinity instead of the relations between the two natures of Christ, Athanasius kept his theology in touch with the core of the Biblical witness. It would not have been an enrichment of the tradition if he had returned to a concentration on the two natures of the God-Man; and at any rate the later councils carried this task right to the brink of permissible speculation. Athanasius had a larger goal in mind than did the later conciliar theologians; he was gradually working out a comprehensive theological program centered on the saving power of the entire career of the Word made flesh. In explicating this program, Athanasius charted a course which took him directly into a more profoundly trinitarian theology than anyone had yet developed. Indeed, few theologians since him have ventured so far into the heart of the mystery.

Spirit Christology. Athanasius' penetrating insight into the saving life of Christ, especially Christ's vicarious victory and receptivity, led him to a coherent trinitarian theology. That trinitarian theology, in turn, fed back into his analysis of the life of Christ and opened up

new dimensions of it. One of the aspects of the life of Christ which Athanasius' trinitarian thought opened up is the possibility of understanding Christ's ministry and miracles in terms of the activity of the Spirit working through his human nature. There are resources within Athanasius' later writings with which a decent Spirit christology could be constructed. Of course Athanasius himself did not go on to develop such a christology in any explicit way, but the principles are scattered here and there, and occasionally he formulated a detail or two. In the *De Incarnatione*, Athanasius was concerned to develop a systematic incarnational Logos christology, and for various reasons the Spirit had an almost negligible role in this early work. The focus was on the unity of the Father and his Word, while in later works it broadened to include the unity of the Son and the Spirit. In terms of the ministry of Jesus, the *De Incarnatione* concentrated on the activity of the Logos in the works of Christ, while the later works began to give room for the activity of the Spirit as well. What is striking about Athanasius' move toward Spirit christology is that he does not perceive it as a fundamental change of course in his theology; he integrates Spirit and Logos christology and never presents them as being in any kind of tension with each other. Of course, given his axiomatic commitment to the unity of the Word and the Spirit, it is not surprising that he is untroubled by their cooperation in the works of Christ.

An example of the way the two understandings exist alongside each other in Athanasius' thought can be found in his explanation of the power at work in the miracles of Christ. A typical expression of the Logos-explanation occurs in *Contra Arianos* III:32:

> When He did divinely His Father's works, the flesh was not external to Him, but in the body itself did the Lord do them. ...And thus when there was need to raise Peter's wife's mother, who was sick of a fever, He stretched forth His hand humanly, but He stopped the illness divinely. And in the case of the man blind from the birth, human was the spittle which He gave forth from the flesh, but divinely did He open the eyes through the clay. And in the case of Lazarus, He gave forth a human voice, as man; but divinely, as God, did He raise Lazarus from the dead.[75]

The Logos is thought of as acting directly through his own body, and Athanasius' concern is

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[75]*Contra Arianos* III 32.

to attribute the proper activity to the proper nature. In an earlier section of the Discourses, however, Athanasius had approached the question from another point of view. In connection with the casting out of demons, he described the divine power working through Christ in terms of the Spirit's activity. "Man's nature is not equal of itself to casting out demons, but only in the power of the Spirit," affirms Athansius.[76] For this reason, Christ said truthfully, "I through the Spirit of God cast out demons." (Matt. 12:28) Athanasius is characteristically concerned to safeguard this statement of Christ against the misunderstanding that the Son himself is subordinate to the Spirit, emphasizing instead that "He did not refuse in respect of His manhood to call Himself inferior to the Spirit" even though he is "the Lord who gives the Spirit."[77] Furthermore, Athanasius demands that the saying be interpreted in terms of Christ's vicarious reception of the Spirit. The Lord cast out demons through the Spirit for our sake, "for we are they who need the Spirit's grace in our sanctification, and again who are unable to cast out demons without the Spirit's power....and when were we able to receive It, except when the Word became man?"[78] The idea behind this seems to be that the Word could have cast out demons by his own proper power, but for our sake he cast them out through the Spirit, to secure our own ability to receive the Spirit and cast out demons through him. It is almost a matter of indifference for Athanasius, which of the two persons of the Trinity is said to be doing the work, and he does not distinguish clearly between them.[79] In fact, when discussing the blasphemy involved in attributing Christ's exorcisms to diabolical power, Athanasius slips from one to the other without interruption: "They who blaspheme against the Holy Ghost, and ascribe the deeds of the Word to the devil, shall have inevitable punishment."[80] Thus Athanasius operated comfortably on the basis of the Logos christology,

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[76]*Contra Arianos* I:50.

[77]*ibid.*

[78]*ibid.*

[79]The examples I have cited leave open the possibility that Athanasius saw a basic difference between healing (which the Word did through his body) and exorcism (which the Spirit did through Christ). I am not aware of any positive reasons for believing this to be the case, though.

[80]*Contra Arianos* I:50.

and was equally comfortable explaining the miracles and ministry of Christ in terms of the activity of the Spirit, or a Spirit christology. Because of the unity of the Son and the Spirit, Athanasius did not even perceive an appreciable difference between the two frameworks. He only endeavored to ensure that the Son was understood as the giver of the Spirit, and not as one who by nature stood in need of him.

Of course a thoroughly pneumatological understanding of the work of Christ would account for more than the miracles; it would also account for the obedient life of faith which the incarnate Son lived out. It must be frankly admitted that Athanasius does not appear willing to move in this direction. He can go so far as to say that in the incarnation, Christ entered a relationship of due creaturely subjection to the Father, so that "when He put on the creature, then it was He called the Father Lord."[81] But Athanasius vigorously opposes the idea that Christ exercised faith in God, and interprets all Scriptural passages which suggest that Christ was "faithful" as meaning that he was "worthy of faith" rather than "exercising faith."[82] Similarly, the obedient life of the incarnate Son is not a theme which Athanasius develops the theological implications of. He seems to mention it at least once, in the *Festal Letter* for 329. He exhorts his readers to fast from external food, and instead to feed their souls with virtue, adding, "such was the case with our Lord, who said, My meat is to do the will of My Father which is in heaven."[83] It is unfortunate that Athansius did not develop this idea, since his basic commitment to the saving power of the entire life of Christ provides the ideal framework for the appropriation of the theological significance of Christ's life of obedience to the Father.

A few scholars have, in fact, offered interpretations of Athanasius' thought in which the obedience of Christ is a prominent theme. Trevor Hart, for instance, puts together a quite compelling case, arguing from the general trend of Athanasius' arguments, as well as adducing a number of specific texts:

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[81]*Contra Arianos* II:50.

[82]*Contra Arianos* II:10.

[83]Letter # 1 (NPNF p. 508). Note that what is being nourished is the Lord's *soul*.

Jesus is not just the man who stands in between us and God and mediates at the point of his *death*; for Athanasius the whole life of Jesus is an offering to the Father on our behalf. 'He humbled himself' Athanasius says, 'in taking our body of humiliation, and took a servant's form, putting on that flesh which was enslaved to sin'. (*contra arianos* I:43) 'He became a servant instead of us and on our behalf' (ibid) and in this same flesh 'He sanctifies himself to the Father for our sakes...that he himself may in himself sanctify us...that he may become righteousness for us, and that we may be exalted in him, and that we may enter the gates of heaven which he has also opened for us.' (*contra arianos* I:41). In other words Christ's whole life of obedient sonship lived in the power of the Spirit is a life lived for others, and not just a preparation for death on the cross.[84]

T. F. Torrance also argues that Athanasius had a profound understanding of Christ's obedient life in the power of the Spirit for our sake. The citations offered in support of this thesis are always rather vague, however, and few clear texts can be produced which clearly teach it. These scholars seem to be tuned in very well to the the basic orientation of Athanasius' theological program, and they are right in pointing out that "vicarious obedience" fits his scheme perfectly. But in the absence of direct statements, and considering Athanasius unwillingness to attribute "faithfulness" to Christ, it seems unlikely that he was comfortable with such a doctrine. Whatever the reason, Athanasius was unwilling to follow the trajectory of his thought in this direction, and therefore left out a valuable theme which he had already done everything necessary to prepare the way for. It is at this point that the fragmentary and occasional character of Athanasius' actual literary legacy is the most frustrating, because he clearly was in the middle of a fascinating theological journey which he did not get to finish in this life. We can wish that he had developed the promise of his pneumatological christology, or had opportunity to write a *De Resurrectione* to complement his *De Incarnatione*, or even a *De Trinitate* which would have set forth his program in its most comprehensive scope, but he did not do so. The best we can hope for is that his abiding insights will be taken up by contemporary theologians who will stand on his shoulders and see even further than he did.

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[84] Trevor Hart, "The Two Soteriological Traditions of Alexandria," *Evangelical Quarterly* 61(1989), 254.

