

ST. ATHANASIUS AND THE
REDEMPTIVE INCARNATION

by

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PREFACE

The mind understands by reducing the multiplicity it finds in the world to a unity proportionate to its own spiritual existence. This accounts for the systematization that occurs in both science and philosophy as these disciplines attempt to understand reality and put it into comprehensible manageability by making it one. Nevertheless, when man turns to God, he discovers a Being more simple than himself, and the process is reversed. By means of analogy and relation, he multiplies the oneness of God until he has some finite appreciation of the infinite transcendence of Being itself. The expansion, however, remains an instrumental construct at odds both with the simplicity of God and man, and in the end, it too must be contracted. This is why theology consistently turns back upon itself, and discovers that every advance is forever new and yet always the same.

As if the inadequacy introduced by the multiplicity of man's finite nature were not enough, he discovers that his understanding of the infinitely simple is further restricted by his own possession of that finite nature in the definite context of space and time. He is subject to the limitations of his age and culture, two dimensions into which he must transpose his comprehension, often at variance with other possessors of finite human nature. And finally, his own personal experience will be another limitation in comprehending the absolute.

No wonder then, that the mystery of the redemptive incarnation has been variously interpreted in the course of human history, finding

expression successively in terms of sacrifice, ransom, satisfaction, and again, sacrifice. This historical development is modified by the cultural context of East and West. Thus while none of the early Fathers stressed the sacrificial work of Christ the Priest, there developed in the East an idea of the mediation of Christ the Word which lent to theology a significant and subtle theory of divinization and placed redemption in the primary context of incorporation into divine life by an adoptive sonship. The West preferred to recognize the healing effect of elevating grace, because this culture was more aware of the solidarity men have with Adam and his sin.

In view of the limiting factors of nature, culture, and experience, it has always been difficult to appreciate this insight of divine incorporation as expressed by the Greek theologians. And yet in our own day, a new consciousness is emerging that promises a common perspective. The idea of the Church as the "people of God" represents a significant modification of the Western mentality by recognizing a prior and basic "ontic" reality which receives legalistic or jurisdictional organization. Similarly, the idea that this "people of God" is being assimilated in the paschal oblation of Christ represents a corresponding modification of the Eastern mentality by an explicit advertence to the sacrificial finality of the incarnation. These developments are due to the emerging theologies of the Mystical Body and the Resurrection.

Generalizations consistently run the risk of oversimplification, particularly when the subject is so close as to be contemporary. For this reason, the present study is no more than an approach to a re-evaluation of the soteriology of St. Athanasius; the suggestions advanced will be brief and tentative, and the emphasis will be on the traditional inter-

pretation to provide the organic continuity that alone can forestall the danger of reading more between the lines than is contained within them.

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ABBREVIATIONS

<u>c. Gentes</u>	<u>Oratio contra Gentes</u>
<u>de Inc.</u>	<u>Oratio de Incarnatione Verbi</u>
<u>de Decretis</u>	<u>De Decretis Concilii Nicaeni</u>
<u>ad Constantium</u>	<u>Apologia ad Constantium Imperatorem</u>
<u>de Fuga</u>	<u>Apologia pro Fuga Sua</u>
<u>c. Arianos</u>	<u>Orationes Adversus Arianos</u>
<u>ad Serapion</u>	<u>Ad Serapion Orationes</u>
<u>de Synodis</u>	<u>De Synodis Arimini et Seleucia</u>
<u>ad Antiochenos</u>	<u>Tomus ad Antiochenos</u>
<u>ad Afros</u>	<u>(Synodal Letter) ad Afros</u>
<u>ad Monachos</u>	<u>Historia Arianorum 'ad Monachos'</u>
<u>ad Episcopos Aegypti</u>	<u>Epistola ad Episcopos Aegypti et Libyae</u>

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ST. ATHANASIUS AND THE REDEMPTIVE INCARNATION

INTRODUCTION

Objective of the Study

A study of the soteriology of St. Athanasius is complicated by a number of very real factors. The first is the fact that his writings are not the fruit of deliberate and concentrated reflection,¹ but are called forth by the Arian controversy. He is constantly apologizing for the repetition that otherwise would not have occurred.² His work is a polemic, not a treatise. The second problem is his approach to redemption.

While the theology of original sin was being formulated in the West, the Eastern Fathers preferred to follow a different course, one that emphasized the coming to earth of the Son of God as a divinization of humanity. Central to their soteriology is the elevating rather than the healing effects of redemption. In addition, their anthropology takes account of the whole man rather than his separate "parts", so that their

¹Thus Archibald Robertson (ed.), St. Athanasius: Select Works and Letters, Vol. IV of the Select Library of Nicene and Post Nicene Fathers, ed. Philip Schaff and Henry Wace (2d Series, 14 vols.; New York: Scribner's Sons, 1903), p. lxvi: "Athanasius was not an author by choice. With the exception of the early apologetic tracts all the writings that he has left were drawn from him by the stress of theological controversy or by the necessities of his work as a Christian pastor. We have no systematic doctrinal treatise..." Another exception is the exegetical fragments.

²Cf. c. Arianos II, 80: "Moreover,...(for we must not shrink from repetition"; II, 22: "(For one must not mind saying often the same thing for religion's sake.)"; ad Serapion I, 27: "We must not mind repeating ourselves;" et passim.

concept of redemption is not dependent on a metaphysics of personality. This orientation is not entirely unlike the direction which characterizes much of our thinking today, and also suggests that perhaps what has been a problem in the past needn't have been an obstacle in appreciating the soteriology of St. Athanasius.

The similarity between the contemporary approach and that of these early Fathers can be seen in the thought of Karl Rahner, when he calls the Church "the enduring historical presence of the eschatologically triumphant grace of God and of Christ in the world for the individual."³ Behind the idea of "eschatologically triumphant grace" is an understanding of the incarnation as a divinization of humanity by which the Church is constituted the "people of God." The criticism levelled at this mentality as it is found in the Greek Fathers is that it involves the idealism of Plato's universals by supposing that the Word assumed "humanity". The corollary to this is that the sacrificial finality of the assumption is, at best, glossed over. Against this critique stands the theology of the "whole Christ" as proposed by Mersch, which involves a very real solidarity of all men with the God-man very much reminiscent of the Easterns, and very unlike the more familiar juridic conception. Mersch would say:

In reality there was not an Incarnation that was later followed by a redemption; there was a redemptive Incarnation, and a redemption through the Incarnation.⁴

Nor does he neglect the death, or what is commonly called the "atonement proper": "As born Redeemer, He bears in Himself the exigency of the

³Karl Rahner, "The Church and the Sacraments," Inquiries (New York: Herder and Herder, 1964), pp. 204-05.

⁴Emile Mersch, The Theology of the Mystical Body (St. Louis, Mo.: B. Herder, 1951), p. 279.

redemptive death from the moment of His birth."⁵ Similar examples may be found in Rahner and Durrwell.⁶

All of which suggests that the expression of Athanasius "For He was made man that we might be made God"⁷ is very much to the point. But related to this is the difficulty the Western mind encounters in his theory of creation. Whether or not the redemptive Incarnation includes the death, here the question is rather what does it accomplish. Now the criticism is that he sets the atonement in the perspective of restoration rather than reconciliation. Thus it seems to be "metaphysical" or "physical" rather than ethical, a direct result of interpreting it on the basis of creation. Against this criticism is the unavoidable fact that men are sinners, and, according to the Scriptures, do need the grace of God. And yet, there are real difficulties with his thought on this point. He divides man's endowments between nature and grace without clearly separating the two principles of division. Reason ends up assigned to grace,⁸ while sanctity remains largely a matter of nature.⁹

The ramifications of this extend in all directions, affecting his notions of sin, guilt, death, judgement, and redemption itself. Sin is an alienation, but from life rather than God, and guilt is lost in a

⁵Ibid., p. 281.

⁶Karl Rahner, op. cit., p. 196; F. X. Durrwell, The Resurrection (London: Sheed and Ward Stagbook, 1964), pp. 53ff.

⁷de Inc., 54.3.

⁸As if men are rational dependent on their being adopted by God. Discussed below, pp. 32

⁹The original state of blessedness, wherein man contemplated the Word, is interrupted when man falls away from this contemplation thereby introducing the dissolution that was his by nature. Sanctity thereupon becomes a matter of restoring a dissolving nature. Discussed below, pp. 38 ff.

pre-occupation with corruption;¹⁰ death is the final tragedy to be avoided at all costs,¹¹ judgement is related to the corruption of nature rather than the alienation from God;¹² and redemption is a restoration rather than a reconciliation.¹³

While the theology of Athanasius can admit these points, it should be noted that they present a problem to the Western peoples and do not necessarily characterize the thrust of his Eastern argument.

¹⁰"For this cause, then, death having gained upon men, and corruption abiding upon them..." (de Inc. 6.1.). It is death, or separation from life, that falls on man after the fall, and thus he is in a state of corruption rather than guilt.

¹¹The panegyric in par. 27 of the de Inc., in which Athanasius describes Christians as eagerly "rushing" into death, indicates there are two levels in his thought. On the one hand, death is the judgement following our transgression in which sense it falls victim in Christ's body (cf. de Inc., 22.4.; c. Arianos II, 8); here it is the direct result of sin (cf. c. Arianos I, 51) and the arch enemy extrinsic to our nature (to Athanasius, "nature graced," cf. de Inc. 4) and to be avoided. (Inasmuch as called "from nothing" our natural state is to be mortal, but as a matter of fact, God willed that man "should abide in incorruption" (Ibid), it is opposed to our nature.) The metaphysical orientation here is explained in that the context is his theory of creation. On the other hand, "death, it is true, is the common end of all men" (ad Episcopos Aegypti 19), and "now that the common Saviour of all has died in our behalf we, the faithful in Christ, no longer die the death as before... henceforth we are only dissolved, agreeably to our bodies mortal nature." (de Inc. 21.1). In this case, the context is clearly the re-creation and the texts embrace an ethical perspective which explains why Christians can embrace death. It is no longer the arch enemy of nature, it has been transformed by Christ. This second level requires a distinction between nature and grace, for were they combined, there could be no possibility of enduring death; there is simply no room for it in "nature graced." This development will be noted in Chapter III.

¹²Thus the sentence is accomplished when death exhausts its power on Christ; the oblation that characterized Christ's life and death is secondary: "Since all were under sentence of death, He, being other than them all, might Himself for all offer to death his own body; and that henceforth, as if all had died through Him, the word of that sentence might be accomplished." (c. Arianos II, 69).

¹³"Mankind then is perfected in Him and restored, as it was made at the beginning, nay, with greater grace" (c. Arianos II, 67). Thus is "nature graced", on its way to destruction since the transgression, re-created rather than reconciled. (Nature, after all, cannot be reconciled: this is a matter of the will.)

Sacrificial and juridical categories belong to the legacy of the West, and it is not at all evident why they should be applied to a different mentality. It seems strange that Athanasius, so conversant with the Sacred Scriptures, could fail to attain a valid soteriology because his philosophy is not Western; and it is unfortunate that the commentary on him has always been conducted in the arena of philosophy, a result of his polemic against the Arian failure to reconcile the transcendence of the divinity to his creation.

The possibility of another alternative has already been suggested, an interpretation of his thought that begins with the appreciation of the Incarnation as the divinization of humanity; as Mersch has pointed out:

It is in terms of life that the Greek Fathers prefer to formulate their teaching regarding our incorporation in the Saviour. They explain the communication of life from the Father to the Son, from the Son to His Sacred Humanity, then from this humanity to all men.¹⁴

It is in terms of life, not guilt, that Athanasius explains redemption. This is also the approach of the Scriptures.

The division of the study follows from these considerations. The first chapter explores the possibility of another interpretation, the second takes up the question of his inadequate philosophy (at least from our viewpoint), the third offers a new perspective, and a final concluding chapter summarizes the specific contribution of Athanasius to Soteriology. Before this is undertaken, two preliminary observations will outline his life and the editions and translations of his works that have been used in this study.

¹⁴Emile Mersch, The Whole Christ, trans. J. R. Kelly (Milwaukee: Bruce, 1938), p. 267.

Life of Athanasius

Athanasius was born around the year 298 at Alexandria, probably of high ranking and wealthy parents. At the famous catechetical school he became acquainted with Greek literature and had a taste of philosophy, but most important "it was in the Holy Scriptures that his martyr teachers had instructed him, and in the Scriptures his mind and writings are saturated."¹⁵

About the time the persecutions ended, (313), he became secretary to the Bishop Alexander, and five years later, just before Arius began spreading his heresy, his two major works, "Against the Gentiles" and "On the Incarnation of the Word," probably appeared.

The Arian crisis of faith in the East¹⁶ came to the attention of Constantine sometime before 324 when Hosius of Cordova arrived in the hope of a settlement. The first general Council of the Church convoked the following year to deal with the problem as well as the Easter and Meletian controversy. Unable to arrive at a clear "test of faith" from sacred scripture language,¹⁷ the philosophic "homocousion" (and many other explanations) were added to the creed of Caesarea's church, and all but two bishops signed the document.¹⁸ Athanasius, as Alexander's secretary, had been active at the Council, and his influence is discovered in the letter Alexander sent out before the Council to reiterate and

¹⁵ A. Robertson, op. cit., p. xvi.

¹⁶ Characteristically in contrast to the practical problem of Donatism in the West.

¹⁷ The "test of faith" had to be unequivocal enough to admit no misunderstanding, or misinterpretation, as the Arians were doing with Sacred Scripture.

¹⁸ Secundus and Theonas. Even Eusebius signed the condemnation, the bishop of Nicomedia who was to be the center of the Arian cause.

emphasize the deposition of Arius at the Egyptian Council of 321. Around 326 Athanasius became patriarch of Alexandria.

Now began the political intrigue as the Arians sought to remove their enemies from their sees.¹⁹ Athanasius found himself again and again faced with different accusations: the case of Ischyras, (had the liturgy been profaned by Athanasius or his deputy?), questions of extortion, of murder (Arsenius) and the like, all recounted some twenty years later in his Apology against the Arians. The charges, however, formed the basis of a new Council, that of Tyre in the year 335. This famous "court trial" ended in no settlement: a commission, prejudiced against Athanasius, went to the Mareotis to investigate some of the charges while Athanasius himself left for Constantinople to request another Council from the emperor. New charges were invented and Constantine finally sent him into Gaul; this first exile lasted from early 336 to late 337.²⁰ Both Arius and Constantine were now dead.

New incriminations were advanced as the Eusebians resolved to install a new bishop at Alexandria. Their nominee was the Arian Gregory; and sometime after his arrival in 339, Athanasius fled to Rome to begin his longest period of exile. The pope arranged for a council, but the Eusebians would not acknowledge his request, holding their own council in Antioch and confirming the sentence passed against Athanasius at Tyre in 335. Sometime around 343, another council, convoked by the emperors Constans and Constantius, met at Sardica, where the whole case,

¹⁹It would not do to wage a doctrinal battle against the creed Constantine had accepted; moreover the prestige of the council prohibited any tampering.

