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# Athanasius' Doctrine; of the Incarnation in Light of its Historical Context as Reflected in De Incarnatione

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SHORT TITLE

ATHANASIUS ON THE INCARNATION

# ATHANASIUS' DOCTRINE OF THE INCARNATION IN LIGHT OF ITS HISTORICAL CONTEXT AS REFLECTED IN DE INCARNATIONE

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by

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# CHAPTER I

## INTRODUCTION

Studies in Christian origins cannot be called a new subject. There are few subjects on which there is a more constant stream of new books, whether the thoughts that find expression in them are new or old. But happily it is also true that there are few areas of investigation on which second thoughts are more rewarding. We can never understand the present without an adequate knowledge of the past, and in this materialistic age to return to the spiritual springs of our Christian heritage is indeed a wholesome process.

The characteristic teaching of the Christian Church distinguishing it from all others is the doctrine of the Incarnation. Christians of all ages have given witness to the centrality of this dogma both as the point of departure and return of all doctrine and sanctified living. Since the time of Nicea the Church in her formal statements has unequivocally held to the cardinal position of the Incarnation, and to the extent that a body of Christians retains its adherence to this foundation, to that extent does it adhere to the good news of Scripture. However, in the generations preceding Nicea there appeared at times a hesitancy and vagueness regarding the Incarnation which at no point reflected the unanimity of opinion following the first general council. It is with this period in the History of Dogma, culminating in Athanasius and the victory of the Nicene formula, that the present treatise is concerned.

A preliminary investigation concerned with the evident classical problems involved in the doctrine of the Incarnation provides as introduction to the present study. That it represented an offense to the Greek mind is evident from the polemics of the Apologists and Fathers. The problem can be approached primarily from two emphases, the nature of the Incarnation and the purpose of the Incarnation, the former involving doctrines concerning Christology, the latter involving doctrines in the area of soteriology. The two emphases are inextricably interwoven to the extent that any aberration in one area will result in an imperfect conception of the other. Origen's limited view of redemption was reflected in his idea of Christ as Divine Instructor, whereas Arius' indifference to the doctrine of the Atonement resulted in a misdirected view of Christ's divine nature. Since Nicea represents the initial attempt at a crystallization of opinion in the Church catholic, the problem of the Incarnation as a dogma is briefly touched upon. The problem of the Incarnation, then, is three-fold, involving the problems of doctrine, of nature, and of purpose.

Athanasius in formulating his expressions on the Incarnation was standing in the historical context of the end of the pre-Nicene era. He was heir to a wealth of opinions and expressions concerning the doctrine which ranged from the pure fount of Scripture to the misguided efforts of the Monarchians. In order to appreciate the conclusions of Athanasius regarding both nature and purpose of the Incarnation a cursory overview of pre-Nicene opinions has been provided. Athanasius utilized these opinions to the fullest extent

in later polemics against the Arians, albeit drawing primary proofs from Scripture itself.

De Incarnatione represents Athanasius' first dogmatic treatise, written somewhat earlier than 320 A.D. Although later writings exhibit more explicitly the doctrine of the homoousion, the De Incarnatione reveals the dispassionate clarity of a theologian expressing himself without the incentive of polemics, hence is apt to reveal more clearly the author's credo. Void of fierce diatribes, closely reasoned and amply supplied with Scripture references, this work of Athanasius reveals clearly his teachings regarding both the nature and purpose of the Incarnation.[1] Later works against the Arians are more apt to stress the nature to the exclusion of purpose.

It is possible to see embodied in the teachings of Arius most of the heresies of the pre-Nicene period, as indicated in this section of the treatise. On the basis of available evidence we must conclude that Arius' lack of a purpose in the Incarnation led him to the extreme position he adopted. Had he Athanasius' clarity and understanding rather than a confused rationale, the history of dogma might have been written differently.

Since it is possible to detect in these two antagonists the embodiment of pagan heresies pitted against orthodox Christianity,

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[1] As expressed in J. W. C. Wand, The Greek Doctors (London: The Faith Press, 1950) p. 1, "His victory arose . . . out of the fact that to him faith was so closely identified to the Faith. He was not interested in theology so much as in the salvation of souls. But just because he was so completely absorbed in the work of a pastor, he recognized to the full the importance of an adequate dogmatic belief."

the ensuing struggle becomes one of critical importance for the Church, with nothing less than the doctrine of the Incarnation at stake.

> The Arian controversy was to him [Athanasius] no battle for ecclesiastical power, nor for theological triumph. It was a religious crisis involving the reality of revelation and redemption. He felt about it as he wrote to the bishops of Egypt, "We are contending for our all."[2]

It would almost appear that Divine Providence raised Athanasius especially for the purpose of defending this cardinal truth of the Church. Perhaps the most material evidence of this can be seen in the fact that he was allowed so long a span of life. He lived for seventy-seven years and was therefore able to see through from the beginning to the end, one of the greatest controversies that has ever troubled the Church on a question of faith.

The victory of the expression of the Faith was realized at Alexandria in 362 A.D. and Constantinople in 381 A.D. However, we should be reminded that this meant primarily a victory for the Christian view of the nature of the Incarnation, that is, the homoousion. The purpose of the Incarnation was not agreed upon until as late as Chalcedon in 451 A.D. and then somewhat equivocally, so that even today Christians have not reached unanimity on the question.

The problem of Arianism in the Church unfortunately was not solved at Nicea or at Constantinople. Wherever the deity of Christ is compromised or denied we experience a re-incarnation of Arius. C. S. Lewis remarked that, "Arianism was one of those 'sensible'

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[2] Archibald Robertson, "Prolegomena," in Nicene And Post-Nicene Fathers, edited by Philip Schaff and Henry Wace (Second Series; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1953), IV, lxvii.

synthetic religions which are so strongly recommended today and which, then as now, included among their devotees cultivated clergy."[3] F. W. Buckler in speaking to the problem of the denial of Christ's perfect manhood and deity has observed:

> By the irony of fate this conception of Christ has within the last fifty years become closely identified with the denial of His divinity, and the work of the Atonement is relegated to the realm of social improvement. In other words, the sacrifice of the cross which identified the sufferings of the Son of Man with the Son of God is no longer regarded as a valid expiation of the sins of the world, and the function of the Atonement rests once more on man's efforts. The production of a societas perfecta was the object of the Pharisees and is the function of the social evangelists . . . Can Phariseeism, which was dead nineteen centuries ago, become a living gospel today merely by its being preached in the name of Jesus Christ? Can a theory of the Kingdom of God which denies the divine Sonship of Jesus be any other than a building on sand? On both issues we are driven back to the issue of the Council of Nicea.[4]

It is the author's hope that this study will not only serve to remind the reader that Arianism is latent in the Church at all times, but will also serve to emphasize the Pauline and Athanasian stress of Christus in nobis. Although the Western Church has grown with the Pauline doctrine of forensic salvation, particularly since the time of Luther, the Athanasian conceptions of the Incarnation are just as purely Pauline, Christ becoming man in order to draw men to God. The fact that a justificatio fidei is foreign to his way of thinking ought in no way detract from Athanasius' pre-eminence. "The one-sidedness of any given age in approaching the work of

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[3] C. S. Lewis, "Introduction," in Athanasius, De Incarnatione, translated by C. S. Lewis (London: The Oxford Press, 1944), p. 11.

[4] F. W. Buckler, "The Re-emergence Of The Arian Controversy," Anglican Theological Review, X (1927-1928), 11-22.

Christ is to be recognized by us not in a censorious spirit of self-complacency, but with reverent sympathy."[5]

The sources consulted in the preparation of this study are many. Special indebtedness is due the editors of both the Ante-Nicene Fathers and the Nicene And Post-Nicene Fathers for their helpful translations in leading the author to the more significant passages in the original. These passages were translated by the author from Migne's classic Patrologiae - Series Graecae, Vol. XXVI. Wm. Bright's Introduction To The Orations and comments in the Dictionary Of Christian Biography, together with Archibald Robertson's introductory remarks to the select writings and letters of Athanasius and excellent translation of the De Incarnatione were of particular benefit. H. M. Gwatkin's unsurpassed Studies Of Arianism together with his Arian Controversy proved invaluable. Reinhold Seeberg's History Of Doctrines and J. N. D. Kelly's Early Christian Doctrines contained much provocative information, together with Hatch's Influence Of Greek Ideas On Christianity. Limited use was made of Edward Hardy's introductions in Christology Of The Later Fathers, as also of Frank L. Cross' The Study of Athanasius and Hoss' Studien Uber das Schrifttum und die Theologie des Athanasius. God In Patristic Thought by G. L. Prestige contains an excellent study of the homoousion doctrine. Athanasius' writings Against The Arians and Arian History provided a voluminous source of original material in addition to his many personal and festal letters. Duchesne's

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[5]Robertson, op. cit., p. lxix.

first two volumes of The Early History Of The Church proved more than adequate for an introduction to the period. The author's own B. D. thesis on The Theology Of Origen was utilized to some extent in the area of pre-Nicene theology. Stevenson's New Eusebius was also helpful in setting the historical and theological context.

Throughout the thesis, including the Bibliography, the following abbreviations will be observed.

AF The Apostolic Fathers. Translated by Edgar J. Goodspeed. New York: Harper and Brothers, 1950.

ANF The Ante-Nicene Fathers. Buffalo: Christian Literature Co., 1886f. Translators of individual works cited from ANF will be given with the first reference in each case.

NE A New Eusebius. Edited by J. Stevenson. New York: The Macmillan Co., 1957.

PNF A Select Library of Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church. Second Series. Edited by Philip Schaff and Henry Wace. New York: Christian Literature Co., 1890ff. The abbreviation will refer to the second series unless otherwise indicated.

Abbreviations relevant to individual chapters within the thesis are given in the first reference citation within the chapter.

## CHAPTER II

## THE PROBLEM OF THE INCARNATION

### The Incarnation As A Doctrine

In the recital of the history of dogma at least two divergent views are expressed regarding the origin and further explication of dogma. Harnack in his able and portentous History of Dogma maintains that the Church by its doctrinal definitions changed the entire character of the Gospel, "transforming an ethical sermon into a metaphysical creed."[1] This view maintains that the inroads of classical philosophy were responsible for Hellenizing the faith.

> By the fourth century the living Gospel had been masked in Greek philosophy. Thus dogma is a bad habit of intellectualizing which the Christian had picked up from the Greek when he fled from the Jew.[2]

Subsequent research has demonstrated the difficulty of maintaining such a theory. It was expected to be quite easy to distinguish between the creed of the Church and the faith of the Gospel. "Today every competent scholar is agreed that theology had already been at work in the minds of the evangelists before they set pen to paper."[3]

On the other hand dogmaticians maintain the position that all doctrines are contained in Scripture, at least in seminal form, and

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[1] J. W. C. Wand, The Four Great Heresies (London: A. R. Mowbray and Co., 1955), p. 18.

[2] Philip Rief, "Introduction," to Adolph Harnack, Outlines of The History of Dogma, translated from the German by Edwin Knox Mitchell (Boston: Beacon Press, 1957), p. v.

[3] Wand, op. cit., p. 48.

that later formulations arose as Christians applied reason to Scripture and began to systematize the various teachings of the New Testament. The present study will proceed on this assumption

> The New Testament does not offer formulated and systematized doctrines for the Church, but it supplies the principles and sets the standards for working out the doctrines needed for the guidance of the Church.[4]

This view can be illustrated as a deep shaft, ever probing more closely into the heart of Scripture, whereas the former thesis is pictured as a large body of water, ever widening its bounds, which long ago spilled over its original banks.

However, students of Christian origins can detect periods of greater and lesser probing in the growth of the Church's doctrines. The first ecumenical council represents a great stride forward in the further explication of dogma by assuming a non-Scriptural term to emphasize Christ's deity. In this stride forward Athanasius was pre-eminent, and the doctrine of the Incarnation was the beginning of doctrinal definitions by the great councils. However, the Church seldom assumed to itself the task of further explicating Scripture. With few exceptions the doctrines enunciated were always in answer to a particular denial of the Faith. Thus Arianism prompted Nicea to offer a clear statement of the Incarnation as a defense against the unwarranted assertions of the heretics.

> The decisions of the councils are primarily not the Church saying "yes" to fresh truths or developments or forms of consciousness; but rather saying "no" to untrue and misleading modes of shaping and stating her truth.[5]

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[4] J. L. Neve, History Of Christian Doctrine, in A History Of Christian Thought (Philadelphia: The Muhlenberg Press, 1946) I, 33.

[5] Archibald Robertson, "Prolegomena," in PNF, IV, xxxiii.

The doctrine of the Incarnation, explicit as it is in the New Testament, received the decided homoousion emphasis at Nicea in order to exclude thereafter any inclinations toward the heresy which it intended to combat.

It would be puerile to deny that in this process the rational method did not enter in some way. This method is generally assumed to have been first applied by the Apologists. The post-apostolic era witnessed Christians admirable in action, firm in belief, and heroic in faith, yet hardly intellectual giants or profound thinkers. Reading Ignatius, Clement of Rome, or Polycarp one is aware of the urgency of church union, unanimity of purpose, and a united front against the attacks of the populace and state. "Their chief interest was in the demands of the new Christian life."[6]

> They [Apostolic Fathers] had no ambition to work out a system of theology, or even to explore the implications of the doctrine handed down to them. Judged by the standards of later orthodoxy they were not always very cautious in their statements. But though they might fail to perceive all the richness of their inheritance they preserved it unsullied for the generations to come, and that was the supreme need of the moment. Renan might complain that Polycarp was ultra-conservative, but as Lightfoot commented, "His was an age when conservatism alone could save the Church."[7]

However, beginning in the middle of the second century the Apologists took upon themselves the task of the defense of the Faith against the attacks of the philosophers, and in so doing of necessity employed forms of speech and thought taken from the realm

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[6] Neve, op. cit., p. 36.

[7] L. E. Elliot-Binns, The Beginnings of Western Christendom (London: Lutterworth Press, 1948), p. 223. See also the comments in Edwin Hatch, The Influence of Greek Ideas on Christianity (New York: Harper and Brothers Publishers, 1957), p. 164.

of the philosophers.

> The defense naturally fell into the hands of those Christians who were versed in Greek methods; and they not less naturally sought for points of agreement rather than of difference, and presented Christian truths in Greek form.[8]

It was in this way that eventually the doctrine of the Incarnation in its most explicit form was clothed in a non-Scriptural philosophical term, yet based upon clear biblical references attesting the truth of the homoousion.[9]

G. L. Prestige in his classic work points out that the Christians, by utilizing philosophical methods, did not thereby of necessity incorporate Hellenic ideas into the Faith of the Church.

> There is nothing particularly Hellenic, still less pagan, about the rational method, except that the Greeks had the providential privilege of its discovery and development. In itself it is a part of the equipment with which human nature has been endowed by God who made mankind. My own conviction is that the Christian doctrine . . . is a legitimate rational construction founded on the facts of Christian experience.[10]

Hatch maintains much the same view when he writes:

> The absorption [of Greek ideas] was less of speculations than of the tendency to speculate. The residuum of permanent effect was mainly a certain habit of mind. . . . Certain elements of education in philosophy had been so widely diffused, and in the course of centuries had become so strongly rooted, as to have caused an instinctive tendency to throw ideas into a philosophical form, and to test assertions by philosophical canons. The existence of such a tendency is shown in the first instance by the mode in which the earliest defenders of the faith met their opponents.[11]

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[8] Hatch, op. cit., p. 129.

[9] Cp. Newman's excursus on Hypostasis and Ousia in the Nicene formula in PNF, IV, 77-147. See also G. L. Prestige, God in Patristic Thought (London: S.P.C.K., 1952), pp. 197-241.

[10] Prestige, op. cit., p. xiii. See also William Fairweather, Origen And Greek Patristic Theology (New York: Charles Scribners Sons, 1901), p. 1.

[11] Hatch, op. cit., p. 133.

Thus doctrine is a natural and necessary outcome of Christian thought about Christian rudiments, applying sanctified reason to Scriptural truth and, according to the analogy of faith, presenting Scriptural truth in a systematized form. Inasmuch as doctrine is based solely on Scriptural evidence, it thus reflects all the certainty and the assurance of Scripture. Prestige comments that, "Christian morality does not appear to survive for many generations after the loss of Christian dogmatic faith."[12] Christian doctrine, rather than being a transformation of the Gospel, is the expression and embodiment of its central significance.

## The Problem Of The Nature Of Incarnation

From earliest times of philosophical speculation, certainly since the time of Plato, a leading thought in metaphysics has been the duality of existence, a transcendent God in some ephemeral sphere with His creation placed in an infinitely subordinate position. Thus an unbridgable chasm is placed between God and man, between God and matter, and between Being and Non-being. Since this was assumed to be the case philosophers concerned themselves with seeking a bridge for the chasm. It was this quest for intermediaries which dominated much of the speculation of the Gnostics, Neo-Platonists, Stoics, and later Jewish sects. Thus the doctrine of the Incarnation was in violent opposition to the categories of thought which had been prevailing for at least one-half millenium prior to Christ. It is in this historical context that Athanasius

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[12] Prestige, op. cit., p. xvi.

spoke, asserting not only that God and matter can come into contact, but that God and man can co-inhabit the same person, and that matter is not essentially evil by nature. It is this distinctly Christian doctrine which caused early opposition and offense on the part of the pagan intelligentia.