The Continuing Victory of the Word

Athanasius' theology begins and ends with reflection on the saving life of God's Word. His attention is primarily focussed on that part of the Word's career which was visible to the apostles: the life of Jesus Christ in the flesh. But from this saving center of revelation, he spreads his thought out in all directions and draws conclusions about the eternal nature of the Father's Word, and the internal relations of the Trinity. He has much to say about the life of the Word before and after his "sojourn among us in the flesh;" on both sides of the incarnation. Because of this comprehensive understanding of the redeeming career of the Word, Athanasius is not finished with the story of Christ until he has described the ongoing victories accomplished by the resurrected Christ. This description is found mainly towards the end of the *De Incarnatione*, and it is presented in an apologetical mode. Athanasius, writing as he did at the very dawn of the Constantinian age,[85] loved to describe the power of Christ in the conversion of the pagan world to Christian faith. In fact, after all the other apologetic arguments had been employed, from the reasonableness of Christian monotheism over against pagan polytheism on the one hand, to the proofs from prophecy on the other,[86] Athanasius brings forth the evidence of Christ's triumph over the old world order. It seems that he considers this demonstration to be the most conclusive evidence for the divinity of the Word, first because it presupposes the truth of all he has said so far about the life, death, and resurrection of Christ, and second because it is evident to all. Thus having used all the arguments at his disposal, Athanasius turns from "proof through words" to proof through "visible events," which are "clearer."[87]

Athanasius sees the Christianization of the world down to the fourth century as definitive evidence that Christ is alive and at work:

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[85]Once again the question of the early or late dating of the *CG DI* makes these remarks equivocal. I assume an early date, as argued above, p. 15. It would be interesting to know for certain whether Athanasius was describing these victories of Christ in the shadow of persecution, or in the wake of Constantine's conversion. Either way, he wrote at a time very near the historical transition between the two.

[86]Refuting the Jews in *De Incarnatione* 33-40, and the Greeks in 41-55.

[87]*De Incarnatione* 30. "Visible events" = φαινομενοων. He also refers to "visible facts" = ορωμενων. For the superiority of this kind of proof, see Torjeson, "Teaching Role of the Logos," p. 220.

> For since the Saviour works so many deeds among men, and ever day in every place invisibly persuades such a great multitude of Greeks and barbarians to turn to faith in him and all to obey his teaching, would anyone still have a doubt in his mind whether the resurrection of the Saviour really occurred and that Christ is alive, or rather that he is life? Is it the mark of a dead man to spur the minds of men so that they deny their fathers' laws and revere the teaching of Christ?[88]

Not only do the conversions of the heathen demand a resurrected and active Christ as an explanation, but the consequent supression of sin is also best accounted for by the same explanation. Christ's power in changing the lives of sinners shows him acting very much unlike a dead man, and in fact reveal him to be far more active and powerful than the sin, vice, idols, and demons which have previously exerted so much influence on the world:

> Or how--if he is not acting himself -- for that is the mark of a dead man -- did he cause those who were active and alive to cease from their activity, so that the adulterer no longer commits adultery, the murderer no longer kills, the law-breaker no longer works wrong, and the impious is henceforth pious? And how, if he had not risen but is dead, could he chase away, cast out, and lay low those false gods said to be alive by the unbelievers and the demons they worship? ... This is not the work of a dead man, but of one alive, and rather of God.[89]

Athanasius clearly enjoys describing these victories. He is only half arguing; he is at least equally rejoicing in the message he proclaims. The list of accomplishments grows longer: the risen Word "has touched all parts of creation and freed and undeceived everything of all error,"[90] he causes people to fear God, drives them to virtuous lives, teaches them about immortality, makes them desire heavenly things, reveals to each one the Father and himself, gives them power over death, causes warlike tribes to turn into peaceful farmers, destroys idols, demonic activity, witchcraft, and irrational desire, and in short "every day works and

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[88]*De Incarnatione* 30. The LNPNF translates "διανοιας των ανθρωπων κατανυττειν" as "to be pricking the consciences of men," doing more justice perhaps to κατανυσσαι than to διανοια, but rendering a livelier reading.

[89]*ibid.*

[90]*De Incarnatione* 45.

effects the salvation of all."[91] Indeed, trying to comprehend the victories and mighty works of the Word since his resurrection is like trying to take in with the eyes all the waves of the sea: "the accomplishments of Christ *in the body*" keep crashing to shore one after the other, impossible to number or mentally grasp.[92] We may not have been eyewitnesses to the actual rising of the body of Christ, but something must account for this astonishing transformation of the world, and Athanasius proclaims that the resurrection of Christ accounts for these changes just as surely as an unseen sunrise accounts for daylight.[93] Ringing changes on this favorite solar image of his, Athanasius argues that even if people are so blind as not to perceive the truth of the resurrection, they cannot deny the effects it has had, just as a blind man can feel the heat emanating from a sun he does not see.[94]

In this way, the final movement of the life of the Word is its continuation in the lives of believers. Christ continues his life and activity by "displaying signs of victory in his own disciples,"[95] who swear vows of virginity in their youth and keep them into their old age, face the death of martyrdom without fear, and set demons to flight in his name.[96] The idea underlying this description of Christ's ongoing work in his disciples is the Pauline notion of the church as the body of Christ. Athanasius quotes this teaching fairly often, but never makes any major attempt at explaining it in his own words, or giving it a place of prominence in his own teaching. He was concerned to emphasize one particular aspect of the ongoing influence of Christ through his followers: it is Christ's work, not ours. There is no chance of simply subsuming the influence of Christ on the world since his resurrection into the work of the church on his behalf, carrying forward his mission. Athanasius relentlessly describes it as

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[91]*De Incarnatione* 31; except for the conversion of the warlike barbarians into peaceful agrarians, which is not mentioned until *De Incarnatione* 52.

[92]*De Incarnatione* 54, emphasis added to underscore that this is not the *logos asarkos* who is changing the world, but the incarnate word, in his body.

[93]*De Incarnatione* 29.

[94]*De Incarnatione* 32.

[95]*De Incarnatione* 29.

[96]*De Incarnatione* 48

the ongoing work of Christ himself, the present stage of the life of God's Word in the flesh.

Perhaps if he had written these thoughts down later in his life, he would have described the

ongoing life of the incarnate Christ more in terms of the activity of the Spirit, since he came

to understand that the Spirit of the Son was the mode of his activity, and that the works of

the Spirit are the works of Christ himself.[97] Either way, it is Christ who converts and teaches,

who overthrows idols and fills his own churches.[98] Even in the ascetic disciplines of the

monks, which Athanasius sometimes describes in almost heroic language, he does not see

human effort and victory, but the work of the risen Word. After narrating a battle of Antony

against an infernal manifestation of the spirit of lust, Athanasius concludes, "This was

Antony's first struggle against the devil, or rather this victory was the Saviour's work in

Antony."[99]

Included among the many demonstrations of the ongoing power of Christ is one final

example which is especially relevant to the work of Athansius himself. He considers it a

proof of the incarnate Christ's divinity and power that he was able to rout not only the

superstition of the ancient world, but also the hellenistic philosophy which had claimed the

best minds of generations:

> To mention one proof of the divinity of the Saviour which is exceedingly
> wonderful: what man or magician or tyrant or king was ever able to take so
> much upon himself and battle against all idolatry and against the whole host of
> demons and all magic and all the wisdom of the Greeks, who are so strong
> and still amazingly powerful, and at one turn to resist them all, as **our Lord,
> the true Word of God?**[100]

Perhaps Athanasius did not see his own theological work in this light, but it is nevertheless

the case that in his reorientation of the Alexandrian theological tradition, he took his place as

one of the disciples through whom Christ "displayed the signs of his victory." Greek ideas

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[97]. *Ad Serapion* 1.19.

[98]*De Incarnatione* 50.

[99]*Life of Antony* 7. Athanasius records many statements of Antony attributing victory to Christ.

[100]*De Incarnatione* 52, emphasis added.

were still "strong and amazingly powerful" when Athanasius became a theologian, and as he grappled with the complicated Logos-theology of his tradition, he critically refined the wisdom of the greeks and imposed on it the demands of the Gospel. Proceeding from the knowledge that our Lord Jesus Christ, and not any cosmological construct, is the *true* Word of God, Athanasius forged more biblical and trinitarian modes of thought, leaving a legacy which systematic theology still has not appropriated fully. To paraphrase the *Life of Antony*, in the Athanasian transformation of the Logos doctrine we see the first struggle of the young Athanasius, but this victory was the Saviour's work in Athanasius.