²⁰The question of the proper dates presents some problem, but in as much as it is of small consequence here, and for the sake of uniformity, the conclusions of Robertson are accepted here and throughout.

to the dismay of the Eusebians, was regarded as open. Athanasius was vindicated, and, after the death of Gregory, and with no little assurance of Constantius's good will, was persuaded to return in 346. The important work produced so far was In Illud Omnia.²¹

The "golden decade" that followed produced fresh material for accusations of conspiracy against Constantius (Constantius had been killed in 350 during the initial campaign of Magnentius for power), as well as two important documents de Decretis and de Sententia Dionysii. It ended in the notorious attack on the church of St. Theonas and the retreat of Athanasius, still incredulous that Constantius had recalled his good will, to the surrounding desert in 356.

This third exile was the most productive literary period of his life. Among the works produced were the Vita Antonii, ad Episcopos Aegypti, ad Constantium, de Fuga, contra Arianos, ad Serapion, and de Synodis. Most of the period was probably spent with the monks, now beginning to flourish, but Athanasius never, in all his hiding seems to have lost contact with the controversy or the affairs of his diocese. This exile also marks the end of the many Arian creeds, the establishment of the Anomeans, the twin council of Ariminum and Seleucia and the definite movements towards conciliation between the Nicenes and Homoi-ousians. The accession of Julian at the death of Constantius brought Athanasius back in 362. The new emperor engaged himself in an attempt to restore the glories of paganism and it was not too difficult to persuade him that Athanasius stood in the way. Thus, in late 362 the bishop was again in exile; but not before he had called the "Council of conciliation",

²¹Not included in this summary of his life are those of questionable authenticity (e.g. Expositio Fidei, and (later) the fourth oration Against the Arians, as well as purely historical works, e.g. the Apology against the Arians, also written latter. See below, pp. 9ff.

so important for reunion, and the basis of his letter ad Antiochenos.

Julian died soon after, and for the third time, the death of the emperor meant the return of the bishop, sometime in early 364. The shortest exile occurred soon after, from late 365 to early 366. This was the last, and Athanasius died seven years later, in the Spring of 373.

Editions and Translations

The 1690 Paris Benedictine edition of Montfaucon was the first satisfactory and adequately complete presentation of Athanasius. The next standard edition was the 1777 Padua edition of Guistiniani, while only with the 1857 Paris edition of Migne is the text complete, although still in need of textual revision and criticism. Migne's work (Vol. 25-28) reprinted the Padua edition, which in turn had followed Montfaucon, with supplementary parts added from other sources.

The English student of Athanasius is fortunate in having virtually all the works of the patriarch in translation.²² The most complete of these is that by Robertson in the Nicene and Post Nicene series, which consists in: a revision of Newman's work as it appeared in the Oxford Library of the Fathers,²³ his own translation from the Benedictine text,²⁴

²² Not translated among his genuine works are minor exegetical pieces: e.g., ad Marcellinum de Interpretatione Psalmorum and a number of fragments. They may be found in Migne, P.G. 27.

²³ Notes to the translations of Atkinson; also, de Decretis, contra Arianos and de Synodis.

²⁴ contra Gentes, de Inc., expositio Fidei, in Illud Omnia, de Sententia Dionysii, ad Antiochenos, ad Afros, and the "personal" letters, e.g., ad Amun, Dracontium, Adelphum and Maximum.

revisions of other Oxford collaborators²⁵ and independent translations.²⁶

The most conspicuous omission in Robertson's work, the ad Serapion, has been translated into the French by Lebon²⁷ and the English by C.R.B. Shapland.²⁸ This study has been based on Robertson's translation, and the one by Shapland, and all the citations are taken from these sources. Where it was necessary to compare the original Greek, it was done from Migne. Newman's work was used to supplement the incomplete notes of Robertson. Works of questionable authenticity have not been considered when the doubt was fairly certain, such as the contra Apollinarium,²⁹ and the fourth Oratio contra Arianos; while others of more or less certain authenticity have been, such as the Vita Antonii. Some of the major works of Athanasius are important from merely an historical perspective, such as his Apologia contra Arianos; while consulted, they form but a minor background. The question of the two recensions of the de Incarnatione Verbi has been explored, and the significant variations compared. The longer version forms the basis of this study.³⁰

²⁵M. Atkinson: (Depositio Arii, ad Episcopos Ecclesiae Catholicae, Apologia contra Arianos, ad Episcopos Aegypti, ad Constantium, de Fuga, and ad Monachos (Historia Arianorum)) H. Burgess: Festal Letters.

²⁶Ellershaw: Vita Antonii.

²⁷Sources Chr étiennes, vol. 15 (Paris: 1947).

²⁸The Letters of Saint Athanasius concerning the Holy Spirit (New York: Philosophical Library, 1951).

²⁹William Bright (trans.), Oxford Library of the Fathers (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1873).

³⁰The discovery of the shorter recension has not affected the authenticity of the longer. It has been studied by J. Lebon, R.P. Casey and others. The conclusion has been that the similarity of style between the two and the fact that there are no significant doctrinal variations indicated an Athanasian authorship in both cases, although the shorter may have been the work of one of his followers. The major changes made in the shorter recension are included as footnotes in the text of the longer recension as it is found in Christology of the Later Fathers, Edward R. Hardy, (ed.), Vol. 3 of the Library of Christian Classics, John Bailie, John T. McNeill, and Henry P. Van Dusen (eds.), (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1954).

I. THE REDEEMPTIVE INCARNATION

Sin and Death

The final event that overtakes every man to conclude his life on earth presents to the Christian a formidable paradox. At one and the same time death is the extreme "witness of his sinfulness"¹ and the "revelation of grace" i.e., salvation in the world.² Death is both the penalty that embraces man's attempt to be autonomous from God and the means of union with God. It is an intrinsic consequence of sin,³ and the intrinsic cause of justification.⁴ Apart from this

¹Over and above the empirical or biological causes of death, faith assigns its proper cause in human history: all sinners die (Rom 5:12-21). The significance of death as a consequence of sin was expanded in the Old Testament to become a sign of sin as well, so that there is a double level of meaning in the phrase "witness of sinfulness." This interweaving of physical (as consequence) and religious (as sign) dimensions becomes important in the atonement because the symbolism of death is transformed by Christ. St. Paul accepted the Old Testament idea that somehow death revealed the relations existing between man and God, but because the Christian had been baptized into the death of Christ, it was evident that Christian death can also be a sign of fellowship with God. It is in fact a transformation: (read 2 Cor. 4:10 and 3:18 together). There are then, two deaths in the world: one the sign of Adam's sin, the other the sign of the grace of Christ.

²Karl Rahner observes, "The truly specific note in his death obviously is that death, as the manifestation of sin, was changed in Him into a revelation of grace..." (On the Theology of Death in Quaestiones Disputatae, (Vol. 2; N.Y.: Herder and Herder, 1961,) p.78.

³Otherwise it will not be a true penalty for sin. cf. Rahner, ibid., pp. 40-63.

⁴The instrumentality of the death is pointed out by Durrwell: "One should not weaken a word without good cause; it does not say that the way of entry is opened thanks to the blood of Christ - thanks, that is, to the merit won forever through its being poured out, - but In that blood." (Op.cit., p. 144,) cf. Heb. 10:19-20; 12:24; 13:12.

apparent scandal, there is the further complication of the resurrection. If we are a people redeemed "in the blood" of the Savior, what of the resurrection? It is a motive of belief, a pledge of salvation, a reward for death and - a cause of justification. (Rom 4:25)

The emergence of biblical theology in our own day has re-focused the conception of the atonement, a problem with which theologians have been continually engaged.⁵ A particular concern has been with an aspect of the atonement common to all the theories that history has proposed, i.e., solidarity. As Prat points out⁶ this notion must support the various theories of ransom, satisfaction, and substitution, (he has reduced them to three) or there will be no atonement. The problem evinced by the conception of solidarity is not that it is, but how it is; or more to the point, in what manner the death of Christ becomes the source of redemption for the Christian. Thus as Vincent Taylor observes,⁷ the work of salvation seems to demand that the judgement against sin be satisfied without extending solidarity to include Christ in the punishment of sin; and all the while, the death must be intrinsically redemptive, under the threat of abandoning the "unequivocal sacred scripture assertion" that our redemption has been effected in the death of Christ.

In the perspective of biblical theology, as it is being formulated today, the resurrection has come to the foreground in thinking

⁵For a discussion, cf. Robert S. Paul, The Atonement and the Sacraments (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1960), pp. 241 ff.

⁶The Theology of St. Paul, Vol. 2, John H. Stoddard, (trans.), (Westminster, Md.: Newman, 1961), p. 201.

⁷The Cross of Christ, (London: Macmillan, 1956), p. 85.

about the atonement. As a result, our modern theologians cannot accept the concept of "an angry Father" exacting justice from His Son, for salvation is founded in the Father's initiative.⁸ According to Sacred Scripture, "God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself" (2 Cor. 5:19). Thus "propitiation" gives way to "expiation".⁹ Redemption becomes a "return to God"¹⁰ so as to indicate its source and end; and in this orientation death itself displays its redemptive significance because it flows through the specification of Christ's sacrifice before it reaches the Christian, or better, the Christian participates Christ's

⁸Lyonnet is working in this perspective when he describes redemption as a return of man to God rather than in the familiar categories of satisfaction, substitution or ransom. (cf. "Redemption through Death and Resurrection," Worship, XXXV April 1961, pp. 281-6.) Stanley expresses the reason quite succinctly: "It was left to Paul's genius to advance the Christian understanding of Christ's death by explaining how it was properly the father's work, and thus co-ordinating it with Christ's resurrection." (Christ's Resurrection in Pauline Soteriology, Analecta Biblica, Vol. 13, Romae, e Pontificio Instituto Biblico, 1961, p. 255). Durrwell describes Christ's death as a sacrifice in that it concludes in God (Op. cit. p. 71). The Resurrection, in fact, specifies that death as a going to the Father. (Ibid., p. 140). Thus the view that Christ effects our salvation by pleading or persuading the Father not to exercise his justice depends on forgetting that the whole drama begins and ends in the initiative of God Himself.

⁹As Taylor puts it, "The one important point of difference is that St. Paul does not speak of the death of Christ as a 'propitiation' or 'the means of propitiation', but as 'a means of expiation'; in the sense of the covering of sins, or more generally as 'a means of atonement.'" (The Atonement in New Testament Teaching, London: Epworth Press, 1945), p. 91. The reference is to Rom 3:25. Without subscribing to merely putative justification, such an opinion is indicative of the desire to eliminate any concept of "the angry" God. Commenting on the same text, Cerfaux remarks that Paul "...certainly does not put Christ's death on the same footing as the bloody sacrifices of the Old Testament. The expiatory value of Christ's death comes not merely from the fact that it is accomplished with bloodshed, but also because it is an act of love and obedience." (Christ in the Theology of St. Paul, New York: Herder and Herder, 1959), p. 146.

¹⁰Lyonnet's point has already been noted; others are no less explicit, as, e.g. Durrwell: "The redemptive sacrifice consisted in Christ's personal return to God." (Op. cit., p. 71) Cf. E. Schillebeeckx, Christ the Sacrament, (London: Sheed and Ward, Stagbock 1963) p. 37.

death as it is the expression of Christ's will to go to the Father.¹¹ Death is redemptive because our history of sin is transformed.¹² It is not that the blood is released, but that through the blood there is a life-bond or contact by which all who enter that death are transformed. Death is an oblation, not an annihilation; or the immolation is a means for the oblation.¹³ The oblation of the Christian is that of Christ, by which he separated himself from "the law, sin, and death," and, in that same humanity became the divine source of the life giving Spirit who cries out "abba, Father," in the Christian.¹⁴

There, are then, four movements which can be discerned in the work of the atonement, all phases of one divine plan, and all exposed in the modern treatment of the resurrection: the initiative of the Father,

¹¹As Durrwall so aptly points out, death by itself is not redemptive but "the conclusion of Christ's carnal existence." (*Ibid.*, p. 49). Thus "Our Lord was not so much going to his death as by way of it: it was a mortal journey whose end was with the Father: "I go to the Father." (*Ibid.*, p. 37). His freely willed death "represented the most intense effort to come to God." (*Ibid.*, p. 55).

¹²Death is not an object, but an act personally experienced; Christ's death, as a (sacrificial) oblation does not exist "out there," but in the Church, which we experience in her sacramental faith-life. Rahner speaks of Christ's death as entering and affecting the ontological ground of spiritual inter-communication between persons. (*Op. cit.*, p. 71). The basis of this is baptism (Durrwall, *op. cit.*, p. 221), for its sacramental efficacy introduces the Christian into the mystery of Christ, and therefore the mystery of the passover. His pasch, now the life stream of the Church, is the reorientation of man to the Father. It will be noted below that Athanasius approaches this concept where he speaks of Christ becoming the guarantee against our mobility, i.e., the alteration in man's will that introduces sin. Christ thus secures for us the gift of grace which Adam could not hold.

¹³Cf. Durrwall, *op. cit.*, p. 60ff.

¹⁴Cf. Cerfaux, *op. cit.*, p. 131: "Our prebaptismal state was determined according to our relations with sin, the Law, and evil or cosmic powers. Christ's death, by means of its ontological efficaciousness, eliminates these relationships." Durrwall, *op. cit.*, p. 106, adds: "But the two Apostles agree in making the bodily humanity of the Saviour the point from which the divinizing spirit gushes out for us."

the identification of Christ with man's legacy of alienation from the Father, the transformation of that history in an act of (sacrificial) oblation; and the sending of the Spirit.

The atonement, already rooted in the principle of solidarity is definitively placed in the context of Paschal solidarity.¹⁵ In the framework of the divine initiative, the Incarnation is not related to the death as a "necessary" precondition of time, but rather both events are related to that divine initiative which is their source.¹⁶ In other words, there is a paschal finality in the Incarnation and the whole event is not achieved until the resurrection concludes the oblation in God, and this on two levels, i.e., in Christ, and in Christians.¹⁷

¹⁵Not that the death can be separated out of the total context of the redemptive Incarnation; any such interpretation of the "atonement proper" is misleading, and detracts from the reality of the Incarnation to begin with, as well as the continuance of it after the death. "Paschal finality" as used here is not meant to separate the events, but to show that the one necessarily demands the other. Precisely because of the hypostatic union, the death of Christ is the inevitable conclusion of his identification with men: sin cannot endure the Godhead. The thought here developed can be explored in Durrwell, op. cit., pp. 35-77; Rahner, "The Church and the Sacraments," op. cit., pp. 196ff; and Mersch, The Theology of the Mystical Body, op. cit., pp. 276ff. In this perspective the juridical categories really do become secondary to the ontological dimensions of the Incarnation on which they are based and this is the insight of the East.

¹⁶We must put the redemptive work of the Cross within the total context of the birth, life, teaching, and resurrection of our Lord, for that redemptive work includes all the divine outpouring from the moment when Mary conceived by the Holy Ghost. But we must remember that the Incarnation itself took place within a context of Israel's preparation and of the predetermined purpose of Almighty God to redeem the human race: Christ is the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world. Therefore, we do not think in terms of a prior event in time but rather in terms of a prior and active purpose... God's "Word" in eternity." (Robert S. Paul, op. cit., p. 299.) The Incarnation and the atonement are interdependent in the perspective of salvation history.