Although the duality of God and matter, good and evil, certainly antedate Plato in the history of speculation,[13] Western thought and the pre-Nicene era in particular look to him as the ultimate exponent of idealistic philosophy.[14] Plato attempts to explain the origin of nature in his Timaeus. Like a human artist or workman, the Demiurge or Creator fashions the world after the pattern of the ideal world. Guided by the idea of the Good, he forms as perfect a universe as it is possible for him to form, hampered as he is by the principle of matter. The Demiurge is not really a creator, but an architect. The two principles, ideal and material, are already in existence. A world-soul acts as the intermediary between the world of ideas and of phenomena. Every individual soul in man has seen the form of the ideal Good, but having become possessed with a desire for the world of sense, was enclosed in a material body as a prison. Should it ever succeed in overcoming the

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[13] E.g. Memphite Theology, Zoroastrianism, Heraclitus, Pythagoras, to mention a few.

[14] As the account given of Plato and Aristotle is quite summary serving only to remind the reader of generally known and accepted facts, detailed references have been omitted. Special indebtedness is due Frank Thilly, A History of Philosophy (New York: Henry Holt and Co., 1953), pp. 73-120 and J. N. D. Kelly, Early Christian Doctrines (New York: Harper and Bros., 1958), pp. 9 ff.

lower side of its nature, it will return to its original star, otherwise it will sink lower and lower, entering in succession the bodies of different animals. Had the soul resisted desire in its celestial life, it would have continued to enjoy a transcendent existence, and to occupy itself with the contemplation of ideas. Since it has failed in this, it is condemned to pass through a stage of purification. Thus to Plato matter is essentially evil, acting as a prison for the soul and a type of accident in the Divine will necessitated because of the soul's Fall.

> Whatever is good, rational, and purposeful in the universe is due to reason; whatever is evil, irrational, and purposeless is ultimately traceable to matter.[15]

Although Aristotle went beyond Plato in uniting Form with Matter, maintaining that Matter must contain Form, this in no way approached an incarnation of ultimate Being with Non-being. His teaching of the Prime Mover, being yet unmoved, placed ultimate reality in a transcendent sphere far removed and unmindful of the world of sense and matter.

Stoicism, which presents a very different picture, is a more representative philosophy of the pre-Nicene historical context. The Stoics reacted vigorously against the Platonic differentiation of a transcendent, intelligible world not perceptible by the senses from the ordinary world of sensible experience. Whatever exists, they argued, must be body, and the universe as a whole must be material. Thus Stoicism was a monism teaching that God or Logos is a finer matter immanent in the material universe, thus denying

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[15] Thilly, op. cit., p. 84.

Platonism to the extent that God was not only brought into contact with matter but was identified with it. Thus Plato destroyed God's immanence and Zeno His transcendence. Marcus Aurelius wrote in his Meditations:

> All parts of the universe are interwoven with one another, and the bond is sacred. Nothing is unconnected with some other thing, for all things have been co-ordinated and combined to form the same universe. There is one universe made up of everything, and one God who pervades everything, and one substance, one law, one common reason in all intelligent animals, and one truth; perchance indeed there is one perfection for all beings of the same stock, who participate in the same reason.[16]

Epicureanism was in obvious conflict with the idea of the Incarnation inasmuch as the followers of Epicurus denied deity altogether. Lucretius, supreme exponent of later Epicureanism, scorns the idea of a supreme Being when he writes in De Rerum Natura:

> Men marked how in fixed order rolled around the systems of the sky; Nor were able then to know whereof the causes; Therefore 'twas men would take refuge in consigning all unto divinities; O humankind unhappy![17]

One of the most potent forces operating in the Church's environment, particularly in the second and third centuries, was Gnosticism. A major element in the Gnostic system was an elaborate scheme of intermediary beings to bridge the chasm between God and man. Hippolytus describes the system of Basileides when he writes:

> The heavenly Cosmos extending as far as the moon was thus created. A similar process produced the sub-lunary Cosmos, called the Hebdomad. A second Archon arose from the cosmic

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[16] Walter J. Black, Marcus Aurelius And His Times (New York: Walter J. Black, 1945), p. 69. Cp. also William Tarn, Hellenistic Civilization (London: Edward Arnold and Co., 1953), pp. 332 ff.

[17] As quoted in Stith Thompson, Our Heritage Of World Literature (New York: The Dryden Press, 1950), p. 398.

> seed, far inferior to the first, and he also produced a son superior to himself, and went on to the work of creation. He is the God of the Old Testament.[18]

Iranaeus in referring to Valentinus' system comments:

> So there are first Abyss and Silence, and then Mind and Truth. And Only-begotten, perceiving for what purpose he had been produced, also himself sent forth Word and Life, being the father of all those who were to come after him, and the beginning and fashioning of the entire Pleroma.[19]

In view of the impossibility of contact between God and matter, the Gnostic version of the Incarnation was decidedly docetic.

> Having endured everything he was continent; thus Jesus exercised his divinity. He ate and drank in a peculiar manner, not evacuating his food. So much power of continence was in him that in him food was not corrupted, since he himself had no corruptibility.[20]

During Athanasius' lifetime perhaps the most serious challenge to the Faith was embodied in the tenets of Neo-Platonism.

> In Neo-Platonism the tendency to make God transcendent was carried as far as it could go. This was that fully developed system, Platonic in its main inspiration, but incorporating Aristotelian, Stoic, and even Oriental elements, which flourished from the middle of the third century and with which

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[18] Hippolytus, Refutation Of All Heresies, VII. 24,3, in NE, p. 77.

[19] Iranaeus, Against Heresies, I. 1, 1, in NE, p. 85.

[20] Clement of Alexandria, Stromateis, III. 7, 59, 3, in NE, p. 91. Cp. also Iranaeus, op. cit., I, 19, 2, in NE, p. 81, "Wherefore Christ Himself did not suffer, but a certain Simon of Cyrene, being compelled, bore the cross in His stead; Simon was transfigured by Him, that he might be thought to be Jesus, and was crucified, through ignorance and error, while Jesus Himself received the form of Simon, and standing by, laughed at them." Iranaeus again refers to Valentinus' system when he writes, "The Word was invested with the animal Christ, but from a special dispensation was begirt with a body endowed with an animal nature, yet constructed with unspeakable skill, so that he might be visible and tangible, and capable of enduring suffering. At the same time they deny that he assumed anything material, since indeed matter is incapable of salvation," op. cit., I, 1, 11, in NE, p. 89.

> the Fathers . . . were familiar. It is best exemplified by Plotinus (205-270 A.D.), the Greek speaking Egyptian who was its founder and also one of the greatest thinkers of the ancient world.[21]

Plotinus maintained that God was the cause of the world of sense because of an unconscious overflowing of Himself, an overflowing or emanation which resulted in Nous and finally in a World-Soul, which was in turn the immediate creator of matter. Thilly describes the system thus:

> Although the world proceeds from God, He did not create it, for creation implies consciousness and will, i. e., limitation. God did not decide to create a world, nor is the world an evolution from God, for God is the most perfect. The universe is an emanation from God, an inevitable overflow of His infinite power or actuality. The farther we are from the sun, the source of light, the nearer we are to darkness, i. e., matter.[22]

Creation, therefore, represented a fall from the perfect to the imperfect, and the farther we go down the scale of being, the greater the imperfection. Thus any suggestion of a union between perfect God and man was abhorrent to the Neo-Platonist. Plotinus' teaching found a militant champion in the person of the apostate emperor, Julian. Following his death the distinctly Greek heresy fell rapidly into disrepute, although at the time of Augustine it was virile enough to attract the attention of the great churchman, and through him in a modified form had some influence on the medieval Church.[23]

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[21] Kelly, op. cit., p. 15. Elliot-Binns, op. cit., p. 68 affirms that it was only in the doctrine of the Incarnation that a serious quarrel existed between Christianity and Neo-Platonism.

[22] Thilly, op. cit., pp. 151 ff.

[23] Cp. Augustine, Confessions, VIII, 2. See also Mary Garvey, Saint Augustine: Christian or Neo-Platonist? (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 1939) and Bruno Switalski, Plotinus And The Ethics of St. Augustine (New York: Polish Inst. of Arts and Sciences, 1946).

The doctrine of the Incarnation was not only at variance with accepted modes of thought in the Hellenic tradition, but also met with pronounced opposition from the Jewish views going back to Philo in the first century B.C.[24] God, he maintained, is not only far above all imperfection, but also above perfection and even beyond definition. Matter stands apart from the Supreme Being and does not emanate from Him, and He acts upon it by manifold powers, the chief of these being the Word. These Powers and the Word himself are represented as being immanent in God and distinct hypostases at the same time, corresponding to the ideas of Plato. Philo represented the typical Jewish emphasis on the transcendence of God, an emphasis which was reflected later in the Ebionite perversions of Christianity.

It is apparent that Athanasius' historical context was oriented in direct opposition to the idea of union between God and man. God stands apart from the world, and has no connection with it except through intermediaries emanating from Himself. The world of sense represents not a product of God's creative hand but an evil prison in which the soul must undergo a purification before that divine element in man returns to the primeval substance from which it was fashioned. When finally Christianity's detractors tired of the supercilious accusations brought in the first century and began seriously to investigate the doctrines of the Church, this fundamental antithesis became apparent. Celsus chides the Christians:

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[24] Cp. E. R. Goodenough, An Introduction To Philo Judaeus (New Haven: Harvard Press, 1940).

> The assertion made by some of the Christians that some God or son of God has come down to earth as judge of mankind is most shameful and no lengthy argument is required to refute it. What is the purpose of such a descent on the part of God? Was it in order to learn what was going on among men? Does He not know everything? If then He does know why does he not correct men? Was He then unable to correct men merely by divine power, without sending someone especially endowed for the purpose?[25]

Tertullian defended the Incarnation in The Apology, maintaining that the philosophers themselves had taught something similar in their pronouncements on the Word, Mind, and Power.[26] Iranaeus declared in Adversus Haereses, "Therefore, as I have already said, He caused man to become one with God."[27] Ignatius writing to the Ephesians reminded them, "There is one physician, of flesh and spirit, originate and unoriginate, God in man."[28] Origen prefaced his remarks in the De Principiis with the assertion, "Jesus Christ was incarnate although God, and while made man remained the God which He was. He assumed a body like to our own."[29] And so it appears that both antagonists and defenders of the Faith were quite aware of the fundamental differences separating them. Herein lay the problem of the nature of the Incarnation. Fourth century Arianism represented a re-emergence of the Greek way, clothed in more sophisticated garb, to be sure, yet seeking a bridge to the gulf between God and man which ultimately denied the Incarnation. It was against

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[25] Origen, Contra Celsus, IV. 2, 3, translated from the Greek and Latin by Frederick Crombie, in ANF, IV, 497 ff.

[26] Tertullian, Apology, 21: 10-14, in NE, p. 171.

[27] Iranaeus, op. cit., III. 19, 6, in NE, p. 123.

[28] Ignatius, To The Ephesians, VII, in AF, p. 209.

[29] Origen, De Principiis, Praef. 4, in ANF, IV, 240.

this insidious attack which promised to destroy the heart of the Faith that Athanasius contended.

## The Problem Of The Purpose Of Incarnation

The Church has classified all doctrines involving the purpose of Christ's sojourn to the earth under the category of soteriology, the doctrine of salvation. Athanasius encountered marked opposition in this area of thought just as in the nature of Incarnation. At least three major antitheses can be detected between the Christian and classical view.

Firstly, inasmuch as the pagan considered God so remotely transcendent from the world of man that He was oblivious of man's plight, any salvation that was to be experienced must proceed on man's initiative and will rather than on God's. Secondly, since matter and therefore body was considered to be essentially evil, the only element of man's nature to be redeemed was the spiritual or rational "soul." The doctrine of a glorified body was foreign to the pagan way of thinking. Thirdly, the nature of salvation itself was in marked contrast to the Christian view, inasmuch as the Hellenic tradition stressed loss of identity by merging with pure Being, continued existence in some ephemeral shadowy Elysian Field, or the possession of pure knowledge unencumbered with a material body. There existed among pagans also the notion of salvation by association, that is, by membership in the proper

group, be it mystery cult, state, or sect.[30] In the following examples elements of the foregoing ideas can be identified.

The Age of Augustus ushered in a period of optimism and hope which had repercussions in the religious as well as political world. Thus a type of salvation was introduced which looked to the state as a god and service to the state as liturgy. Salvation was in terms of the citizen rather than as an individual. Cochrane writes concerning this optimism:

> For centuries, indeed, unique associations were to cling to the reign of Augustus as the dawn of a new and better epoch for humanity. To these the noblest expression was given by Vergil, who was at that time largely responsible for their diffusion. Thus . . . Vergil constitutes a supreme embodiment of the optimism of his age.[31]

Cicero continues in the same optimism to look to society as the savior.

> Cicero replies with a message of freedom in the state, holding out the vision of the bene honesteque vivendi societas as embodying the highest values of civilized man. In doing so he reasserts the characteristic hope of classical antiquity.[32]

Cochrane continues,

> Thus for Cicero no less than for Vergil, salvation is not individual but marks the achievement of purposes which are to be realized only in the corporate life.[33]

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[30] At times comparisons are made between the Church and pagan cults in salvation by association. It ought be noted, however, that the Church consists of individuals who are saved because of a personal faith, and only after arriving at this faith do they become the Church. Thus faith saves, not the membership in the Church.

[31] Charles Norris Cochrane, Christianity And Classical Culture (New York: Oxford University Press, 1944), p. 27.

[32] Ibid., p. 42

[33] Ibid., p. 48.

The Gnostic systems not only stressed the idea of salvation by knowledge, but also that salvation itself consists in pure knowledge.

> In all the Gnostic systems redemption is brought about by knowledge, and it is the function of the divine mediators to open the eyes of "pneumatic" men to the truth. "The spiritual man," the disciples of the Valentinian Marcus declared, "is redeemed by knowledge," while according to Basileides, "The Gospel is knowledge of supra-mundane things." (Iranaeus I, 21, 4; Hippolytus Ref., VII, 27, 7)[34]

Basileides maintained that following the salvation of those who have attained unto knowledge, the remainder will be confirmed in their existing state in the world.

> When this salvation takes place, God will bring upon the whole Cosmos enormous ignorance, that all things may continue according to their nature, and that nothing may desire anything of the things that are contrary to their nature. But all the souls of this quarter of creation, as many as possess the nature of remaining mortal in this region only, continue in it, aware of nothing different or better.[35]

Iranaeus points out that, according to the Gnostics, only the immaterial soul will be saved. "They declare of all that is material that it must of necessity perish, inasmuch as it is incapable of receiving any breath of incorruption."[36] An interesting observation which may have occurred to the reader is that according to the Christian account of the Fall in Genesis it is eating of the tree of knowledge, in a sense, which led to or constituted sin, rather than knowledge leading to salvation. Marcion, writing during the latter half of the second century, maintained,

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[34] Kelly, op. cit., pp. 26 ff.

[35] Hippolytus, op. cit., VII, 27, 1, in NE, p. 80.

[36] Iranaeus, op. cit., I, 1, 11, in NE, p. 89.

> Salvation will be the attainment only of those souls which had learned the doctrine, while the body, as having been taken from the earth, is incapable of sharing in salvation.[37]

Duchesne has described Philo's doctrine of salvation which is much akin to the Gnostics:

> The aim of moral life is to defeat the influence of body on mind. Asceticism is the best means to this end, but knowledge and well-regulated activity avail also, with the help of God. Thus the soul draws nearer God; in the next life it will attain to Him, and even here it may, in ecstasy, attain to momentary union with Him.[38]

Porphyry clearly enunciates the doctrine of salvation by ethics initiated by man himself.

> It is the man himself who, by his works, renders himself agreeable to God, and is deified by the conforming of his own soul to the incorruptible blessed one.[39]

At another time he wrote,

> You will honor God best when you form your soul to resemble Him. This likeness is only by virtue; for only virtue draws the soul upward towards its own kind.[40]

The mystery religions constituted an important element in the context of the first centuries of the Church. A major emphasis common to all mystery cults had to do with the decay and revival of nature of which the god or hero was a mere symbol. This remained the central core, and round it each cult grouped its own details or

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[37] Ibid., I, 25, 2, in NE, p. 102.

[38] Louis Duchesne, Early History Of The Christian Church (London: John Murray, 1957), I, 113.

[39] Porphyry, Epistle to Marcella, 16 ff., in A Source Book For Ancient Church History, edited by Joseph Ayer (New York: Charles Scribners Sons, 1930), p. 203.

