

Vladimir Cvetkovic

ST. ATHANASIUS OF ALEXANDRIA – A CHAMPION OF NICENE ORTHODOXY

The greatest achievement for the Christian Church after the edict declared in Milan at 313 is certainly the first ecumenical council in Nicaea summoned by the emperor Constantine. When the Church was shaken by the teaching of Alexandrine presbyter Arius and when the division among Christians on the question about the true nature of Jesus Christ became so common, the answer came from the Emperor. Summoning the council in Nicaea, St. Constantine established the institution, which will remain in the history of the Church as the supreme authority of the Christendom. One very young deacon participated at this event, spending all his life afterwards defending the Nicene Creed. This young deacon will become the bishop of Alexandria.

Athanasius of Alexandria is well known as a champion of Nicene Orthodoxy. In spite of the fact that Athanasius was just a deacon when he attended the Council of Nicaea as a follower of Bishop Alexander, whom he was to succeed as Bishop of Alexandria, his role was significant in the condemnation of Arius' teaching. The condemnation of Arius at Nicaea could not contain the influence of Arius and his supporters among the churches. As a result, the Alexandrian bishop was to spend his entire life struggling against the Arian heresy. In witnessing to the faith in a true God, Athanasius became involved in imperial and ecclesial intrigues and spent many years in exile. Emperor Valens in 366 invited Athanasius to resume his place as Bishop of Alexandria. Athanasius spent the last years of his life in tranquility, remaining faithful to his beliefs in the divine *Logos* who became flesh. From his early apologetic writings *Contra Gentes* and *De Incarnatione* is evident that the central place in his interest is occupied by the doctrine of relationship between God and the world. In *Contra Gentes* Athanasius is still under the big influence of Origen and previous Alexandrian tradition. In another treatise of this time, *De Incarnatione* he develops his own style and the

influence of Origen decreases¹. It has become a commonplace view² that Irenaeus of Lyon influenced Athanasius by distancing him from Origen and Alexandrian catechetical tradition. This is evident in the language, which Athanasius adopted from Irenaeus to describe the relationship between God and the world. Athanasius approaches this problem in the same way as the Bishop of Lyon. Making a clear distinction between the Creator and created beings, Athanasius speaks of God the Father as a Creator.³ He abandoned the Origen's theory according to which God and the world, distinct in their intrinsic nature, are connected by mediatory role of *Logos*. Athanasius emphasises the significance of the doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo*, which from Athanasius onwards was adopted as a principle of patristic theology. The relationship between created and uncreated nature governs the paradigm of Athanasius' ontology⁴. His early works indicate that Athanasius' starting point is the relationship between God and humanity. His cosmology is always in function of his anthropology.

For God, the creator of the universe and king of all, who is beyond all being and human thought, since he is good and bountiful, he made mankind in his own image through his own Word, our Saviour Jesus Christ; and he also made man perceptive and understanding of reality through his similarity to him, so that as long as he kept his likeness he might ever abandon his concept of God or live in the company of the saints, but retaining the grace of him who bestowed it on him, and also special power given him by the Father's Word, he might rejoice and converse with God, living an idyllic and truly blessed and immortal life.⁵

In Athanasius' ontology the convergence between immanence and transcendence of God's being is underlined. The concept of God who transcends all beings and thinking belongs to Platonic⁶ and Middle-Platonic world-views. Athanasius probably follows Irenaeus,⁷ who provides the same concept of divine transcendence. Athanasius' God is 'incorporeal and incorruptible and immortal, lacking nothing whatever'⁸. The divine being according to Athanasius is real, true being (τὸν ὄντως ὄντα Θεόν)⁹. To the

¹ Andrew Louth, *The origins of Christian Mystical Tradition*, (Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1981), pp. 77-80

² Khaled Anatolios, The Influence of Irenaeus on Athanasius, *Studia Patristica*, volume 36, Peeters, Leuven, 2001, pp. 463-76.

³ See also in Irenaeus, *Epideixis* 6.

⁴ Khaled Anatolios, *Athanasius, The coherence of his thought*, (Routledge, London, NY, 1998) 31-5.

⁵ Athanasius, *Contra Gentes* 2, (in Athanasius, *Contra Gentes and De Incarnatione*, edited and translated by Robert W. Thompthe Son, Oxford, 1971).