¹⁷The problem of how what was achieved in Christ attaches to the Christian is further confused by arbitrarily separating the two phases of redemption, and has led to a "redefinition" of the objective and subjective approach by Lyonnet. He describes two stages of justification: in the

St. Athanasius and the Paschal Finality of the Incarnation

The biblical perspective affords another approach to the Fathers, and, in the case of Athanasius, posits the question of whether the Greek conception of the deification of man includes or excludes the intrinsic redemptive significance of death. There is a double consideration involved in this problem, the first whether the Incarnation as such, is separated from the death as the source of redemption and secondly, whether the restoration involved in the redemption excludes the ethical import of the atonement. In brief, the question could be phrased: does the concept of deification include a sacrifice, and does this sacrifice include an oblation? It has long been recognized that Eastern speculation works against such a conceptualization, and this for at least two reasons: it demands a recognition of the human instrumentality of the death of Christ in the divine work of reconciliation while the East preferred to concentrate on the divinity of Christ, and it postulates an ethical perspective that embraces the historical dimensions of sin in the world, while the East retained a metaphysical orientation in terms of nature.

Instances of both are ready at hand in Athanasius. The first can be seen in his predilection for confining the word *ὁ λόγος* to the Word, and the parallel hesitancy to refer to Christ's manhood as a nature.¹⁸

first, the divine Christ, by the instrument of his humanity, accomplishes redemption by his life and especially the mysteries of his death and glorification. In the second, this instrumental causality reaches us through faith and the sacraments. (*La valeur soteriologique de la résurrection du Christ selon saint Paul*, "Gregorianum", XXXIX 1958, pp. 295-318). Thus redemption is being accomplished in the people of God: the sacrificial immolation (oblation) has never ceased in the consciousness of Christ. This insight characterizes Durrwell's work *passim*, who finds the continuity in Christ in his humanity as the source of the life giving Spirit. It agrees with Rahner's point that somehow Christ's death is still present in the world.

¹⁸ Cf. J. H. Newman, Select Treatises of St. Athanasius in Controversy with the Arians, Vol. 2, (London: Longmans Green and Co., 1895), pp. 426 - 429.

Thus in his rebuttal of the Arian exegesis of Prov. 8:22 ("The Lord created me a beginning of His ways, for his works"), taken to mean that Christ was therefore a creature, he says:

For the creatures, having a created essence, are originate, and are said to be created, and of course the creature is created; but this mere term "He created" does not necessarily signify the essence or the generation, but indicates something else as coming to pass in Him of whom it speaks, and not simply that He who is said to be created, is at once in His nature and Essence a creature.¹⁹

In this language, *οὐσία* seems to be reserved for the divine nature alone, as if there were no human nature in Christ. In addition, he speaks of something "as coming to pass in Him," which is strongly suggestive of not assuming a created nature, but of being acquainted, in a transient way, with things human, by way of accident rather than nature. He has already in fact, so described the Incarnation:

In the same way it is possible in the Lord's instance also to understand aright, that He did not become other than Himself on taking the flesh, but being the same as before, He was robed in it.²⁰

Christ is viewed also as the Word who took to himself the economy or mission of restoring the works of creation, and this is paralleled with the "manhood" (*ἀνθρωπίνον*) of the Word in direct contrast to the "essence" (*οὐσία*).²¹ Or, again, what "came to pass in him" was not a matter of nature, but indeed, something qualitative, some sort of "renovation".²² In any case, there is a remarkable pre-occupation with the divinity of the Word, almost a fear of associating

¹⁹C. Arianos, II, 45.

²⁰Ibid., 8.

²¹Ibid., 51.

²²Ibid., 46.

him with anything created, lest He be called a creature. Thus he does not like to admit the reality of Christ's death as the qualification he makes in the following statement indicates: "For He made even the creation break silence; in that even at his death, marvellous to relate, or rather at His actual trophy over death..."²³ Characteristically this thought is embodied in the many texts which describe Christ offering His body to death, upon which it exhausts its force,²⁴ with the impression that He does not at all die.

It should be noted that Athanasius is arguing against the Arians who had affirmed that Christ was a creature, a manifest distortion of the hypostatic union; and just as Athanasius defended Dionysius, his predecessor at Alexandria who had obscured the divinity of Christ in emphasizing his distinctness from the Father against the Sabellians,²⁵ now he himself required defense after apparently obscuring the humanity of Christ in emphasizing his equality with the Father against the Arians.

The second element militating against an expression in Athanasius of the paschal finality of the Incarnation as sacrifice and oblation is the "metaphysical" preoccupation with $\Phi\theta\acute{o}\rho\alpha$ and $\acute{\alpha}\Phi\theta\alpha\rho\epsilon\acute{\iota}\alpha$ in creation and recreation. This perspective highlights the transgression in terms of nature rather than will and concerns itself with death and corruption rather than sin and guilt.²⁶

²³ de Inc., 19.3.

²⁴ cf. c. Arianos, II, 69; de Inc. 8.4; 22.3.

²⁵ De Sententia Dionysii, 5.

²⁶ It should be noted that the anthropology of Athanasius does not admit this distinction: man is conceived as a whole. The distinction is ours, not his.

The atonement, as the paschal fulfillment of the Incarnation, requires real at-one-ment, or reconciliation, as well as a restoration which is not contained in the purely metaphysical categories. One example may be cited here, and the major discussion reserved for Chapter Two, on "creation".

For this cause, then, death having gained upon men, and corruption abiding upon them, the race of man was perishing; the rational man made in God's image was disappearing and the handiwork of God was in process of dissolution.²⁷

It seems very unlikely that a study of Athanasius that centers the Western philosophy of man will arrive at any notion of a paschal finality in the Incarnation. Yet, another approach remains open: that is, the biblical categories. Speculation may lend a contribution to the redemptive significance of death by finding in it a supreme or definitive affirmation of the life that went before and now is, as it passes out of time, complete in that expression;²⁸ the biblical insight will point out the particularity or specification of that affirmation in the phrase "I am going to the Father"²⁹ (John 7:33; 13:1), and thus add the ideas of sacrifice and oblation.

The extent that Athanasius is dependent on sacred scripture is at once evident from a glance at the table Robertson includes in his

²⁷ de Inc., 6.1.

²⁸ The Church teaches that the significance of death is that the possibility of merit, demerit, or conversion ends. Cf. the statement (not authoritative) from the Collectio Lacensis of 1 Vatican VII, 564 - 65, as contained in The Church Teaches, John F. Clarkson et al (eds), (St. Louis, Mo.: B. Herder, 1955), 891. While this limitation of the period of meriting rests on God's free ordinance, there seems to be some rationale that links it intrinsically to the nature of death, particularly if we accept with Rahner, (On the Theology of Death, op. cit.) the axiological status of death in our lives as an event that is finally consummated when the active personal self affirmation is made definitive. The continuity of this affirmation is based on our being spiritual beings.

²⁹ Durrwell's additon to Rahner's theology of death. See note 11, above.

work on Athanasius,³⁰ and Gwatkin observes that "His works are one continuous appeal to scripture," adding in a footnote

The mere number of his quotations is significant. The de Decretis contains 105 in 24 pages, the three Orationes contra Arianos 918 in 181 pages...The de Synodis is a narrative of events, so that it contains fewer; but the instant a doctrine has to be established (c. 49) he gives a series of thirty quotations. And these are not merely ornamental, as when he quotes Hermas, but substantial parts of his argument.³¹

Athanasius, then, grounds himself in the Sacred Scripture. If, as in De Decretis, paragraph 31 he employs the non-biblical categories against the Arian ontology, he will be found all the while insisting that the biblical terms would be more accurate and easier to use. In his earlier work he had declared: "For although the sacred and inspired Scriptures are sufficient to declare the truth...we must communicate in writing to you what we learned from them."³² He is much more at home away from philosophical speculation and terminology. The famous watchword $\delta\mu\omega\upsilon\sigma\iota\sigma\mu\omega\varsigma$ appears but once in his work against the Arians. He is more concerned with meanings and the spirit rather than simple words, and this characteristic approach to Sacred Scripture betrays his expertise as a biblical theologian, despite a few shortcomings.³⁴

³⁰Op. cit., pp. 585 - 91.

³¹Studies of Arianism (Cambridge: Deighton Bell & Co, 1900), p. 48.

³²g. Gentes, 1.3; cf. Ibid., 45ff., ad Episcopos Aegypti, 4, and ad Serapion I, 33.

³³cf. John H. Newman, Select Treatises of St. Athanasius in Controversy with the Arians (Vol. 2, London: Langmans, Green and Co., 1895), p. 442. The instance is found in g. Arians, I,9.

³⁴cf. Gwatkin, op. cit., p. 73. Thus Athanasius, unfamiliar with Hebrew, bases his whole exposition of the text from Proverbs 8:22 ("The Lord created me a beginning of his ways for His works") on the

He insists against the Arians that a text must not be taken from context,³⁵ and he follows what he admonishes;³⁶ the context extends not only to the specific passage in question,³⁷ but to the larger framework of revelation as a whole.³⁸

The suggestion that the biblical categories of Athanasius are more compatible with the idea of the paschal finality of the incarnation receives some confirmation from Harnack:

On the whole, therefore, the conception of sacrifice is really alien in the view of the Greeks to the strict theory of Christ's significance. It found its way in through exegesis and the Mysteries and threatened the compactness of the dogmatic conception, according to which everything that Christ did was summed up in the complete assumptio carnis.³⁹

Scripture and the liturgy provide a perspective that philosophy does not. It has been pointed out that the life of the Church has not suffered from the inadequate theories of the atonement as they have been proposed through the centuries because the atonement has always been present in the sacraments.⁴⁰ In a similar way the return to the

Mistranslation of the LXX version which had substituted "created" for "possessed." In the LXX the two words bear a resemblance to each other. In another case, he changed his exegesis of the text of Luke 10:22, "All things were delivered to Me by My Father. And none knoweth Who the Son is, save the Father; and Who the Father is, save the Son, and he to whomsoever the Son willeth to reveal Him." In his work In Illud Omnia, he refers the "all things" to the mediatorial work of Christ, not his essential nature, while in c. Arianos III, 35 he does apply it to his essential nature, but not in the sense of creation; what the Son has is given, but according to the perfect nature of the Father, eternally.

³⁵c. Arianos II, 44.

³⁶Ibid., III, 1ff.

³⁷Ibid., II, 11.

³⁸Ibid., 12-14.

³⁹Adolph Harnack, History of Dogma (Vol. 3; New York: Russell and Russell, 1958), p. 314.

⁴⁰Robert S. Paul, op. cit., pp. 301ff.

New Testament in formulating a theology of the atonement has placed it in the proper perspective of the divine initiative, so that it becomes one event with the incarnation, now viewed in its finality as the sacrificial oblation that restores and reconciles man to God.

Sacred Scripture is much wiser than the philosophers who place death in man's nature as composite by observing that it is there as a consequence of his history (Rom. 5:12-21). This division suggests that the contrast between East and West at the time of Athanasius may be treated in a similar manner. If the restoration of nature comes about in a deification, the history is transformed: there is only one event, for the deification is the transformation of man who has a history. Christ, becoming present in history has a solidarity with all men that is nonetheless real without being Platonic, and his action in history has an openness through his human nature which subsists in the Word to all men who are identified with Him.

This division between nature and history is not questioned; as Durrwell notes: "More than any legal reparation or moral conversion, the Redemption is a real transformation, for man's sickness is in the reality of his nature."⁴¹ Yet if the discussion is confined to the level of nature, the dilemma arises that either evil is a substance or man is not redeemed. Christ identified with our nature, but not our sin; and so sin, as guilt, is of the will: in this sense Christ reorientates the bias of nature towards evil by sanctifying the will. Redemption then, is the ongoing reality of Christ assimilating men in his paschal consciousness through the life of the Church. It is a fact of history that

⁴¹ Op. cit., p. 43.

Christ became and is the "life-giving Spirit." Thus the biblical theologian Fr. Durrwell, can admit with Athanasius that redemption is directed towards human nature, without abandoning the historical perspective by which Christ identifies with and transforms the human situation of being alienated from the Father.⁴² In this light, another modern theologian compares Christ's death to a stream or a spring that "pours into those who believe" for

His death did not take place once for all, in an absolute sphere completely detached from history. It exercises a true power over Christian humanity. The death of Christ brings about in us a state of death and separation by a true, intrinsic causality. It has a causality analogous to that of the risen life. Christian life is thus under the tenure of Christ's death and resurrection.⁴³

History and nature must be related in a theology of the atonement. Because Christ is, the redemption is an historical fact; and because Christ is what He is, i.e., the God-man, the redemption is intrinsic to human nature, without ceasing to be a gift. The nature that Christ assumed is divinized without being less human and it reaches to us without being more human. Nevertheless, a division for the sake of analysis between history and nature will facilitate an approach to Athanasius that appreciates his insight without minimizing his deficiency. The question of Christ becoming "less human" in His divinization introduces the problem of the significance Athanasius attaches to corruption or alteration in his discussion of sin and re-creation, but its primary context is reversed, because he deals with man and creation before Christ and re-creation. The question of Christ becoming "more human" when divinization is referred to the redeemed

⁴²Ibid., pp. 35-77.

⁴³Lucien Cerfaux, Christ in the Theology of St. Paul, trans. Geoffrey Webb and Adrian Walker, (New York: Herder and Herder, 1959), p. 127.

2 HUMAN NATURE AND THE ATONEMENT

Athanasius in Controversy

The Council of Nicea stands at the head of one of the most interesting periods of the Church. When the bishops returned to their sees late in 325, the problem for which they had been called together to solve¹ had only begun. Arianism would not fall before the *ὁμοούσιον* without a struggle² and the bishops would discover that a condemnation of heresy was different from an explicitation of belief.³ The Trinitarian

¹Constantine, not the bishops, issued the call for the Council. He had decided to support the new religion for the sake of peace, and so was quite content to accept whatever decision was reached. Hosius, bishop of Cordova, however, probably provided some influence and may even have suggested the "general" council, an idea "grandiose enough" to tempt an emperor. Cf. Gwatkin, *op. cit.*, pp. 37ff.

²Not necessarily doctrinal. The drama of political intrigue has prompted some commentators to divide the history after Nicea between the "ecclesiastical orthodox" and "imperial heterodox." It would be rash to see any clear cut division, for none of the Nicenes appear to have objected when the imperial power exiled the Arians after the Council. After the Sirmian Manifesto (357), when the Anomeans exposed the tenets of Arianism without attempting to disguise them, the controversy became doctrinal. (Cf. Gwatkin, *op. cit.*, pp. 161ff.) Up to this point the distinction was between "Nicene" Christians and "Arian" Christians, both groups, e.g., using the same churches, although exceptions are present. Antioch had an uncompromising faction of Arians in contrast to the Nicenes at Alexandria.

³The orthodox could agree that Arianism was heterodox; but whether the *ὁμοούσιον* was orthodox was something else. A large majority of the bishops returned to their sees with little or no commitment to a word that was "unscriptural," suggestive of Sabellianism (at least later in the wake of Marcellus, who saw more clearly than the Nicenes that the *ὁμοούσιον* indicated oneness or identity as well as equality), under former ecclesiastical condemnation (against Paul of Samosata at the Council of Antioch in 268), and even implied some philosophic difficulty (a third substance or *ousia*, common to Father and Son and prior to them.) Language had neither reached a precision that could

and Christological debates had begun, and now they would fill the next four centuries.