[40] Ibid.

nationalistic emphases. All mysteries were concerned about salvation in some way, as Elliot-Binns has observed;

> There was in the centuries in which they [mystery religions] mainly flourished a demand, almost universal in range, for "salvation." This salvation might take different forms, from the mere desire to be saved from material disasters in this life to protection from evils in the world to come. Sometimes salvation was associated with a person, and the title of savior was given to many of the gods. This use of savior may account for its neglect as a term for the Lord in orthodox Christian circles.[41]

Referring to these cults Harnack said, "Niemans konnte mehr ein Gott sein, der nicht ein Heiland war."[42]

Athanasius, writing in the mainstream of theological and philosophical speculation which was to a great degree at variance with the Faith of the Incarnation, met and answered the challenge of the time. He championed the cause of the homoousion because it was a Scriptural affirmation, thus placing it among the cardinal dogmas of the Church. He saw clearly that any doctrine of personal salvation for all men also involved the doctrine of the God-Man, and conversely, that because God had become man He had effected a redemption for all. Any compromise with the currencies of contemporary thought would have meant a denial of Scriptural truth.

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[41] Elliot-Binns, op. cit., p. 61.

[42] Ibid., p. 60, note 1.

## CHAPTER III

### THE INCARNATION IN PRE-NICENE THEOLOGY

In the period of the Apostolic Fathers the Church was nothing so little as a society of theologians. Monotheists and worshippers of Christ by the same instinct, to analyse their faith as an intellectual problem was far from their thoughts. Clement of Rome maintained that Christ was the Son of God, exalted above the angels, the Lord Jesus Christ.[1] The sufferings of Christ are described as the sufferings of God.[2] He is the only mediator of our salvation. "By the blood of the Lord there is redemption (λυτρώσις) to all that believe and hope in God."[3] Clement expounded no developed doctrine of salvation, but recognized that in Christ alone was redemption from death, and that He was God as well as man.[4]

Hermas, in giving his exhortations to repentance, limits the grace of God somewhat when he states,

> If thou shalt do some good thing not embraced in the commandment of God, thou shalt purchase to thyself the greater dignity and thou shalt be more honored before God.[5]

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[1] Clement of Rome, Corinthians, XXXVI, in AF, p. 67.

[2] Ibid., II, 1, in AF, p. 50.

[3] Ibid., XII, 7, in AF, p. 55.

[4] Ibid., XXXII, 2, in AF, p. 64.

[5] Hermas, The Shepherd, Sim.V, 3, 3, in AF, p. 152.

Yet faith apparently is presented as being among the Christian virtues.[6] The work of Christ consisted in bringing forgiveness for the sins of the past and for the future gave to men His commandments. Hermas presents no finished statement regarding the Incarnation other than, "For that spirit is the Son of God."[7]

The epistle of Polycarp to the Philippians assumes that those to whom it is addressed acknowledge the divinity of Christ.[8] It is just as firmly held that Christ suffered on account of our sins for our redemption.[9] Man receives this salvation from God not by works but by faith.

> Though you have not seen Him you believe with unutterable, triumphant joy which many desire to share, for you know that you have been saved by His favor, not by what you have done, but by the will of God through Jesus Christ.[10]

The Christian, says Polycarp, who has apprehended Christ in faith will in love fulfill the law of Christ, following Him with patience, in hope of being raised up by God to everlasting life.

Barnabas maintained that Christ was not the Son of man but the Son of God,[11] who assumed human flesh and suffered upon the cross. This suffering was a sacrifice for our sins.[12]

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[6] Ibid., Mand. VIII, 9; XII, 3; Sim. IX, 15, 2; IX, 1, 1, in AF, pp. 123-201.

[7] Ibid., Sim. IX, 1, 1, in AF, p. 172.

[8] Polycarp, Philippians, 1, 2; 2, 1; 9, 2, in AF, pp. 237-244.

[9] Ibid., 1, 2; 8, 1, in AF, p. 239 and 250.

[10] Ibid., 1, 3, in AF, p. 239.

[11] Epistle of Barnabus, 12, 10; 7, 9, in AF, p. 38 and 31.

[12] Ibid., 5, 1; 7, 3, in AF, p. 21 and 30.

The Ignatian letters stand alone in this period for depth of theological reflection and content. The central idea is that of the renovation of man[13], now under the power of Satan and death[14], which are undone in Christ, the risen Savior[15], who is our true life and endows us with immortality.[16] This is by virtue of His divinity[17] in union with His perfect manhood. "God appeared in human form,"[18] and, "He who became perfect man gives me strength,"[19] state unequivocally the doctrine of the Incarnation. Ignatius does not distinguish the relation of the divine to the human in Christ but is content to insist on both. As in the other Fathers of this period, Ignatius has no clearly formulated idea of salvation other than the doctrine of immortality and that God is the great Physician who through Christ has healed mankind.

The Apostolic Fathers, rather than investigate the heritage given them in the traditions and writings of the Faith, passed them on with no further comment other than a reiteration of the truths of the Incarnation and salvation in Christ. Inasmuch as the later controversies were to center about the method of Incarnation rather

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[13] Ignatius, Ephesians, 20, in AF, p. 213.

[14] Ibid., 3, in AF, p. 208.

[15] Ignatius, Smyrnians, 3, in AF, p. 229.

[16] Ibid., 4, in AF, p. 229. Cp. Ephesians, 17, op. cit., in AF, p. 212, and Magnesians, 6, in AF, p. 215.

[17] Ignatius, Ephesians, 19, op. cit., and Symrnians, 4, op. cit.

[18] Ignatius, Ephesians, 19, op. cit.

[19] Ignatius, Symrnians, 4, op. cit.

than its reality, Arius could with complete confidence refer to the Apostolic Fathers as his precursors, a device also employed by the Nicenes.

The second century of the Christian era, although beset with varying opinions and divergent interpretations of Christ's Person and work, was united on the basis of common regulae fidei and creeds. Since it is true that the all-inclusive statements of the creeds are the very elements which led to speculation about them, and so into heresy, it will serve our understanding of the period to acquaint ourselves with the basis of Christian union in the last half of the second century.

There began to appear in many Christian writings short summaries of belief, objectively stated, which were called variously the "canon of truth," "the preaching of the Church," and Rule of Faith or regulae fidei. These, however, are not to be confused with the Christian symbols which existed entirely apart from the Rules of Faith. Albert C. Outler maintains there were six definitive Rules of Faith prior to Origen, those of Ignatius, Aristides, Justin, Tertullian, Iranaeus, and Hippolytus.[20] Each regula contained that which was considered the principal doctrines of the Church. As a defense against the trend of speculation, Christians were compelled to search for a trustworthy safeguard against the inroads of the Gnostics and Platonists. "The apostles were the last and only

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[20]Albert C. Outler, "Origen and The Regulae Fidei," Church History, VIII (September, 1939), 215.

authorities. Also, the Lord was quoted as the highest authority."[21] The Rule of Faith in effect acted less as a deterrent to heresy than as its foundation, since most erring thinkers invariably appealed to the Rule of Faith. Origen claims to begin from the regula fidei in De Principiis and maintains that the Rule was simply a starting point for speculation.[22] The elements which the six Rules of Faith mentioned above have in common are simply stated.

1. God is One, He is Almighty, He is the Father of Jesus, He is the creator of the world.

2. Jesus Christ is the Son of God, born of the virgin Mary, was crucified under Pontius Pilate, arose from the dead, is the Lord who reigns together with the Father, will return to judge the world.

3. The Holy Spirit is holy, it was He who inspired the Old Testament prophets, it was He who conceived Jesus in the womb of Mary, He dwells in the hearts of saints.[23]

Although the doctrine of the Incarnation is not explicitly stated,[24] the affirmation of Jesus as God's son who was born and died, who reigns together with the Father, and who will return to judge the world, certainly reflect characteristics of both deity and humanity.

Along with the Rule of Faith, second century Christians utilized numerous symbols in the liturgical rites of the Church. We may regard the creeds as compendia of the theology of the Church,

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[21] Hans Lietzmann, The Founding Of The Church Universal, in The Beginnings Of The Christian Church, translated from the German by Bertram Lee Woolf (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1938), II, 134.

[22] Origen, De Principiis, Praef. 4, translated from the Greek and Latin by Frederick Crombie, in ANF, IV, 225.

[23] Outler, op. cit., p. 216.

[24] Although Iranaeus, Against Heresies, I. 2-3, in NE, p. 115, writes, "Who became Incarnate for our salvation."

and may gather from them those propositions which were common to the theology of the age. The most ancient text of a creed within our reach is that of Marcellus of Ancyra (337 or 338 A.D.).[25] It was this creed which Rome adopted when she began using Latin about 150 A.D. The creed gives expression to the second century theology in these words:

> I believe in God (Father) Almighty, and in Christ Jesus, His only-begotten Son, born by the Holy Ghost and the virgin Mary, He was crucified under Pontius Pilate and was buried. (And) the third day He rose from the dead, ascended into heaven, and is sitting on the right hand of the Father, from where He will come to judge the living and the dead. And in the Holy Ghost, the Holy Church, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the flesh (and life everlasting).[26]

From the generation of the Son and His later session at the right hand could be deduced His divinity, and from the human characteristics of suffering and death His humanity. Yet such deductions are made only in a post facto manner following the study of Scripture. The fact remains that the early neophyte Christians saw no need to emphasize the Incarnation in their official statements. It remained for the later antagonists with heretics to stress this Biblical truth when they discerned that its denial involved the denial of the very Faith itself.

Although stress was not placed on the Incarnation, this in no way denies that the Fathers recognized the true God-Man in Christ.

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[25] As found in Reinhold Seeberg, History Of Doctrines In The Ancient Church in Text-Book Of The History Of Doctrines, translated from the German by Charles E. Hay (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1954), I, 84.

[26] Seeberg, op. cit. Translation is the author's.

"From the earliest moment of theological reflection it was assumed that Jesus Christ was true God as well as true man."[27] The problem, therefore, was not whether He was God, but how within the monotheistic system it was still possible to maintain the unity of God while insisting on the deity of one who was distinct from the Father. Significant is the fact that the Fathers continued to follow St. John in using the term Logos to apply to the Person of Christ. Yet in utilizing this age-old terminology, a favored term of the cultured classes, the Church invited believers and pagans alike to ascribe to Christ all the attributes of the many logoi of antiquity, from Heraclitus to Philo. Neve associates the use of the term with an emphasis on the deity of Christ.

> Whenever it (Logos) was mentioned, the interest of all was at once secured. But that precisely this term was chosen proves how entirely the thoughts of the Church were centered in the exalted Christ. If they had thought chiefly of the man Jesus, they might easily have characterized Him as a second Socrates. But they thought of Him as God, in and with God, and hence selected a term such as Logos in order to make the matter plain to the heathen.[28]

However, it must be emphasized that absolute deity was ascribed to Christ before the name Logos was given to Him, not after, as Prestige in his exhaustive treatise comments:

> This happened (deity predicated of Christ), and the fact must not be overlooked, before and not after the rise to prominence of the Logos doctrine. Logos theories were an attempt to

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[27] G. L. Prestige, God In Patristic Thought (London: Society For The Promotion Of Christian Knowledge, 1952), p. 76.

[28] J. L. Neve, History Of Christian Doctrine, in A History Of Christian Thought (Philadelphia: The Muhlenberg Press, 1946), I, 46.

> explain an already accepted belief in the deity of the Son, not the cause of such belief gaining acceptance.[29]

Even Harnack maintained that Clement, Ignatius, Barnabas, and Justin could not conceive of Christianity without faith in the divinity of Christ.[30] The well known rescript of Pliny to Trajen states, "The Christians are accustomed to sing a hymn to Christ as God."[31]

At the same time the humanity of Christ was just as clearly recognized. Ignatius wrote to the Trallians that Christ was conceived by Mary and was the seed of David.[32] In the Homily of Clement we read, "The Lord who saved us, though He was originally spirit, became flesh and thus called us."[33] Although the dual nature was recognized, the Ante-Nicene Fathers generally overlooked the rational difficulties connected with the problem, leaving it to their successors of the Nicene and Post-Nicene ages to discuss. As pointed out by Lietzmann:

> In the world of ideas of the early Church and its theologians, all these ways of thought were to be found uncoordinated side by side: what modern logical analysis separates neatly stood closely together in the life and thought of the early Christians, and did so for the most part without any signs of clash; but

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[29] Prestige, op. cit., p. xxi.

[30] Adolph Harnack, Outlines Of The History Of Dogma, translated from the German by Edwin Knox Mitchell (Boston: Beacon Press, 1957), p. 53.

[31] Pliny, Epp., X, 96, as quoted in NE, p. 13.

[32] Ignatius, To The Trallians, translated from the Greek by Roberts and Donaldson, in ANF, I, 70.

[33] Homily of Clement, translated from the Greek by Marcus Dodds, in ANF, VII, 194.

in the course of time theologians became aware of hidden incongruities, and attempted to find a genuine agreement.[34]

As already intimated,[35] the Apostolic Fathers were not entirely clear in their conception of the work of Christ. Perhaps this state of affairs bears out the preliminary supposition that a clear idea of salvation must lead to a clear idea of Incarnation. A decided emphasis is placed upon Christ's gifts of fresh life, new knowledge, and immortality. The Didache, for example, confines itself to thanking God, "for the life and the knowledge," or "for the knowledge, faith, and immortality," which God has disclosed, "through His servant Jesus."[36] Through Christ, according to Clement, we gaze up to heaven and "taste immortal knowledge."[37] The object of Christ's endurance, says Barnabas, was to abolish death and to demonstrate resurrection from the dead."[38]

Alongside these thoughts, however, a rather different strain is discernible. This latter emphasis dwells on the Lord's passion, death, and resurrection, and affirms that He suffered for our sakes. His blood, states Clement, "was given on behalf of us."[39] Sometimes, as in Hermas, Christ's sufferings should move us to repentance. So

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[34] Lietzmann, op. cit., p. 152.

[35] Supra., p. 24.

[36] Didache, 9, 3; 10, 2, in AF, p. 15.

[37] Clement, Corinthians, 36, 2, in AF, p. 67.

[38] Epistle of Barnabas, 5, 6, in AF, p. 27.

[39] Clement, Corinthians, 21, 6; 49, 6, in AF, pp. 60 and 73.

in second Clement, "What recompense shall we then give Him?"[40] Clement himself adds that the shedding of Christ's blood has brought the grace of repentance to the world.[41] Yet he is also aware that believers find redemption (λυτρώσις) through the Lord's blood, and that His life was surrendered in sacrifice for us. Only Barnabas interprets Christ's passion in expressly sacrificial terms, stating that He offered His body as a sacrifice for our sins, appealing to Isaac's sacrifice as a prototype.[42]

As has already been intimated, an influence during this period leading to the gradual formation of a system of theology was the necessity of defending the Church against heathenism. As the first conscious theologians, therefore, the Apologists are more directly important for our present inquiry. On the one hand the Apologists are philosophers rather than theologians. Christianity is conceived of as the only true philosophy. They are at great pains to show the similarity between pagan thinkers and the Faith. Justin Martyr saw the Logos at work in all the worthwhile productions of antiquity, maintaining that Christians actually teach much the same as early philosophers.[43] Octavius in Minucius Felix argued that the poets and philosophers of antiquity held views identical to the Christians,[44]

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[40] Second Clement, 1, 2, in AF, p. 85.

[41] Clement, Corinthians, 7, 4, in AF, p. 52.

[42] Epistle of Barnabas, 7, 3, in AF, p. 30.

[43] Justin Martyr, First Apology, Chap. 5, 24 and passim, translated from the Greek by Dodds and Reith, in ANF, I, 161-187.

[44] Minucius Felix, Octavius, Chap. 19, translated from the Latin by Robert Earnest Wallis, in ANF, IV, 182.

while Tatian maintained that the Greeks were indebted for all their wisdom to none other than Moses.[45] Athenagoras claimed all the ancient poets gave witness to the fact of the unity of God.[46]

Since the theology of the Apologists approaches philosophy, it is not surprising that they think of the Person of Christ from the cosmological rather than soteriological view-point. This, as we shall see later in Arianism, almost invariably resulted in a subordinationism of Christ. Both Saint Paul[47] and Athanasius begin with soteriology and from this arrive at the divine nature of Christ. A clear doctrine of atonement for sinners must result in the expression of the deity of Christ. Beginning with cosmology, however, there is no need for a co-equal co-essential with the Father. Robertson has pointed out:

> The Apologists' view of Christ's divinity and of His relation to the Father is embarassed. His eternity and His generation are felt to be hardly compatible. His distinct personality is maintained at the expense of His true divinity . . . He is an intermodiary between God and the world.[48]

But if the Apologists were philosophers, one at least was also a martyr. Although their philosophical speculations concerning the

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[45] Tatian, To The Greeks, Chap. 31 and 40, translated from the Greek by J. E. Ryland, in ANF, II, 61-83.

[46] Athenagoras, A Plea For Christians, Chap. 5, translated from the Greek by B. P. Pratten, in ANF, II, 123-148 passim.

[47] Archibald Robertson in "Prolegomena," in PNF, IV, xxiii writes, "The person of the Savior is regarded by the apologists from the cosmological, not soteriological viewpoint. St. Paul starts from the latter, and his view gradually embraces the distant horizon of the former (I Cor. 8:6, Col. 1:15). From the soteriological side also he reaches the divinity of Christ (Rom. 5:1-8). Here, as we shall see, Athanasius meets Arius substantially by St. Paul's method."

[48] Robertson, op. cit., p. xxiii.