Chapter 5
Athanasius and Contemporary Theology

The theology of Athanasius, as this thesis has attempted to demonstrate, is a vital, coherent system of trinitarian reflection on the saving power of the life of Christ. A distinctively Athanasian type of systematic theology is latent in his writings, and while much work still needs to be done before an accurate, decisive, and truly comprehensive reading of that theology can confidently be put forth, it is at least clear that such a reading is a real possibility. The distinctive contours of Athanasian theology are evident; the outlines of the system are not hard to make out. His work is not just a string of *ad hoc* polemical tracts, but a coherent theology which stands as a challenge to our own age.

Of course it is not novel to claim that Athanasius is a model for the renewal of theology in our time; the history of Athanasian scholarship is marked by the recurrence of fitful attempts to revive interest in him as a means of stirring up the contemporary church. J. A. Möhler's 1827 book, *Athanasius der Grosse und die Kirche seiner Zeit*, was one such attempt, and a half-century later (1883) J. H. Newman published *The Arians of the Fourth Century* with similar hopes. Both authors

> denounced the sclerosis of theology and the deficiencies of the Church characteristic of their times and suggested that the nineteenth century was renewing certain errors committed by the Arians in the fourth century. Therefore, they were presenting Athanasius as the invincible promotor of theological truth and the savior of the institutional Church.[1]

More recently (1963) Dietrich Ritschl suggested, somewhat more tentatively than a Möhler or a Newman, that Athanasius might be a "source of new questions" to goad Christian thinkers out of the "theological helplessness" of the age.[2] It is not at all uncommon to call in *Athanasius Contra Mundum* for help in opposing the spirit of later ages.

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[1]Charles Kannengiesser, "Athanasius of Alexandria and the Foundation of Traditional Christology," *Theological Studies* 34 (1973), 103. Kannengiesser's own article goes on to find, in Athanasius' thought, resources for the renewal of contemporary theology.

[2]"Athanasius Source of New Questions," *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* I (Spring 1964), 319.

The purpose of this chapter, however, is not to hold up the Athanasian standard as a reproach to the fecklessness of theology at the end of the twentieth century, even though contemporary theology is no doubt just as feckless as the theology of any age ever has been, and no less in need of a dose of Athanasian corrective than earlier ages. But to really appropriate all of the lessons of Athanasian theology in the contemporary setting would entail a doctrinal concentration and a theological reorientation of even greater proportions than that which Athanasius himself wrought in his own day. Instead of describing the theological distance which separates us from Athanasius, I will focus on points at which contemporary theology is already showing signs of drawing nearer to Athanasian insights, in hopes that these represent windows of opportunity. In the last fifty years there have been signs of renewal in theology, as a stronger grasp of trinitarian insights has made possible a thorough re-examination of the history of doctrine. Having followed a long roundabout path, theology has begun to find its way back to a sense of the importance of the issues Athanasius worked with in the fourth century. In what follows I will describe some of the recent developments in theology, especially those that resonate most clearly with the theology of Athanasius. I will also explain why, and to what extent, Athanasius should be considered the patron saint of the renewal of theology in our time.

A Detour Through Augustine

The most important similarity between Athanasian theology and the contemporary state of affairs is the promising renewal of trinitarian thinking in the last half-century. For 1500 years the church has carried the doctrine of the Trinity along as a brute fact of revelation, a mere revealed mystery which was to be included in the list of things we maintained on the basis of authority and tradition. But dating from at least the first volume of Barth's *Church Dogmatics*, modern theology has been marked by a return to profoundly trinitarian reflection.[3] The doctrine is being returned to its central place in theology, and a thorough critique of accretions and misunderstandings of it is ongoing. To understand the

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[3]A good overview of this renewal can be found in Ted Peters, *God as Trinity* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1993).

current repristination of trinitarian thought, it is necessary to examine briefly the problems which have beset it in the centuries since Athanasius. A complete history of "The Emergence and Defeat of the Doctrine of the Trinity"[4] would involve a great many issues not directly related to Athanasius' work. It was Augustine whose treatment of the doctrine established its general lines of development through the centuries, and a glance at his work will be sufficient to suggest the fate of trinitarianism between Athanasius and our own day. To a great extent, Augustine departed from the path marked out by Athanasius and led theology on a long detour, from which it is only now returning.

In the theology of Athanasius we can see a mind struggling with the Biblical materials and attempting to interpret them appropriately. The result is a trinitarian form of exegesis and analysis of Christ's life. This exegetical dynamic is not evident in Augustine's influential work *De Trinitate*. By the time Augustine inherited the doctrine of the Trinity, it was no longer a set of biblical questions made urgent by heretical misinterpretation; it was a piece of established dogma. "The doctrine of the Trinity came to the West as a finished product....For Augustine it is simply a received fact of the church's teaching."[5] Thus, even from his point of departure Augustine allowed an alienation of the doctrine from its genuine roots in Scripture. Its primary home, for Augustine, is in theological tradition. Rather than constructing doctrine out of the basic materials in the Bible, Augustine, in Books I-IV of *De Trinitate*, takes up each passage and demonstrates how it conforms to his understanding of the dogma.[6] The most illuminating contrast between the methods of Athanasius and Augustine is the exegesis of the important passages describing the baptism of Christ. Athanasius' treatment of

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[4]The title of Part I of Catherine Mowry LaCugna's *God For Us: The Trinity and Christian Life* (New York: Harper Collins, 1991), which see for a balanced and sympathetic account of the mishandling of the doctrine by Augustine, the Cappadocians, Aquinas, and Gregory Palamas.

[5]Robert W. Jenson, *The Triune Identity* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1982), p. 114.

[6]Augustine is not without his defenders on this point. One traditional way of reading *On The Trinity* is to see this first section as *developing* the doctrine of the Trinity from Scriptures, rather than merely supporting it. See for instance Edmund Hill, "Karl Rahner's 'Remarks on the Dogmatic Treatise *De Trinitate*' and St Augustine," *Augustinian Studies* vol. 2 (Villanova University, 1971), 68. I find this reading unlikely, for reasons set out below.

this subject has already been discussed.[7] Augustine's treatment is radically different. At this event, Father, Son, and Spirit were distinctly present as the paternal voice from heaven, the human Christ, and the descending dove. Augustine blunts the point of these distinctive manifestations in a remarkable way: "So the Trinity together wrought both the voice of the Father, and the flesh of the Son, and the dove of the Holy Spirit, while each of these things is referred severally to each person."[8] This rather cavalier treatment of one of the most important passages for the development of the doctrine of the Trinity is telling. If each of the three manifestations is equally the work of the entire Trinity, there is no need for them to be revealed as three. Their diversity is apparently a clue to show us that there is a similar diversity in God, but the revealed forms are not really expressive of the hidden Trinity. The two just happen to correspond, and the entire hidden Trinity worked in fashioning three distinct signs to be manifested. There is a strange twisting and turning evident here in Augustine's exegesis, as he sidesteps the implications of the threefold appearance, and then maneuvers back into them by saying that while each manifestation is really the work of the undivided Trinity, it is "*referred* severally to each person." To say no more, there is clearly a tendency in Augustine's exegesis to go to any lengths necessary to de-emphasize the diversity of the three persons in their historical manifestations.

To carry this analysis further, though, the question must be asked why Augustine finds it necessary to de-emphasize the distinctness of the persons. It seems clear that the reason for his exegetical bias lies in his preference for the philosophical notion of God's unity. This preference can best be accounted for by Augustine's predilection for NeoPlatonism, which was absolutely rigorous in its application of the ideas of unity and simplicity to the Deity. Plotinus, for instance, explains reality in terms of a doctrine of the unfolding of the

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See above, p. 123.

[8]*On the Trinity* IV.21. In Letter XI (to Nebridius, 389), Augustine demonstrates the *logical impossibility* of one person of the Trinity doing anything alone, since the three persons are related as closely as existence, essence, and permanence. They only appear to act separately "on account of the weakness which is in us, who have fallen from unity into variety." Augustine had only been a Christian for 3 years at this point and an unreconstructed NeoPlatonism clearly had the upper hand in his thought. It would be unfair to take this letter as seriously as his later work.