The struggle against Arianism⁴ provides the historical setting for St. Athanasius, the "champion of orthodoxy."⁵ His life is determined by the ebb and flow of the powers around him; in and out of exile, he writes in response to the varying stages of the controversy:⁶ preparing his defense, attempting to win over wavering bishops, answering a letter about the life of Antony, rebutting the Arian exegeses, and so on. In a very real sense, he is a sign of the maturity the Church had reached at Nicea, for the application of the philosophic $\delta\lambda\omicron\gamma\omicron\gamma\omicron\sigma$ was an admission that an appeal to the "rule of faith" would not satisfy the ontological dissembling of a heretic.⁷ Philosophy had to meet with philosophy. And

contain a metaphysics of personality nor a universality that could embrace East and West. Cf. Gwatkin, op. cit., pp. 46ff; Bright (ed.) The Orations of St. Athanasius against the Arians (Oxford: Clarendon, 1873), p. xv.

⁴Not so easily categorized. Newman notes (Select Treatises, op. cit., p. 28) that there were three factions from the start: Arians proper, a Semi-Arian reaction, and the Eusebean court party. Actually there were few Arians until the Anomeans decided to forego the compromising spirit of the anti-Nicenes; by then (mid-century) the doctrinal points had undergone considerable revision in an extremist direction, so that the Semi-Arians about faced in their original reaction to the Nicenes and now opposed the Anomeans.

⁵Legend tends to accept more than fact accords, and this is as true of Athanasius as any other man who has affected the drift of history. Until Apollinarius lent his philosophy to the controversy, there was considerable ambiguity on the more Christological question of Christ's human soul and free will. Gwatkin suggests that Athanasius was to some extent guilty of Sabellianizing Christ. (op. cit., p.30)

⁶With the exception of his two treatises g. Gentes and de Inc., all his major works are affected by their direction against the heresy that broke out around 318... These two works appear to have been written before then.

⁷Their characteristic evasion pertains to scriptural interpolation, but not without a deliberate confusion of such words as ageneton. (Cf.

yet, Athanasius is not a philosopher; he is forced to defend an "unscriptural" word;⁸ and all the while understands that theology must take account of meanings as well as words.⁹ He faces a conception that so completely alienates the Father from His creation that it would perish at his touch;¹⁰ that expects atonement from a created mediator, neither God nor man,¹¹ and that finds the vital principle of sanctification in a Spirit far beneath the dignity of even the first of creatures.¹² This repudiation of the Trinity engages the dialectic of what he knows from Sacred Scripture:

c. Arianos, I, 30-34; de Decretis 28ff; de Synodis 46ff.) The word can be taken to refer to creation or generation. As Prestige notes (God in Patristic Thought London: S.P.C.K., 1956), p. 135: "But the main source of his [Origen's] difficulty lay in the fact that no satisfactory distinction has as yet been clearly drawn between derivation and creation." (Cf. Ibid., pp. 37-54; 135-40; 151-56). Arius was taking advantage of this confusion: "For ye say that an offspring is the same as a work, writing 'generated or made'" (c. Arianos, II, 20).

⁸Cf. Robertson, op. cit., p. xviii: "Least of all was Athanasius the author of the $\delta\mu\omicron\omicron\upsilon\sigma\iota\omicron\nu$; his whole attitude toward the famous test is that of loyal acceptance and assimilation rather than of native inward affinity." Athanasius is constantly apologizing for his use of this type of language rather than the expressions of Sacred Scripture.

⁹Cf. Newman, Select Treatises, op. cit., p. 363: "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 very words used. Thus he scarcely uses the symbol $\delta\mu\omicron\omicron\upsilon\sigma\iota\omicron\nu$ (one in substance), throughout his Oration."

¹⁰Cf. de Decretis, 8; c. Arianos II, 24-6; 30. At times Athanasius seems to express a similar opinion, as in Ibid., 64: "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." For him, however, the reference is to being in the Word so as to continue in existence; man is not the product of His mediation in an emanationist sense.

¹¹Cf. de Synodis, 15-19.

¹²Cf. c. Arianos, III, 15; ad Antiochenos, 3. Athanasius reviews the teachings of Arius by quoting extracts from the heretic's Thalia, (now lost) in c. Arianos I, 5ff; and de Synodis 15ff.

that God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself¹³ (2 Cor. 5:19); that the Son knows the Father¹⁴ (Mt. 11:27); and that sanctity is in the Spirit of the Son.¹⁵ (1 Jn. 3:24). Athanasius recognizes that the transcendent divinity is in close contact with His creation. From the very beginning, in fact, the world is so gifted with the presence of the Word that it can be said to be "graced."

On Creation

Athanasius begins his treatise On the Incarnation of the Word with a consideration of the creation of man.¹⁶ This has led to the accusation of his Western critics that he obscures the historicity of the Incarnation by confusing the grace of redemption with that of creation. But this presumes that the dialectic of Athanasius in his description of redemption begins in the distinction between nature and grace in creation whereas he is concerned to depict the restoration of man as a whole. It might be better to follow his description than impose our own categories of thought on it from the beginning.

According to Athanasius, man's natural state is explained by the fact that he is a creature called out of nothingness, and therefore

¹³Cf. c. Arianos III, 6.

¹⁴Cf. ad Episcopos Aegypti 16; de Decretis, 21; c. Arianos II, 22.

¹⁵Cf. c. Arianos, I, 43.

¹⁶Cf. de Inc., 4.1: "You are wondering, perhaps, for what possible reason, having proposed to speak of the Incarnation of the Word, we are at present treating the origin of mankind. But this, too, properly belongs to the aim of our treatise." Athanasius goes on to say that the reason of His coming was "our transgression" and "for our salvation." The commentators point out that Athanasius tends to see the acts of creation and recreation as one single work. Cf. Shapland, (ed), The Letters of St. Athanasius concerning the Holy Spirit (New York: Philosophical Library, 1951), p. 37; or of being worked out in physical rather than ethical categories. Cf. Robertson, op. cit., p. lxx.

subject to return to nothingness:

For man ^{is} by nature mortal, inasmuch he is made out of what is not.¹⁷

And a single body is composed of these distinct parts - having its parts combined for use, but destined to be divided in course of time when nature, that brought them together shall divide them at the will of God, who so ordered it.¹⁸

The death which befalls men comes to them agreeably to the weakness of their nature; for unable to continue in one stay, they are dissolved with time.¹⁹

Yet, this natural state is hypothetical because as a matter of fact, man was created otherwise;

For God has not only made us out of nothing; but He gave us freely by the Grace of the Word, a life in correspondence with God.²⁰

Life is different from "product," and a life in correspondence with God is by far in contrast to mere "life." Thus, in relation to man, the word "creation" is not at all sufficient; there is also a "genesis":

For God not only created them to be men, but called them to be sons, as having begotten them.²¹

Man is both product and son, created "out of nothing" and "begotten according to God." From this point on, it will be difficult to keep the two separate; as, for example, can be noted in the apparent attribution by Athanasius of rationality to man "begotten in the Image." Reason seems to be dependent not on man's nature as created, but on his nature as begotten; in this perspective it would not be intrinsic to human nature in actual fact. Before this is brought out, it is necessary

¹⁷ de Inc., 4.6.

¹⁸ c. Gentes, 28.4.

¹⁹ de Inc., 21.4.

²⁰ Ibid., 5.1.

²¹ c. Arianos II, 59.

to describe more precisely man's nature as "generated."

Seeing then all created nature, as far as its own laws were concerned, to be fleeting and subject to dissolution, lest it should come to this and lest the Universe should be broken up again into nothingness, for this cause He made all things by His own Eternal Word...For (creation) partakes of the Word Who derives true existence from the Father.²²

God, then, holds creation together in His Word, so that regardless of the fall it would perish without this presence. Intrinsically, creation is "fleeting and subject to dissolution," and so it receives from its Creator a further gift of grace above and beyond nature that enables it to "stay" in existence. The gift is not a quality, but the presence of the Word Himself, Who brings with Him to creation the gifts of reason and immortality. This aspect becomes very noticeable when Athanasius defends his exegesis of Proverbs 8:22 against the Arian interpretation. The Word is not the first product of creation, He is not one of the creatures at all, but he is the cause of their being the reflection of God.²³ Thus Christ is ἀρχὴ in creation not as a beginning simply, but as a causal beginning outside the series. The Word is first born, not as an external and created instrument of the Father in creating, but He is internal and connatural at all times with the Father. It is no surprise that Athanasius draws out the parallel opinion: just as the Word is present as ἀρχὴ in the creation, the Word is present as ἀρχὴ in the recreation, through the incarnation. It is in this framework that he sometimes calls the body an instrument (ὄργανον) as if it were the point of leverage by which the divine entered our race: "Being God, He had His own body, and using this as an instrument

²² c. Gentes, 41.3.

²³ Cf. c. Arianos, II, 78.

He became man for our sakes."²⁴ The body is instrument in retrospect to the incarnation rather than with reference to the atonement; but this is not the ordinary usage. More often, the body is that which is assumed in order to be sanctified and become the source of the Spirit.²⁵ This sanctification of his manhood as conceived by Athanasius has given rise to a Platonic interpretation, as if the Word assumed the human species. Yet there is not trace of idealism, but rather a hint that he has caught the Pauline import of Christ as the "quickening Spirit," and is proposing that Christ's humanity is the source of salvation. This will be taken up later.

Aside from creation being sustained by the presence of the Word (as if it too were generated) there is another gift which it receives:

God, Who has the power over all things when He was making the race of men through His own Word, seeing the weakness of their nature, that it was not sufficient of itself to know its maker...makes them after His own Image and after His likeness; so that by such grace perceiving the Image, that is, the Word of the Father, they may be able through Him to get an idea of the Father, and knowing their Maker, live the happy and truly blessed life.²⁶

Man's original state was characterized by the capacity to know God; this is more than a merely negative state, it is a positive and living assimilation to God through His Image.²⁷ By turning away from merely sensible objects, and preserving his contemplation of things eternal, the

²⁴Ibid., III, 31.

²⁵Cf. c. Arianos, I, 41-3.

²⁶de Inc., 11, 1-3.

²⁷Cf. J.N.D. Kelly, Early Christian Doctrines (New York: Harper, 1959), pp. 346-7: "What the Bible imagery describes as the free intercourse of man with God in the garden, Athanasius's mysticism easily allegorizes as contemplation mixed with desire which ever renews the divine likeness in the soul."

mind of man is drawn towards the Father and constantly renews itself in this desire. There are two elements involved here, the one following the other: man was made incorruptible because he participated in the Word, but to preserve this likeness it was necessary that he should always know and contemplate the Word. This second gift was not imparted to creation in general:

And among these, having taken especial pity, above all things on earth, upon the race of men, and having perceived its inability by virtue of the condition of its origin, to continue in one stay, He gave them a further gift...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.²⁸

Very concisely, Athanasius is saying that

By reason of his likeness to Him that is (and if he still preserved this likeness by keeping Him in his knowledge) he [man] would stay his natural corruption.²⁹

Immortality seems to be dependent on man's rationality, which in turn is dependent on his "reflection" of the Word; i.e., reason is extrinsically a power of man because of his partaking the Word, when, having been created, he was begotten as an adopted son of God. And yet, the immortality was not complete, for God had given a law with the "promise of incorruption in heaven," and the threat of "incurring that corruption in death which was theirs by nature."³⁰ Nor was the gift absolutely dependent on preserving "Him in his knowledge," because sinners "abide in death and in corruption" and are "ever in the corruption of death."³¹ On the other hand, the evidence for the ascription of rationality to adoption rather than creation is very strong; thus he says:

²⁸ de Inc., 313.

²⁹ Ibid., 4.6.

³⁰ Ibid., 3.4.

³¹ Ibid., 3.5.

How could they be rational without knowing the Word (and Reason) of the Father, in Whom they received their very being?³²

For it had been better for him to have been made simply like a brute animal, than, once made rational, for him to live the life of the brutes.³³

It is difficult to see how the state Athanasius is describing admits the distinctions philosophy now draws in its metaphysics of personality. Rather there is a strain of mysticism and imagery in an anthropology which takes man as a whole and describes his relation to God. There is no mention of the modern distinction of "preternatural," but a constant awareness of the mystery of adoption. Created and begotten, man had a destiny beyond himself, but it would be realized from within:

Neither, as God Himself is above all, is the road to Him afar off or outside ourselves, but it is in us...it is the soul of each one of us and the intelligence which resides there. For by it alone can God be contemplated and perceived.³⁴

This then is why the soul has the capacity for beholding God, and is its own way thereto, receiving not from without, but from herself the knowledge and apprehension of the Word of God.³⁵

This conception, adequate in itself, falls apart when subjected to the necessity of distinguishing nature and grace. According to the traditional criticism of his argument, Athanasius has placed himself in the dilemma of making everything over and above man's sensuous constitution a gift superadded to man in his original state, a gift of grace as of yet incomplete, but destined to become perfected provided that man preserves his reflection of the Image. Such a gift is reason, and the use of his reason enables man to continue in contemplation of the Word, and so remain in the state of incorruptibility. Reason then, is inalienable to man, but only in dependence on the Word.

This confusion apparently takes the element of a decisive loss

³² Ibid., 11.2.

³³ Ibid., 13.2.

³⁴ c. Gentes, 30, 1-3.

³⁵ Ibid., 33.4.

out of the fall; because man's constitution is "nature graced" the transgression will be seen as effecting a quantitative retrogression or gradual decay rather than a qualitative "once and for all" fall. It is parallel to the advance that would have characterized his "stay" in incorruptibility. For the same reason, the characteristic feature of the fallen state will be the burden of corruption rather than the weight of guilt, insofar as "graced nature" was involved in a metaphysical advance based on cognition.

Very significant is the distinction he makes forty years later, after the long controversy with the Arians had forced him to defend the divinity of Christ in the face of the Scriptural texts which were interpolated against that divinity:

At the same time, things originate could not without the Word be brought to be; hence they were made through Him and reasonably. For since the Word is the Son of God by nature proper to his essence, and is from Him, and in Him, as He said Himself, the creatures could not have come to be, except through Him.³⁶

By perceiving that what belongs to the Son by nature, we have by participation or adoption, he has a handle by which to distinguish grace and nature in creation.

The discussion on creation will be resumed in Chapter three, in the perspective of human history. Although there seems little room for "atonement" in death when the presuppositions of a theory of creation fix the gulf between man and God in a quantitative and progressive deterioration of "nature graced," a more moderate view would suggest that if there is an intrinsic redemptive significance to the incarnation as proposed in the thought of Athanasius, it will not be discovered in the categories of death or guilt. The influx of divine life is too predominant in his thinking.

³⁶ c. Arianos, II, 31.