⁶ Plato, *Republica*, VI, 509b, see also in E.P. Meijering, *Orthodoxy and Platonism in Athanasius; Synthesis or Antithesis*, Leiden, 1968, 6-9.

⁷ Irenaeus, *Epideixis* 3.

⁸ Athanasius, *Contra Gentes* 22.

⁹ Athanasius, *Contra Gentes* 30.

existence of God as a true being Athanasius adds the existence of something that is completely opposite to God, or non-being as such. He situates the world between two fundamental and diametrically opposite ontological categories. Thus the world has two possible directions † toward God or toward non-being, from which it came to being¹. Establishing the divine transcendence, Athanasius does not diminish God's accessibility. On the contrary, he affirms the divine accessibility through creation. Athanasius states that God 'who is invisible by nature, (...) might nevertheless be known to people through his work'.² We find in Irenaeus the same way of establishing divine accessibility.³ He moves from God's self-contained transcendence to a conception of God's goodness. Thus he provides ontological presuppositions for accessibility in the very being of God. Apart from the apophatic descriptions of God as a being defined by many negative attributes, Athanasius gives some positive statement about God. God is 'good' (ἀγαθός) and 'lover of mankind' (φιλόανθρωπος).⁴ It means that God by his goodness and loving-kindness, which is in his nature, has bridged the ontological gulf between created and uncreated nature. God creates in order to manifest his love and his creative agency is integral to his being. The relationship between God and creation is articulated on the basis of a distinction *in se* and *ad extra*. God is 'in all creation, he is in essence outside the universe but in everything by his power, ordering everything and extending his providence'.⁵ Employing the distinction essence-power, Athanasius shows the presence of God in the world by his power. The crucial point in the relationship between God and creation is the total dependency of the creation on God, because God brought creation from nothing into existence. The divine sovereignty characterises the relationship between God and the world and preserves his transcendence. On the other side is divine 'goodness', which keeps the relationship between divine immanence and transcendence in balance, maintaining the nearness of God. Being outside creation by his essence God allows creation to share in his power. Athanasius, like Irenaeus, uses Platonic categories of participation:

Being good, he [God] governs and establishes the whole world through his Word who is himself God, in order that creation, illuminated by the leadership, providence and ordering of the Word, may be able to remain firm, since it shares in the Word who is truly from the Father and is aided by him to exist.⁶

Being ontologically impoverished, creation is constantly in the state of a potential dissolution back into nothingness. Athanasius shows that the ac-

¹ Athanasius, *De Incarnatione* 2.

² Athanasius, *Contra Gentes* 35.

³ Irenaeus of Lyon, *Adv. Hear.* II, 9, 1 'For even creation reveals Him who formed it, and the very work made suggests Him who made it, and the world manifests Him who ordered it'.

⁴ Athanasius, *Contra Gentes* 35.

⁵ Athanasius, *De Incarnatione* 17.

⁶ Athanasius, *Contra Gentes* 41.

tivity of God in the world is to maintain creation in existence by his *Logos*. He makes no distinction in Godhead by prioritising the Father over the Son, or God over his *Logos*. The *Logos* is fully divine for Athanasius.

His holy disciples teach that everything was created through him and for him, and that being good offspring of a good The Father and true The Son, he is the power of the Father and his wisdom and Word; not so by participation, nor to these properties accrue to him from outside in the way of those who participate in him and are given wisdom by him; but he is absolute wisdom, very Word, and himself the Father's own power.¹

Athanasius defines *Logos* in a completely different way from Arius. For him *Logos* is not on the side of creation, as it was in Arius, but on the side of the strictly divine. *Logos* is other than creation, but he is powerfully present in it. He keeps the role of mediator between God and creation, but there is no subordinationism. Athanasius clearly distinguishes the *Logos* of God from λόγος σπερματικός of Stoics.

By word I do not mean the word involved and innate in every creature, which some are accustomed to call seminal; it has no life of its own neither can it reason or think, but it acts merely by an extrinsic art according to the skill of him who set it in the creature. Nor do I mean the word of human kind which is composed of syllables and expressed in the air. But I mean the living and acting God, the very Word of the good God of the universe, who is other than created things and all creation; he is rather the sole and individual Word of good The Father, who was ordered all this universe and illuminates it by his providence. He is the good Word of the good The Father, and it is he who has established the order off all things, reconciling the opposites and from them forming a single harmony.²

Athanasius does not only distinguish *Logos* from the seminal *logos*, but his *Logos*, as in Irenaeus³, differs from the human word or λόγος προφορικός because *Logos* is not composed and therefore not dissolvable. Despite the fact that Athanasius openly attacked the Stoic doctrine of λόγος σπερματικός in previous citation, for some scholars it remains an open question how Athanasius saw the relation between human reason and divine Reason in his early treatises⁴. It is obvious that in *Contra Gentes* we can trace the frequent influence of a Stoicism, but this is not the case with the Stoic

¹ Athanasius, *Contra Gentes* 46.