One, which is strikingly similar to Augustine's doctrine of the Trinity.[9] As Augustine struggles to collate the revealed multiplicity with the divine unity to which he is ultimately committed, it becomes apparent that he has a deeply divided mind on this subject. Cornelius Plantinga perceives that the contradictions which constantly threaten Augustine's doctrine are explained by "the incompatibility of trinity materials derived from two quite disparate sources."[10] Augustine works, as we have seen, with biblical texts which clearly point to the personal distinctness of the Father and the Son (and, to a lesser degree, the Spirit). But he is reading off of another page at the same time: "he has not only biblical materials to bring to the theological workshop but also his strong NeoPlatonic conviction that God is a simple being, that in God persons and attributes are identical."[11] The tension between these two sources, biblical and NeoPlatonic, accounts for the awkwardness of Augustine's exegetical acrobatics. While NeoPlatonism harmonized beautifully with the basic monotheistic tone of the Scriptures, it clashed horribly with those elements of the revelation in Christ which gave rise to trinitarianism.[12] Augustine either was not conscious of the profound dissonance between the two systems, or was conscious of it and determined to harmonize them at any cost. Unfortunately the cost was very great. So firmly does Augustine hold to the absolute unity of the divine nature that he must explain the historical dispensation in terms of this rather abstract philosophical presupposition. This effectively undermines the basis of

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[9]While most scholars view Plotinus as the primary source of Augustine's NeoPlatonism, some have argued that in many details Augustine is closer to Porphyry. For a concise summary of the debate see William J. Hill, *The Three-Personed God* (Washington: Catholic University of America Press, 1982), 53.

[10]Cornelius Plantinga, Jr., "The Threeness/Oneness Problem of the Trinity," *Calvin Theological Journal* 23 (1988), 44

[11]*ibid*, 45.

[12]The eminently quotable Robert W. Jenson points out that Augustine's deleterious impact on the doctrine of the Trinity is owing to the fact that his "personal spiritual and intellectual experience impressed themselves on Western theology in a way unparalleled in Christian history," and that this has "blighted our trinitarianism, for Augustine experienced the triune character of God himself as one thing and the history of salvation as quite another. Thus the trinitarian formulas lost their original function." p. 116.

trinitarian theology, turning the distinct persons into facades for the one God.[13] The line of reasoning which begins with Augustine's dismissal of the three persons revealed at the baptism of Christ reaches its culmination in the kind of scholastic theology which can say with Peter Lombard, "just as the Son was made man, so the Father or the Holy Spirit *could* have been and can be now."[14] When theologians can affirm such a statement, as Jenson says, "the bankruptcy of trinitarian meaning is complete."[15]

Thus Augustine begins his treatise on the Trinity by taking his understanding of the traditional doctrine as the norm, and then reading this norm back into the Scriptural evidence, thereby distorting Scripture. At precisely the points where the Scriptures jar against Augustine's doctrine and could therefore exert some corrective force, Augustine subjects their witness to his NeoPlatonically-influenced preference for divine unity. It is easy to see how later generations, following in the footsteps of the great Bishop of Hippo, were led further and further away from the genuine basis of the doctrine of the Trinity. Augustine had effectively kicked away the ladder by which the church, through the theology of Nicea and Athansius, had ascended to its doctrine in the first place.[16]

In the second section of *On the Trinity*, Books V-VII, Augustine works out a technical vocabulary capable of describing his doctrine of the Trinity. He does this in dialogue with earlier writers, but strikes out significantly on his own as well.[17] Because of his peculiar emphasis on the divine unity, and his disregard for the historical details of revelation, Augustine is forced to invent a few new ways of speaking about the persons of the Trinity. First, he must deal with the issue of the sending of the Son and the Spirit. Before Augustine,

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[13] Hence Harnack's famous judgement, "Augustine only gets beyond modalism by the mere assertion that he does not wish to be a Modalist," in *History of Dogma* IV, p. 131.

[14] Lombard, *Sentences* 3:1.3

[15] Robert W. Jenson, *The Triune Identity* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1982), 127.

[16] Thus with Augustine's doctrine of the Trinity we are dealing with "a reversion to pre-Nicene thinking." Jenson, p. 117 and also 127.

[17] Augustine's dependence on the Cappadocian Fathers is treated in Eugene TeSelle, *Augustine The Theologian* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1970), and also in John Edward Sullivan, *The Image of God* (Dubuque: The Priory Press, 1963)

the sendings of the Son and Spirit were conceived along the lines of the historical narrative in the New Testament. That is, the Son became flesh and was born, and after his ascension the Spirit descended. But because Arians had argued that the one who is sent must be inferior to the one who sends,[18] Augustine felt compelled to explain the missions of the Son and Spirit in a new way. Rather than defining them as the actual historical appearances of the persons, Augustine defines the divine missions as inter-trinitarian processions, or relationships of origin timelessly present in God. For the second person of the Trinity, then, "to be sent is to be known to proceed from the Father."[19] But "to proceed" is itself understood in an altogether timeless way, having nothing to do with the incarnation. In this way, Augustine develops a sharp distinction between visible and invisible missions, or as the terms would come to be rigorously formulated in the scholastic period, between missions and processions.

Thus the basis of the doctrine of the Trinity is no longer to be found in the revealed dispensation of the Gospel. Instead, the reality of the Trinity is hidden deep within the Godhead itself, in a secret communion of internal relations and coinherences. There are in God "subsistent relations," modes of self-relatedness which are called persons. These relations are, of course, a mystery, so hidden from our understanding as to be invisible. It is a fundamental axiom of Augustine's doctrine that the Trinity which is God acts indivisibly toward all things outside itself, having only one single relationship to creatures. "The Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit is one Beginning in respect to the creature, as also one Creator and one God."[20] So the real threeness of God is known only to God, and makes no practical difference outside of God. God is revealed as Father, Son, and Spirit in order that we can know the Trinity does exist, but the revelation is somewhat arbitrary. As Robert W. Jenson says, "It is the visible missions which are the saving history, but the visible missions, so far

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[18]C. M. LaCugna refers to a kind of naive subordinationism inherent in the economy of salvation. While this subordinationism must be overcome theologically, it must first be taken seriously. *God For Us* p. 27.

[19]*On the Trinity* 4.20

[20]*On the Trinity* 5:14 Harnack paraphrases, "The Trinity...is apprehended in the strictest unity; *it is the creator*. It is really one person; the 'persons,' as Augustine teaches us in other writings, are *inner* phases (moments) in the *one* God; they have no cosmological import." (emphases in the original) History of Dogma V, p. 236.

from themselves being the processions, cannot even, according to Augustine, unambiguously reveal them."[21] The whole Trinity, after all, fashions the flesh of the Son, the dove of the Spirit, and the voice of the Father. Three men appeared to Abraham, but the entire Trinity could have been in each of them, just so long as there were three of them to give us the right clue. This is more than a little perplexing.

Augustine recapitulates in his terminology what he had already done in his exegesis: he accounts for the Trinity by keeping two sets of books. In one he records the processions inside the ontological Trinity, and in the other he lists the events of the economy of salvation. He views these two realms as corresponding in an arbitrary fashion, not necessarily connected to each other causally or expressively or in any other way. He establishes, if not modalism, then at least a kind of trinitarian epiphenomenalism. This double bookkeeping begun by Augustine was the beginning of the end for the doctrine of the Trinity. It isolated the doctrine from salvation and all other elements of Christian life, making it essentially a superfluous speculative filigree. A tangle of difficult terms were developed to describe the various components of the doctrine, and those few intellectual christians who felt specially called to contemplate the secrets within the Trinity had to master the distinctions between persons, essences, missions, processions, subsistent relations, appropriations, coinherences and interpenetrations. This obscure mathematical terminology, scholastic in the pejorative sense, became a harsh taskmaster which did not even pay off, since the outward acts of the Trinity are indivisible anyway, and everything, including the history of our salvation and the events of Jesus' life, was seen as an outward act of the Trinity.

Thus the doctrine of the Trinity became a mystery, a revealed mystery. In the past, the Trinity had been called a mystery because it concerned the unfathomable depths of salvation. Athanasius, as we have seen, employed a trinitarian analysis of the gospels as the authoritative explanation of how salvation was accomplished in Christ. Augustine severed the connection between salvation and the Trinity, though, and now the doctrines seemed completely unrelated. Once the Trinity ceased to be the mystery of salvation, it became a

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[21]Jenson, p. 128

mystery of obscurity. As Ted Peters points out, theologians ever since have been able to excuse doctrinal laziness by spinning out contradictions ("paradoxes") and blaming the confusion on the mystery of God's being. This amounts to "theological sleight of hand"[22] whereby the mysteriousness of the Godhead is brought in to cover for unclear theological statements: "Of course you can't understand what I'm saying, I'm talking about God!" At any rate, Augustine put himself in a peculiar predicament. The doctrine of the Trinity as he taught it had absolutely no explanatory power for the Christian life. What had been the greatest interpretive key for salvation now needed to be interpreted; the explanation required explanation.

This is the internal logic of Augustine's doctrine of the Trinity which led him to develop what would become the most famous part of his treatise, the psychological analogies for the Trinity found in the third section, Books VIII-XV   Alienated from the economy of redemption, the doctrine of the Trinity could only be explicated by analogy if it was to have any contact at all with the Christian life. Accordingly, Augustine sets out to "invoke the everlasting light, that He may illuminate our darkness, and that we may see in ourselves, as much as we are permitted, the image of God."[23] Catherine Mowry LaCugna has pointed out that this part of the treatise brings out "the soteriological dimension" of Augustine's doctrine, which is "a program of contemplation through which every Christian can be united with the Trinity in whose image we are created."[24] This path to salvation through contemplation is, not surprisingly, rather NeoPlatonic. In Augustine's theology there is no compelling reason to understand the Trinity in relation to the history of salvation, so it is cut off from its authentic roots and grafted onto a NeoPlatonic mysticism.