The Fall and its Effects

The conception of the fall in Athanasius followed directly from his views on creation. Just as man, as created, preserved his status of immortality insofar as he contemplated the Word, now he turned to the objects presented by his sensuous constitution and became an "irrational" being destined for corruption instead of continuing immortality. Athanasius deploys the analogy of a charioteer wildly thrashing along the course with no goal or end in view; he is headed for that which is not, and this is the nature of evil.³⁷

But nearer to themselves were the body and its senses; so that, while removing their mind from the things perceived by thought, they began to regard themselves, preferring what was their own to the contemplation of what belonged to God.³⁸

Athanasius points out later what creatures have as their own: "Man is by nature mortal, inasmuch as he is made out of what is not."³⁹ Now, by preferring this he becomes involved in the dissolution that characterizes whatever is made from nothing rather than the advance which had been his as "begotten" according to the Image of God. Thus men

no longer remained as they were made, but were being corrupted according to their devices; and death had the mastery over them as king.⁴⁰

Men now became habituated to their desires, continuing to contrive evil from their contemplation of the objects of sense, until, "the race of man was perishing; the rational man made in God's Image was disappearing, and the handiwork of God was in process of dissolution."⁴¹ In vivid strokes, Athanasius depicts the gradual devolution that followed man's rejection of "the thoughts of his soul." The Image of God on

³⁷ c. Gentes, 4.4. ³⁸ Ibid., 3, 2-3. ³⁹ de Inc., 4.6.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 4.4. ⁴¹ Ibid., 6.1.

earth was in process of disappearing and the progressive obliteration confronted God Himself with the dilemma of witnessing the destruction of His work at the hands of finite men or of recalling the sentence of death He had placed on the transgression: "For death, as I said above, gained from that time forth a legal hold over us."⁴² On the horns of the dilemma rested God's goodness and justice.

Would man's repentance constitute an escape? No - the transgression had set men towards corruption, and so his nature had become involved (besides his will).⁴³ In this way, Athanasius apparently separates the act, as cause, from its consequence, the state of corruption. Repentance might undo the former act of will, but it could not touch the latter state. Man remained free, however, and could repent,

For they are able, as they turned away their understanding from God...in like manner to ascend with the intelligence of their soul and turn back to God again.

or continue their perversion:

For being by nature mobile, even though she have turned away from what is good, yet, she did not lose her mobility...and knowing her own power over herself, she sees that she is able to use the members of her body in either direction, both toward what is, or toward what is not.⁴⁵

Thus the fall is quantitative, capable of accretion rather than irrevokable. Some, in fact, fall farther than others, and the concept of original sin is all but lost sight of: "For to such a depth have some fallen in their understanding, to such darkness of mind..."⁴⁶ The introduction of "mobility" is significant from the fact that Athanasius does not draw out here its consequences in soteriology; he merely cites the characteristic aspect of man as alterable and that this is the cause of

⁴² Ibid., 6.2.

⁴³ Ibid., 7.1ff.

⁴⁴ c. Gentes, 34.2.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 4, 2-3.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 9.3.

his beginning and continuing in the state of corruption. Yet it is precisely this aspect of alteration which he develops in his treatise against the Arians: "For since the first man Adam altered, and through sin death came into the world."⁴⁷

It is this approach that enables him to conceive of Adam as a first parent rather than a mere prototype, for he contrasts the life we have from Adam to that we have from Christ not on the basis of nature deteriorating and being restored, but on the ability to retain that life. Christ secures the grace that Adam lost for his progeny, for as the natural Son of God he is righteousness, and because he is man, he secures this for men. He is the eschatological and effective sign of victorious and redemptive mercy, a real Second Adam for a divinized humanity.

The contrasting idea of the prototype had developed from his conception that man was created with a capacity for perfection and that sin had interrupted this advance which men were making (not man, but men). Every man is capable of using his intelligence to contemplate the Word and so attain greater perfection. What Athanasius proposes here in spite of this is quite different. Characteristically, in him the East arrived at the concept of solidarity in terms of Christ, the Second Adam, and divinization, while the West had developed the legalistic approach by which all men shared in the guilt of the first Adam.⁴⁸ It might be said

⁴⁷c. Arianos I, 51.

⁴⁸Cf. J.N.D. Kelly, op. cit., pp. 175ff; thus, pp. 178-9: "The Alexandrian theologians drew an equally realistic picture of man's plight, but the chief premise of the doctrine of original sin which we have seen emerging in the West, the conception of our physical solidarity with Adam and thus of our participation in his sinful act, was largely absent from their thinking." In the East, solidarity is in terms of the Second Adam, and through this they arrive at our solidarity with the First Adam: just the reverse of the West.

that the contrast of the two approaches is between an essential solidarity in human nature and an existential solidarity in human history. With the concept of alteration, Athanasius has introduced an aspect of human history, because in this case it has to do with Christ securing our will rather than restoring our nature.

The significance of his treatment of the fall is his emphasis, not so much on man transgressing a precept (he characteristically uses the term as a noun rather than a verb)⁴⁹ but on man falling away from the contemplation of the Word. This places the redemption in a framework of knowledge so that the significance of death can become attenuated and even lost sight of in the revelational aspect of the incarnation. Yet the concept of alteration has already introduced the necessary element that will find an intrinsic redemptive significance in death, and that is the identification that the Savior finds with sinners to render their hold on life secure. With this the gulf between man and God is a matter of will as well as of nature, although Athanasius himself is not concerned with whether or not he observes this distinction.

The Recreation: Deification

The physical theory of the atonement, or deification,⁵⁰ may be said to emerge from the distinctive treatment of Irenaeus called recapitulation, a theory inspired in part by the Pauline notion of the Second Adam.⁵¹ (Rom. 5, 12-21; 1Cor. 15:20-2; 45-9) Irenaeus would have it that

⁴⁹Cf. de Inc., 4.2; c. Arianos II, 65, 68.

⁵⁰By "physical theory" is meant a conceptualization which sees redemption as a restoration of a fallen nature, and thus one which requires a distinction between nature and will. As such, it was not espoused by the early Fathers.

⁵¹Cf. J.N.D. Kelly, op. cit., pp. 376ff.

Christ "became what we are in order to enable us to become what He is,"⁵² and with this the stress is placed on the incarnation as the cause of redemption. In view of his theory of creation, there can be little doubt that the soteriology of Athanasius can be interpreted as a physical theory of the atonement in which Christ becomes man to restore the divine image in us:

For therefore did He assume the body originate and human, that having renewed it as to its Former, He might deify it in Himself, and thus might introduce us all into the kingdom of heaven after His likeness.⁵³

In his writings on the creation, Athanasius conceived that man was in a "blessed" state,⁵⁴ contemplating the Word as having been made in His Image, and so was not only continuing in immortality,⁵⁵ but even advancing in perfection through his intelligence.⁵⁶ The transgression interrupted this progression⁵⁷ and brought on a parallel devolution,⁵⁸ a gradual obliterating of the image of God and a consequent corruption. The recreation, then, will center on restoring this image: "None other could create anew the likeness of God's image for man, save the Image of the Father."⁵⁹ This restoration succeeded in re-establishing man in the contemplation of God, and so the redemption is largely a matter of the incarnation, of the "re-presence" of the Word in creation. The image Athanasius employs to develop this idea of deification is that of a *parousia*, i. e., a visitation by a king to one of

⁵²Cited in J.N.D. Kelly, *op. cit.*, p. 172, from Haer. 5, praef.

⁵³*c. Arianos* II, 70.

⁵⁴*de Inc.*, 3.3; 11.3.

⁵⁵*Ibid.*, 4.6.

⁵⁶*c. Gentes*, 30, 1-3; 33.4.

⁵⁷*c. Arianos* I, 51.

⁵⁸*de Inc.*, 6.1.

⁵⁹*Ibid.*, 20.1.

his cities:

For the actual corruption in death has no longer holding ground against men, by reason of the Word, which by His one body has come to dwell among them. And like as when a great king has entered into some large city and taken up his abode in one of the houses there... For now that He has come to our realm, and taken up His abode in one body among His peers, henceforth the whole conspiracy of the enemy against mankind is checked, and the corruption of death which before was prevailing against them is done away.⁶⁰

Such an image may have suggested itself from an actual visit to the city of Alexandria by Diocletian in 297 or 298, but at any rate the practice would have been sufficient to recommend its use. It is not mere rhetoric, but something immediate, and so its effect is powerful. In this text, the king's presence "in a body" is sufficient; but in other cases, as when the figure is used to show that the presence of harmony in the universe is due to its having one ruling power,⁶¹ the element of activity is added to mere presence. The king brings order and peace because he manages the people, directs their activities, guides their interests, so that all the opposites do not clash.

This would suggest that the simile of the king's presence could be expanded to include some work, or, as here, that the incarnation is not sufficient without the activity to which it is ordered. In this way, death could be accounted for as well as the incarnation, and in fact, the twin ideas of sacrifice and deification do frequently appear together: "The Word was made flesh in order to offer up this body for all, and that we, partaking of His Spirit, might be deified."⁶² From this it appears that in spite of his stress on Christ as restoring the divine image in us, Athanasius does not neglect the fact that His sacrificial offering released man from the judgement of sin; after all, "death...

⁶⁰ de Inc., 9, 2-4. ⁶¹ c. Gentes, 38; 43. ⁶² de Decretis 14.

gained from that time forth a legal hold over us,"⁶³ so that it was necessary to find a release from this curse, as well as a restoration from corruption. This was, in fact, accomplished by the incarnation, "inasmuch as He had a purpose, for our sakes, to take on Him through the flesh all that inheritance of judgement which lay against us."⁶⁴ Having taken our "flesh," (and this word is frequent in Athanasius),⁶⁵ He has taken our "affections;" by identifying with a body, He has identified with what is in that body:

He has taken on Him the curse which lay against us (as the Apostle has said, 'Has redeemed us from the curse' and 'has carried,' as Isaiah has said, 'our sins' and as Peter has written, 'has borne them in the body on the wood'); so if it is said in the Proverbs 'He created', we, must not conceive that the whole Word is in nature a creature, but that He put on the created body and that God created Him for our sakes, preparing for Him the created body, as it is written, for us, that in Him we might be capable of being renewed and deified.⁶⁶

This quote occurs in the midst of a passage in which he appears to ignore the reality of Christ's human nature, and seems to admit that the Logos functions in place of the human soul of Christ.⁶⁷ The phrase "in Him" is suggestive in this text that the deification that supposedly occurs at the incarnation, does so as a principle and source - that "we might be capable" of deification, or of "being renewed." Whether or not he is thinking of the instrumental causality of Christ's humanity is

⁶³ de Inc., 6.2.

⁶⁴ c. Arianos, II, 76.

⁶⁵ A usage cited by commentators as indicative of his Apollinarianism. Athanasius himself defends its use by an appeal to Sacred Scripture and Tradition. Cf. de Inc. 17; c. Arianos, III, 30.

⁶⁶ c. Arianos, II, 47.

⁶⁷ And so the accusation of an Apollinarian tendency. G. Voisin clears him of the charge in "La Doctrine Christologique de Saint Athanase," Revue d'Histoire Ecclesiastique, I (1900), pp. 226-48.

here a matter of conjecture.⁶⁸ Other texts are more explicit.⁶⁹ The matter of how we are relieved from the judgement of sin through its being "taken on Him," betrays that Athanasius, conformably to his predilection of thinking of the creation and fall without drawing our distinctions between nature and grace, has apparently transposed "curse" and "sin" to "corruption" and "death":

Since all were under sentence of death, He being other than them all, might Himself for all offer to death His own body: and that henceforth, as if all had died through Him, the word of the sentence might be accomplished (for 'all died' in Christ), and all through Him might thereupon become free from sin and from the curse which came upon it, and might truly abide forever, risen from the dead and clothed in immortality and incorruption.⁷⁰

The oblation that Christ makes is not to the Father, but to death. Death is a power reigning over men; by exposing His body to it, Christ demonstrates his superiority and vanquishes it. Death, present in the world since the fall (and in this sense, the fall is always present) runs its course and becomes depleted in Christ. The sentence imposed on men has been carried out, literally, on Christ's body; it was not lifted, but accomplished.⁷¹ Henceforth, death no longer rules.

In parallel fashion, it follows that "as if all had died through Him" can be taken literally, not mystically. The death that

⁶⁸ It is not clear whether a mere "local" sense is implied, which would mean that Christ's body is the "sphere" in which redemption is accomplished, rather than that an actual causality (instrumental) is exercised by Christ's humanity.

⁶⁹ Cf. c. Arianos, I, 47-8; discussed below, pp. 44ff.

⁷⁰ c. Arianos, II, 69.

⁷¹ The idea that Christ "offers" his body to death (actually, "exposes" would be better) may be traced in the de Inc., 81^o; 9.1ff; c. Arianos I, 60; II, 7-8; 66 et passim. Thus de Inc., 22.4: "But He received that death which came from men, in order perfectly to do away with this when it met Him in His own body."

would have come to the Christian has been used up on Christ. For this reason, Athanasius, in paragraphs twenty - one to twenty - five of his de Incarnatione explains why Christ accepted death from others (it was not in his nature, and thus He had to "borrow" it from men); why it was public (so that the resurrection would be believed in, and His superiority over death be acknowledged), and why it was accomplished on the cross (again to show that Christ was superior to death in any form.) In any case, Christ is depicted as the mighty conquerer of death. Thus, quite contrary to the Pauline significance of death and its relation to Baptism as the Christian initiation into the mystery of Christ's pasch, this text evinces no such mystical interpretation.⁷² The sentence has run out, in principle and in practice: it is, simply "accomplished."

But it is accomplished by the principle of substitution, not solidarity,⁷³ for there is no real continuity between Christ and Christians. In this connection, Athanasius differs from Paul, in a minor but very significant point of language. Where Paul avoids the Greek ἀντὶ (instead of) and prefers ὑπέρ (on behalf of),⁷⁴ Athanasius is apt to do the reverse.⁷⁵ The idea of substitution is more characteristic of him.

⁷²But see n. 11, p.4, on the two dimensions in his thought on death.

⁷³Mersch, (The Whole Christ, op. cit., pp. 273ff.), and J.N.D. Kelly (op. cit., p. 38), do not agree with the common interpretation as presented here. They prefer to see a mystical union rather than the substitution of Christ as victim "in our stead." It is not that because He suffers death, we don't, but that His death becomes ours through "the kinship" of the flesh. (Cf. c. Arianos I, 43; 66.) This would bring Athanasius more in line with St. Paul.

⁷⁴Cf. Taylor, The Atonement in New Testament Teaching, op. cit., p. 59.

⁷⁵Cf. de Inc., 8.4; 20.6; et passim.

Nevertheless the use of "in Christ" admits of another interpretation. After the above text, he goes on to say "we all were joined, even we, to the Word,"⁷⁶ indicating that there is a new creation, where all are (will be) in Christ. (He quotes Gal. 6:15 and 3:28.) It is not clear whether he is referring to grace or glory, and in fact is probably speaking of both. He cites an example of what the recreation will be: "in the resurrection they neither marry nor are given in marriage," and yet the whole sense of the passage is that in Christ the sentence has been accomplished, and so is effective for the present.⁷⁷ Perhaps he doesn't see as clearly as Paul the "newness" of the creation, but rather the "creation" which is new.

Primarily, the "in Christ" or our "being joined by the kinship of the flesh" seems to refer to a principle or source rather than an active or mystical union: thus he refers to the deification wrought in Christ as a pledge or guarantee of our own: "For therefore the union of this kind, that He might unite what is man by nature to Him who is in the nature of the Godhead, and his salvation and deification might be sure."⁷⁸ This parallels what he had said before,⁷⁹ that Adam held grace extrinsically, i.e., insecurely, and in this context he goes on to say that what Christ did in the flesh was "the beginning of our new creation...having made for us that new way."⁸⁰ In contrast to the

⁷⁶ c. Arianos II, 69.