² Athanasius, *Contra Gentes* 40.

³ Irenaeus, *Adv. Hear.* II, 17, 4 'If, again, the Aeons were derived from *Logos*, *Logos* from Nous, and Nous from Bythus, just as lights are kindled from a light-as, for example, torches are from a torch-then they may no doubt differ in generation and size from one another; but since they are of the same substance with the Author of their production, they must either all remain for ever impossible, or their The Father Himself must participate in passion'.

⁴ E.P. Meijering, *Orthodoxy and Platonism in Athanasius*, p. 34.

doctrine of doctrine of λόγος σπερματικός. Using the same vocabulary and conceptual tools of Stoics, Athanasius replaced the doctrine of λόγος σπερματικός with faith in the Creator *Logos*.¹ Athanasius interpreted the Stoic doctrine about rationality as a way to know God in the Christian sense in terms of his strong belief that *Logos* in creation is the Son of God, our Lord Jesus Christ. The knowledge of *Logos* is at the same time the knowledge of God.

As looking up to heaven and seeing its order and the light of the stars one can form an idea of the Word who sets their order, so when thinking of the Word of God one must also think of his The Father, God, from whom he proceeds and therefore rightly called the interpreter and messenger of his The Father.²

The universe is constructed reasonably by the *Logos* of God. But this *Logos* is not the impersonal and immanent Reason of the Stoics, but *Logos* is the Son of God, the incarnate Jesus Christ. Athanasius does not deny that the order, meaning and intelligibility in the world is arranged and governed³ by the *Logos* of God. Athanasius develops this argument through the analogy between reason and order in the world and *Logos*, who is the Son of the Father.⁴ In his second treatise *De Incarnatione*, Athanasius develops his theological argument in *Contra Gentes*. Thus the knowledge of God is presented in the context of grace. Athanasius asks the question:

What advantage would there be for those who had been made, if they did not know their own Maker? Or in what way would they be rational, being unaware of the Word of the Father by whom they had also been created? (ἼΗ πρὴξ ἁῶν εἶεν λογικοῦ μὴ γινῶσκοντες τὸν τοῦ Πατρὸς Λόγον, ἐν ᾧ καὶ γεγόνασιν).⁵

Answering on the question how λογικοὶ are rational if they do not know the *Logos* of God, Athanasius combines the Stoic argumentation with typically Christian theme. The Stoic argumentation is that λογικοὶ are rational if they participate in *Logos*, which is Reason. In Athanasius interpretation *Logos* is the Son of God, who was the incarnate Jesus Christ. Thus, real λογικοὶ are those who recognise the full revelation of *Logos* in Jesus Christ.

Therefore, lest this should happen, since he is good he bestowed on them on his own image, our Lord Jesus Christ and made them according to his own image and likeness, in order that, understanding through such grace the image, I mean the Word of the Father, they might be able through him to gain some notion about the Father, and recognising the Maker, might live a happy and truly blessed life.⁶

¹ Andrew Louth, Reason and Revelation, *Scottish Journal of Theology*, volume 23, 1970, p. 386.

² Athanasius, *Contra Gentes* 45.

³ Athanasius, *Contra Gentes* 40.

⁴ Khaled Anatolios, Athanasius, p. 49.

⁵ Athanasius, *De incarnatione* 11.

⁶ Athanasius, *De incarnatione* 11.

As we see the Stoic idea of λόγος σπερματικός is completely changed with the Christian orientation. Athanasius employs the Platonic category of participation to show in which ways man can be truly λογικός. Through participation in the image and the likeness of incarnate *Logos* of God, we can be truly rational and have knowledge of God.