Incarnation led them somewhat astray, nevertheless they affirmed the truth of the Incarnation over against the unbelieving pagans of the time. Tatian speaks of Him as "God in the form of a man."[49] Aristides says, "It is confessed that this Son of the most high God descended from heaven . . . and took flesh from a virgin."[50] Justin writes, "The Word of God became man for our sakes, so that participating in our miseries He might heal them."[51] The Apologists defended the Incarnation simply by asserting its truth, but its nature and purpose remained a subject of speculation.

We approach now the important period of doctrinal formulation reflected in the writings of Iranaeus, Tertullian, and Origen, all of whom came closer to the expression of nature and purpose of the Incarnation. The specific problem of the period was Monarchianism, reconciling the divinity of Christ with the unity of God.

Iranaeus is perhaps the first genuine theologian standing in the tradition of the Apostles. He regarded the Genesis account of the Fall as genuine history, and all men by participating in Adam's Fall shared his guilt.

> In the first Adam we offended God, not fulfilling His commandment . . . to Him alone were we debtors whose ordinance we transgressed in the beginning.[52]

Because all men sinned in Adam, Iranaeus sees Christ as one who has come to restore man to his pristine holiness. "Because of His

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[49] Tatian, op. cit., 21, 1, in ANF, p. 73.

[50] Aristides, Apology, 15, 1, in NE, p. 56.

[51] Justin, Second Apology, 13, 4, in ANF, I, 192.

[52] Iranaeus, Against Heresies, V. 16, 3, translated from the Greek by M. Dods in ANF, I, 544.

measureless love He became what we are in order to enable us to become what He is."[53] Iranaeus' key conception is that of recapitulation (ἀνακεφαλαίωσις). All men were joined with Adam in the first transgression and therefore were guilty. Christ has come as a second Adam, so all who are now joined to Christ will become pure just as previously those joined to Adam were sinful. Christ's saving work is valid for all mankind, and according to the Lucan genealogy this salvation is also available for men in the Old Testament period. Adam was the originator of a race disobedient and doomed to death, so Christ is regarded as inaugurating a new, redeemed humanity. However, the Incarnation itself does not save us, but Christ's blood has bought our ransom from Satan.[54] Also, since it was Adam's disobedience which resulted in sin, only Christ's obedience can propitiate God.

> In obliterating the disobedience of man originally enacted on the tree, He became obedient unto death, even the death on the cross, healing the disobedience enacted on the tree by obedience on a tree.[55]

Iranaeus, beginning from soteriology, is perhaps the first theologian outside the New Testament to bring clearly into focus the relationship between nature and purpose in the Incarnation.

> Therefore He caused man to become one with God. For unless a man had overcome the enemy of man, the enemy would not have been legitimately vanquished. And again, unless God had freely given salvation, we would not now possess it securely. And unless man had been joined to God, he could never have become a partaker of incorruptibility. For it was incumbent upon the Mediator between

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[53] Iranaeus, Ibid., 5, Praef., in ANF, I, 526.

[54] Iranaeus, Ibid., V. 1, 1, in ANF, I, 526.

[55] Iranaeus, Ibid., V. 16, 3, in ANF, I, 544.

> God and men, by His relationship to both, to bring both to friendship and concord.[56]

Tertullian, founder of Latin theology, was above all a realist. Much of his theology rests upon the principle that there is nothing spiritual without corporeality. As Neve has pointed out:

> The reality of nature and the visible world, the reliability of the senses, the significance of the corporeity and the substantiality of the spirit -- these things constituted the basis of his thoughts.[57]

Since the soul is in a sense material, all men are ultimately materially involved in Adam's guilt. Thus Tertullian was the first not only to teach traducianism but also to explicate a doctrine of original sin. "The first man infected the whole race by his seed, making it the channel of damnation."[58] However, beginning with man's culpability in the sight of God, Tertullian does not press the issue into a doctrine of redemption but rather emphasizes the idea that man must earn merits with God. Christ's work was in a certain sense sacrificial, but Tertullian does not stress a doctrine of atonement or redemption. As Ayer points out:

> In the writings of Tertullian a conception of Christianity is quite fully developed according to which the Gospel was a new law of life, with its prescribed holy seasons and hours for prayer.[59]

Tertullian, discoursing on the meritorious effects of fasting, writes:

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[56] Iranaeus, Ibid., III. 19, 6, in NE, p. 123.

[57] Neve, op. cit., p. 94.

[58] Tertullian, De Testimonium Animae, 3, translated from the Latin by Peter Holmes, in ANF, III, 184.

[59] J. C. Ayer in A Source Book For Ancient Church History, edited by J. C. Ayer (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1930), p. 165.

> Who will any longer doubt . . . that by a renewed interdiction of food and observance of the precept the primordial sin might now be expiated, so that man may make God satisfaction through the same causative material by which he offended, that is, by interdiction of food. . . . So that hunger might rekindle salvation.[60]

And again:

> Now since God as judge presides over the exacting and maintaining of justice . . . ought one to doubt that also in the case of repentance, justice must be rendered to God.[61]

Although Tertullian deviates from the orthodox view of the Gospel of Christ and the atonement, yet he is the first to explicate clearly the unity of substance and the distinctions within the Trinity. This emphasis on substance in Tertullian had a direct impact on the first ecumenical council and the generations thereafter inasmuch as theological terminology henceforth was cast in material forms. Such terms as ousia, hypostasis, persona, and essentia, look to Tertullian as spiritual father. The African Father's own statement on the Incarnation is:

> This ray of God, as was ever fore-told in time past, came down into a virgin and in her womb fashioned into flesh, is born, man mingled with God. The flesh informed by the spirit is nourished, grows to manhood, speaks, teaches, acts -- and is Christ.[62]

Before taking up the study of Athanasius' doctrine of the Incarnation a short account of his spiritual predecessor at Alexandria is of paramount importance in appreciating the historical context. Strongly diverging from the Carthaginians, the Alexandrians

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[60] Tertullian, De Jejunio adversus Psychios, 3, in Ayer, op. cit., p. 166.

[61] Tertullian, De Poenitentia, 2, in Ayer, op. cit., p. 167.

[62] Tertullian, Apology, 21, 14, in NE, p. 172.

maintained that man in his primitive state was (and children still are) innocent and childlike, with free-will to grow toward holiness. Clement of Alexandria states that Adam, "was not created perfect in constitution, but suitable for acquiring virtue . . . for God desires us to be saved by our own efforts."[63] This view made Christ's work of salvation one of moral example and a tutor to lead erring men back on the path toward godlike virtue and holiness.

It was Origen's doctrine of the Son more than any other of his teachings that influenced the next two centuries of Christian thought. It was he who first erected a complete theological system on the basis of the Rule of Faith. Origen approached the doctrine of Christ from the soteriological viewpoint, as Iranaeus before him. Before the creation of the material world God created a fixed number of souls. As these souls were endowed with free-will, they were capable of erring. Most of them erred, and to the degree that they fell from God, they were incorporated in some form in the material world. Thus Origen sees all men as sinful beings from their birth because of their "pre-birth" fall. In order to redeem them the Word became united to a perfect soul which had not sinned, and came to earth as the God-Man. Origen is quite explicit concerning his doctrine of the hypostatic union and communication of attributes. The Word then proceeds to deify human nature, first His own, then others as well. The end of the world will find all souls back in harmony with the One, that is, God. The world began with estrangement from God, through Christ it is now reconciled.

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[63] Clement of Alexandria, Stromateis, 6, 12, translated from the Greek by A. Wilson, in ANF, II, 503.

Origen's doctrine of Christ's nature is a two-fold apparent antithesis which allowed both Athanasius and Arius to appeal to Origen as an authority. The Son is begotten of the essence of the Father, He is of the same essence,[64] and there is no unlikeness whatever between the Son and the Father.[65] He was begotten from eternity of the will of the Father. Thus Origen first explicates the eternal and continuous generation of the Son.[66]

On the other hand the Word is God derivatively, not absolutely.[67] He is the mirror of God's glory, hence not that glory in itself. Because He is substantia substantialiter subsistens, He is as such no ἀγέννητος. He is an ἀϊτιάτον, and the Father is πρῶτον ἄϊτιον.[68]

Since the main aspect of man's sin lies in ignorance of the Father, Christ's primary function is one of teacher, and the highest salvation consists in being taught.[69] However, for simpler Christians Origen does hold out the idea of atonement.

> Origen believed in the vicarious sacrifice of Christ. Christ is a sacrifice not merely for all men, but for fallen angels. The merit of Christ must be appropriated by each individual

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[64] Origen uses the term homoousion. Cp. Fragm. 3 in Hebrews as quoted by Robertson, op. cit., p. xxvi.

[65] Origen, De Principiis, op. cit., I. 2, 12, in ANF, IV, 250.

[66] Ibid., IV. 28; I. 2, 4, in ANF, IV, 376 and 247.

[67] Ibid., I. 2, 2, in ANF, IV, 246.

[68] Harnack, op. cit., p. 159.

[69] William Fairweather, Origen And Greek Patristic Theology (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1901), p. 91 states, "It is not as the crucified one, but merely as a divine teacher that He is of consequence to the wise."

through faith. By believing in Christ we become like Him in character.[70]

Because of the many-sidedness of Origen, the Church's most prolific writer in her long history, his system came to be misunderstood, misappropriated, and viciously maligned until there remained no system at all. In a sense the Arian controversy was only one aspect of the drawn out Origenistic controversies. Origen was fundamentally a Trinitarian aligned against the Monarchian heresy, explicitly expressing the Trinity and co-essentiality of the Son. Arianism was at core Monarchian, denying any multiplicity within the godhead. This it was that in later controversies Origen and Athanasius were actually aligned with orthodoxy. As we shall see, Arius by misappropriating Origen was guilty either of a lack of understanding or sheer duplicity.

In this brief historical sketch it becomes evident that ultimately the issue of the Incarnation must be resolved. Origen in his formulations became explicit about its nature and purpose, thus exciting churchmen throughout the Mediterranean to cast their lots one way or the other. Within two generations after his death the issue was forced at Nicea. Athanasius personified the implicit traditions of the Fathers and the teachings of the New Testament, Arius the philosophical approach of the Apologists and those predecessors on the fringe of orthodoxy.

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[70] Albert Henry Newman, Ancient And Medieval Church History, in A Manual Of Church History (Philadelphia: The American Baptist Publications Society, 1951), I, 285. See also Eugene de Fay, Origen And His Works, translated from the Swedish by Fred Rothwell (New York: Columbia U. Press, 1929), pp. 109 and 128.

## CHAPTER IV

### ATHANASIUS' DOCTRINE OF THE INCARNATION

In Athanasius' De Incarnatione we have reflected the mature theological grasp of the young Alexandrian. Only in two works, On The Incarnation and Against The Heathen do we see Athanasius expressing himself apart from the attacks of heretics and politicians. Hardy maintains:

> The combination of the enthusiasm of a youthful mind with the wisdom of a great one has given the treatise De Incarnatione its place among those Christian classics which are read not only as documents in the history of Christian thought but as treatments of the subjects with which they deal. Historically it stands at the meeting point between the work of the Apologists and that of the theologians of the age of the councils.[1]

Like all apologies, De Incarnatione is not so much an exercise in speculative reasoning as an appeal for personal decision. That it should serve as the basis for our present examination of the relationship between Arius and Athanasius is evident both from its contents and aloof sobriety, untouched by the necessities of polemical strife.

> On The Incarnation is the point of departure of later patristic thought. The Arians in their blatant early statements shortly challenged its central convictions by asserting that the Word was not God, but only the greatest of God's creatures.[2]

Although Athanasius wrote voluminously and well for the greater part of his life, it was this treatise, "which set the standard of

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[1] Edward Hardy, "Introduction To Athanasius," in Christology Of The Later Fathers, edited by Edward Hardy, in The Library Of Christian Classics (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1954), III, 44.

[2] Ibid., p. 47.

Athanasius' thought from which he never deviated throughout the whole of his long life."[3]

Athanasius was primarily concerned with the purpose of the Incarnation rather than its nature.

> He was not in any sense a professional author, writing for the love of it, but a practicing pastor and administrator entering the lists out of sheer necessity.[4]

Hence it is his soteriology which dictates his Christology. He approached Christ's person only after arriving at a deep conviction regarding His work. We shall therefore examine firstly Athanasius' soteriology, and secondly his Christology.

To Athanasius the Incarnation of the Son of God and His death on the cross is the center of faith and theology.[5] The doctrine of salvation can be considered from two emphases, the Incarnation and the vicarious Atonement. Athanasius' main stress lies with the former.

Man was created in the image of God[6] by being given the Word and a perfect knowledge of God. It was to be man's destiny to "abide ever in blessedness, living the true life which belongs to the saints in paradise."[7] However, Adam and Eve, by their infraction

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[3] J. W. C. Wand, The Greek Doctors (London: The Faith Press, 1950), p. 3.

[4] J. W. C. Wand, The Four Great Heresies (London: A. R. Mowbray and Co., 1955), p. 44.

[5] Κεφάλαιον τῆς πίστεως in Athanasius, De Incarnatione, 19, in PNF, IV, 41. Cp. also 9, 1 and 2, 20. Hereafter the De Incarnatione will be referred to as DI.

[6] DI, 3, 8; 10, 44, κατὰ τὴν θεοῦ εἰκόνα.

[7] DI, 3, 3.

of God's law, brought death both to themselves and their descendants. However, death was a gradual process, degenerating men's former inclinations toward good into evil. Thus corruption was not absolute but relative. The process of decay continued through the Old Testament history until such a time that a savior had to be sent to rescue man from his plight. Man had been created with a capacity for perfection, but this capacity was slowly wasting away. The ultimate end of man under these conditions would be death, which to Athanasius seems to mean annihilation.

> For transgression of the commandment was turning them back to their natural state, so that just as they have had their being out of nothing, so also, as might be expected, they might look for corruption into nothing in the course of time.[8]

It appears that this degeneracy or φθορα was a gradual decline rather than an absolute fiat of corruption.

> The race of man was perishing, the rational man made in God's image was disappearing, and the handiwork of God was in the process of dissolution.[9]

God was now confronted with a dilemma. On the one hand He was compelled to decree death for those who had incurred it, since this had been His warning. "For God would not be true if, when He said we should die, man died not."[10] Were this done, there would have been no profit in man having been made to begin with, thus showing a lack of rationality with God. If God allowed man to continue into death this would reveal a weakness, since He would neglect the work

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[8] DI, 4, 5.

[9] DI, 6, 1.

[10] DI, 6, 3.

of His own hands. It was then out of the question to leave men to the current of corruption. "This would be unseemly and unworthy of God's goodness."[11]

On the other hand, God could call men to repentance, but this involved God in yet another dilemma. For repentance in no way would change man's nature but only stay him from acts of sin.[12]

> Now if there were merely a misdemeanor in question, and not a consequent corruption, repentance were well enough. But if, when transgression had once gained a start, men became involved in that corruption which was their nature, and were deprived of the grace which they had . . . more than this was needed.[13]

Therefore by repentance man could not avert his doom. The problem, then, was the total renewal of man's nature. However, God could not recreate man, since this involved the admission of neglect or weakness in God's original creation. The restored humanity had to come about in a way that would not compromise God's goodness or His justice.[14]

The answer to the problem was in the Incarnation of the Word. By the Incarnation human nature was renewed. Just as in the first Adam mankind lost the image of God, so in the second Adam men were restored to the image of God.

> How could this have come to pass save by the very Image of God, our Lord Jesus Christ? For by men's means it was impossible, since they are but made after an image; nor by angels either, for not even they are God's images. Whence the Word of God

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[11] DI, 6, 10.

[12] DI, 7, 3.

[13] DI, 7, 4.

[14] DI, 9, passim.

> came in His own Person, that as He was the image of the Father, He might be able to create afresh the man after the Image.[15]

Athanasius draws the simile of a portrait. When a likeness has been spoiled by stains or effaced, he whose likeness it is must come once more to enable the portrait to be renewed on the same wood. For the sake of his picture even the mere wood on which it is painted is not thrown away, but the outline is renewed upon it. So the purpose of the Incarnation was to renew man in the likeness of the Father's image. The simile of a king in a city is also utilized to illustrate the point. Just as a king who enters a city brings high honor to it and practically dispels any possibility of banditry or evil during his stay, so also with man after God took up His abode with us.

> 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.

The foregoing account would seem to suggest that Athanasius conceived of human nature after the manner of Platonic realism, as a concrete idea or universal in which all individual men participate. From this point of view, when the Word assumed human nature and suffused it with His divinity, the benefits would thus automatically accrue to all mankind, and the Incarnation would in effect be the redemption. Kelly has observed, "There is little doubt that Athanasius' platonism tended at times to lose touch with his

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[15] DI, 13, 7.

[16] DI, 9, 4.

Christianity."[17] However, Athanasius clearly indicates that this benefit accrues only to those men who are in a special relationship to God.