⁷⁷ More explicit is ad Episcopos I; c. Arianos III, 19.

⁷⁸ c. Arianos II, 70.

⁷⁹ Ibid., 68.

⁸⁰ Ibid., 70.

insecurity of the old way in Adam (before the fall) we have a sure way in Christ. Thus there is more emphasis on the instrumental causality of the "in Him" than the interpretation reminiscent of the platonic idealism would allow, for Christ has wrought a means not an end; He is the eschaton outside of time: "Nor in any other way was it fitting that our life should be founded, but in the Word Who is before the ages."⁸¹ And so "in Him," through His humanity, we pass through grace to glory.

This development is quite significant, inasmuch as it would eliminate the frequent charge that he conceived of the incarnation as an "automatic" deification of all men. The fact that he arrives at the principle of solidarity in terms of Christ rather than Adam, causes some embarrassment to our Western outlook, which tends to interpret the incarnation as the coming of Christ to placate an offended Father. For Athanasius, Christ brings to humanity the sanctity of God, but it must come through Him, i. e., He must sanctify His body for men. Thus comes the criticism:

So complete, however, is the identity of the humanity of Christ with the nature of humanity as a whole that we may, according to Athanasius, refer the statements of Scripture as to a special endowment and exaltation of Christ, to the whole humanity.⁸²

As if Christ assumed humanity, the incarnation "automatically" extends deification to all men: Christ became man so that man might become God. While the notion of solidarity is going to be difficult for the Eastern mentality, which stresses the divinity of Christ,⁸³ Athanasius, in

⁸¹ Ibid., 76.

⁸² Harnack, op. cit., Vol. 4, p. 47.

⁸³ Thus the Word tends to become the subject of all the actions of Christ. For the notion of solidarity, it will be necessary to arrive at the human instrumentality of Christ in redemption.

fact, does not make an appeal to an "automatic" deification. There is no doubt that he does associate Christ's humanity with our own.⁸⁴ This association he makes quite explicit:

For whatever is written concerning our Saviour in His human nature, ought to be considered as applying to the whole race of mankind; because He took our body, and exhibited in Himself human infirmity.⁸⁵

Nevertheless, association is not identification, and the point he is making becomes clear when he says:

But the Saviour on the contrary...is here said to be anointed, that, as before, being said as man to be anointed with the Spirit, He might provide for us men, not only exaltation and resurrection, but the indwelling and intimacy of the Spirit. And signifying this the Lord Himself hath said... 'I have sent them into the world, and for their sakes do I sanctify, Myself, that they may be sanctified in the truth.' (John 17:18) In saying this He has shown that He is not the sanctified, but the Sanctifier; for He is not sanctified by other, but Himself sanctified Himself, that we may be sanctified in the truth...And notwithstanding, He who, as the Word and Radiance of the Father, gives to others, now is said to be sanctified, because now He has become man, and the Body that is sanctified is His. From Him then we have begun to receive the unction and the seal...it is not the Word, considered as the Word and Wisdom Who is anointed with the Spirit which He Himself gives but the flesh assumed by Him which is anointed in Him and by Him; that the sanctification coming to the Lord as man, may come to all men from Him.⁸⁶

This conception does not embody a platonic scheme for deification, but rather one of the first attempts to break away from a scheme that placed salvation in a partaking of Christ's divinity. For Athanasius, we attain salvation by partaking in Christ's humanity. The Word does not identify with an abstract human nature, but a concrete human nature with all its "affections" or properties. Thus Christ, as man, and because He is man, sanctifies Himself and so becomes the source of our sanctification.

⁸⁴ Cf. Mersch, The Whole Christ, op. cit., pp. 276ff.

⁸⁵ Apologia de Fusa, 13; cf. c. Arianos I, 43.

⁸⁶ c. Arianos I, 46-7.

The incarnation is more than a temporal pre-condition for this sanctification, for both are beyond any consideration of time.

According to Scripture, there is a divine plan operative in human history. This is the framework in which Athanasius works out a soteriology. In our own day, the theology of the resurrection has renewed this biblical perspective, and thus Durrwell is expressing the thought of Athanasius in modern terms when he describes Christ's sacrifice as an offering that concludes in God and so establishes Christ in his full humanity as the sender of the Spirit from God.⁸⁷ Mersch concludes that Athanasius is thinking of our mystical identity with Christ,⁸⁸ and what he means by this is perhaps best expressed by commentators such as Wikenhauser, when he concerns himself with the phrase of Paul "in Christ."⁸⁹ Mersch admits with Newman⁹⁰ that the "how and the why" of the union or solidarity is left unexplained when Athanasius talks about Christ's death, but there can be little doubt that from His birth, Christ carries within Him the exigency to die. Taken together,

⁸⁷ The Resurrection, op. cit., passim.

⁸⁸ The Whole Christ, op. cit., pp. 284ff.

⁸⁹ Pauline Mysticism (New York: Herder and Herder, 1960), p. 104: "There is an objective relationship between Christ and Christians, it is a fellowship in life and being which has the sacrament of Baptism as its foundation. If this can be called mystical, then logically all Christians are mystics." How far this union extends for Athanasius may be seen in the following: "For the Lord was working with Antony - the Lord who for our sake took flesh and gave the body victory over the devil, so that all who truly fight can say, 'not I but the grace of God which was with me.'" (Vita Antonii, 5) "This was Antony's first struggle against the devil, or rather this victory was the Saviour's work in Antony, 'who condemned sin in the flesh that the ordinance of the law might be fulfilled in us who walk not after the flesh but after the spirit.'" (Ibid., 7.) "And no longer in Adam are we all dying, but in Christ we are all reviving." (c. Arianos I, 59)

⁹⁰ Select Treatises, Vol 2, op. cit., p. 135: incorporated by Robertson, op. cit., n. 7 to c. Arianos I, 48.

this redemptive incarnation is the source of our sanctification:
 "...that the sanctification coming to the Lord as man, may come to
 all men from Him"⁹¹ Thus the gift of sanctity comes to all men
 who "have in Him and through Him their origin of receiving them."⁹²

It remains to define more precisely the significance of the
 death Christ dies. Athanasius does express that Christ makes an
 oblation to the Father: "And thus taking from our bodies one of like
 nature... He gave it over to death in the stead of all and offered
 it to the Father."⁹³ But it is not clear whether the self offering is
 made in order that death can run out on Him, or whether death is a
 way to the Father; and once more the action is *ἀντί* not *ὑπέρ*. In
 all such cases, his argument is interpreted as if the sentence weigh-
 ing on men is one of death and corruption, so that, even when guilt
 and sacrifice are connected, it is the former that predominates. It
 is no surprise that he differs from Paul, who avoids *λύτρον* and
 its cognates,⁹⁴ by their extensive application. The idea of substi-
 tution is quite compatible with ransom: Christ redeemed us through
 His body by presenting it to death. Even when the idea of debt or
 satisfaction comes up, it is in terms of death, and not sin: the
 sentence is one of corruption rather than guilt:

But since it was necessary also that the debt owing from all
 should be paid again for, as I have already said, it was owing that
 all should die, for which especial cause, indeed, He came among us:
 to this intent, after the proofs of His Godhead from His works,
 He next offered up His sacrifice also on behalf of all, yielding
 His temple to death in the stead of all...For there was need of
 death, and death must needs be suffered on behalf of all, that
 the debt owing from all might be paid.⁹⁵

⁹¹c. Arianos I, 47. ⁹²Ibid., 48. ⁹³de Inc., 8.4.

⁹⁴Cf. Taylor, The Cross of Christ, op. cit. p. 30.

⁹⁵de Inc., 20, 2-5.

Because he associates the sentence with corruption, the sacrifice becomes separated from the oblation; (he "offered up His sacrifice"), and attached to the incorruption. The sacrifice is the immolation of death that occurs in His body. It is not the orientation of His will to the Father, or even an act that accomplishes or expresses a desire for this union with God,⁹⁶ but it is directed to the corruption in man's nature:

And thus, He, the incorruptible Son of God, being conjoined with all by a like nature, naturally clothed all with incorruption, by the promise of the resurrection. For the actual corruption in death has no longer holding-ground against men, by reason of the Word, "Which by His one body has come to dwell among them."⁹⁷

This passage, introducing the simile of the king coming to dwell in the city, not only suggests that the idea of sacrifice is alien to the thought of Athanasius, but by linking once again the sentence against the transgression to nature and corruption, confirms that it is not a matter of will. The ideas appear to be connected, but the discussion so far has not revealed on what basis Athanasius puts them together. If it is not found in the ideas of guilt and sin, which, after all, belong more properly to the Western heritage of Tertullian, there still remains the possibility of discovering the tie in the idea of "righteousness," a concept more compatible to the Greek Mind.

The question then is, if the criticism that guilt is replaced by a metaphysical corruption in the thought of Athanasius is correct, does the idea of righteousness admit an ethical perspective?⁹⁸ The

⁹⁶If Athanasius does not distinguish nature and will, as in fact, he does not, the traditional criticism as presented here is somewhat arbitrary.

⁹⁷de Inc., 9.2.

⁹⁸It is not entirely clear why such an imposition should be made of his thought, insofar as his soteriology always considers man as a

texts so far cited point to the death as the development of that which the Word began at the incarnation, so that this event is not merely the continuation of the work of the Logos; but if there is a distinction between nature and will, the death it points to is apparently little more than a destruction, i.e., a destruction of death itself (in Christ's body), with no clear indication of the act being ordered to union of will with God: it only restores a nature to its imaging of God, clothes it with incorruption, even renews its contemplation of the Word, so that man becomes as he was made in the beginning, or even better: "Mankind then is perfected in Him - and restored, as it was made at the beginning, nay with greater grace."⁹⁹ In all cases, it can be admitted that Athanasius hurries over the concept of guilt to stress the positive aspect of deification.

In spite of this orientation, sin is present, and cannot be ignored: "By bearing our sins in His body on the tree," as Peter speaks, we men were redeemed from our own affections, and were filled with the righteousness of the Word."¹⁰⁰ Athanasius, in fact, can deal with sin without accepting a distinction between nature and will. Opposed to death and sin is the righteousness of the Word, the source of life:

Wherefore there was here also need of one unalterable, that men might have the immutability of the righteousness of the Word as an image and type for virtue... Good reason then, that the Lord, Who ever is in nature unalterable, loving righteousness and hating iniquity, should be anointed and Himself sent, that He, being and remaining the same, by taking this alterable flesh, "might condemn sin in it," and might secure its freedom, and its ability henceforth 'to fulfill the righteousness of the law' in itself, so as to be able to say, 'But we are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if so be that the Spirit of God dwelleth in us' (Rom. 8:9).¹⁰¹

whole even when he uses words such as corruption and death. (He is describing redemption in terms of life.) It is presented here as part of the common interpretation without implying that it is a correct interpretation.

⁹⁹c. Arianos II, 67.

¹⁰⁰Ibid., III, 31.

¹⁰¹Ibid., I, 51.

"Alteration" has largely been utilized to refer to the change that characterized (and continues to characterize) man's state after the fall, but it was also used to indicate the cause of man's state of devolution, (or re-instatement): "For being by nature mobile, even though she have turned away from what is good, yet she did not lose her mobility,"¹⁰² and thus "mobility" can refer to either nature or will: he is not concerned with the distinction. In the above text, having shown that we have security from Christ, he proceeds to show how it attaches to us by drawing a contrast between Christ and Adam:

For as when Adam transgressed, his sin reached unto all men, so, when the Lord had become man and had overthrown the Serpent, that so great strength of His is to extend through all men.¹⁰³

The picture he draws here is similar to his theory on creation; the difference being that Adam in paradise was strengthened by the presence of the Word extrinsically; now redeemed man has this strength intrinsically. Lest it be supposed that by "type of virtue" Athanasius is here speaking of simple edification, he might have referred his reader to paragraphs thirteen and fourteen of his de Incarnatione, where he delineated the creation of man in the image of God. Man is what he is (by adoption) precisely because the Word is that (by nature). The Lord, as the unchanging unchangeable, is the principle of unchangeableness in man; he secures man's freedom (which for Athanasius is firm attachment to the good)¹⁰⁴ by taking the flesh and condemning its legacy of sin. Freedom is not simple mobility, it consists in righteousness; and if this righteousness did not belong to the Word, it could not attach to man.

¹⁰² c. Gentes, 4.2.

¹⁰³ c. Arianos I, 51.

¹⁰⁴ Cf. c. Gentes 4.5: "Then seeing, as I said before, and abusing her power, she has perceived that she can move the members of the body also in opposite way...not knowing that she is made not merely to move, but to move in the right direction."

Up to this point, it might be said that the concept of deification in Athanasius does not exclude the intrinsic redemptive significance of death, but neither does it include it, if he is held to the distinctions we are accustomed to draw in a philosophy of man. It should be noted, however, that at this point the whole argument has changed. The problem is not whether the Greek concept of deification by the incarnation excludes the sacrifice or death, but what is the redemptive incarnation as it is expounded by Athanasius. Now that a more adequate understanding of the solidarity involved in redemption has emerged from the theology of the mystical body, it is much easier to see in what sense all humanity has in fact been redeemed by the incarnation, and the discussion can become involved with the relation of the redemptive incarnation to God rather than the mutual relation of its phases. This has been the contribution of the theology of the resurrection.

3 - HUMAN HISTORY AND HUMAN DEATH

A New Perspective

The characteristic feature of Athanasius' thought on redemption, as evidenced in the philosophic perspective, is summed up in this passage from his work against the Arians:

for as the Lord, putting on the body, became man, so we men are deified by the Word as being taken to Him through His flesh, and henceforward inherit life everlasting.¹

This deification however, does have two phases, one pertaining to the judgment that weighed against men, the other to corruption:

For by the sacrifice of His own body, He both put an end to the law which was against us, and made a new beginning of life for us, by the hope of resurrection which He has given us.²

The difficulty is that the "sentence" or judgment is transposed in his thought to become almost the source of the corruption rather than the sanction of guilt:

all being held to have died in Him, the law involving the ruin of men might be undone (inasmuch as its power was fully spent in the Lord's body)³

With this, the double faceted structure of redemption merges in a single grand work of restoration: "Mankind is perfected in Him and restored, as it was made at the beginning, nay, with greater grace."⁴

¹c. Arianos III, 34.

²de Inc., 10.5.

³Ibid., 8.4; cf. c. Arianos I, 60; II, 7, 8, 66, 76.

⁴c. Arianos II, 67.

The sentence--i.e., death, has been paid by all, since it ran out in Christ.

The following passage, however, sums up another whole current of his thought:

"For when the first way, which was through Adam, was lost, and in place of paradise we deviated unto death, and heard the words 'Dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return,' therefore, the Word of God, who loves man, puts on Him created flesh at the Father's will, that whereas the first man had made it dead through the transgression, He Himself might quicken it in the blood of His own body, and might open 'for us a way new and living,' as the Apostle says, 'through the veil,' that is to say, His flesh; which he signifies elsewhere thus, 'wherefore, if any man be in Christ, he is a new creation.'⁵

The rest of this chapter might well be a commentary on this passage. Note the following shifts of perspective: "the first way" immediately places the discussion of creation and the fall in the context of the redemption, the only way its significance can be demonstrated. This "first way" was "through Adam", in contrast to the way, "new and living" that we have in Christ, and which makes for "a new creation." The historic significance of grace, as coming from Christ seems much more in the foreground.