It is very interesting to mention that Athanasius in his *Contra Gentes* proposes another way to know God. Apart from the way of knowing God which is based on faith in the Creator, there is one based on the rational and immortal soul. The soul has the faculty of independent contemplation God.¹ Athanasius describes soul as τὴν φύσιν εὐκίνητος,² using the same term as Origen.³ Following Origen, who teaches that the soul falling from the level of *nous* to the level of *psyche* is imprisoned in the body, Athanasius links *nous* and the soul in reverse process. Thus *nous* as the superior pole and principal director of the soul⁴ always turns the soul back into communion with God.⁵ Conceiving the soul as self-motivating by nature, Athanasius nearly establishes the existence of an eternal reality alongside God, which is not dependent on God's grace. But in *De Incarnatione*,⁶ Athanasius neglected the idea of self-moving soul, teaching that man, including his soul, is mortal by nature because he is created by nature. The purity of the soul still remains the way to gain the eternal life and knowledge of God.⁷ The original contribution of Athanasius is the doctrine of the soul as mirror of God the Father.⁸

‘When the soul has put of every stain of sin with which it is tinged, and keeps pure only what is in the image, than when this shines forth, it can truly contemplate as in mirror the Word, the image of the Father (ἐν κατόπτρῳ θεωρεῖ τὴν εἰκόνα τοῦ Πατρὸς τὸν Λόγον), and in him meditate on the Father, of whom the Saviour is the image’.⁹

Being a mirror-image of the Father means to reflect the image of God. But the purity of the soul is a condition for being formed in such an image. It is important to underline that there is no ontological connection or the natural kinship between God and the soul. The soul can reflect the image of God only when it is pure. Although dealing with a Platonistic theme, Athanasius nevertheless retains a Christian position.

He achieved some progress in his early treatises in comparison with the previous tradition not just by deplatonising it, but also by giving answers to some current theological problems. Athanasius emphasised the transcen-

¹ Athanasius, *Contra Gentes* 2. 33.

² Athanasius, *Contra Gentes* 4. 9.

³ Origen, *On the First Principles*, I, 8, 4.

⁴ Charles Kannengiesser, Athanasius of Alexandria and the foundation of traditional christology, *Theological studies*, 34, Baltimore, 1973., p. 109.

⁵ Athanasius, *Contra Gentes* 26.24; 39.19; 34.14 .

⁶ Athanasius, *De Incarnatione* 4.

⁷ Athanasius, *De Incarnatione* 57.

⁸ Andrew Louth, *The origins of Christian Mystical Tradition*, pp. 79-80.

⁹ Athanasius, *Contra Gentes* 34.

dence of God the Creator over creation, which came from nothing as well as God's action to protect creation from the corruption inherited in its ontological poverty. The absence of anti-Arian polemics is evident in his early works. The necessity for the Son to be fully divine and fully human is not a central theme of *Contra Gentes* and *De Incarnatione* though it is of more concern in his anti-Arian writings.

Now we focus our interest on the theological implication of Arian teaching and Athanasius' refutation of it.

As we seen before, Athanasius and Arius agreed that the relationship between God and the world must be conceived in the light of doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo*. The need to stress the ontological difference between God and the world common to both authors was the logical response to Origen's teaching. Thus God became absolutely free and sovereign in relation to the world and the world became dependent on God. The abolition of an intermediate zone between God and creation was achieved in different ways in Arius and in Athanasius. With the intention of preserving an ontological gulf between God and the world, Arius applied a radical disjunction between God and the world to the relation between God and *Logos*. Thus *Logos* or the Son of God was downgraded to the level of creaturehood. Athanasius on the other hand distinguished the relationship between God and the world from the relationship between God and *Logos*. He placed *Logos* in the divine realm. Athanasius, like Arius, divided reality on two distinct realms, the uncreated and the created. By positioning *Logos* in the divine realm, Athanasius points out dissimilarity between the Son and the creation.

The Son is Offspring of the Father's essence (γέννημα τῆς τοῦ πατρὸς οὐσίας), and He is Framer, and other things are framed by Him, and He is the Radiance and Word and Image and Wisdom of the Father, and 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 (ἴδιος) to the Father's essence and one in nature (ὁμοφυσῆς) with it.¹

Athanasius uses terms as 'offspring of the Father's essence', 'proper to the Father's essence', and 'one in nature' to underline the divine nature of the Son. Those terms are correlatives to ὁμοούσιος.

The word 'Coessential' has not this meaning when used of things immaterial, and especially of God, and acknowledging that the Word was not a creature, but an offspring from the essence, and that the Father's essence was the origin and root and fountain of the Son, and that he was of very truth His The Father's likeness.²

Anatolios³ in his book pointed out that ὁμοούσιος is not a positive statement telling us something about God's being; rather it is a negative one

¹ Athanasius, *Contra Arianos* I, 58.