But why was it necessary for redemption to be made by means of an incarnation? Although man had manifold testimonies to God's goodness and perfection by way of the prophets and the wonders of nature[18], man had spurned these revelations and had continued on his way of willful self-destruction. Athanasius gives the reason for this particular means of redemption when he writes:

> He sojourns here as a man, taking to Himself a body like the others, and from things of earth, that is, by the works of His body, He teaches them so that they who would not know Him from His Providence and rule over all things, may even from the works done by His actual body know the Word of God which is in the body, and through Him the Father.[19]

Although renewal of human nature appears to be the predominant strain in Athanasius' soteriology[20] there remain other emphases. A second reason for the Incarnation was to lead man to a purer knowledge of God. God, knowing that man was by nature not sufficient to know Him, gave him a knowledge of Himself. "For what profit to the creatures if they knew not their Maker?"[21] He made them in the

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[17] J. N. D. Kelly, Early Christian Doctrines (New York: Harper and Brothers Pub., 1958), p. 379.

[18] DI, 12.

[19] DI, 14, 8.

[20] Wand, Greek Doctors, op. cit., p. 4, "He became man in order that man might become God."

[21] DI, 11, 2.

image of the Word, that thus they might know the Word, and through Him, the Father. Yet man, despising this, fell into idolatry, leaving the unseen God for magic and astrology, and all this in spite of God's manifold revelations of Himself.[22] God, foreseeing man's forgetfulness, provided also the works of creation to remind man of Him. Further, He ordained the Law and the Prophets whose ministry was to the world, but men heeded only their own lusts.[23] A king whose subjects had revolted would, after sending letters and messengers, go to them in person. The Word made flesh revealed the king to men, "that by His body they may perceive the truth, and through Him recognize the Father."[24] The Word in the body was never defiled by it, but as the sun illuminates and cleanses and warms without itself being contaminated, so the deity in Christ cleansed the body and human nature. "He quickened and cleansed the body also, which in itself was mortal."[25]

This may lead the inquirer to question what place Christ's passion and death played in Athanasius' system. He felt the supremacy of the cross as the purpose of the Savior's coming, but he does not in fact give to it the central place in his system of thought which it seems to occupy in his instincts. Man had involved himself in the sentence of death. Death must therefore take place to

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[22] DI, 11, passim.

[23] DI, 12.

[24] DI, 15, 2.

[25] DI, 17, 7.

satisfy this sentence.[26] The Savior's death put an end to death inasmuch as it was regarded as a punishment or was symptomatic of man's corruption.

> 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, in order firstly to make men quit and free of their old trespasses and further to show Himself more powerful even than death, displaying His own body incorruptible, as firstfruits of the resurrection of all.[27]

On the surface the doctrine is one of substitution, but what Athanasius was seeking to bring out was not so much that one victim was substituted for another, as that "the death of all was accomplished in the Lord's body."[28] In other words, because of the union between His flesh and ours, His death and victory were in effect ours. Just as through our kinship with the first Adam we inherit death, so by our kinship with Christ we conquer death and inherit life. Thus the vicarious suffering and death of Christ is fully explicated. Through union with Christ, men may now be released from the death sentence and be restored to a state of perfection approaching deity. Athanasius does not indicate the difference, if any, between the unfallen Adam and the new man in Christ.

The resurrection also finds an important place in his system.

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[26] DI, 20, 2 and 5.

[27] DI, 20, 2.

[28] DI, 20.

> Supposing now death slain by Him, what could have happened save the rising again of His body and its being displayed as a monument of victory against death.[29]

It is difficult to ascertain the means whereby one appropriates these benefits, or exactly what the benefits are. Perhaps both are contained in Athanasius' statements giving evidence of Christ's power in the world, works which include:

> Drawing men to religion, persuading to virtue, teaching of immortality, leading on to a desire for heavenly things, revealing the knowledge of the Father, inspiring strength to meet death, displacing the godlessness of idolatry.[30]

It is possible for some to detect appropriation of Christ's merits in a manner approaching justification by faith.

> Death is destroyed, and by the sign of the cross and faith in Christ men tread it down as dead . . . Now that the Savior has raised His body death is no longer terrible; for all who believe in Christ tread him under as nought, and choose rather to die than to deny their faith in Christ.[31]

However, Athanasius is quite explicit, too, when he enjoins the virtues of good works on his readers.

> Without a pure mind and a modelling of the life after the saints, a man cannot possibly comprehend the words of the saints. For just as if a man wished to see the light of the sun, he would at any rate wipe and brighten his eye, purifying himself in some sort. . . He that would comprehend the mind of those who speak of God must needs begin by washing and cleansing his soul, by his manner of living, by imitating the works of the saints . . . so that he may escape the peril of sinners and their fire at the day of judgement and receive what is laid up for saints in the kingdom of heaven.[32]

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[29] DI, 30, 2.

[30] DI, 31, 2.

[31] DI, 27, 1 and 2.

[32] DI, 57, 3.

It must be confessed that Athanasius does not penetrate to the full meaning of St. Paul. The latter ascribed a central importance not to the fact of the Incarnation, but in its relationship primarily to sin and in the destruction of the power of sin. Man himself is not essentially changed or deified, as with Athanasius, but as God sees man through the propitiatory work of Christ, man appears cleansed. The triumvirate of flesh, world, and Satan remain to harass mankind. It must also be confessed that on the surface, at least, Athanasius leaves room for a Pelagian type of man who will increase in perfection until he approaches deity.

Although Athanasius may not have grasped the full import of St. Paul, he was certainly not alone in this oversight among the Fathers. Athanasius retained the full Scriptural emphasis of man's total depravity, his helpless condition, and the necessity of God's intervention. He recognized that Christ's suffering and death were a vicarious act on behalf of all men, and that His resurrection insures our resurrection. Man was made, and is still exclusively destined for, knowledge and fellowship with his Creator. The only means to this end is Christ, God's Incarnate Son. Mankind is now once again enabled to proceed upon the course on which it was bound at the time of the Fall. The idea of ἀφθαρσία which so often stands with him for the summum bonum imparted to us in Christ involves a moral and spiritual restoration of our nature, not merely the physical suppression of φθορά by ἀθανασία.[33]

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[33] DI, 47, 51, 52.

Thus Athanasius explicitly outlines his soteriology already before the Nicene controversy began. In later years, forced by the necessities of the time, he was to emphasize the nature of Christ to a far greater extent than the purpose of His coming. Yet his energy and stamina in the homoousion struggle had as their source the abiding conviction that unless Christ was true and essential God, no restoration could be effected, no death could be conquered, and man was yet in his corruption.

Athanasius also speaks of the nature of Christ as being true God and man. Because the doctrine had not yet come under question or direct attack, the author speaks of the essential deity of the second Person as a matter of course, to be taken for granted. There is an abundance of explicit statements testifying to the deity of the Word, and by the Word is meant Christ. "We have by God's grace noted the divinity of the Word of the Father,"[34] and Christ persuaded men by the works He did, "that He is not man only but also God and the Word and Wisdom of the true Father."[35] Such signs made Him known no longer as man, "but as God, the Word."[36] Christ was the Word, and the Word was God. Athanasius clearly states this truth in scores of instances. A few will suffice. "The general Savior of all, the Word of God, takes to Himself a body."[37] The signs and wonders

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[34] DI, 1, 1.

[35] DI, 16, 1.

[36] DI, 16, 4.

[37] DI, 15, 2.

attending the crucifixion showed Him to be, "not man merely, but the Son of God and Savior of all."[38] "Now these things showed that Christ on the cross was God."[39] Since Christ is God, He alone should be worshipped[40] and given all glory. "He alone among men is God, the Word."[41] There is little doubt that Athanasius places Christ on an equality with the Father. He arrived at the equality of the Son with the Father through his abiding conviction of the redemption, that is, soteriology rather than philosophy. He recognized that in order to have a meaningful redemption, the Word must be true God.

> For being Word of the Father and above all, He alone of natural fitness was both able to recreate everything and worthy to suffer on behalf of all.[42]

"None other was sufficient for man's need save the image of the Father."[43] More specifically, in refutation of the Arians, he declares, "And how, if the Logos was a creature, would He be able to dissolve a decree of God and forgive sin?"[44] Athanasius' constant appeal in the subsequent struggle was to the Redemption. If

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[38] DI, 19, 3.

[39] DI, 19, 3.

[40] DI, 45, 6.

[41] DI, 45, 3.

[42] DI, 7, 5; 9, 1; 9, 2.

[43] DI, 13, 9.

[44] Athanasius, Orationes, etc., II, 67, translated from the Greek by Cardinal Newman, in PNF, IV, 384.

Arius is correct, the plan of salvation must be discredited. Whether philosophically or logically Arius may be the more rational, Athanasius' point of departure remains scriptural and pastoral. In the final result, Athanasius shows that his is the more rational of the two, since Arius lacks a purpose in Incarnation, and if he possessed one to begin with, it must of necessity be unscriptural.[45]

> The man partaking of a creature would not be deified unless the Son were truly God; and the man would not be equal with the Father, unless He who assumed the body was by nature also the true Logos of the Father.[46]

Although the De Incarnatione contains Athanasius' fundamental statement of belief, especially his doctrine of salvation, it will complement our inquiry to refer to his polemical writings against the Arians, especially the four Orationes. At no point does Athanasius deny the unity of the Godhead by his insistence on the coessentiality of the Son.

> And since Christ is God from God and God's Word, Wisdom, Son, and Power, therefore but one God is declared in the divine Scriptures. For the Word, being Son of the one God, is referred to Him of Whom also He is, so that Father and Son are two, yet the Monad of the Godhead is indivisible (ἀδιαίρετος) and inseparable (ἄχωριστος). And thus, too, we preserve one beginning of Godhead and not two beginnings, whence there is strictly a monarchy.[47]

It is entirely possible that Athanasius' emphasis on the unity of God was informed, to some extent, by the tradition of the Alexandrian school, by the distinctly Western stress on unity, and by the

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[45] Ibid., I, 35, 8, 38, 42; II, 23 ff.

[46] Ibid., II, 70.

[47] Ibid., IV, 1.

Sabellian idea then circulating. However, he also recognized that the divine Monarchy must also be maintained in opposition to Arius' conception of a "second God," and idea which would have destroyed the Trinity and ultimately resolved itself in polytheism.

In opposition to the Sabellians Athanasius denies a Father-Son Being (υἱοπάτωρ) or a sole-natured God (μονοούσιος), for by these tenets the existence of the Son would be denied.

> They are two, because the Father is Father and not also Son, and the Son is Son and not also Father, but the nature is one. wherefore neither is the Son another God, for He was not procured from without, else were there many.[48]

In the same context Athanasius utilizes the already ancient simile of the sun and its rays, for the sun and its rays are two separate entities, yet but one light. Also, just as a river springing from a fountain is not separated from it, although there are two forms and two names, so neither is the Father the Son, nor the Son the Father.

There are hence two distinct Persons but they remain united. This unique relationship Athanasius describes with the term ἑνότης τῆς οὐσίας, or oneness of essence.[49] The Word is a generation (γέννημα) from the essence (οὐσία) of the Father.[50] His relationship to the other created beings is described by Athanasius.

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[48] Ibid., III, 4.

[49] Athanasius, De Decretis, 22, translated from the Greek by Cardinal Newman, in PNF, IV, p. 165. Cp. also Athanasius, De Synodis, III, translated from the Greek by Newman, in PNF, IV, 468 ff.

[50] Athanasius, Orationes, op. cit., I, 29.

> Things originate stand and serve in their place below the Triad, therefore the Son is different in kind and different in essence from things originate, and on the contrary is proper to the Father's essence and one in nature with it.[51]

The Son thus shares with the Father the one divine substance, and in doing so is also immutable and eternal.

The Son was begotten by the Father, but such begetting cannot be thought of in human terms, as Athanasius explains in his defense of the Nicene definition.[52] The things begotten of men are in some way parts of those who begat them. Men lose their substance in begetting, and again they gain substance from the accession of food. But God, being without parts, is Father of the Son without partition or passion, for there effluence of the immaterial nor influx from without, as among men. God is Father of the one and the only Son. This is the Logos of the Father, in whom it is possible to behold that which is of the Father without passion or division.

Although all things created have come to be by the Father's will, the Son is external to either will or causation.

> By His (Father's) good pleasure and will all things have come into being through the Word. He is external to the things which have come to be by will, but rather is Himself the living counsel of the Father, by which all these things have come to be.[53]

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[51] Ibid., I, 58. Here again is a remarkable avoidance of the term ὁμοούσιον. He says that the Son is ἑτερογενὴς καὶ ἑτεροούσιος τῶν γενητῶν, καὶ τῆς τοῦ πατρὸς οὐσίας ἴδιος καὶ ἀμέριστος.

[52] Athanasius, De Decretis, op. cit., 11.

[53] Athanasius, Orationes, op. cit., III, 64.

Thus Athanasius directly opposes the Arian notion of the Son being the first of all creatures, brought into existence by the will of the Father. The Father and the Son are therefore two Persons, the Begetting and the Begotten, but by virtue of their identical essence they are one. Furthermore, the begetting of the Son is not an act which can be placed in time, but is rather an eternal fact. "The Father is always begetting."[54] Athanasius stands in line with Origen to affirm the ongoing and continuous process of the eternal generation of the Son, whereas Arius objected at the outset of the controversy to the phrase, "Always Father, always Son."[55]

Athanasius, in formulating his statements on the Godhead, was heir to the beliefs of the Church as reflected in the creeds and regulae fidei, yet furnished something new in the form of defining a relationship between the Father and the Son. He was careful to avoid the pitfalls of the Monarchians, who asserted either a docetic Christ or a demi-god man. Yet he utilized the terminology of the Monarchians in asserting the unity of the essence of the Godhead, yet in two distinct persons. There is evidence[56] that he ultimately considered that the one personal God was the Father of

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[54] Ibid., III, 66 reads γεννητικός. Cp. also I, 14.

[55] PNF, IV, p. 314, note 4. Thus Arius, by admitting to a begetting in time, must also maintain a mutability on the part of God, since there was a time when He was not Father, thus contradicting the immutability of God. Athanasius points this out in Orationes I, 20, 24, 25.

[56] Reinhold Seeberg, History Of Doctrines In The Ancient Church, in Text-Book Of The History Of Doctrines, translated from the German by Charles E. Hay (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1954), I, 211.

the Logos, although such evidence is neglibible in comparison with his more explicit emphases to the contrary.

It was not as a theologian but as a believing soul in need of a Savior that Athanasius approached the mystery of Christ. Throughout the mazes of the Arian controversy his tenacious hold upon this fundamental principle steered his course and balanced his theology. It was his concern for man's redemption, forgiveness of sins, and ultimate joy in heaven that guided his thinking during the critical years of the fourth century and that characterized his voluminous writings. It was only by soteriology that he arrived at the doctrine of the mystery of Christ, and it is only thus that Christians of any age can avoid the pitfalls of excluding either divinity or humanity from the Person of Christ.

> It was not the demands of logical consistency, forced upon him alike by the assaults of his opponents and by the requirements of his own position which inspired Athanasius. The arguments, both positive and negative, by which he justifies his discussions are primarily of a religious nature, and it is precisely this fact which constitutes the novelty and importance of his view.[57]

The novelty of Christianity as expressed by Athanasius in comparison with the pagan historical context are by this time obvious. The classical religions draw a sharp line between deity and humanity, declaring that any approach between them was not only undesirable but dangerous. The Greeks were suspicious of any who claimed to become godlike.[58] Athanasius declared that Christ became man in

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[57] Ibid.

[58] Albert A. Trever, History Of Ancient Civilization (New York: Harcourt, Brace, and Co., 1936), I, 212.

order that man might become as God. All the ancients testified to the chasm between Being and Non-being. Arius emphasized this when he posited a mediary between man and God. Athanasius unequivocally stated that God had actually taken His abode in humanity. The ancients insisted that salvation consisted essentially in immortality. Athanasius emphasized the truths of forgiveness, atonement, and a renewed human nature. The ancients laid claim to an essentially pure mankind which needed no correction. Athanasius emphasized the depravity of corrupt human nature and the need for a renewal. The ancients laid stress on virtuous living as the means by which to gain salvation. Athanasius, although the emphasis is not lacking, speaks also of a personal relationship and union with the Son. The ancients thought of a transcendent God in a remote world. Athanasius placed God on a cross in the center of a suffering world. Small wonder that the Church, with the large influx of pagans following Constantine's edicts of toleration, began to disavow the Scriptural truths which were so out of harmony with the traditions of the past. It is not surprising that we find an Arius with a multitudinous following reiterating the claims of the context of the pagan world. The astonishing fact is that in the face of hostile and overwhelming opposition, both physical and intellectual, Athanasius alone stood fast, and not only stood but gained the victory. In this sense Athanasius Contra Mundum is a descriptive and factual eulogy.

## CHAPTER V

## ARIUS AND THE INCARNATION

Because of the fundamental issues at stake, involving the heart of the Faith itself, Arius has often been regarded with hostility by later Christians who vilify his memory and teachings. The Arian controversy, however, was not the result of any malicious designs perpetrated by its leader. It was inevitable in Christendom that a decisive conclusion be reached regarding the position of the Son in relation to the Father, and thus the nature of the Incarnation. The extent and duration of the controversy are enough to show that it was no mere outbreak of unmeaning wickedness. There must have been historic causes for its victories, historic causes also for its decline and fall.

