

WILL THE REAL ATHANASIUS PLEASE STAND UP?

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Church historians, when thinking of Athanasius as standing *contra mundum*, have almost universally thought of him as standing not only against the heathen and heretical world but also slightly askance to the apostolic theological world as well. Historians of ecclesiastical and theological affairs have too readily assigned Athanasius to a theological position cut out largely by Origen. Though the great Athanasius opposed Origenism at its worst (e. g., Arianism), the taint of being of the same Alexandrian ecclesiastical tradition and associations with the Alexandrian school of thought have kept him in the shadow of Origen. Being so consigned, Athanasius has not been given his rightful place beside Augustine as one of the two towering giants of the first half-millennium of Christendom and the father of evangelical systematic theology.

I suggest that a fresh look at Athanasius is in order by those who wish a better understanding of orthodoxy in the early Church. It is my contention that Athanasius derived his early theology not from Origen but from the second-century Fathers, leaving Origen to influence those of lesser capabilities. A study of the second-century Fathers and their theological parallels in Athanasius' early work, *The Incarnation of the Word of God*, will prove that Athanasius owes far more to Irenaeus and his preceptors than to Origen and his teachers.

It goes without saying that the early Church Fathers relied heavily on the Scriptures for their theological language. It is a fact that the test of orthodoxy used in the early Church was the extent to which Scriptural language and thought forms permeated the Fathers' writings. My purpose here is to compare how this permeation was expressed by the second-century Fathers and how it was remarkably re-expressed by Athanasius in *The Incarnation of the Word of God*.

1. THE INFLUENCE OF THE APOSTOLIC FATHERS ON ATHANASIUS'

THE INCARNATION

As we consider the post-apostolic Christian writers to find parallels and roots for *The Incarnation* as expressed by Athanasius, we are struck by the dearth of theological definitions and formulae. Kelly puts it this way:

Thus it is useless to look for any systematic treatment of the doctrine [of the incarnation] in the popular Christianity of the second century. It is true that the Apostolic Fathers make numerous references to Christ's work. For

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the most part, however, they are rehearsing the clichés of catechetical instruction, so that what they say smacks more of affirmation than explanation.¹

Robertson writes concerning the theological formulations of the period: "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."² Let us now briefly look at the statements made by the Apostolic Fathers that bear directly on Athanasius' doctrine of the incarnation.

Clement of Rome, an acquaintance of the apostles, wrote in his letter to the Corinthians that Jesus was the Son of God, "much greater than angels," and the recipient of the Gentiles as his inheritance.³ In chapter 12 Clement writes that "through the blood of the Lord there shall be redemption unto all them that believe and hope on God," and in chapter 21 we read, "Let us fear the Lord Jesus Christ, whose blood was given for us." Clement, in chapter 46, may have initiated a common refrain in early Christian literature by referring to schism and strife in the tearing of the actual body of Christ ("Wherefore are these strifes and wraths and factions and divisions and war among you? Wherefore do we tear and rend asunder the members of Christ, and stir up factions against our own body, and reach such a pitch of folly, as to forget that we are members one of another?"). Athanasius wrote in chapter 24.4: "Whence neither did He suffer the death of John, His head being severed nor, as Isaiah, was He sawn in sunder; in order that even in death He might still keep His body undivided and in perfect soundness, and no pretext be afforded to those that would divide the Church." Finally, in chapter 49 of Clement's letter we see this: "Jesus Christ our Lord hath given His blood for us by the will of God, and His flesh for our flesh and His life for our lives."

Hermas the Shepherd, written no later than 150, also has a few things to say concerning Christ—namely, that he is the Son of God, a servant, and the means whereby God's commandments are given to the people of God.⁴ Athanasius quotes *Hermas* in chapter 3.1 when he writes, "Secondly, in the most edifying book of the Shepherd, 'First of all believe that God is one, which created and framed all things, and made them to exist out of nothing.'" This quote is taken from the First Mandate of *The Shepherd*. In the Parables, 5,6, Hermas states, "The Holy Pre-existent Spirit, Which created the whole creation, God made to dwell in flesh that He desired."

The *Didache* is nowhere directly quoted by Athanasius (except in *Syntagma*, if he wrote this work), and there is little trace of its thought in *The Incarnation*.

¹J. N. D. Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines* (New York: Harper & Row, 1960), p. 163.

²A. Robertson, tr., *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers* (New York: Christian Literature Company, 1892), Vol. IV, p. 22.

³Clement of Rome, *Epistle to the Corinthians*, 36, in *The Apostolic Fathers*, tr. J. B. Lightfoot (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1956), p. 28.

⁴*The Shepherd of Hermas*, Parables 5, 5, in J. B. Lightfoot, tr., *The Apostolic Fathers*, p. 206.