Augustine's work was so brilliant, in its failures no less than its successes[25] that it

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[22]Ted Peters, *God as Trinity* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1993), 16.

[23]*On the Trinity* IX:2.

[24]LaCugna, 91.

[25]Jenson describes how Augustine's mishandling of the Trinity's relation to salvation history led him to formulate, almost accidentally, the dialectical unity of the human soul, and the distinction between the conscious and the unconscious. Thus his mistake nourished western culture for millenia. Find and footnote.

determined the course of trinitarian theology for more than a thousand years. The scholastic doctrine of the Trinity, especially as expressed in Aquinas, is basically an elaboration and refinement of the Augustinian approach. The scholastic doctrine of the Trinity developed Augustinian thought in two ways which were especially harmful to the vitality of the doctrine. First, the interpersonal relationships which define, or are even constitutive of, the persons of the Trinity were increasingly described as inscrutable relations of origin. Thus the relationship of origin proper to the son Son is begottenness, and that proper to the Spirit is spiration (mutually spirated from Father and Son), and both are generated, or proceed, from the unbegotten Father. The concentration on the relations of origin eclipsed all other relations, emptying the ongoing life of the Trinity of its significance and flattening the doctrine to a taxonomy of beginnings. This led to the second development, the considerable widening of the gap between the temporal missions and the eternal processions of the persons. The patient scholastics offered elaborate descriptions of each mission and each procession, distinguishing them from each other carefully.[26] Thus the history of salvation on the one hand and the eternal nature of God on the other no longer stood in a direct and unequivocal relation to each other.

The Trinity and Historical Revelation

That such a sundering of our knowledge of the Trinity from the life of Christ was impossible in the theology of Athanasius should be evident from the account of his basic commitments given in chapters three and four. Athanasius based all his thought on the revelation of God in Christ, and made the incarnation his starting point for all doctrines. His systematization and elaboration of this theological method, as described in this paper, is one of the most important developments in the history of theology, but it has gone largely undocumented because it was not accompanied with the fireworks of polemical rhetoric which characterized much of the fourth century. While Athanasius was launching rockets at

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[26]In this overview I have in mind chiefly the treatise on the Trinity in the *Prima Pars* of Aquinas' *Summa Theologia*, which is surely a fair example of scholastic thought at its highest. Nevertheless, these few remarks are not intended as a study of Thomistic trinitarianism.

the Arians, he was also laying the foundation for a new kind of systematic theology;

salvation-historical trinitarianism. Charles Kannengiesser has described this methodological

priority of the incarnation, and the attendant christological concentration, as Athanasius'

"fundamental intuition:"

> Although Athanasius changed his technical terminology several times, he
> remained faithful throughout his life to this fundamental intuition: that which is
> first in the exposition of the Christian faith is not God as such, nor the
> universe in its divine origin, but the historical event of salvation accomplished
> in Christ.[27]

Theology has taken a long Augustinian detour to return to this insight, but is at last returning.

In recent years, theologians from many traditions have been coming to the same basic

conclusion: the historical revelation of God in Christ is the only sufficient foundation for the

doctrine of the Trinity. The striking similarities between Athanasius' insights and certain

twentieth-century theological projects does not escape Kannengiesser: "I would not like to

anticipate in Athanasius a Karl Barth or a Pannenberg, but Athanasian Christocentrism

remains an astonishing innovation in the context of the ancient theological tradition of

Alexandria."[28] One can almost picture the careful historian rubbing his eyes to make sure he

is not mistaken in seeing so close a connection. A less cautious, but no less insightful

comparison between Athanasius and Barth can be found in two articles published by T. F.

Torrance on the centennial of Barth's birth.[29]

The work of thinkers like Jürgen Moltmann and Walter Kasper, to name only two of

the most prominent writers, is thoroughly informed by a concentration on the details of the

historical revelation of God in Christ as the basis of trinitarian theology. The title of Kasper's

book, *The God of Jesus Christ*,[30] encapsulates the entire approach quite nicely: the Christian

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[27]Charles Kannengiesser, "Athanasius of Alexandria and the Foundation of Traditional Christology," *Theological Studies* 34 (1973), 112.

[28]*ibid.*

[29]"The Legacy of Karl Barth (1886-1986)," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 39 (1986), 289-308; and "Karl Barth and the Latin Heresy," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 39 (1986), 461-482.

[30]Walter Kasper, *The God of Jesus Christ* (New York: Crossroad, 1992).

doctrine of God is based on what we can know about God from the Christ event. Moltmann's theological project is committed to scrutinizing the events of the revelation with incredible care, bringing a trinitarian analysis to bear on them. His ability to render a christological reading of the Trinity and a pneumatological history of Christ has enriched contemporary theology greatly. Probably no one has carried forward the Athanasian ability to study the life of Christ and ask "what is the Trinity doing?" better than Moltmann.[31] So far there is no evidence that Moltmann has drawn directly from Athanasius for resources.

Moltmann has in fact often used the early fathers as something of a foil against which to define his own views. In one such case, he has articulated the widespread complaint that classical Christology was so concerned with questions of the composition of the God-Man that it ignored the actual earthly ministry of the Lord, and his message. He laments that in the Apostolic and Nicene Creeds, "there is either nothing at all, or really no more than a comma, between 'and was made man, he suffered' or 'born' and 'suffered'"[32] Moltmann and others have attempted to reappropriate the theological significance of the ministry and teaching of Christ. Athanasius' central intuition of the saving efficacy of the entire life of Christ provides an ideal foundation from which to begin such a project. His vigorous restatement of the Adam-christology and recapitulation ideas of Irenaeus is perfectly in line with Moltmann's attempts to draw out the significance of the life of Christ for all types of human experience, including fetal life and old age. That Athanasius' thought tends naturally in that direction is evident from the fact that he was able to draw out the theological significance of Christ's miracles. His insight into the correspondence between the miracles of Christ and the universal work of the Logos is a rich area which deserves greater study. So far, only C. S. Lewis has made much of it, and that in popular works which did not attempt to push the analysis any deeper into the nature of the manifestation of the Trinity in the ministry and message of Christ. Combining the Athanasian understanding of the miracles with a fully-

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[31] Any of his recent writings could be cited, but see especially *The Trinity and the Kingdom* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1981), *The Way of Jesus Christ* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1990), and *The Spirit of Life* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992)

[32] *The Way of Jesus Christ* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1990), 150.

developed doctrine of the Spirit would take the conversation to the next level and yield abundant insights into the trinitarian meaning of Christ's earthly ministry.

One of the few living theologians who shows signs of having given Athanasius a careful and independent reading is Wolfhart Pannenberg. Pannenberg's appreciation of the *Contra Arianos* is especially pronounced, and from his interaction with Athanasius Pannenberg has developed a revolutionary understanding of the mutual reciprocity of the trinitarian persons. He describes this insight as the most important argument of Athanasius: that the Father is not the Father without the Son, and therefore the two persons are mutually and reciprocally differentiated.[33] This understanding banishes the subordination of the Son and Spirit to the Father, an error which has threatened trinitarianism with lopsidedness since its beginnings. The thesis of the mutual reciprocity of all three persons has not yet yielded all of its explanatory power for systematic theology, but Pannenberg has moved a good distance down that path. Such an understanding is best viewed as a radicalization of the *homoousios*.

Another thesis distinctive of Pannenberg's thought is that the second person of the Trinity should not be thought of primarily as an eternal Son, but as Jesus Christ. The inclusion of the actual earthly Jesus in the Trinity proper is of course a problematic proposition, but it has much to commend it, not least that it brings to life so many otherwise dormant passages of Scripture. Pannenberg, citing Athanasius, has introduced into trinitarian theology a whole new set of ways to understand the self-differentiation of the three persons, on the basis of Jesus' self-distinction from the Father on one hand and the Spirit on the other. Making this the locus of attention brings into play Jesus' sayings about the Father giving authority and the kingdom to the Son, and Paul's teaching about the Son returning it to the Father.[34] This is a considerable enrichment of trinitarian thought, laying a much broader foundation than the mere relationships of origin which dominated scholastic theology. Again, this way of thinking about the Trinity is in its infancy, since it has been neglected for most of the years between Athanasius and Pannenberg.

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[33]Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology* Volume I (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), 271. See also p. 312 for further implications of this real trinitarian reciprocity.