² Athanasius, *De Synodis* 45.

telling us that *Logos* is not a creature. Athanasius' qualification is based on the difference between God and the created order. Athanasius introduces "apart" ὁμοούσιος, another technical term to describe how the Son relates to the ἴδιος, the Father. ἴδιος is a biblical⁴ term, which was used by Alexander, his predecessor as Bishop of Alexandria. It describes the Son's relation to the Father as a relation of intimacy and inseparability. To 'be proper' with the Father means to be "from his essence" (ἐκ τῆς οὐσίας). The Son is 'proper to' the Father, while the relationship between creation and God is defined in the terms of 'externality'. Thus, creation is 'external to' or 'from outside' (ἐκτός, ἔξωθεν) the Father.

When then was God without that which is proper (ἰδίου) to Him? Or how can a man consider that which is proper (ἰδίου), as foreign (ξένου) and alien in essence (ἄλλοτριουσίος)? For other things, according to the nature of things originate, are without likeness in essence with the Maker; but are external (ἔξωθεν) to Him, made by the Word at His grace and will, and thus admit of ceasing to be, if it so pleases Him who made them; for such is the nature of things originate.⁵

By using the terms 'proper to' and 'external' or 'alien', Athanasius emphasises the ontological difference between God and creation as well as the identity in essence between the Son and the Father. Arguing against Arius' belief that the Son is 'called the Son and God and Wisdom only by participation'⁶, Athanasius makes another pair of oppositions to describe the relationship between God and creation. Being 'proper to' means to be from same essence, and being 'external to' means to 'be by participation'. Thus, 'the Son Himself is not the Son by participation, but is the Father's own offspring'.⁷

Athanasius makes a fundamental distinction between God and creation, articulating the distinction in terms of what partakes and what is partaken as well as in the terms of what is external and what is proper to divine essence. The Son is related essentially to God, and not by participation, for there is nothing of the Father in which the Son does not participate. Being proper to the Father's essence means that God as God is wholly participated in (ὅλως μετέχεσθαι)⁸ by the Son. The full participation of the Son in the Father indicates that there is no gap between that which partakes, and which is partaken, because there is no gap between the being of the Father and the being of the Son. This is not the case with the creation. Athanasius applies

³ Khaled Anatolios, *Athanasius*, p. 96.

⁴ *John* 5:18 'This way why the Jews sought all the more to kill him, because he not only broke the Sabbath but called God his own The Father (πατέρα ἴδιον), making himself equal God', and *Romans* 8:32 'He who did not spare his own The Son (τοῦ ἰδίου υἱοῦ), but gave him up for us all, will he also not give us all things with him'.

⁵ Athanasius, *Contra Arianos*, I, 20.

⁶ Athanasius, *Contra Arianos*, I, 15.

⁷ Athanasius, *Contra Arianos*, III, 1.

⁸ Athanasius, *Contra Arianos* I, 16.

the category of participation on the relationship between God and the world in such a way that creation is related to God by participation in the Son. Athanasius' usage of participation differs from that of Arius. Arius teaches that the Son is a creature among other creatures, but not the same as them.

We consider that the Son has this prerogative over others, and therefore is called Only-begotten, because He alone was brought to be by God alone, and all other things were created by God through the Son.⁹

Arius offers a hierarchical model of participation, giving a mediatory role to the Son. All things participate in the Son, who alone participates in the Father. God is involved in the world through the Son, who protects the world from direct contact with God. Athanasius criticises this position with a series of arguments. The first argument against the Arian position is that God is not so weak that he needs help from the Son in the act of creation.¹⁰ The second argument is against the standpoint that God created only the Son and left the rest of the creative act to the Son. According to Athanasius, the God of Arius is too proud to be involved directly in the creative act¹¹ for the direct force of God cannot create the creatures so weak by nature.¹² The third argument is against mediatory role of the Son. If the Son is a creature like any other, how can he endure the 'God's hand', and how the Father can create him directly? If the Son is a creature, existence of yet another mediator for the creation of the Son is implied. Every created mediator requires another mediator, and so on *ad infinitum*.¹³ We can find the same argument in Irenaeus' refutation of Gnostic doctrine.¹⁴ Irenaeus argues that God needs no assistance or helper in creation.¹⁵ Irenaeus uses the same argument against those who says that God is 'careless, or inferior, or paid no regard to those things which took place among his own possessions'.¹⁶ The logic of infinite regress¹⁷ is also criticised by Irenaeus. The conclusion of both Irenaeus and Athanasius is that all things were created by the Father, through *Logos*, who is his 'hand', and without whom nothing can be made: ὁ Πατήρ, ὡς διὰ χειρὸς, ἐν τῷ Λόγῳ εἰργάσατο τὰ πάντα, καὶ χωρὶς αὐτοῦ οὐδὲν ποιεῖ.¹⁸