> The appearance of Arianism about the year 318 A.D. was no historical accident, but a direct result of earlier movements, and an inevitable reaction of heathen forms of thought against the definite establishment of the Christian view of God.[1]

Now that persecution seemed to have passed away forever it was inevitable that heathen thought inside the Church should endeavor to seize for itself the central doctrine of the Faith. "The Arian problem was one which the Church was unable to avoid."[2] As the controversy was a direct result of earlier movements it will serve our purposes briefly to inquire into the alleged antecedents of Arianism,

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[1] H. M. Gwatkin, Studies Of Arianism (Cambridge: Deighton, Bell, and Co., 1882), p. 17.

[2] Archibald Robertson, "Prolegomena," in PNF, IV, xv.

noticably Origenism on the one hand and the school of Antioch on the other. Upon reflection, it will become clearer that Arius' appeal to these Fathers as his spiritual antecedents was based either upon a misunderstanding of them or conscious misappropriation of their statements. The only possible or plausible conclusion that remains is that Arianism was essentially heathenism asserting itself against the Church[3], rather than a heretical tendency arising from within. Hatch maintains,

> We owe to Greek philosophy -- to the hypothesis of the chasm between spirit and matter -- the tendency to interpose powers between the Creator and His Creation.[4]

Perhaps the most important contribution of Origen to Christology was his definition of the eternal generation of the Son. "The Son was begotten before any beginning that can either be comprehended or expressed."[5] Again he gives expression to this view when he writes,

> Wherefore we have always held that God is the Father of His only-begotten Son, who was born indeed of Him, and derives from Him what He is, but without any beginning.[6]

Although these statements could be supported by Arius, filling them with his own content, Origen's further elaborations clearly indicated his meaning.

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[3] Supra., Chap. I.

[4] Edwin Hatch, The Influence Of Greek Ideas On Christianity (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1957), p. 280.

[5] Origen, De principiis, I. 2, 2, translated from the Greek by F. Crombie, in ANF, IV, 246.

[6] Ibid.

> He is begotten from the essence of the Father, He is of the same essence (ὁμοούσιον), but there is no unlikeness whatever between the Son and the Father.[7]

It was against this distinct expression of coessentiality that Arius inveighed at Nicea. Origen further maintains that the generation has been eternal and is existing continuously into eternity. The Father has always been Father, the Son always Son. Arius, already at the beginning of the controversy, firmly denied the doctrine of, "Always Father, always Son."[8] There is no question in the mind of Origen concerning the Son's essential godhead or His eternal origin. Nevertheless, Origen does place the Son in a subordinate position to the Father causally. Since the Father has caused the Son's existence, the logical inference is that the Son is in some way indebted to the Father. Here Origen uses the unfortunate phrase ὁ δεύτερος θεός[9] which was to prove a shibboleth for schismatics in later controversies. Origen has also been accused of using the term κτίσις in reference to the Son, that is, a created being. The only instance of the term is in a fragment of De Principiis, IV, 4, 1, preserved by Emperor Justinian and printed in the Berlin edition. Prestige maintains:

> If this extract is genuine and literally accurate the statement is indeed a serious matter. But even in the same context the erring Origen stoutly denies the truth of the formula adopted by Arius, that there was a time when He was not. Origen held

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[7] Ibid., I, 2, 12.

[8] Supra., Chap. 3, note 55, p. 56.

[9] Origen, Contra Celsus, 39, translated from the Greek and Latin by F. Crombie, in ANF, IV, 515.

a species of subordinationism, but he most certainly was no Arian.[10]

Perhaps this species of subordinationism was due to the hostility of Origen maintained against the Monarchians in either form. In Origen the hypostatic distinctness of the Son and Spirit is once for all made good for the theology of Eastern Christendom. The distinct personality of the Son is maintained from all eternity.[11]

Following Origen Eastern theology diverged into two main streams headed by Methodius on the one hand and Gregory Thaumaturgus on the other. Methodius vehemently attacked Origen's speculative methods and more philosophic conclusions, but left the doctrine of the Son unchallenged. Gregory, ignoring the questionable elements in Origen, tenaciously held to the co-eternity of the Son. Robertson, in commenting on the position of the later Origenists, maintains, "The hypostatic subordination of the Son was insisted upon, but His true Sonship as of one nature with the Father, was held fast."[12] In both Origen and his followers Monarchianism was the heresy most dreaded. For this reason the distinct personality of the Persons was maintained to be still essentially within the godhead. On the other hand Arianism was in its essential core Monarchian. When a line came to be drawn between God and man, Origen unequivocally drew the line so as to include Son and Spirit in the godhead. Arius drew

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[10] G. L. Prestige, God In Patristic Thought (London: Society For The Promotion Of Christian Knowledge, 1956), p. 133.

[11] Origen, De Principiis, I, 2, 9, op. cit.

[12] Robertson, op. cit., p. xxvii.

the line between the Father and the Son. Athanasius recognized this distinction and used it against Arius in the De Decretis or his defense of the Nicene definition.[13]

The Origenist bishops of Syria had succeeded in deposing Paul of Samosata, the ablest pre-Nicene exponent of dynamic Monarchianism, from the See of Antioch. According to Paul, the man Jesus had been inhabited by the Word, and by sheer efforts at virtue had approached so nearly to deity that God finally adopted Him into the godhead in a subordinate position. Following Paul's deposition, Lucian the martyr seems to have taken the leadership of Paul's followers and united them into a fraternal brotherhood which formed the basis of much of the anti-Nicene reaction later on.

> The only two points in which Lucian appears to have modified the system of Paul were firstly in hypostasizing the Logos, which to Paul was an impersonally divine power, secondly in abandoning Paul's purely human doctrine of the historical Christ . . . The Logos assumed a body, but itself took the place of a soul . . . and the inferiority and essential difference of the Son from the Father rigidly followed.[14]

The influence of Lucian on the Nicene Age cannot be overstated. Although he may not be culpable for all of Arius' formulations, nevertheless all Arians of the generation following Nicea seemed to have at one time or another come under the influence of Lucian. It

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[13] Athanasius, De Decretis, VI, 27, translated from the Greek by Cardinal Newman, in PNF, IV, 168. J. W. C. Wand, The Four Great Heresies (London: A. R. Mowbray and Co., 1955), p. 42 states, "Arius fails however to notice that while Origen recognized the distinctions within the godhead, he himself departed so far from the customary Christian teaching as to take these distinctions out of the godhead, leaving the Supreme God as one undifferentiated unity."

[14] Robertson, op. cit., p. xxviii.

was a tendency of the Antiochene tradition to bring into prominence the human element in the Person of Christ, sometimes to the extent of compromising His deity. Gwatkin maintains that this in itself is meaningless, inasmuch as this tendency was common to Eastern Christendom. Thus the Arianism at Nicea was authored rather by Lucian and Paul than the Christian tradition of Antioch.

> The only real resemblence of the Antiochene doctrine to Arianism is on the anthropological grounds; and that is the common property of the whole Eastern Church. So far as regards the Person of the Lord they started from antagonistic positions worked by different methods, and came to contrary results.[15]

Although the extant writings of Arius hardly include all of his theological works, the available documents, together with the defenses of Athanasius, give the student an adequate idea of Arius' position. Extant writings of Arius are his letters to Eusebius of Nicomedia and to Alexander, preserved by Theodoret and Epiphanius, and the extracts from the Thalia preserved in Athanasius (pp. 308-311 in PNF, IV) in addition to numerous other references by Athanasius plus the records of the Nicene Council.

The dominant idea in the views of Arius was the Monarchian principle of one God, unbegotten and remote, transcendent, hence without contact with creation.

> Behold, God is said to be One, and Only, and First; how, say ye, that the Son is God? For if He were God He had not said, 'I Alone,' nor, 'God is One.'[16]

The Arians denied eternity to the Son, since two eternals meant a —

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[15] Gwatkin, op. cit., p. 21.

[16] Athanasius, Orationes, III, 7, translated from the Greek by Cardinal Newman, in PNF, IV, 397.

contradiction in terms.[17] God alone is above all things uncreated and unoriginate (ἀγένητος). All else is created (γένετος). The Name Son implies an act of procreation, therefore before such an act there was no Son, and strictly speaking, no Father. He came into being from the Father's will[18] as did all things. Hence, there was a time when the Son did not exist (ὁυκ ἦν πρὶν γένηται). The Son was brought into being in order to create the universe, which could not bear the awful touch of deity. However, He is a Son by adoption, not by nature. Because the Son is a creature, He cannot know the Father, much less make Him known to others.

> Identifying the eternal godhead with the Father and regarding the Logos as no more than a power or quality of the eternal Father, he said that before time began the Father had created the Son by the power of the Word to be His agent in creation. The Son was not therefore to be identified with the godhead. He was only God in a derivative sense.[19]

This teaching Arius compressed into the form of a syllogism. Christ is the Logos Incarnate, He is capable of change and suffering, hence the Logos is capable of change and not equal to God.

In considering the Logos, Arius referred to Him as a philosophical pattern or cosmic principle, after the pattern established long before by the Greek thinkers. The Word was the divine principle which permeated the world. God had spoken many individual Words in time past, but Christ was by grace elevated to the rank of The

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[17] Ibid., III, 28.

[18] So Origen too, but Origen places the Father's will within the essence of the godhead. Arius said it was extraneous to it.

[19] Wand, op. cit., p. 41.

Word. He was this not by nature but by adoption. On the other hand, Athanasius thought of the Logos after the pattern of the Fourth Gospel, as a divine Person, the Son of God, who although He was the agent in creation, was separate from the world and who, when He came into the world, was not recognized by it. Seeberg, in quoting Athanasius' explanation of Arius' Logos doctrine, says:

> The Logos is therefore a creature of the Father, created by Him as the medium in the creation of the world. Accordingly He is not God in the full sense of the word, but through His enjoyment of the divine favor He receives the names God, etc.[20]

An important semantic controversy arose over the meanings of "begotten" and "create." To Arius the word begotten (γεννητος) carried the sense of created (γενητος). Since the Father was the only uncreated being it followed that there was an essential difference between the nature of the Father and that of the Son. To Athanasius, on the other hand, begotten meant the opposite of created. To be begotten of your father meant that you shared his essential nature, and to be eternally begotten meant that one did so from eternity.

The relationship of the Holy Spirit to the Son is scarcely touched by the early Arians, but so far as we can find they considered it not unlike that of the Son to the Father, as Gwatkin surmises:

> If they never drew from St. John, "all things were made by Him," the logical inference that the Holy Spirit is a creature of the Son, their whole system required it. Thus the Arian

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[20] Reinhold Seeberg, History Of Doctrines In The Ancient Church, in Text-Book Of The History Of Doctrines, translated from the German by Charles E. Hay (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1954), I, 203.

> Trinity of divine persons forms a descending series separated by infinite degrees of honor and glory, not altogether unlike the Neoplatonic triad of orders of spiritual existence extendint outward in concentric circles.[21]

It is easily apparent that Arius derived his teachings not from the position of a pastor and shepherd but rather as a philosopher attempting to solve seemingly disparate elements of Christianity. His constant emphasis is a demand for rational satisfaction. So also did Arius ignore the Scriptural basis until he had arrived at his conclusions without its use.

> Arianism, then, was almost as much a philosophy as a religion. It assumed the usual philosophical postulates, worked by the usual philosophical methods, and scarcely referred to Scripture except in quest of isolated texts to confirm conclusions reached without its help.[22]

Prestige confirms the Arian neglect of Scripture. "Like most people of schismatical temper, they really neglected the Bible in order to concentrate on a few selected texts."[23] Arianism's appeal to the pagan philosophers is understandable when we reflect that the army, the civil servants, the educated, and the life of society were still largely heathen. The inevitable influx of heathen into the Church, now that the empire had officially become Christian, brought with it multitudes to whom Arianism was a more intelligible creed than that of Nicea. As Robertson has pointed out. "The influence of the philosophers was a serious factor. They might well welcome Arianism as a Selbstersetzung des Christentums."[24]

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[21] Gwatkin, op. cit., p. 21.

[22] Gwatkin, op. cit., p. 21.

[23] Prestige, op. cit., p. 147.

[24] Robertson, op. cit., p. xxxv. Cp. Gwatkin, op. cit., p. 21.

The end of the third century witnessed the conflict of faith and reason coming to an accounting. As the Christians held to the regulae fidei on the one hand and exercised speculation on the other, a number of issues obviously needed clearing up. There was little question as to the monotheism of Scripture, yet how to reconcile this with the deity of Christ and the Spirit represented an intellectual difficulty. Arius stepped in with a summary solution denying deity to Christ and placing Him outside the godhead. Yet Christian instincts of life and worship demanded Christ to be true God, as He had been declared such from the earliest moments of the Church. If, as in the Arian system, Christ were made a god to be worshipped but not equal to the Father, the Church was confronted with polytheism, and the circle from heathenism back to heathenism was complete. Athanasius, recognizing this serious yet farcical situation, inveighed against its absurdity.[25]

Not only did the evident polytheism of Arius witness against him, but more important than this, its failure with regard to the Christian doctrine of Redemption, or the Incarnation, testified against it. God was not in Christ reconciling the world to Himself. In Christ we see a created being but not the love of the Father. Christ, in being a creature, is equal to man, but in being adopted by the Father is above man and worthy to be worshipped. Hence, "like Mohammed's coffin, He hovered between heaven and earth, belonging to neither."[26] Sinners who have offended the Father must

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[25] Athanasius, Orationes, 23, op. cit.

[26] Wand, op. cit., p. 42.

remain content with a pardon from one who is incapable himself of knowing the Father.

An excellent summary of Arianism is given by Gwatkin:

> Some attractions it certainly had. It seemed simpler than orthodoxy, and was more symmetrical than Semi-Arianism, more human than Sabellianism, while to the heathen it was very Christian sounding. But as a system Arianism was utterly illogical and unspiritual, a clear step back to heathenism, and a plain anachronism even for its own time. It began by attempting to establish Christian positions and ended by subverting each and all of them. It maintained the unity of God by opening the door to polytheism. It upheld the Lord's divinity by making the Son of God a creature, and then worshipped Him to escape the reproach of heathenism. It lost even His true humanity in a fantastic theory of the Incarnation which refused the Son of Man a human soul. Above all, no true revelation of love could come from a God of abstract infinitude and mystery, condemned to stand aloof forever from the world lest it perish at His touch; no true atonement from a created mediator, neither truly God nor truly man; no true sanctification from a subject Spirit far beneath the dignity even of the first of creatures. In a word, there could be no intrinsic strength in a system which covered the whole field of Christian doctrine with the ruins of its pretentious system.[27]

A final commentary regarding the bankruptcy of the Arian system can be seen reflected in the methods employed to establish itself in the empire. It is all too true that Christians have through the ages been guilty of cruelty to one another and to the world, seeking to gain power, wealth, prestige, or other advantages ostensibly in the name of Christ. The first such incident in which nominal Christians ignore Christ's command of love can be seen in the attitude of the Arians over against the orthodox following Nicea.[28] It is clear

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[27] Gwatkin, op. cit., p. 3.

[28] Although it is true that Constantine established a dangerous precedent at Nicea by exiling Arius and his followers, thus using the civil arm to support a religious conviction.

that Arianism worked throughout by court intrigue and military outrage. "Arian successes began and ended with Arian command of the palace."[29] The later council of Milan was overawed with soldiers, that of Ariminum worn out by imperial delays and cajolery. Yet the victory was ephemeral, and the conquerors remained isolated in a crowd of hostile bishops. The incidents of Gregory and George in Alexandria reveal the utter dependence of Arianism on the arm of the civil government to maintain its strength. The ruthless pursuit of Athanasius from the northernmost limits of the empire to the Nitrian desert in the south reveal the hostility of the Arians to the evangel of the New Testament.

> So far as we know, not one of them was eminent as a religious character. Their strength was in a fixity of policy and in ecclesiastical intrigue, and their battery was the imperial court.[30]

The only resistance offered by the Nicene party seems to have been that of Athanasius' writings, whose powers of persuasion based on a host of Scriptural references ultimately won the day, the pen conquering the sword.

The dependence of Arius on the historical context of pagan philosophy is by this time obvious to the reader. No false system ever struck more directly at the life of Christianity than Arianism. Reaffirming the transcendent deity of Plato, coupled with the intermediaries of the Gnostics, the Logos of Philo, the Nous of Plotinus, and the methodology of philosophy, Arius combined the

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[29] Gwatkin, op. cit., p. 3.

[30] Robertson, op. cit., p. xxxiv.

elements of heathenism in one grand assault on the Incarnation. But for all that the doom of Arianism was uttered at Nicea and verified in the six decades which followed. In the succeeding ages there have recurred many forms of the denial of the Incarnation, but following Nicea all such manifestations must catagorically be denied a place in the kerygma. The issue was clearly decided. Bleak and distressing as was the controversy of the fourth century, we shall in the succeeding pages follow closely the path of the struggle until ultimately the truths of De Incarnatione emerge victorious.

## CHAPTER VI

## THE CONFLICT

The conflict between Arians and orthodox, although theoretically protracted from the very beginning of Christianity, actually was formalized with the first ecumenical council at Nicea. Although the council was called to deal with a number of questions, it was the Arian problem which ultimately arrested attention and which in later years gave to the council its eminence in the history of the Church.