[34]*ibid*, 322

Oikonomia and Theologia

Closely connected to the rediscovery of the historical revelation in Christ as the foundation of the doctrine of the Trinity is the discussion of theological methodology which takes as its primary categories the distinction between *oikonomia*, God's economy of salvation, and *theologia*, the realm of propositions concerning God's nature. The point of departure for this discussion is what has come to be called Rahner's Rule, that "the economic Trinity is the immanent Trinity, and vice versa." Rahner came to this insight through a complex analysis and critique of Thomist trinitarianism, but he could have read it right out of Athanasius. Rahner's Rule has become an almost universally accepted starting point for trinitarian theology in recent years. It is becoming so widely accepted that it is difficult to explain to students why there was ever a failure to understand that it was true. Recently, Catherine Mowry LaCugna has advanced a step beyond Rahner's Rule by proposing that *oikonomia* is *theologia* and vice versa.[35] As LaCugna develops this revolutionary proposal in her book *God For Us*, it promises to reunite trinitarian theology and spirituality in a powerful way. Her thesis is articulated quite thoroughly, beginning with a meticulous reading of the history of doctrine. In the first chapter, she describes how the decision of the Council of Nicea began the process of driving a wedge between *oikonomia* and *theologia*, and thus set the doctrine of the Trinity up for a fall. The student of Athanasius cannot help wishing that LaCugna had given more attention to the post-Nicene writings of the Council's greatest defender. Unfortunately she seems to rely rather heavily on the tendentious presentation of the Arian crisis found in Hanson's *Search for the Christian Doctrine of God*, and has little interest in the theology of Athanasius on its own terms.

If LaCugna or a similarly gifted theologian were to examine Athanasius for his position on the distinction between *oikonomia* and *theologia*, it is not altogether clear what conclusions would be reached. On the one hand, the theology of Athanasius as presented in this thesis is clearly on the side of a close linking of the two; and in fact Athanasius can be

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[35]Catherine Mowry LaCugna, God For Us: The Trinity and Christian Life (San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1991). Ted Peters has a good summary and discussion of her position in *God as Trinity* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1993).

seen as the first theologian to articulate and systematize the *oikonomia* as the foundation of all *theologia.* On the other hand, Athanasius scholars such as Bouyer and Florovsky understand Athanasius' conception of the distinction between the two realms rather differently:

> Père Louis Bouyer, in his admirable book on St. Athanasius, has rightly stated that, in the Discourses, St. Athanasius forces the reader "to contemplate the Divine life in God Himself, before it is communicated to us" This was, according to Père Bouyer, the main emphasis in the book. In this perspective one can see the radical difference between the Divine and the creaturely. One sees the absoluteness of the Divine transcendence: God does not need his creatures. His own Being is perfect and complete in itself. And it is this inner Being of God that is disclosed in the mystery of the Trinity. But the actual mystery is double. There is, indeed, the mystery of the Divine Being. But there is another concomitant mystery, the mystery of Creation, the mystery of the Divine oikonomia. No real advance can be achieved in the realm of "Theology" until the realm of "Oikonomia" had been properly ordered.[36]

This way of describing the difference between *oikonomia* and *theologia* is precisely what LaCugna opposes. If Florovsky is right in his reading, then Athanasius can scarcely be considered the forerunner of the contemporary renewal of trinitarianism. The evidence necessary for answering this question adequately has not yet been collated by Athanasian scholars. The understanding of Athanasius' theology offered in this thesis can be considered an argument in favor of the consonance of his thought with recent developments, including LaCugna's proposal. But serious questions remain unanswered, and in fact can barely be formulated correctly at this stage. It is not altogether clear that Athanasius would be comfortable with the way in which the Immanent Trinity is drawn into almost necessary contact with the world in recent theology. He was, as Florovsky points out, adamant about keeping "the divine life in itself, before it is communicated to us," on the far side of the *chorismos* from all creaturely reality, and might not look with favor on some of the implications recently drawn out of the Rahnerian approach. As a fourth-century Greek theologian, Athanasius would not have let go of the idea of divine aseity without being thoroughly persuaded by Scriptural testimony.

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[36] George Florovsky, "The Concept of Creation in Saint Athanasius," *Studia Patristica* VI (1962), 54.

A similarly ambiguous question in the interpretation of Athanasius concerns his thoughts on God and temporality. Pannenberg, who as we have seen draws heavily on Athanasius' theology of the Trinity, nevertheless admits that Athanasius' views on God's relation to time are inadequate by modern standards. He adduces a number of relevant texts in which Athanasius clearly asserts God's immutability, and the freedom of the entire Trinity from anything like change or becoming.[37] Pannenberg points out that such a distinction "makes trinitarian theology one-sided and detaches it from its biblical basis."[38] But T. F Torrance has attempted to draw out of Athanasius' theology some rather different implications, asserting that for Athanasius the creation and the incarnation are events "which had not happened before, even for God."[39] Torrance claims that this teaching, that "something new has taken place in God," is "held together with an immense sense of the unchangeableness of God," and that in the face of such a mystery "we may speak only with reverence, and awe."[40] Torrance cites a large number of texts which are supposed to support his claims, but it is not at all clear that they do so. It may well be that he has grasped a subtle movement in Athanasius' theology, and that here too we may find resources for further insights into the workings of God in Christ. But until a stronger case is made, the preponderance of the evidence seems to be with Pannenberg's reading of Athanasius, and thus the question of temporality is a point at which it must be admitted that Athanasius' theology is out of phase with the contemporary concensus.

The Founder of Christian Theology

Athanasius was an Alexandrian theologian, but he was not content to follow the Alexandrian tradition. In fact, his dissatisfaction with certain tendencies in that tradition led him to critically revise the logos-doctrine, the central theological category of the traditon. In

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[37]Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology* Volume I (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), 333.

[38]*ibid*

[39]T. F Torrance, *Theology in Reconciliation* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975). 224

[40]*ibid*, 223.

so doing, he transformed the entire nature of Christian theology. He had available to him a clear model for what a comprehensive theological system should look like in Origen's *On First Principles*. Although he never attacked Origen, or any of his predecessors,[41] he resolutely avoided doing theology in the way that they had. Kannengiesser calls Athanasius' departure from the Origenian model an "innovation which shook the foundation of the traditional structures but respected the language and authority of the tradition."[42] The Athanasian transformation of the Logos doctrine was the first step in the development of a new kind of self-conscious, forward-looking systematic theology: salvation-historical trinitarianism. Athanasius centered all of his thinking on a soteriological and trinitarian analysis of the life of Christ. He expressed this analysis most systematically in the form of comprehensive doctrines of the incarnation and the Trinity. Later theologians followed his lead in organizing all doctrine around an incarnational center; for instance Gregory of Nyssa's *Great Catechism* and the works of Ambrose of Milan and Cyril of Alexandria.[43] Contemporary theology is returning, after a long detour, to the trinitarian insights developed by Athanasius. The foundation laid by Athanasius, it seems, is the most secure basis for systematic theology even in our own age. It is not going too far to call the first theoretician of the connection between the life of Christ and the doctrine of the Trinity the founder of Christian theology, or as Möhler said "the father of the church's theology; that is, not of the church's faith, which comes only from Christ, but of the sharp and precise presentation and development of this faith in conceptual form."[44]

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[41]Notice his reverential tone in speaking of Origen, "that labor-loving man," in *De Decretis* 27.

[42]Charles Kannengiesser, "Athanasius of Alexandria and the Foundation of Traditional Christology," *Theological Studies* 34 (1973), 113.

[43]*ibid.* 107.

[44]J. A. Möhler, *Athanasius der Grosse und die Kirche seiner Zeit* (Mainz, 1827), 272. Quoted in Friedrich Lauchert, *Die Lehre Des Heiligen Athanasius des Grossen* (Leipzig: Gustav Fock Verlag, 1895), 4.

Appendix 1
Athanasius' Words in Christ's Mouth

Athanasius was a bold exegete who understood that responsible theological exegesis means asserting that it is possible to know what God means by a given passage of Scripture. Far from shrinking from this daunting claim, Athanasius went a step further and even dared to paraphrase what he thought Jesus intended his words to mean. He put these assertions of doctrine in the mouth of Christ, usually introduced by a phrase like "What is the Lord saying but this?" These first-person structures are not common in Athanasius, but when they occur they are expected to carry a lot of weight in the course of the argument. I reproduce them here, out of their contexts, because they seem to me to serve as a fairly reliable and certainly instructive summary of Athanasius' theology.

*De Decretis 21. "I am from the Father, and inseparable from Him."

*Contra Arianos I:46. "I, being the Father's Word, I give to Myself, when becoming man, the Spirit; and Myself, become man, do I sanctify in Him, that henceforth in Me, who am Truth (for 'Thy Word is Truth'), all may be sanctified."