Through this metaphor Irenaeus and Athanasius emphasise that the world was created from nothing by an immediate act of God, without a mediator. The role of *Logos* or the Son is not the role of a mediator, but because he

⁹ Athanasius, *De Decretis* 7.

¹⁰ Athanasius, *Contra Arianos* II, 24.

¹¹ Athanasius, *Contra Arianos* II, 25.

¹² Athanasius, *Contra Arianos* II, 31.

¹³ Athanasius, *Contra Arianos* II, 26.

¹⁴ E.P. Meijering, *Orthodoxy and Platonism in Athanasius*, pp. 89-90.

¹⁵ Irenaeus, *Adv. Hear.* IV, 7, 4 '...The Father being in no want of angels, in order that He might call the creation into being, and form man, for whom also the creation was made; nor, again, standing in need of any instrumentality for the framing of created things'.

¹⁶ Irenaeus, *Adv. Hear.* II, 2, 1.

¹⁷ Irenaeus, *Adv. Hear.* II, 2, 3.

¹⁸ Irenaeus, *Contra Arianos* II, 31; *De Decretis* 7 also in Irenaeus, *Adv. Hear.* IV, 20, 1.

is no less fully divine than the Father he is also no less truly the Creator. The role of the Son is to bridge the gap between creation and God, not through functional mediation, but rather through the immediate presence of the Father in creation. Being consubstantial with the Father, the Son reveals his presence in creation. Thus, the incapacity of creation to know God is bridged by partaking in the Son's knowledge of the Father. Not only the Son, but also Holy Spirit plays the role of mediator between God and the world. This mediation is based on the divine status of the whole Holy Trinity and their immediacy in the world.

Athanasius introduces another model of participation, completely different from that of Arius'. This model of immediate participation implies that through participation in the Spirit, creation participates in the Son and by participating in the Son, also participates in the Father. This model of participation is called 'immediate participation'¹⁹ different from hierarchical participation of Arius according to which the Son 'alone partakes the Father, and all other things partake the Son'.²⁰ Athanasius states:

The Son is not such by participation, but, while all things originated have by participation the grace of God, He is the Father's Wisdom and Word of which all things partake, it follows that He, being the deifying and enlightening power of the Father, in which all things are deified and quickened, is not alien in essence from the Father, but coessential. For by partaking of Him, we partake of the Father; because that the Word is the Father's own.²¹

Athanasius is against Arius' model of hierarchical participation because such a model puts in question the divinity of the Son as well as the omnipotence of God. The categories of participation can be explained in the terms of grace. Arius' gradualist model of transmitting grace to creation implies two steps. In the first step, the Son receives grace from the Father, and then distributes it to the rest of creation. It is unacceptable to Athanasius that one who receives by participation can grant participation to others. Athanasius does not deny the possibility that one creature can give to another creature, but he wants to underline the role of creatures as receivers and the role of God as the ultimate Giver.

In that way the world is fully dependent on God and the gap between God and the creation is bridged by God's initiative and not by that of the creation. This positive step by God toward creation does not abolish the ontological difference between God and the world. The immediate participation of creation in the life of the Holy Trinity implies a certain correspondence between God and the world. The 'likeness' between God and creation cannot be described in terms of analogical similarity. Their difference in nature

¹⁹ Khaled Anatolios, *Athanasius*, p. 115.

²⁰ Athanasius, *De Decretis* 9.

²¹ Athanasius, *De Synodis* 51.

causes an asymmetrical relationship between God and the world, because creation partakes and God is partaken of. The asymmetrical structure of this relationship, based as it is on absolute dependence of the world on God, emphasises their 'likeness' much more than their otherness. The 'likeness' and the otherness between God and the creation lead us to the question of continuity and discontinuity between God and the world. It puts in question the relation between God's essence and his will.