Of the two hundred fifty or more bishops[1] at Nicea it was a small minority which recognized the critical situation and the un-Christian doctrine which was confronting the Church. Alexander and Athanasius of Alexandria were the rallying point of the orthodox, Arius of the Arians, while the great mass of bishops, two hundred and more, formed the undecided and generally disinterested center group.[2] The two Eusebiuses, of Caesarea and Nicomedia, were

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[1] Numbers vary. According to A. Robertson, "Prolegomena," in PNF, IV, xvii, note 1, "Eusebius' Vit. Const. iii, 8 - over 270, Eustath. in Thdt. i, 8 - more than 300. Athanasius acquiesces in the precise figure 318. (Gen. 14:14 the Greek numeral ΤΙΗ combines the cross with the initial letters of the Sacred Name.) 318 first occurs in the Coptic acts of the Council of Alexandria 362 A.D. The number is perhaps symbolical rather than historical."

[2] Robertson, op. cit., p. xviii, refers to the center group as the Conservatives, and writes of this term, which will be employed throughout this thesis, "A term first brought into currency in this connection by Gwatkin, and since adopted by many writers including Harnack . . . the term is too useful to be surrendered. The truly conservative men, here as in other instances, failed to enlist the sympathy of the rank and file."

spokesmen for the various factions represented in the center group. Much authoritative material has been produced regarding the council,[3] and our present purpose, rather than rewrite a description of the proceedings, will be to see in the council itself and the generation following in its wake the struggle for the Church's true meaning of the Incarnation.

The conservatism of the great mass of bishops rejected Arianism more promptly than had been expected by its adherents.

> The almost unanimous horror of the Nicene bishops at the novelty and profaneness of Arianism condemns it irrevocably as alien to the immemorial belief of the churches.[4]

But it was one thing to perceive this, quite another to so formulate the belief of the Church as to exclude the heresy.

> When the assembled bishops heard the acknowledged formula of the Bishop of Nicomedia they were so shocked and horrified that they went so far as to tear up a copy of it in sight of all.[5]

It seems to have been agreed at an early stage, perhaps it was understood from the first, that some formula of the unanimous belief of the Church must be fixed to make an end to the controversy. The Alexandrians and conservatives confronted the Arians with the traditional scriptural phrases which appeared to leave no doubt as to the eternity of the Son. To their surprise they were met with

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[3] Cp. C. J. Hefele, A History Of The Christian Councils (Edinburgh: T and T Clark, 1894). H. R. Percival, The Seven Ecumenical Councils, in PNF, XIV. Athanasius, Defense Of The Nicene Council, in PNF, IV.

[4] Robertson, op. cit., p. xvii.

[5] J. W. C. Wand, The Four Councils (London: The Faith Press, 1951), p. 10.

complete acquiescence. However, as each test was propounded, it was observed that the Arians whispered and gesticulated to one another,[6] evidently hinting that each could be safely accepted since it admitted of evasion. If their assent was asked to the formula, "Like to the Father in all things," it was given with the reservation that man as such is the image and glory of God. "The power of God," was acceptable since the host of Israel was spoken of as dunamis Kuriou, and that even the locusts and caterpillars are called power of God. The eternity of the Son was countered with the text, "We that live are always (2 Cor. 4:11)." The Fathers were baffled, and the test of the homoousion, with which the minority had been ready from the first, was being forced upon the majority by the evasions of the Arians. When the day for the decisive meeting arrived it was felt that the choice lay between the adoption of the word, cost what it might, and the admission of Arianism to a position of toleration and influence in the Church. Eusebius of Nicomedia determined finally to state the Arian cause in unequivocal and clear terms, but his creed was met with open hostility and rejection. The inner party of Arians was by this time reduced to five people.

Eusebius of Caesarea, sensing the impasse, finally came forward with his own formula from his See. The creed was carefully overhauled, to the extent that Eusebius himself was at length estranged

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[6] Athanasius, De Decretis, 20, translated from the Greek by Cardinal Newman, in PNF, IV, 163.

from it.[7] The insertion of the homoousion was made. Before ratification, however, the council hesitated.

> So the council paused. It was an immense change to issue a single test creed for all bishops of Christendom; and though the entire council had agreed to it, and was actually sitting for the purpose, the conservatives were sure to make it as innocent as they could. Again, it was a serious step to positively exclude Arianism; and though they had consented to do this also, they had not done so without misgiving.[8]

The pause was prompted by other considerations. For the first time in the Church it had been proposed to make everything depend on a word not found in Scripture, of material tendency, and inclining not a little toward Sabellianism, besides lying under the condemnation of an earlier council at Antioch.[9] We should wonder if the bishops had not hesitated.

However, the clear-sightedness of the orthodox theologians won the day, and all signed the formula with the exception of Arius, Theonas, and Secundus. "With a great revulsion of feeling the council closed its ranks and marched triumphantly to its conclusion."[10] Although all rejoiced at the successful conclusion of the complex difficulty, and signalled the victory with a sumptuous meal by Constantine, it was only after a half-century of bitter strife that the ultimate triumph of the homoousion could be declared.

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[7] Ibid., 3. Cp. also Athanasius, Epistola Eusebii, 5, 6, 7, translated from the Greek by Cardinal Newman, in PNF, IV, 75 ff.

[8] H. M. Gwatkin, Studies Of Arianism (Cambridge: Deighton, Bell, and Co., 1882), p. 45.

[9] C. 260 A.D. at the condemnation of Paul of Samosata the use of homoousion was in effect also condemned.

[10] Robertson, op. cit., p. xx.

> The victory at Nicea was a surprise rather than a solid conquest. As it was not the spontaneous and deliberate purpose of the bishops present, but a revolution which a minority had forced through by sheer strength of clearer Christian thought, a reaction was inevitable as soon as the half-convinced conservatives returned home.[11]

It was not until the death of Constantine in 337 A.D., however, that the Arian party once again became vocal and active. In the intervening years the opposition was more personal against the orthodox bishops rather than doctrinal. There remained at least three distinct elements of reaction following Nicea on which the hostility toward orthodoxy was nourished.

The persecuted Arians, those sent into exile by Constantine, formed the first party of anti-Nicenes. Robertson says of Eusebius of Nicomedia, "Following his exile he was ready to move heaven and earth to efface the results of the council."[12] Arius in Illyricum pleaded his cause so effectively that as late as fifty years following Nicea the Church was reaping the whirwind of his exile there. Inasmuch as the orthodox leaders at Nicea gave their tacit assent to Constantine's unfortunate precedent of persecuting heretics, the Arians appealed also to a sense of martyrdom and injustice. However, within three to five years after the council all Arian leaders had again been recalled by Constantine.

Eusebius of Nicomedia formed the center of the second anti-Nicene ring. Most of his entourage included former students of Lucian or those influenced by him. In this party we find court

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[11] Gwatkin, op. cit., p. 64.

[12] Robertson, op. cit., p. xxi.

intrigue of the basest sort, adventurers and opportunists, politicians and hangers-on, but few if any theologians. Gwatkin comments on the situation:

> For thirty years the intriguers found it to their interest to profess conservatism. Constantine's court was as full of selfish cabals as that of the old French monarchy of Louis XV. Behind the glittering ceremonial on which the treasures of the world were squandered were fighting armies of place-hunters great and small, cooks and barbers, women and eunuchs, courtiers and spies and adventurers of every sort . . . The noblest bishops, the ablest generals, were their fairest prey; and we have no surer testimony to the greatness of Athanasius or Hilary than the pertinacious hatred of this odious horde.[13]

The atmosphere of a court is seldom favorable to a high standard of moral or religious principle, but in this case the mob of heathen in addition to the Jews also formed a large opposition, whether out of hatred for the Nicene party or out of conviction that Christ was not true God.

Yet a third element of reaction can be detected in the large mass of bishops who sullenly acquiesced at Nicea who, on returning home, by their very indifference gave strength and hops to the Arian cause. Their conservatism was one of short-sightedness, prone to acquiesce in things as they were, hard to arouse to a sense of great crisis, reluctant to step out of the groove.

> Arian hatred of the council would have been powerless if it had not rested on a formidable mass of conservative discontent, while the discontent might have died away had not the court supplied it with the means of action.[14]

Against these elements of reaction, the Western bishops, led by Athanasius, contended for about a decade until the death of

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[13] Gwatkin, op. cit., pp. 59 ff.

[14] Ibid., p. 61.

Constantine. Following the accession of his sons the struggle became as more sharply defined as it did violent. The initial onslaught by the Easterns took the form of personal reprisals with the ultimate goal of restoring Arius to his position in Baucalis and deposing Athanasius. It was during this period that Eustathius was deposed from the bishopric of Antioch by the Arians in charge for allegedly casting doubts on the legitimacy of Constantine's birth. This act was to cause division in the Church of Antioch for many years to come, the congregation dividing itself between two opposing leaders. Constantine began to incline toward Arianism, or at least an easy toleration of its leaders, by recalling them and urging Athanasius to accept into communion "all who should desire it."[15] Athanasius' reply to the emperor: "This Christ opposing heresy has no fellowship with the Church."[16] It was during this period, too, that at least a score of orthodox bishops were, on one pretext or another, deposed from their Sees. Athanasius in his History Of The Arians lists them together with a commentary on the injustices perpetrated by the usurpers.[17]

Finally, Athanasius himself suffered his first of five exiles. Constantine planned to celebrate the Tricennelia of his rule by consecrating his grand church on Mt. Calvary. On their way to

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[15] Athanasius, Orationes, I, 5, translated from the Greek by Cardinal Newman, in PNF, IV, 315.

[16] Ibid.

[17] Athanasius, History Of The Arians, I, 5-7, translated from the Greek by Cardinal Newman, in PNF, IV, pp. 271 ff.

Jerusalem the bishops were to stop at Tyre and dispatch the business of the Egyptian troubles. Athanasius, too, repaired to the council, where the Arian element outnumbered the Nicene two to one. It was here that the two ludicrous fabrications of the cases of Isychras and Arsenius were charged against Athanasius. In the first, where he had been accused of violently stopping a Eucharist celebration and breaking a chalice in the process, it was pointed out that the incident in question allegedly took place on a week-day when the Eucharist was not celebrated, the chalice of the church was still intact, and the bishop in question admitted the entire case was a fabrication. In the second case Athanasius was accused of cutting off a man's hand, whereupon the victim in question was produced intact, possessing both hands. The Arians, not to be outdone, brought charges of magic against the Bishop of Alexandria. Finally, an appeal was made by the Arians to the emperor, accusing Athanasius of stopping grain shipments to the capital. Since such action came nearer the emperor's real interest, he dispensed with a trial and sent Athanasius into exile, perhaps for reasons of peace more than any other. "If he exiled Athanasius it was not for heresy."[18] He was plainly a center of disturbance, whether rightly or wrongly.

In the following year (337 A.D.) Constantine died. Shortly after assuming office, his three sons agreed to recall the banished bishops, and Athanasius returned to Alexandria,[19] where he was received,

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[18] Gwatkin, op. cit., p. 73.

[19] Bringing with him a letter from Constantine III, in which it was said that Constantine I, had banished him only to withdraw him from the sanguinary hands of his enemies.

"more joyously than ever an emperor was."[20] His enemies renewed their intrigues against him and even placed at his side, as bishop of the Arians in Alexandria, Pistus, an old friend of Arius. Whatever Athanasius may have expected on his arrival, home was no haven for him. At a synod attended by over eighty bishops a paper was adopted in which Athanasius vindicated the Nicene formula.[21] By this time Eusebius of Nicomedia had been advanced to the bishopric of Constantinople, where Constantius, ruling the Eastern empire, was a fanatic Arian.

At a synod held at Antioch in 341 A.D. Athanasius was again exiled, allegedly for returning to his See without having the reinstatement decree of the council which deposed him. With this Council of Antioch the formal doctrinal reaction began. No less than four Arian creeds were adopted, all intended to supercede that of Nicea. It was this council, too, which commissioned Ulfilas to evangelize the Goths. The Dedication Creed of this council, so called because the council was convoked to dedicate the new church of Antioch, was hardly Arian in the original sense. It maintained a similarity between the Father and the Son but disavowed the marked dissimilarity maintained by the Arians at Nicea. In place of Athanasius, Gregory the Cappadocian usurped the See of Alexandria, forcibly compelling the congregation to acquiesce in his decisions.

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[20] Sozomen, Church History, II, 5, translated from the Greek by Chester D. Hartranft, in PNF, II, 262.

[21] The De Decretis. Cp. note 6, p. 74.

Athanasius took refuge with Julius, Bishop of Rome, where he was hailed as a saint and martyr.

In 343 A.D., the two emperors, Constans in the West and Constantius in the East, convoked a council at Sardica. Here the Western bishops reaffirmed the decisions of Nicea and recognized Athanasius as the rightful bishop of Alexandria. The Arians, however, detached themselves and retired to Philippopolis, where they declared allegiance to the creed of Antioch and excommunicated Athanasius, Hosius, and Julius. An important side issue of the Sardica council which was to assume great importance in later years was the establishing of the appellate jurisdiction of Rome, which declared itself available to serve as arbiter in any subsequent ecclesiastical disputes.

Constantius, somewhat influenced by the decision of Sardica, and still more by his brother Constans,[22] sought to allay the flames of controversy by restoring Athanasius and several other bishops to their Sees. He even gave Athanasius a gracious reception at Constantinople and commended him to the civil and ecclesiastical courts as a man of God.

Scarcely had two years passed after Athanasius' restoration, when on the death of Constans (350 A.D.) a new tempest arose. Athanasius was accused of collaborating in the murder of Constans.

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[22] Constantius being at war with the Persians, his brother seized the occasion as favorable for bringing him to his views. Athanasius says that Constantius had previously ordered the governor of Alexandria to watch the ports that he might have him executed if he presented himself. The rival bishop, Gregory, was killed in a popular uprising.

A synod was held at Arles in 353 A.D., which Constantius attended in person. His violence and threats had such an effect on all present that everyone, with one exception, signed the condemnation of Athanasius. Paulinus of Treves alone withstood the emperor and was thereupon banished to Treves where he died. In 355 A.D., a synod was convened in Milan at the request of Liberius of Rome where a few more remained faithful to Athanasius, including Liberius, Hosius, and Hilary of Poitiers. All were summarily banished. The following year Athanasius himself was forced to flee his See when five thousand men surrounded the church while the bishop was celebrating the eucharist. Friends of the bishop seized him and carried him to safety, from where he fled to his monastary friends in the desert.

For five or six years Athanasius lived in danger of capture and death, flying from cell to cell and from cave to cave, but found time to write his volumes Against The Arians and History Of The Arians. Old Hosius gave way to the Arians after a year and Liberius after two years, but Athanasius, with his friends in the desert, still trusted in the Incarnate Lord for protection.

Now that the Arian party was victorious throughout Christendom, council after council was held in order to arrive at some formula to replace the Nicene. Ammianus Marcellinus, the pagan historian, complained that the numerous meetings of the bishops caused the greatest confusion and inconvenience. "They deranged the postal service. The highways were constantly covered with galloping bishops."[23]

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[23] As quoted by David Duff, The Early Church, edited by David Duff (Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark, 1891), p. 389.

Nicea had been thoroughly discredited in Christendom, but the end was not yet. The two elements of reaction, the conservative and the decided Arians, had heretofore been united in their hostility toward the homoousion, albeit for diverse reasons. The conservatives dreaded the Sabellianism implied in the formula of Nicea, whereas the Arians openly opposed the equality of the Son with the Father. Now that the two disparate groups were left victorious in the field the breach became pronounced, Arians toward anomoeanism and the conservatives toward homoionism, the one toward Nicea, the other away.

> It was not the Nicene cause but the conservative coalition which the flight of Athanasius destroyed. The victory seemed won when the last great enemy was driven into the desert; and the intriguers hasted to the spoil. They forgot that the West was merely terrorized for the moment, that Egypt was devoted to its patriarch, that there was a strong opposition in the East, and that even the conservatives who had won the battle for them were certain to desert their unworthy leaders the moment they declared for Arianism.[24]

The extreme party, the decided Arians headed at this time by Eunomius, boldly declared for ἑτερούσιον (of different substance) and ἀνόμοιον (unlike) in opposition to the homoousion of Nicea and the homoiousion of the moderate conservatives. The latter group was represented by Basil of Ancyra. The Council of Sirmium, 357 A.D., declared for the term ὅμοιος (like), and this declaration was accepted by Hosius and Liberius, worn out by their banishment. Jerome, in commenting on this so-called Sirmium blasphemy, claimed, "The whole world groaned at finding itself Arian."[25]

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[24] Gwatkin, op. cit., p. 156.

[25] Wand, op. cit., p. 21.

> The Sirmium manifesto is the turning point of the entire contest. Arius had been so utterly defeated at Nicea that the leaders of his party were forced to throw him over and keep his doctrines in the background for a whole generation; and even when the cause of the great council seemed hopelessly lost, not one of them ventured to confess himself an Arian.[26]

With the Sirmium blasphemy the breach between the Arians and Semi-Arians became wider, and as a natural consequence there was a gradual approximation between the latter party and the adherents of the Nicene faith.