*Contra Arianos II:47. "My Father hath prepared for Me a body, and has created Me for men in behalf of their salvation."

*Contra Arianos II:71. "The Father has made Me into flesh, that I might be man."

*Contra Arianos II.79. "It is made securely, for according to the will of my father, I am imaged in each work, for my name was made in the works. The Lord created me for the works, for my impress is in them; and I have thus condescended for the framing of all things."

*Contra Arianos II.81. "All things took place in Me and through Me, and when there was need that Wisdom should be created in the works, in My Essence indeed I was with the Father, but by a condescension to things originate, I was disposing over the works My own impress, so that the whole world as being in one body, might not be at variance but in concord with itself."

*Contra Arianos III:21. "By Our unity may they also be so one with each other, as We are one in nature and truth; for otherwise they could not be one, except by learning unity in Us."

*Contra Arianos III:22. "And Thou Father in Me; for I am Thy Word, and since Thou art in Me, because I am Thy Word, and I in them because of the body, and because of Thee **the salvation of men is perfected in Me**, therefore I ask that they also may become one, according to the body that is in Me and according to its perfection; that they too may become perfect, having oneness with It, and having become one in It; that, as if all were carried by Me, all may be one body and one spirit, and may grow up into a perfect man."

Contra Arianos III:23. "As Thou in Me, and I in Thee. And when they shall be so perfected, then the world knows that Thou hast sent Me, for unless I had come and borne this their body, no one of them had been perfected, but one and all had remained corruptible. Work Thou then in them, O Father, and as Thou hast given to Me to bear this, grant to them Thy Spirit, that they too in It may become one, and may be perfected in Me. For their perfecting shews that Thy Word has sojourned among them; and the world seeing them perfect and full of God, will believe altogether that Thou has sent Me, and I have sojourned here. For whence is this their perfecting, but that I, Thy Word, having borne their body, and become man, have perfected the work, which Thou gavest Me, O Father? And the work is perfected, because men, redeemed from sin, no longer remain dead; but being deified, have in each other, by looking at Me, the bond of charity."

*Contra Arianos III:49. "For you know not [what hour the Lord doth come]; but I, the Lord, know when I come, though the Arians do not wait for Me, who am the Word of the Father."

Appendix 2
What is the Center of Athanasius' Thought?

One goal of this thesis has been to demonstrate that the theology of Athanasius deserves to be considered as a kind of systematic theology, even if the system is latent in the writings and requires a constructive effort to draw it out. This appendix contains a series of quotations, arranged in rough chronological order, in which various writers attempt to indicate precisely what is central in the theology of Athanasius. Also included are descriptions of the extent to which Athanasius can be considered a systematic thinker. Some of the writers have spent decades studying Athanasius, others are interested in him only incidentally. The fact that they offer a variety of different answers suggests that Athanasius has frequently been misunderstood. But the fact that none of these authors can resist making the attempt to state in a few sentences the center of Athanasius' theology bears witness to the profound coherence and interconnectedness of his ideas. Very few scholars, on the other hand, feel compelled to offer pithy statements of what is *new* or *distinctive* in Athanasius. Obviousy Athanasius gives the impression, not of an innovator or daring speculative virtuoso, but of a thinker who has taken Christian doctrine and ordered its various propositions around what is absolutely indispensable, with a powerful concentration and focus on that vital center. Some of the following judgements are more correct than others, but they are all instructive.

So wurde Athanasius der Vater der kirchlichen Theologie, d.h. nicht des Kirchenglaubens, der nur von Christus kommt, sondern der schärfern und genauern Darstellung und Entwickelung dieses Glaubens im Begriffe. --J. A. Möhler, *Athanasius der Grosse und die Kirche seiner Zeit* (Mainz, 1827), 272. Quoted in Friedrich Lauchert, *Die Lehre Des Heiligen Athanasius des Grossen* (Leipzig: Gustav Fock Verlag, 1895), 4.

Athanasius was not a systematic theologian: that is he produced no many-sided theology like that of Origen or Augustine. He had no interest in theological speculation, none of the instincts of a schoolman or philosopher. His theological greatness lies in his firm grasp of *soteriological* principles, in his resolute subordination of everything else, even the formula ὁμοούσιος, to the central fact of Redemption, and to what that fact implied as to the Person of the Redeemer. He goes back from the Logos of the philosophers to the Logos of S. John, from the God of the philosophers to God in Christ reconciling the world to Himself. ... To Athanasius the Incarnation of the Son of God, and especially his Death on the Cross, is the centre of faith and theology. Archibald Robertson, "Prolegomena" in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, second series, volume 4 (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1891), lxix.

"Cur Deus homo?" Diese Frage, die den lebendigen Mittelpunkt der ganzen athanasianischen Theologie bildet, ist vor Allem schon in der Schrift De Incarnatione etc......--Friedrich Lauchert, *Die Lehre Des Heiligen Athanasius des Grossen* (Leipzig: Gustav Fock Verlag,1895), iii. 110.

Darum eben ist Athanasius der wahre christliche Theologe, weil ihm das Christentum nicht ein totes System von Lehr-und Glaubenssätzen ist, sondern der lebendige Glaube an Jesus Christus; die gottmenschliche Person des Erlösers ist der Mittelpunkt, auf den Alles hinführt, und der wiederum Licht ausstrahlt auf alles Andere. Darum kann auch die letzte Aufgabe der christlichen Theologie in ihrem Wesen keine andere sein, als die Erkenntnis, soweit wir darin einzudringen vermögen, der Person und des Erlösungswerkes Jesu Christi; im Lichte der göttlichen Offenbarung; damit steht alles Andere, was die christliche Dogmatik zu behandeln hat, in der innigsten Verbindung, als Voraussetzung (unter diesen Gesichtspunkt fällt auch die ganze Lehre von Gott dem Dreieinigen) oder fortdauernde Wirkung des Erlösungswerkes, und kann nicht losgetrennt davon und ohne Rücksicht darauf behandelt werden --Friedrich Lauchert, *Die Lehre Des Heiligen Athanasius des Grossen* (Leipzig: Gustav Fock Verlag,1895), 1-2.

At this point Athanasius gives to his description of the Godhead that *ethical* turn which colours his whole theory of the Incarnation, and is specially characteristic of the catholic conception of God which he represents. The goodness of God --that is his keynote. Robert L. Ottley, *The Doctrine of the Incarnation*, Vol. II (New York: Macmillan, 1896), 26.

This chapter summarizes Athanasius' teaching as to the purpose of the Incarnation; th thought of redemption is the keynote of his theology. His central idea is that by the Incarnation the Divine Being Himself entered into the world of humanity, in order to fulfil its obligations, and to lift it into the life of fellowship with God --in a word, to 'deify' human nature. It is in this respect that Athanasius seems to advance beyond some of the ante-Nicene apologists. They regarded the Logos philosophically as teh creative and life-giving principle of the universe. Athanasius looks upon the Logos as essentially the Redeemer and Saviour; the philosophical standpoint gives way to the religious and ethical interest. Robert L. Ottley, *The Doctrine of the Incarnation*, Vol. II (New York: Macmillan, 1896), 29-30.

Athanasius, though an Alexandrian, was not a speculative theologian, but a great Christian pastor....Redemption was the centre of his teaching. As far as Athanasius' theology was systematic, it was a systematizing of Scripture. ...Athanasius' own teaching is best described as a direct and complete repudiation of the teaching of Arius. He denies *seriatim* all Arius' propositions. --W Emery Barnes, "Athanasius" in *Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics*, James Hastings, gen. ed. Volume 3, 170-171.

He immediately proceeds further, to center his doctrine round the supreme theological truth, the dogma of the divinity of the Son and of the Incarnation. This he does in the second part of the Discourse on the Incarnation already referred to....The theme of the discourse is the communication of virtue, power, and sanctity, in a word, of supernatural life, which takes place between the Christians and Christ and manifests the union that exists between the Head and the members; in other words, it is the unity of the Mystical Body. --E. Mersch, *The Whole Christ* (London: Dennis Dobson Ltd, 1938), 265-266.

The center of the theology of Athanasius: we must live a genuinely divine life, and this life is literally the life of Christ in us. --Louis Bouyer, *L'Incarnatione et l'Eglise-Corps du Christ dans la théologie de saint Athanase* (Paris: Editions du Cerf, 1943), 46-47. Cited in in Christopher Smith, "The Life-of-Christ Structure of Athanasius' De Incarnatione Verbi," *Patristic and Byzantine Review* 10 (1991), 24.