The denial by Arius that the Son is fully divine separates God's creative activity from his being.

God being Maker, to say, that His Framing Word and His Wisdom once was not? It is the same as saying, that God is not Maker, if He had not His proper Framing Word which is from Him, but that that by which He frames, accrues to Him from without, and is alien from Him, and unlike in essence.²²

By making *Logos* dependent of creation, Arius identifies the function of the Father with the function of the Creator.²³ If the Son is not Son by nature, but belongs to the realm of created beings, than God cannot be called the 'Father' but only 'Maker' or 'Creator'. The generative nature of God correlates with his creative activity.

But if there be not a Son, how then say you that God is a Creator? Since all things that come to be are through the Word and in Wisdom, and without This nothing can be, whereas you say He hath not That in and through which He makes all things. For if the Divine Essence be not fruitful itself, but barren, as they hold, as a light that lightens not, and a dry fountain, are they not ashamed to speak of His possessing framing energy? and whereas they deny what is by nature, do they not blush to place before it what is by will?²⁴

Athanasius distinguishes between the relationship of God with creation and the relationship of the Son with the Father. Crucially, Athanasius cuts the connection between *theologia* and *oikonomia*, giving absolute priority to God's being over his will.

For the Word of God was not made for us, but rather we for Him, and 'in Him all things were created.' Nor for that we were weak, was He strong and made by the Father alone, that He might frame us by means of Him as an instrument; perish the thought! it is not so. For though it had seemed good to God not to make things originate, still had the Word been no less with God, and the Father in Him.²⁵

Two different names can be applied to God. He is simultaneously the Father and the Creator. Being the Father entails much more than being the Creator.²⁶ Athanasius establishes a distinction between generation and cre-

²² Athanasius, *Contra Arianos* 17.

²³ Athanasius, *Contra Arianos* I, 29.

²⁴ *Contra Arianos* II, 2.

²⁵ Athanasius, *Contra Arianos* II, 31.

ation on the basis of a distinction between divine essence and will. God's essence precedes his will, because God is 'The Father of an offspring from his proper essence' first and then he 'frames things that are external to him and before were not, by willing them'.²⁷

Arius establishes a relationship between God and the word on the basis of divine will, which relates to the world. Athanasius, on the other hand, starts from the position that God is always Maker, but this does not lead him to conclude that his works necessarily must be eternal, as is the case with Origen. Being Maker implies the power to make and it does not constitute a relationship between God and the world, as in the case of God's Fatherhood, which is constitutive of his relationship with the Son. 'Man may be and may be called Maker, though the works are not as yet; but he cannot be called the Father, nor can he be, unless a Son exists'.²⁸

The Fatherhood of God tells much more about God's being than his creaturehood. God's Fatherhood does not imply temporal sequence in its being, as is the case with his creaturehood. God's Fatherhood implies logical order in his being. The Father and the Son are the ontological characteristics of God's being²⁹ and it necessarily connotes an actual relation by which God's very being is constituted.

Athanasius refutes Origen's concept of God as παντοκράτωρ by defining God's power to make intrinsic to divine being and defining the creation as necessarily temporal because it has come from nothing.

God always had the power to make, yet the things originated had not the power of being eternal. For they are out of nothing, and therefore were not before their origination; but things which were not before their origination, how could these coexist with the ever-existing God?³⁰

Only God's power to make is eternal. The creation has its beginning in time and it does not co-exist with God. It depends on the power of God the Creator, because of inherent limitation of its nature. The relationship between the Father and the Son has priority over the relationship between God and the world. Athanasius concludes this on the basis of the priority of nature over will.

Now it is a something that surpasses will, that He should be by nature, and should be The Father of His proper Word. If then that which comes

²⁶ Athanasius, *Contra Arianos* I, 33.

²⁷ Athanasius, *Contra Arianos* II, 2.

²⁸ Athanasius, *Contra Arianos* I, 29.

²⁹ G. Florovsky 'The Concept of creation in St. Athanasius', *Studia Patristica* 6, Berlin, Academie Verlag, 1962, pp. 45-6, reprinted in G. Florovsky, *Collected works*, (volume 4, Northland Publishing company, Belmont, Massachusetts, 1975), pp. 52-3.