Having lost the first way, we "deviated unto death" and yet the death is related to guilt, for man now "heard the words..." This transgression called forth the Word of God, who "loves man", and God takes "created flesh" at his "Father's will". Both of these last phrases represent a significant concession on the part of Athanasius, for all along he has been hesitant to identify the Word either with anything created lest he be called a creature, or with the Father's will, lest he be made inferior or dependent on the Father in dignity. The concession establishes the mediatorial work of salvation in the divine initiative and requires an

⁵Ibid. II, 65.

intimate identification of Christ with man. The identification is wrought so that Christ "might quicken it," and this is very suggestive of an association with the Holy Spirit, who is viewed by Athanasius as the actualizer of the power of God,⁶ although here it carries the primary meaning of "enliven" or "refresh". The unification is accomplished "in the blood," a clear formulation of the immolation involved in a sacrificial death, while there is no reference to exposing his body to death so that it might run out in Him. Christ really enters into the situation of mankind as sinners, to the extent of experiencing death.

Continuing with the words of the Apostle (Heb. 10: 20) "through... His flesh", there is a clear indication of the instrumentality of Christ's humanity, for this is how Athanasius interprets "flesh". Finally, the end result is "a new creation," rather than a re-creation, for the emphasis is on the "new" rather than the creation: it is a new way. Placed in the larger context of his discussion of Prov. 8: 22, in which this passage occurs, Christ appears as a real proto-parent, not type; and this power of generation, by which men become adopted, is realized in the pasch, i.e., "in the blood." Thus Athanasius continues:

Therefore from love to man none other than the Lord, the 'beginning' of the new creation, is created as 'the Way'... that man might walk no longer according to that first creation... as the blessed Apostle teaches in Colossians, saying, 'He is the Head of the body, the Church, who is the Beginning, the First-born from the dead, that in all things He might have the preeminence.'⁷

What this "new way" consists in can be seen by our relationship to his body:

not the Word, considered as the Word, received this so great grace, but we. For because of our relationship to His body we too have

⁶Cf. below, p. 66 ff.

⁷c. Arianos II, 65.

become God's temple, and in consequence are made God's sons.⁸

This relationship is some association with him,⁹ so that we participate in the mysteries of his life. Thus when the Spirit descended on Him in the Jordan, it was "for us"; the Spirit came to him for us.¹⁰ In fact,

now that the common Saviour of all has died on our behalf, we, the faithful in Christ, no longer die the death as before, agreeably to the warning of the Law, for this condemnation has ceased; but corruption ceasing and being put away by the grace of the Resurrection, henceforth we are only dissolved, agreeably to our bodies mortal nature.¹¹

This is why death has "lost its sting": it is not the same as before, but has become a means of union with God.¹² What happens to Christ is "on our behalf", and our relationship to him is participating that which he has "for us", even to the extent of death. But this is not the ultimate:

And as He Himself, who sanctifies all, says also that He sanctifies Himself to the Father for our sakes, not that the Word may become Holy, but that He Himself may in Himself sanctify all of us.¹³

The source of this sanctity is evident: "there is one sanctification, which is derived from the Father, through the Son, in the Holy Spirit."¹⁴ Nevertheless, it must come through our Lord's humanity; the flesh is assumed by him to be anointed and become the source of man's sanctification: "that the sanctification coming to the Lord as man, may come to all men from Him".¹⁵ He is the "first born" of the new creation, inaugurating a "new way" to the Father, a way achieved in his flesh (humanity):

He is therefore called and is the "First-born" of us, because all men being lost according to the transgression of Adam, His flesh

⁸ Ibid., I. 43.

⁹ Cf. above, p. 45f.

¹⁰ c. Arianos I, 47.

¹¹ de Inc. 21. 1.

¹² Cf. above, n. 11, p. 4.

¹³ c. Arianos I, 41.

¹⁴ ad Serapion I, 20.

¹⁵ c. Arianos I, 47.

before all others was saved and liberated, as being the Word's body; and henceforth we, becoming incorporate with It, are saved after its pattern.¹⁶

"that by His being called first, those that came after Him may abide, as depending on the Word as a beginning."¹⁷

Coming by means of his humanity, it reaches us in the Spirit: "For what the Word has by nature, as I said, in the Father, that he wishes to be given to us through the Spirit irrevokably."¹⁸

This rapid survey of the soteriology of St. Athanasius cannot be contained in the philosophic framework of human nature and death. There is another alternative, that presented by the biblical categories of human history and death, which, without negating the former open up a new horizon. It begins with the divine initiative in the plan of salvation.

The Initiative of the Father

St. Paul captured this aspect in two very succinct phrases, one revealing the initiative: "For God was truly in Christ, reconciling the world to himself" (2 Cor. 5: 19) and the other revealing the love: "But God commends his charity towards us, because when as yet we were sinners, Christ died for us. (Rom. 5: 8-9)

This approach is altogether different from the interpretation gleaned from Athanasius' theory of creation, where the Father "generated" men according to His Word, and so preserved them in existence, so that they could ever renew in their desire toward Him by the contemplation of the Word. The new way is not to be in the soul, nor is it to be explicated by a distinction of grace and nature. It is "in Christ," in whom God is

¹⁶Ibid., II, 61.

¹⁷Ibid., 63.

¹⁸Ibid., III, 25.

working for the salvation of all. More than this, the action must center in the human consciousness of Christ; the sacrifice of reconciliation cannot stop at immolation but must press on to oblation if it intends to conclude in God.

In applying this perspective to Athanasius, then, it will be constantly necessary to distinguish nature from history. He too speaks of the Father's love, but sometimes it is in the context of nature or creation, as:

For they [creatures] could not have endured His nature which was untempered splendor, 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.¹⁹

Passages such as this lead to the confusion of nature and grace. How much different is the following: "The God of all then... being loving and kind, prepared beforehand in His own Word, by whom also He created us, the Economy of our salvation."²⁰ In the context of history, the creation becomes "also," clearly distinct from the grace which was to be realized in an "economy." Thus the Incarnation itself is placed in the context of Israelite history, a history that begins in Adam, the fall and the promise. It is this approach which supports the following passage: "For all vicer men, being merely born of Adam, died, and death reigned over them; but He, the Second Man, is from heaven".²¹

The distinction between Adam and Christ is not as obvious or easily achieved as might at first appear; note the lack of distinction in the following sentence: "that as through Him we have come to be, so also in Him, all men might be redeemed from their sins, and by Him all things might be ruled."²²

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, II, 64.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 75.

²¹ *Ibid.*, I, 44.

²² *Ibid.*, 49.

This text comes from the philosophic interpretation of his theory of creation, while the first depends on his historical approach to redemption. The significance of this distinction is best observed in the theology of death that comes from them. The philosophic approach interprets death as the tragic enemy of our nature, while the historical approach reveals its significance as the means of union with God and the fulfillment of our nature. Just as there is in the world, a life from Adam and Adam's death, so there is a life from Christ and Christ's death; and as long as the recreation is interpreted in terms of creation, i.e., insofar as man, created in the image is restored in that image, the historical significance of Christ will be submerged in the Logos doctrine wherein the Incarnation merely continues his cosmological work. If the Incarnation retains its uniqueness, the distinction between redemption and creation, between our life from Adam, and our life from Christ, must be preserved. Hence the importance of placing the Incarnation in the context of an economy manifesting the initiative and love of the Father in his plan for our salvation. While Athanasius succeeds in placing redemption in the divine initiative, it is not always clear why he does so. Sometimes the motive is love, equally apportioned in the work of creation as well as redemption:

He has yet of the loving-kindness and goodness of His own Father been manifested to us in a human body for our salvation... it will appear not inconstant for the Father to have wrought its salvation in Him by whose means He made it.²³

At other times, the divine initiative is ordered to perfecting what was lost or inadequately held in creation: "For through the Son is given what is given; and there is nothing but the Father operates it through

²³de Inc., 1, 3-4.

the Son, for thus is grace secure to him who receives it."²⁴ The thought here is that since the economy proceeds from the Father, the Son, who works it, and who has or is what the Father is, can secure for men the quality that proceeds from the nature of the Father as agenneton:

but they all preach of Him as Radiance, thereby to signify His being from the essence, proper and indivisible, and His oneness with the Father. This also will secure His true unchangeableness and immutability.²⁵

Being ingenerate, (and also unoriginate), the Father is unchangeable.

Creatures, on the contrary are alterable:

for things originate, being from nothing, and not being before their origination, because in truth, they come to be after not being, have a nature which is changeable.²⁶

This alterability in creatures is capable of different meanings.

The philosophic approach identifies it as the gradual dissolution or corruption of fallen nature. This historical view identifies it as the cause of ethical devolution, thus locating it in the will; (without denying the place of nature):

But that originate things are changeable, no one can deny, seeing that angels transgressed, Adam disobeyed, and all stand in need of the grace of the Word.²⁷

Thus the initiative of the Father through the Son secures in man's will the righteousness that he could not hold in Adam. Christ secures man in this unchangeableness by sanctifying himself for all of us, thus being, in his humanity, the source of our righteousness:

For through He had no need, nevertheless He is said to have received humanly, that on the other hand, inasmuch as the Lord has received, and the grant is lodged with Him, the grace may remain sure.²⁸

²⁴c. Arianos III, 12.

²⁵de Decretis 23.

²⁶c. Arianos I, 36.

²⁷ad Afros, 7.

²⁸c. Arianos III, 38.

It must be concluded from all this that Athanasius does not draw out the full soteriological implication involved in the historical perspective of the Father's initiative in the work of salvation, and this for two reasons. In one sense, it was not necessary, inasmuch as he was not a heir of Tertullian's legalistic mentality that led to the idea of Christ placating an angry God, and the system of satisfaction and merit evolving from this. On the other hand, the Trinitarian character of the Arian controversy led him to stress, when he said that "Thus God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself,"²⁹ not that God was in Christ, but that Christ was equal to God. Nevertheless, the groundwork is there, and represents a modification of the system that evolved from his theory of creation. Inasmuch as Christ secures for us the grace of the Father's unchangeableness, the redemption is placed in the context of a will (and nature) that is preserved in true freedom, or attachment to good as well as immortality.

Christ and His Identity with Sinners

Because the language in his approach to redemption implicated a "restoration" of creation, it follows that his view of the identification achieved by Christ will likewise be subject to this interpretation. This has been noted in the transposition of judgment to signify death rather than guilt.³⁰ It should also be noted, that, as a matter of fact, Christ can not identify with sin at all in a physical context, since this would make evil a substance or Christ a sinner. On the other hand, it is necessary "that Christ became what we are to lead us to what He is," a favorite formula of the Greek Fathers. How to reconcile this paradox

²⁹Cf. Ibid., 6.

³⁰Cf. above, pp. 48ff.

is the problem of Christ's relation to sin.

That there is some association of Christ with humanity is obvious:³¹ "And when He received the Spirit, we it was how by Him were made recipients of it."³² The contact is the source of our life: "And no longer in Adam are we all dying; but in Christ we are all reviving."³³ But this association with Christ is the "after" of redemption, not the "before." This latter aspect is not so easily identified in view of the transposition our thought makes, as in this text: "...inasmuch as He had a purpose for our sakes, to take on Him through the flesh all that inheritance of judgment which lay against us."³⁴ Here the judgment can refer to the corruption in our nature, which, as a sentence that must be accomplished, runs out on Christ's body. A similar example is found in the following: "For man, being in Him, was quickened: for this was why the Word was united to man, namely that against man the curse might no longer prevail."³⁵

The problem is that Athanasius can use the vocabulary of reconciliation, i.e., words such as "judgment" "sentence" "curse" "debt" and "sin" to describe what he means by restoration, or redemption. Thus if Christ satisfies our debt, the debt is related to the sentence of death rather than with men who are sinners, and whose will is inadequately oriented to good. Yet the latter is not altogether absent from his thought "by bearing our sins in His body on the tree," as Peter speaks, we

³¹Cf. above, pp. 45.

³³Ibid., 59.

³⁵In Illud Omnia, 2.

³²c. Arianos I, 47.

³⁴Ibid., II, 76.

³⁶Cf. de Inc., 20; c. Arianos II, 66.

men were redeemed from our own affections, and were filled with the righteousness of the Word."³⁷

In this case, the grace that comes from Christ is not the immortality of the Word, but his firm attachment to virtue. Still, however, the relation of solidarity with Christ is described according to its positive aspect of incorporation with Him, or deification, rather than forgiveness of sins. Yet, redemption must not only be intrinsic to man's corruption, but to his guilt as well. The next passage comes close to this meaning; perhaps it is as far as Athanasius, preoccupied with Christ's divinity, can go:

because that the Lord who supplies the grace has become a man like us, He on the other hand, the „Savior, humbled Himself in taking 'our body of humiliation;' and took a servant's form, putting on that flesh which was enslaved to sin.³⁸

Yet this ascription is rare, and more often, Athanasius is content with affirming that Christ became man, without giving his enemies a handle to use against the divinity of Christ. Thus he affirms:

And He became man, and did not come into man; to show that Christ was not merely visiting in a body as the Word had formerly come to the prophets, but had really 'been made flesh.'³⁹

It might be noted that theologians are still grappling with this problem today, i. e., how to account for our intrinsic release from the judgment against sin without making Christ undergo a punishment for sin.

Athanasius, then, does not advance his soteriology beyond a philosophic perspective by associating Christ with the historical situation of man and the heritage of sin, perhaps because he does

³⁷c. Arianos III 31.

³⁸Ibid., I, 43.

³⁹Ibid., III, 30.

not perceive that Christ can identify with the fallen nature of man without participating the guilt that resides in man's will. Yet he does see that redemption must be intrinsic. It remains to consider whether this advance will be arrived at from the more positive aspect of identification, i. e., the transformation it is ordered to.

Christ and His Transformative Oblation

Again, it will be necessary to carefully separate the notion of death as related to history, and as related to nature. Only in the former case can it be endured, insofar as it becomes specified as a means of union with the Father. There are thus two levels in the discussion here, the first, whether Christ really died, or vanquished death, and the second, whether that death is more than pure immolation. The first question will ascertain the finality of the Incarnation, and the second, the finality of the death.

Although Athanasius frequently talks as if death was destroyed by Christ,⁴⁰ he also maintains that it was changed by Him; of this, the resurrection is both the sign of His participation in it and evidence that it is no longer the same; thus, because Christ died "on our behalf" (not "in our stead") we "no longer die the death as before... but corruption ceasing and being put away by the grace of the resurrection, henceforth we are only dissolved."⁴¹

Death plays a real part in our sanctification:

How then has He given Himself, if He had not worn flesh?
For flesh He offered, and gave Himself for us, in order
that undergoing death in it, 'He might bring to naught
him that had the power with death, i. e., the devil'.
(Heb. 2:14)⁴²

⁴⁰Cf. note 3, above.

⁴¹de Inc., 21.1.

⁴²ad Adelphus, 6.