St. Athanasius was on fire with the love of Christ. ...His love of Christ is the key to his whole life and also to his writings. Christ, the Word incarnate, occupies the central position in the doctrinal system of this celebrated Doctor of the Church, as all writers on Athanasius observe. It is true, he did not write a Summa of Christology or of theology; however, from his writings we can build up a rather complete system of religious thought in his day. In that system Christ, under one aspect or another, is always in the central place. --Dominic Unger, "A Special Aspect ofAthanasian Soteriology," *Franciscan Studies* 6 (1946), 30.

St. Athanasius, too, has his pet idea, deification (θεοποιησις). ... Time and again he expresses this fact of our deification; it is the heart of his Christology; it is his mode of expressing the doctrine of the Mystical Union of all in Christ. It, moreover, expresses concisely but completely the Savior's role in the universe. --Dominic Unger, "A Special Aspect ofAthanasian Soteriology," *Franciscan Studies* 6 (1946), 42.

At this moment of apparent triumph Athanasius sets out the central theme of the Alexandrian Christology at its best. His chief concern is with the power of the new life in Christ which we share; his divinity makes his life might and his humanity makes it ours. Edward R. Hardy, "Introduction" in *Christology of the Later Fathers*, Library of Christian Classics (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1954), 18.

His chief concern is with the power of the new life in Christ which we share; his divinity makes his life might and his humanity makes it ours. Edward R. Hardy, "Introduction" in *Christology of the Later Fathers*, Library of Christian Classics (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1954), 18.

Now Athanasius is the most unitary theologian in history. It is this quality that scholars have so often mistaken for intellectual underdevelopment or even aridity, or other less pleasant characteristics. ...Athanasius is the theologian *par excellence* where, if one studies one part, one is committed to the whole; at any rate, specialisation is impossible until the overall position has been established. And it is this task that above all makes any treatment of Athanasius inordinately and uncontrollibly [sic] long. The outcome of all this is that there is, in an important sense, only one article that can be written about Athanasius and the Arian controversy. --J. A. B. Holland, "Athanasius versus Arius: What Now?" *Reformed Theological Review* 28 (1969), 17.

He never had time or opportunity for a dispassionate and systematic exposition. Moreover, the time for systems had probably not yet come. But there was a perfect consistency and coherenece in his theological views. His theological vision was sharp and well focused. His grasp of the problems was unusually sure and firm. In the turmoil of a heated debate he was able to discern clearly the real crux of the conflict. From tradition St. Athanasius inherited the catholic faith in the Divinity of the Logos. This faith was the true pivot of his theological thought. It was not enough to correct exegesis, to improve terminology, to remove misunderstandings. What needed correction in the age of St. Athanasius was the total theological perspective. --Georges Florovsky, Georges, Collected Works Vol. 8, *The Byzantine Fathers of the Fifth Century* (Vaduz: Buchervertriebsanstalt, 1987), 133-134. [1962]

The theology of Athanasius is based on the historical figure of Christ, the God-man and Savior. The trinitarian question of the generation and consubstantiality of the Son of God is for him primarily a Christological and soteriological problem. He is concerned not with speculation, but with living religious experience. --Georges Florovsky, Collected Works Vol. 7, *The Eastern Fathers of the Fourth Century* (Vaduz: Buchervertriebsanstalt, 1987), 42.

For Athanasius the origination of the world and its impression by the Word are not separated in time. He wants to stress the duality of creation, which has its own fluctuating and created nature, and also bears the preserving stamp of the Word through whom it exists. Thus, creation has both "nature" and "grace." Athanasius' system is built on the distinction and opposition of these two elements. --Georges Florovsky, Collected Works Vol. 7, *The Eastern Fathers of the Fourth Century* (Vaduz: Buchervertriebsanstalt, 1987), 44.

Athanasius was the first bishop and theologian of the early Church who attempted to *organize all Christian doctrine concerning the incarnation of God*. This contribution of systematic order directly influenced the Great Catechism of Gregory of Nyssa; it influenced Ambrose of Milan and Cyril of Alexandria. --Charles Kannengiesser, "Athanasius of Alexandria and the foundation of traditional christology," *Theological Studies* 34 (1973), 107.

In any case, the fundamental intuition of Athanasius over which no doubt could be
entertained and which motivates his entire refutation of Arianism is essentially
Christological. More than anything else, through all sorts of arguments whose
weaknesses are sometimes evident and whose development may appear quite clumsy,
Athanasius insists that the Arians are mistake in their concept of theology, because
they believe they are able to form a Christian idea of God by first developing in
isolation the theory of the divinity of the Father and the Son, without taking into
consideration right from the start the mystery of the incarnation of the Son. Although
Athanasius changed his technical terminology several times, he remained faithful
throughout his life to this fundamental intuition: that which is first in the exposition of
the Christian faith is not God as such, nor the universe in its divine origin, but the
historical event of salvation accomplished in Christ. --Charles Kannengiesser,
"Athanasius of Alexandria and the foundation of traditional christology," *Theological
Studies* 34 (1973), 112.

...Athanasius' theology, whose central insight is into the sharp distinction between God and
all other reality, and the consequent fragility of created being and its need for God to
intervene to rescue it. --Andrew Hamilton, "Narrative in the Theology of St.
Athanasius," *Colloquium* 10 (1977), 10.

The teaching of deification constitutes the primary and central idea of the whole theology of
St. Athanasius. --Constantine Tsirpanlis, "Aspects of Athanasian Soteriology," in
Greek Patristic Theology (New York: E.O. Press, 1979), 34.

The difficulty lies in the fact that the Western method of scholarship tends to search for a
central theme or a central point in every subject. Undoubtedly, this can lead to a
more concise understanding of the writing of any author, but if the writer himself did
not set out to follow such a central theme, this over-systematising approach can only
lead to a distorted understanding of the author in question. For in Athanasius we find
a writer who constantly repeats himself, and even apolgise for doing so. When we
read his writings we realise that he has his own method, which is particularly clear in
the three books known by their Latin titles as *Contra Gentes, De Incarnatione Verbi,*
and *Contra Arianos.* His method is first to trace a circle of ideas in reply to a
question or in defence of a particular point of doctrine. Then he enlarges the circle,
possibly repeating what he has already said, but adding new points, and he may go on
to construct a third circle where the early ideas recur once more. We might call it a
concentric style of writing, and the result is that Athanasios' writings are far from
systematic in the Western sense of the word, and always lack a single central point.
To discover his essential meaning we need to study the circles, not to search for the
centre, and this is true above all in *De Incarnatione Verbi.* --George Bebawi, "St.
Athanasios: the dynamics of salvation," *Sobornost* 8 (1986): 25.

Athanasius' theology remains strikingly coherent throughout his writings. It focuses on the
incarnation of God in Christ as the central principle of Christian theology. The Trinity
is truly known only in light of the gospel message. The incarnate Son of God
operates in divinizing humankind, which is saved by the Son from death and
corruption in conjuction with its own godlikeness. The mystery of Christ, revealed by
the New Testament,is actualized in the life of the church, in its official creed, in
baptism, in the Eucharist, and in the religious improvement of its members. --Charles
Kannengiesser, "Athanasius" in *Encyclopedia of Religion*, ed. Mircea Eliade (New
York: Macmillan, 1986), Vol. I, 479.

The *De Incarnatione* gives us the Christology of Athanasius in its pristine form. Here, we
find all the pricniples which he was to invoke and develop in later years, to unmask
and oppose the errors of Arius and to defend Nicene orthodoxy. As a work of
post-baptismal catechesis, the *De Incarnatione* clearly reveals Athanasius' basic
conviction that the Incarnation was the central mystery of Christianity. In the light of
that mystery, he could discuss creation, the fall, the saving work of Christ in the
passion, death, and resurrection. ... The theology of Athanasius is, clearly, a theology
of the Incarnation. In addition to the pre-Arian *De Incarnatione Dei Verbi*, the
Athanasian *corpus* reveals a perduring interest and reflection on the mystery of the
Word of God. --Agnes Cunningham, "The Witness From Alexandria: Athanasius
Contra Mundum," *Communio* 14 (1987), 413.

In the Father we have the Son: this is a summary of Athanasius' theology. R. P C. Hanson,
The Search for the Christian Doctrine of God (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1988), 426.

In making the incarnation the fact which determines his view of reality, rather than a fact
which has to be slotted into an *a priori* 'plausibility structure,' Athanasius stands
Christian theology and apologetic method in Alexandria on its head. ... But
Athanasius does not just *begin* his theology with the fact of the incarnation, and then
move on to discuss other issues; rather he allows its radical significance to percolate
through the whole of his understanding of man in his relationship to God, and it is
nowhere more radical than in his exposition of the doctrine of redemption. Trevor
Hart, "The Two Soteriological Traditions of Alexandria," *Evangelical Quarterly*
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