³⁰ Athanasius, *Contra Arianos* I, 29.

first, which is according to nature, did not exist, as they would have it in their folly, how could that which is second come to be, which is according to will? For the Word is first, and then the creation.³¹

The Son is proper to the Father's essence and not foreign to God as is the case with the creation. The Son feels the same delight as the Father seeing the world made after his own image³² because he is one in being with the Maker. The relationship between God and the world is contained in the relationship between the Father and the Son. God mediates the ontological distance between God and the world in a twofold way. First, God is essentially the Father of his only-begotten Son and only subsequently the Maker of the world. Second, through the incarnation of his Son, God becomes the Father of humanity by grace and the Maker of the Incarnate *Logos*.

Athanasius links God with creation in one positive relation based on divine creative agency. The creation has its being only in God. But it does not mean the abolition of the ontological poverty of creation and the establishment of the world as independent being. The being of the world remains 'foreign' and 'external' to God's being, because it participates in God 'from nothing'. The creation receives being from participation in God through his *Logos*. Participating in the *Logos*, the creation participates in the Father, because '*Logos* is the Father's own'.³³ Thus, the relationship between God and the world becomes dialectical, through an incarnate *Logos* who effects transformation of created reality.

Athanasius in defending the Nicene formula made an exceptional contribution to Christian belief in the divinity of *Logos*. By establishing *Logos* as a fully divine, Athanasius developed the Christian conception of the relation between God and the world. Under the influence of certain philosophical schools, earlier doctrines posited God either too close to the world, resulting in the divine being linked with the world by necessity, or by emphasising the divine transcendence created a totally independent world. Thus God either absorbs the world into his own being or is unable to influence the world. A realm of subordinate mediators filled the gap between God and the World, and protected the world from the hand of God, or helped God to deal with the world. With the Gnostics the schema of intermediaries became more complex, because God the Creator employed semi-gods. Origen and the Alexandrian catechetical school could not avoid cosmological patterns of Middle-Platonism establishing one eternal hierarchical chain of beings, which put at risk God's transcendence. Athanasius clearly distinguished God from creation, putting on the one side the world, which could 'not exist at all' and on the other God the Creator, who could 'not have created at all'.

³¹ Athanasius, *Contra Arianos* II, 2.

³² Athanasius, *Contra Arianos* II, 82.

³³ Athanasius, *De Synodis* 51.

Athanasius' argument is sometimes traced back to Irenaeus, Bishop of Lyon. Athanasius followed Irenaeus in establishing the relationship between God and the world based on the divine love and the divine presence in creation.

Another great achievement of Athanasius is the complete identification of *Logos* with Jesus Christ. In that way he brought to a complete stop the long history of philosophical doctrines of *Logos* and their influence on Christian thought. *Logos* ceased to be the cosmological principle, the Divine Reason, the reason inherited in creatures, God's instrument in creation, God's power etc. *Logos* in Athanasius is *Logos* who became flesh. Thus Jesus Christ as incarnate *Logos* preserves the role of Mediator, but not as a functional one. He brings the world near the Father. *Logos* accomplishes his divine status through the communion of God and the world in him. Otherwise, if he is merely a creature, he would not be able to bridge the ontological gulf between God and the world.

Владимир Цветковић

СВЕТИ АТАНАСИЈЕ ВЕЛИКИ И НИКЕЈСКО ИСПОВЕДАЊЕ ВЕРЕ

Арије и његови следбеници су својим учењем о створеној природи Господа Исуса Христа дубоко поткопали библијске темеље на којима се базирало исповедање вере у IV веку. Први Васељенски сабор сазван у Nikeји од стране Константина Великог осуђује Арија и његове следбенике али потреси у царству не престају. Највећу борбу против Арија и његових следбеника води Свети Атанасије Велики, безрезервно бранећи оно што су Свети оци усагласили у Nikeји. Свети Атанасије за разлику од Арија који учи да "беше када Сина Божијег није било" и да је Бог створио све, укључујући и Сина Божијег "ни из чега". Атанасије Велики истрајавајући на Nikeјском решењу "omousios" (једносушни) које одређује Сина као биће које има исту суштину као и Отац, утврђује Сина или Логос Божији не на страни створеног као Арије већ на страни нествореног и божанског. Атанасије потврђује Божију трансценденцију у његову слободу у односу на свет, тврдећи да свет није морао ни да постоји и да Бог Творац није морао уопште да ствара, већ да је стварање израз његове слободне воље и љубави. Са светим Атанасијем Великим почела је нова ера у историји хришћанске мисли, ера догматске теологије.