So it continued under Julian (361 A.D.) who tolerated all Christian parties, trusting that by their disputes and mutual animosities they would furnish abundant proof of the unworthiness of their faith. Athanasius, however, who had returned to Alexandria, was received with such enthusiasm and reverence that Julian declared him once again an exile. The fourth exile did not commence, however, before the Council of Alexandria in 362 A.D. had once again declared the triumph of the Nicene formulation. With this council the creed of Nicea gained its first decisive triumph since Sardica in 343 A.D. Never again in the official acts of the Church was the doctrine of the homoousion challenged.

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[26] Gwatkin, op. cit., p. 158.

## CHAPTER VII

## THE VICTORY

The eight months of undisturbed peace which Athanasius enjoyed under Julian were well employed. One of his first acts was to convoke the aforementioned Synod of Alexandria to deal with the questions which stood in the way of the peace of the Church. Our knowledge of the proceedings of the synod is derived entirely from its Tome or letter addressed to the Church at Antioch.[1] The council was occupied with four problems. Firstly, the terms on which communion should be given to those Arians who desired to re-unite with the Nicenes.[2] They were to be asked for nothing beyond the Nicene test besides an anathema against Arianism, together with an affirmation of the co-essentiality of the Holy Spirit.

> As many as desire peace with us . . . and those who are seceding again from the Arians, do ye call to yourselves and receive them as parents their sons, and welcome them as tutors and guardians . . . without requiring more from them than to anathemetize the Arian heresy and confess the faith confessed by the holy fathers at Nicea, and to anathemetize also those who say that the Holy Spirit is a creature and separate from the essence of Christ.[3]

The last issue, that concerning the Spirit, had been rising to prominence of late and had called forth from Athanasius his Four Discourses To Serapion. The emphatic way in which the point is

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[1] Athanasius, Tomus ad Antiochenos, translated from the Greek by Wm. Bright, in PNF, IV, 481-486.

[2] Ibid., 3 and 8, in PNF, IV, 484 and 485.

[3] Ibid., 3, in PNF, IV, 484.

pressed in the third paragraph of the Tome emplies that an attempt was being made in some quarters to subscribe to the Nicene Creed while maintaining the Arian position with regard to the Spirit.

Secondly, the Arian Christology also occupied the council. The integrity of Christ's human nature on the ond hand, its perfect union with the Word on the other, are clearly emphasized.

> The Word Himself was made flesh, and being in the form of God, took the form of a servant, and from Mary after the flesh became man for us, and that thus in Him the human race is perfectly and wholly delivered from sin and quickened from the dead, and given access to the kingdom of the heavens.[4]

This question had begun to come into prominent discussion in several parts of the Christian world and was soon to give rise to the system of Apollinarius, who, by his own representative, subscribed to the decisions of Alexandria.

Thirdly, the state of the Church at Antioch was the most practical problem before the council. Since the deposition of Eustathius, the Nicene Christians had worshipped alone without the benefit of a leader, while the Arians, by far in the majority, had the benefit both of a bishop and meeting place. The council recommended the smaller party reunite with the larger under the spiritual headship of Miletius, the Semi-Arian bishop. In order to placate the staunch orthodox minority, however, the council judiciously termed the reunion as one of a return of the larger body to the smaller.[5]

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[4] Ibid., 7, in PNF, IV, 485.

[5] Ibid., 3, in PNF, IV, 483.

Finally, and perhaps most important of all, the council recognized the need for clarity in the use of theological terminology. An obvious difficulty had arisen inasmuch as the Eastern Church spoke in Greek and the West in Latin terms, but words having the same etymological derivation had arrived at different theological usage. Thus the word ὑπόστασις in Greek had the same etymological meaning as substantia in Latin -- that which stands under -- but they had become opposites in theology, ὑπόστασις meaning Person and substantia substance. There was thus room for a good deal of confusion, the Latins often thinking that the Greeks meant three substances when they spoke of three hypostases. Jerome, indeed, denounced the formula of three hypostases as Arian.[6] The Tome speaks to these issues and clarifies theological terminology.[7]

The importance of this council was out of proportion to the number of bishops who took part in it or to the small number of decisions it arrived at.

> Jerome says that by its judicious conciliation it "snatched the whole world from the jaws of Satan." (Adv. Lucif. 20) If this is in any measure true, if it undid both in East and West the humiliating results of the twin synods of 359 A.D., the honor of the achievement is due to Athanasius alone.[8]

The council held in his own home town represented not only a personal triumph for Athanasius, but also the victory of the doctrine to the

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[6] As quoted by J. W. C. Wand, The Four Great Heresies (London: A. R. Mowbray and Co., 1955), p. 62.

[7] Athanasius, Tomus ad Antiochenus, 8 and 9, op. cit., 485.

[8] Archibald Robertson, "Prolegomena," in PNF, IV, lviii.

furtherance of which he had dedicated his life. It prepared the way at long last for the final triumph of the Nicene faith.

Meanwhile, the three great Eastern churchmen known to historians as the Cappadocian Fathers were beginning to make themselves heard. In spite of many petty quarrels, personal animosities, divided churches, and broken promises, not to mention an influx of half-convinced Arians into the ranks of the orthodox for the sake of expediency, Basil of Caesarea set about to bring the divided elements into some sort of union. It was plain to him that the personal and factual oppositions could only be overcome if all were lifted out of the narrow circles of local churches and their policies and considered from the vantage point of the Church catholic. He aimed at a grand meeting of Western churchmen, sent out from Rome to the East, where they would be entirely free to reach whatever conclusions the subject matter itself required. He felt confident that a meeting of such importance and authority would be able to effect what had been impossible for half a century. Although Basil met with rebuffs from both parties, subsequent history showed that his efforts bore fruit in the eventual triumph of the homoousion at Constantinople.

There soon came another element which brought about a rapprochement between the Semi-Arians and Nicenes, the persecuting fury of the emperor Valens (364--378 A.D.), which was directed against both parties. For the fifth time Athanasius was banished. He lived among the tombs, hiding even in his father's grave. But the people of Alexandria this time demanded his recall with such determination and vehemence that the emperor, fearing the outbreak of a revolt,

was constrained to yield. Athanasius returned, with strength unbroken, though with a body spare through fastings and vigils, and continued to labor among his people. He died in 373 A.D.

The differences among the leaders in the rapprochement were fine, although important, and kept the homoiousion party apart from the homoousions until the council of Constantinople clarified the issue. Athanasius began with the idea of the unity of God which admitted distinctions to be made within the godhead. The Antiocheans shared the interest in the individual aspect of each Person of the Trinity, but since they recognized each of the three Persons as God, they came to see that they must insist that all share the same identical substance. Homoiousion did not deny the coessentiality of God but meant to preserve the distinction of the Persons.

> The formula in which the Cappadocians summed up their idea of the Trinity was "one substance in three persons." (one ουσια in three υποστασεις) This was acceptable to Athanasius because, while it preserved the unity of the godhead, it also allowed for the deity of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, the special truth for which he was contending.[9]

Basil of Caesarea wrote Against Eunomius in opposition to the extreme Arian party led by Eunomius. The conclusion at which Basil arrived was the co-eternity of the Son with the Father, consequently He was not created, but must therefore be of the same essential quality of being as the Father. Basil did not place any emphasis or importance on the use of proper terminology to express these truths as long as the result did not compromise the deity of the

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[9] J. W. C. Wand, op. cit., p. 59

Son. Along with other Easterns, he viewed with suspicion the possibilities of Sabellianism if the homoousion were pressed to an extreme.

> Basel speaks of Athanasius in terms of unbounded veneration and praise, and Athanasius in turn rebukes those who attempted to disparage Basil's orthodoxy, calling him a bishop such as any church might desire to call its own.[10]

In 379 A.D. a political event occurred which was to have far-reaching effects on the Church. It was in this year that Theodosius, later called "The Great," was made a colleague of Maximus, the emperor. Theodosius, often called a second Constantine,[11] was to champion the cause of orthodoxy by upholding the Nicene cause and by influencing the council of Constantinople to reaffirm the Nicene formula. Yet it is important for our present study to see that it was hardly the political powers that impressed the theological terminology on the Church, but rather it was the inner Christian consciousness and experience which ultimately determined the systematized form of belief. Had force or politics been influential, Arianism most assuredly would have gained the victory. In the history of the Church there has seldom been a heterodox belief with such strong political supporters as Arianism, yet the minority won the day. By the time of the council of Alexandria the homoousion victory was nearly complete. Theodosius, by convoking the council of Constantinople, offered the Church an opportunity to express that which

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[10] Robertson, op. cit., p. lxiii.

[11] David Duff, The Early Church, edited by David Duff (Edinburgh: T. and T. Clar, 1891), p. 432.

already was believed. "The issue of the strife was a foregone conclusion even before the veteran of Alexandria was taken to his rest."[12]

Yet Theodosius' accession to the purple certainly did give the Church a status not previously enjoyed, at least not since the days of Constantine. Shortly before his baptism he made the following pronouncement.

> It is our pleasure that all nations governed by our clemency and moderation should steadfastly adhere to the religion which was taught by S. Peter to the Romans; which faithful tradition has preserved; and which is now professed by the pontiff, Damasis, and by Peter, Bishop of Alexandria, a man of Apostolic holiness. According to the discipline of the Apostles, and the doctrine of the Gospels, so was believed the whole deity of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost, under an equal majesty and reverend Trinity. We authorize the followers of this doctrine to assume the title of Catholic Christians.[13]

The final official sanction of catholic Christianity to the Nicene formula came at Constantinople in 381 A.D. Canon I from the council states:

> The faith of the three-hundred eighteen fathers who were assembled at Nicea in Bythinia shall not be set aside but shall remain dominant. And every heresy shall be anathemetized, especially that of the Eunomians or Anomoeans, the Arians or Eudoxians, the Semi-Arians or Pneumatomachians, the Sabellians, Marcellians, Photinians, and Apollinarians.[14]

The long contest was at an end. Arianism soon ceased to be a political power within the empire, and if Teutonic converts prolonged

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[12] H. M. Gwatkin, Studies Of Arianism (Cambridge: Deighton, Bell, and Co., 1882), p. 64.

[13] J. W. C. Wand, The Four Councils (London: The Faith Press, 1951), p. 26.

[14] In J. C. Ayer, A Source Book For Ancient Church History, edited by J. C. Ayer (New York: Charles Scribners Sons, 1930), p. 354.

its existence until the sixth century, their fitful persecutions availed little to recover for their faith its lost domination of the world. Succeeding councils revolved about issues dealing with the nature of Christ rather than the nature of God. Nicea had once and for all affirmed Christ's deity. The continued refinement of this doctrine called for further inquiries as to the manner in which God and man could dwell in the same person. Humanly speaking, the eventual triumph of the Scriptural teaching as it emerged from the bitter struggle was due to the steadfast patience, obdurate persistence, and tenacious convictions of one man alone, the Bishop of Alexandria.

# CHAPTER VIII

## CONCLUSION

The problem of the Incarnation as such did not return to trouble the Church. Although it may still be denied today by indifference or neglect, the mainstream of orthodox Christianity recognizes in Christ a coessential of the Father.

Christ Himself taught His disciples concerning His deity, the epistles continued to testify to this revelation, and the Apostolic Fathers proclaimed the message. Yet it remained to the Church to refine the implications of the belief and so to express itself as to exclude all heretical notions from its dogma. This refinement began to take place on a catholic scale at Nicea, but it remained for later generations to give the term ecumenical to the formulation. The binding of the bishops to a single test creed was a novelty. Up until this time the Fathers expressed themselves in accord with the regulae fidei and their individual credos, but few ventured to superimpose their orthodoxy on the Church universal. At Nicea a small minority saw this as the only escape from the corruption of heretical notions and the disintegration they would bring. The deliberations at the first council showed to all that the problem of dogma must be the only answer to heresy. Dogma, then, in no way encompassed the whole meaning or whole doctrine of the Church. It was a constant "no" in answer to the heretics, and as such limited itself to the answer which the situation demanded.

The problem of Incarnation, as such, was a difficulty with which philosophers had been occupied for centuries, but at no time was God even remotely credited with taking upon Himself the form of a man. It was from this tradition of speculation that Arianism arose, and was therefore an invasion of the Church from without rather than a difference of opinion from within. It is true that the Arian reaction following Nicea found eminent churchmen at its head, yet the same leaders eventually came to the realization that the homoousion intended rather to guard against a heresy rather than fully and completely explicate a Scriptural truth. When this realization was achieved, and when finally the Arians had so discredited themselves, the Semi-Nicene leaders subscribed to the formula.

A further implication of the problem of Incarnation involved its purpose. The ancients were concerned with man's approach to God, not realizing that this was impossible because of man's decadent condition. The Christians taught that the initiative lay with God, who had come to men. The philosophically oriented mind approached the problem through speculation and reason, the Christians through the eyes of faith and the heart of the pastor. Thus it was that even the great speculators Clement and Origen of Alexandria began from soteriology to approach theology, rather than the obverse. Only through a Scripturally founded plan of redemption could Christ's essence be declared equal to that of God. Any other method invariably involved either a species of Docetism or Ebionitism. So too, Athanasius, driven by the necessity of the situation, applied his pastoral instincts to the problem and arrived at the conviction of

Christ's deity. Arius, on the other hand, being without the shepherd's heart or a Scripturally based plan of redemption, emphasized only the rational and intellectual paradox of the Incarnation. All the more striking is Arius' lack of a coherent plan of redemption when we note his lack of Scriptural emphasis or Biblical orientation, whereas Athanasius exudes Scripture references at every turn, giving further evidence to the characteristic of heresy in ignoring the total analogy of faith.

However, the truth of Athanasius and falsity of Arius were not new. In the preceding centuries the fathers were well aware of the problem, but none set themselves to offer a definitive statement. The great Fathers, Iranaeus, Tertullian, and Origen all recognized Christ's deity, since without deity their plans of redemption failed. All were eminently concerned about man's salvation, whereas the detractors from the faith recognized either a lack of need or lack of pastoral depth. Thus Nicea offered no new dogma, but rather by its explicit affirmation of that which had always been held, closed the door to corruptions of the truth. Thus the characteristic of doctrinal explication can be compared with a well from which the Christian draws fresh water, but always from the same well, and the water is always the same as that drawn before. Harnack's emphasis on a primitive Gospel which was later polluted by Greek influences, or the simile of an overflowing lake which is constantly spreading farther and farther into other waters and foreign provinces, is hardly tenable.[1]

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[1]The precedence of a soteriology before a theology, in the narrow sense, is but one of the elements out of harmony with Harnack's idea.

Athanasius began with the unique idea of salvation as it was embodied in his doctrine of the restoration of man. Since human nature had fallen and was progressively deteriorating, some cleansing influx was needed to purify human nature and set it off once again on the path to purity. This Christ effected when He assumed human form. However, the Incarnation per se was not the only redemption. Christ's sacrifice on the cross was also necessary in order to atone for man's sins, and His resurrection was necessary in order to signalize the victory over death. Thus Christ, the living Lord, still governs His Church and draws humanity to Himself. Not all will be saved, however, only those who are in an intimate personal association with Christ and give evidence of this in their lives. Only God could cleanse the human race inasmuch as man was helpless if left to himself. Thus Athanasius fought with determination against any compromise of Christ's essential godhead, since this would negate his entire plan of salvation. Christ must be essentially God in a position equal to the Father. Although Athanasius did not propose the homoousion formula, he championed the truth it taught and accepted no alternative unless he was convinced of the adherent's basic agreement with the Nicene formula. Thus, although the Cappadocians did not recognize the formula, Athanasius was convinced they were in essential agreement with it.

Arius, beginning from the side of speculation, arrived at a position where both Christ's deity and humanity were affirmed and denied, leaving a mythical creation hovering between heaven and earth. Since prayer and worship could be addressed both to the Father and Christ, who were essentially dissimilar, he also opened the door to

the polytheism from which the early Church was fleeing. The rational difficulty was identical with that proposed by contemporary anti-Trinitarians who ignore man's sin and need for salvation. Arianism was summarily dismissed at Nicea, but it needed a half-century to complete its death agony.

The death agony did not always appear as such, and Arianism continued to win adherents to its standard until at last the Bishop of Alexandria seemed the last exponent of a dying cause. Finally, however, the absence of a Scripturally based doctrine of redemption led the Arians to assert essentially un-Scriptural ideas, and the Semi-Nicene detected them for what they were. Thus began the reaction again in favor of Nicea, a reaction which ultimately gained the victory at the councils of Alexandria and Constantinople. The victory was not only in favor of the Scriptural doctrine of the Incarnation, but just as essential, and an often ignored emphasis, was the victory for the Scriptural doctrine of the sinfulness of man, his need for redemption, and the redemption being initiated and effected solely by God.

The problem of the Incarnation is a recurring one in Christendom. No generation can ignore its implications or overlook its centrality. But theology can never be so <u>in abstracto</u>. The analogy of faith and Scripture are the leveling and modifying influences which keep the Christian within the bounds of faith. Alongside Athanasius' emphasis on the <u>homoousion</u> and the formulations of Nicea also went his fervent plea, "My heart's desire and prayer for Israel is that

they may be saved."[2]

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[2]David Duff, The Early Church, edited by David Duff (Edinburgh: T. and T. Clar, 1891), p. 393.

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