"For our Savior did not redeem us by inactivity, but by suffering for us he abolished death."⁴³

This interpretation represents an advance over the idea of offering His body to death, that as a sentence, it might run out on Him. Thus Christ can really enter into death, and through death can make His self offering to the Father for us; He took "the form of the servant, and as man underwent for us death in His flesh, that thereby He might offer Himself for us through death to the Father."⁴⁴ There is then, a true oblation, an offering that concludes not only in the transformation of death, but does this because the immolation is an oblation that concludes in God. In this perspective, Athanasius is no longer wary of pointing out the reality of Christ's death. At one place he criticizes the position of the Jews who "expect indeed the Christ as coming, but do not reckon that He undergoes a passion."⁴⁵ He is explaining Acts 2:36 as meaning that the Word, always Lord and King, now manifests His Kingship over us (for us) on the cross, or in another sense, that we begin to have Him for king because on the Cross He has displaced the reign of corruption. In another case, he clearly points out this finality of the Incarnation: The Word "at last became incarnate for our sakes, that He might offer Himself to the Father in our stead, and redeem us through His oblation and sacrifice."⁴⁶ This oblation is a true transformation, first for Christ:

But when He had brought on that time which He Himself had appointed, at which He desired to suffer in the body for all men, He announces it to the Father, saying, 'Father, the hour is come; glorify Thy Son.'⁴⁷

⁴³Festal Letters XIII, 6.

⁴⁴g. Arianos I, 42.

⁴⁵Ibid., II, 15.

⁴⁶Festal Letters X, 10.

⁴⁷de Fusa, 15.

and then for us:

For as Christ died and was exalted as man, so, as man, is He said to take what as God, He ever had, that even such a grant of grace might reach to us.⁴⁸

It is in this context that Athanasius arrives at the human instrumentality of Christ in the work of our redemption, already noted,⁴⁹ and this work is accomplished not only by Him but in His death, which opens up the "new way" according to the Second Adam. This way is inaugurated for Christians at their baptism: "for as we are all from earth and die in Adam so being regenerated from above of water and Spirit, in the Christ we are all quickened."⁵⁰ This sacrament begins a new life in union with Christ, in whom "we are all re-viving" and it is possible because, as a matter of fact, Christ is still living; as the risen Christ, he is still active in the world; "For if it be true that one dead can exert no power, while the Savior does daily so many works."⁵¹

There can be little doubt that Athanasius does ascribe a paschal finality to the Incarnation which terminates it in the resurrection as the source of Christ's exaltation as man (for us) and our own resurrection with Him, through the relation we have with His body. But the advance does not end here; it must include the gift of the Spirit, in whom the power of God reaches out to us and incorporates us in the mystery of Christ.

The Life Giving Spirit

The Spirit is generally viewed as the means through which Christ's activity and power are realized in men. St. Athanasius restores the New Testament identification of the Spirit as the Spirit of Christ not only

⁴⁸c. Arianos I, 42.

⁴⁹Cf. above, p. 55 ff.

⁵⁰g. Arianos III, 33.

⁵¹de Inc., 31, 2.

because He is sent by Christ, but because He is the minister of all Christ's activities:

But when we are enlightened by the Spirit, it is Christ who in him enlightens us...we are made to drink of the Spirit, we drink of Christ...if by the Spirit we are made sons, it is clear that it is in Christ we are called children of God... Furthermore, as the Son is life - for he says 'I am the life' - we are said to be quickened by the Spirit... But when we are quickened by the Spirit, Christ himself is said to live in us.⁵²

The Spirit of Christ relates us to the Father:

For the Spirit of the Word in us names through us His own Father as ours, which is the Apostle's meaning when he says, 'God hath sent forth the Spirit of His Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father.'⁵³

The favorite image of the Father's to describe the relation of Father and Son i.e., light and radiance, was expanded to include the Spirit:

And when the Spirit, is in us, the Word also, who gives the Spirit, is in us, and in the Word is the Father... For where the light is, there is also the radiance; and where the radiance is, there also is its activity and lambent grace.⁵⁴

Again, the Spirit is "the activity" of Christ, the "lambent grace" completing the trinity. The main point is his argument from unity of operation to unity of essence, in the course of which he states that sanctification is one such operation: "there is one sanctification which is derived from the Father, through the Son, in the Holy Spirit."⁵⁵ The important development, however, is the fact that the Spirit is the means by which we participate Christ's righteousness: "For what the Word has by nature, as I said, in the Father, that He wishes to be given to us through the Spirit irrevocably."⁵⁶

⁵²ad Serapion I, 19.

⁵³de Decretis 31.

⁵⁴ad Serapion I, 30.

⁵⁵Ibid., 20.

⁵⁶c. Arianos III, 25.

This represents the advance Athanasius did not draw out when he arrived at the idea that Christ somehow was a guarantee against the alterability that led us, and continues to lead us, into sin. The availability of this grace depends on the historic significance of Christ, who becomes the life giving Spirit: "And having rendered the flesh capable of the Word, He made us walk, no longer according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit."⁵⁷ Thus deification is dependent not alone on the Incarnation, but on receiving the Spirit of Christ:

And these are they who, having received the Word, gained power from Him to become sons of God; for they could not become sons, being by nature creatures, otherwise than by receiving the Spirit of the natural and true Son. Wherefore, that this might be, 'the Word became flesh', that He might make man capable of God-head.⁵⁸

Furthermore, receiving the Spirit of Christ is dependent on Christ's oblation:

And if we wish to know the object attained by this, we shall find it to be as follows: that the Word was made flesh in order to offer up this body for all, and that we, partaking of His Spirit, might be deified.⁵⁹

With the gift of the Spirit, the Second Adam becomes the dread of a divinized humanity. Assuredly, sinners have no place in this new race and so the economy of salvation prepared and directed by the Father has entered its definitive phase in Christ. Redemption is present in the world: thus is the scriptural insight of St. Athanasius.

⁵⁷Ibid., I, 60.

⁵⁸Ibid., II, 59.

⁵⁹de Decretis 14.

4 CONCLUSION

It was suggested at the outset that if Athanasius were accepted at face value, his idea of deification in terms of the divinized humanity of Christ could lead to a closer appreciation of the Eastern teaching on the atonement. A deliberate comparison was made between his theories and our own thinking today in terms of the theology of the Mystical Body and the current emphasis on the resurrection. From the one we see the solidarity that has to intervene for redemption and from the other we arrive at the oblation that characterizes the redemption as effective because it concludes in God.¹ In both cases, the focus is on the divinity without obscuring the humanity, and for this reason Athanasius holds his own. This point can now be explained.

The discussion of deification in Chapter two arrived at the conclusion that Athanasius conceives of redemption as the work by which Christ, in sanctifying Himself, somehow becomes the source, origin, principle, or beginning of our sanctification, i.e., that He is the Second Adam, the head and true protoparent of a race of divinized humans. There was little indication that this somehow involved a generic assumption of humanity,

¹The apparent contradiction is due to separating one event into two parts. On the one hand, redemption is already accomplished in the incarnation simply because it is what it is, that is, the divinization of Christ's humanity, a humanity "supernaturally one" (Mersch) and therefore in fundamental unity with the individuals likewise possessing this form. On the other hand, redemption becomes effective when the sacrifice consummates in God, and Christ, now completely human, becomes the source of the life-giving Spirit. (Durrwell) The former refers more directly to human history as a whole, and the latter has individual men in the focus, in so far as they belong to a community.

as if all men were contained in Him, but much to imply a true instrumental (and conjoined is also inferred from his insistence on the subsistence of Christ's humanity in the Word) causality on the part of the humanity that was anointed. One statement may be recalled here:

And if, as the Lord Himself has said, the Spirit is His, and takes of His, and He sends It, it is not the Word, considered as the Word and Wisdom, who is anointed with the Spirit which He Himself gives, but the flesh assumed by Him which is anointed in Him and by Him, that the sanctification coming to the Lord as man, may come to all men from Him.²

If there is some question as to whether this sanctification was achieved by the mere presence of the Word in the flesh, or by His works in the flesh, the problem is ours, not his, although it remains a true problem for us. This is so because our interpretation of his approach to creation has not appreciated his understanding of the presence of the Word, as Image, in creation, not simply as exemplar, but true and efficient sustainer. The unity or assimilation is much more dynamic and existential than we care to admit with our essential distinction of nature and grace. Should we accept a real and continuing genesis here, in which creation participates the Word as type and parent, we should also find it in the re-creation. In the existential perspective, a theory of "nature graced" is not at all inadequate, for as a matter of fact, history has seen no other creature outside of some relation to grace, even if that relation is negative, and, on the other hand, in the essential perspective, the "natural man" remains a matter of hypothesis, never realized, and never to be realized. That Athanasius understood the significance of the coming in the flesh of the Word can be clearly seen:

And men are clothed in flesh in order to be and to subsist; but

² C. Arianos I, 47.

the Word of God was made man in order to sanctify the flesh.³

In which case the incarnation can only be conceived as a redemptive incarnation, the assumption of a humanity that bears within itself its own mandate to death. This can be the only finality of the identification of the Word with flesh. Yet here, another difficulty was encountered; and again the problem was ours, not his. It appears that the sentence of death is a physical, even personified force that finds Christ's body too extensive for its corrupting power and so exhausts itself and runs out. In the historical perspective, however, this is precisely what happens; if it does not, then Christ is not the triumphant sacrament of God's grace. Our interpretation of his theory of the fall is responsible for our failure to appreciate this point. While the language he uses can embrace a metaphysical formulation, it is not entirely clear that it actually does. Another example can be recalled:

For this cause, then, death having gained upon men, and corruption abiding upon them, the race of man was perishing; the rational man made in God's image was disappearing, and the handiwork of God was in process of dissolution.⁴

It is necessary to interpret this passage in the context of Athanasius, not our own categories. The work involved receives its thrust from the historical situation Athanasius is describing either in actual fact, or as is more likely, with an imaginative and instructive use of hyperbole. That situation is the relation man has taken towards God since the fall, and it is viewed as an ever worsening attitude, (not condition) or perversion that is expressed in paganism in all its forms. In a very real sense, history has

³Ibid., II, 10.

⁴de Inc., 6.1.

exhibited the progressive and deepening rejection of God as far as the panorama of paganism extends. This is not necessarily a quantitative devolution, although there is a relation to physical dissolution; it is an intrinsic consequence and therefore real sanction for sin. Death is in the world because of sin, and while death is physically measurable its religious significance is not, and in this sense the fall is qualitative. Like a "beserk charioteer" man is struggling to reach what is not; he has no goal to end his course. This finality will be re-established when the King, the God-man, makes it present in humanity what belongs to God. The pieces of his argument fall together only if we abandon our own interpretation.

A number of phrases in the above quote call for some clarification. By "death" is meant the situation that prevails as a result of the transgression, a whole series of events that ought not to come to "nature graced" and therefore is opposed to man; an enemy, even a power working against man. He is not speaking simply of the event that comes to suddenly end man's stay on earth, but the sign of religious death. Bodily mortality is the crushing witness to the spiritual decay of paganism; it cannot be absolutely identified with physical dissolution:

But corruption ceasing and being put away by the grace of the Resurrection, henceforth we are only dissolved, agreeably to our bodies mortal nature.⁵

Death lingers on in the world after it has run out in Christ: what then, has run out on Him? Not the physical death, but the religious significance attaching to it. With Christ, a new race, a divinized humanity originates. God's life is irrevocably present in Christ for

⁵Ibid., 21.1.

men and spiritual decay has lost its power; it cannot prevail, for sin cannot endure the hypostatic union, and the effect of that union is a unity in Christ's humanity that extends to all men.

This brings up another phrase in the quote, "the race of men." This is not an entity given once and for all in the creation, a presumption unconsciously involved in the metaphysical interpretation of his theory of the fall. Rather, generation by generation, men continue to display the power of sin in the world. This comprehensive concept embraces the historical situation of man after the fall; it is not as if the human essence were deteriorating, (despite the sentence that follows in the quote), but his existential situation was worsening. Thus the definitiveness of the fall is not, as all the commentators have noted, evident, at least from the categories of nature and grace; and yet there was an irreversible and tragic turn, when the history of man was subjected to an interruption that completely reversed the direction he was taking. From that point on, "the rational man made in God's image was disappearing" - not that nature was dissolving, but that history was exhibiting the madness and folly of man's attempt to be autonomous. This attempt, not-rational in its origin, continues to display this characteristic as the original rejection of life is prolonged time and man falls away from God's image.

This is the final phrase, "God's image." It is man that is perishing, not the indefectible image of God. To be made in God's image means that man "images forth" the Word, because He is present to man. When this reflection is rejected in the transgression, man retains his rationality (intellect) and mobility (will) and yet loses his hold on life and attachment to good, and ends up on the rocks of paganism. What is disappearing then, is not nature, i.e., the corruption is not

entirely metaphysical, but the evidence of God's life on earth. The defection is in man, not as in his nature, but in his attraction to life and goodness; and history witnesses this devolution. When the God-man restores to humanity its possession of the Image, redemption is realized, and so the sentence of death can be said to have exhausted itself on Christ. The god-man identified with the flesh of sin, but no sin, since sin was the bias of the flesh. Yet, because He was in the flesh he accepted the physical legacy of death in the flesh and at the same time, he denied, on behalf of humanity, the religious legacy of death, and secured through this human denial a new way for man, in so far as man accepted this identity held out to him:

And when became He 'High Priest of our Profession,' but when, after offering Himself for us, He raised His Body from the dead, and, as now, Himself brings near and offers to the Father those who in faith approach Him.⁶

Accepting this identity is possible through the Spirit of Christ, and this was the conclusion of Chapter three:

In Him [Spirit] the Word makes glorious the creation, and by bestowing upon it divine life and sonship draws it to the Father.⁷

With the perspective of the biblical categories, the deification could be re-interpreted as a sanctification, the only difference being that the latter is more obviously a mode of being, and easier to place in relation to its source. Chapter three suggested that the soteriology of St. Athanasius achieved a greater integration in terms of the Father, whose love and initiative is the source of redemption, the Son, who accomplished the transformative oblation that is the redemption, and

⁶ c. Arianos II, 7.

⁷ ad Serapion I, 25.

the Spirit who draws all men to the redemption. The significance of this development is that Athanasius arrives at the principle of solidarity in terms of life and justification rather than death and guilt. Instead of contrasting the corruption that prevailed after the fall to the incorruption preceeding it, there is a sound basis for contrasting the sanctity prevailing after Christ to the idolatry preceeding Him. In this light, Christ is more than an artisan restoring creation, and more than an exemplar; He is the priest reconciling creation, and a parent, or head of that new creation, the people of God.

If the theology of the atonement in St. Athanasius focuses on the Incarnation, Soteriology has not been emptied of its content by a metaphysical concept of restoration or deification; rather, it has been founded on the only principle from which it can take its origin, the hypostatic union which constitutes Christ Priest. Christ, fully man, subsists in the Word, and in this subsistence his humanity is divinized to the limit of its capacity, so that in the possession of his self as human, He becomes one with men with the unity of humanity in a supernatural way, and so by grace, secures redemption (already belonging from the Incarnation to mankind as a whole) to anyone who identifies himself with this race in Him. Over and against the sin that is in man's nature as a result of his history there now stands a divinization of man's nature as a fact of the historical Christ. "He was made man that we might be made God."

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