Polycarp, who Irenaeus tells us was “instructed by the apostles, and was brought into contact with many who had seen Christ” (*A. H.*, III, 3), wrote a letter to the Philippian Christians around 140. In it he makes the following statements about the death of Christ: “Our Lord Jesus Christ ... endured to face even death for our sins ...,”⁵ and he “died for our sakes and was raised by God for us.”⁶ Polycarp also gives us a glimmer of Augustine’s doctrine of grace when he writes, “Forasmuch as ye know that it is by grace ye are saved, not of works, but by the will of God through Jesus Christ.”⁷ Harris quotes Westcott as writing, “The short epistle of Polycarp contains far more references to the writings of the New Testament than any other work of the first age (70-120).”⁸ It is important to note here that Irenaeus studied under Polycarp.

The Epistle of Barnabas, written between 70 and 130, speaks surprisingly clearly in a number of places concerning the incarnation. We find the doctrine in an infant stage in such passages as these: “Behold again it is Jesus, not a son of man, but the Son of God, and He was revealed in the flesh in a figure”;⁹ “He Himself endured that He might destroy death and show forth the resurrection of the dead, for that He must needs be manifested in the flesh”;¹⁰ “for to this end the Lord endured to deliver His flesh unto corruption, that by the remission of sins we might be cleansed.”¹¹ These quotes show beyond a doubt that the incarnation was evident, however sparsely, in the early writings. Note also this early death-defeating motivation of the incarnation being expressed by the Church. Finally, in clear sacrificial language, Barnabas writes, “He was in His own person about to offer the vessel of His spirit a sacrifice for our sins, that the type also which was given in Isaac who was offered upon the altar would be fulfilled.”¹²

Last among the Apostolic Fathers we would refer to Ignatius. Robertson claims that Ignatius’ letters “stand alone among the literature of their day in theological depth and reflexion.”¹³ By this Robertson is saying that Ignatius, writing at the beginning of the second century, is alone in attempting to bring out the mystery of the natures of Christ. Harris makes the point that Ignatius, writing in Greek like Polycarp, knew the Scriptures well, and numerous quotations and allusions to Holy Writ are found in his seven letters. McGiffert states, “The only father of the period, so far as I am aware, whose piety found vivid and burning expression in his writings, was Ignatius of Antioch, early in the second century. His piety ... was nourished, it would seem, rather upon Jesus Christ than upon God the Father.”¹⁴ (It is interesting to note that

⁵Polycarp, *Epistle to the Philippians*, 1, in *ibid.*, p. 95.

⁶*Ibid.*, 9, p. 98.

⁷*Ibid.*, 1, p. 95.

⁸R. L. Harris, *Inspiration and Canonicity of the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1957), p. 206.

⁹Barnabas 12, in J. B. Lightfoot, tr., *The Apostolic Fathers*, p. 148.

¹⁰*Ibid.*, 5, p. 140.

¹¹*Ibid.*

¹²*Ibid.*, 7, p. 142.

¹³A. Robertson, tr., *op. cit.*, p. 22.

¹⁴A. C. McGiffert, *The God of the Early Christians* (New York: Scribner’s, 1925), p. 84.

both Irenaeus and Athanasius were Greeks, wrote in Greek and made extensive use of the Scriptures in their writings.) We read in Ignatius' letter to the *Ephesians*, chapter 19, that "God appeared in the likeness of man unto the newness of everlasting life," and in his letter to the *Smyrneans*, chapter 4, we find, "I endure all things, seeing that He Himself enableth me, who is perfect Man." In chapter 3 of the same letter, Ignatius writes, "For I know and believe that He was in the flesh even after the resurrection." In his letter to the *Trallians*, chapter 9, Ignatius gives an *almost completely parallel* account of the humanity of Christ to that which Athanasius gives in chapter 18 of *The Incarnation*. In his letter to the *Romans*, chapter 6, Ignatius writes, "Him I seek, who died on our behalf; Him I desire, who rose again for our sake." In his letter to the *Ephesians*, chapter 7, we find the following statement: "There is one only physician, of flesh and of spirit, generate and ingenerate, God in man, true life in death, Son of Mary and Son of God, first passible and then impassible, Jesus Christ our Lord." In the same letter, chapter 20, we read of "one Jesus Christ, who after the flesh was of David's race, who is Son of Man and Son of God." It is clear by now that even Ignatius does not distinguish the natures of Christ. He continues to confuse them in *Ephesians*, chapter 18: "For our God, Jesus the Christ, was conceived in the womb by Mary according to a dispensation, of the seed of David but also of the Holy Ghost." He just claims both, leaving the problem to be solved in another age!

In his letter to the *Trallians*, chapter 2, Ignatius lays the groundwork for Athanasius in his chapters 8-11 when he writes, "For when you are obedient to the bishop as to Jesus Christ, it is evident to me that you are living not after men but after Jesus Christ, who died for us, that believing on His death ye might escape death." This continues that common strain begun with Barnabas that flows through Irenaeus to Athanasius—that is, that the abolition of death was one of the major motivating reasons for the incarnation. The similarity of these writers at this point is striking. In the letter to the *Philadelphians*, chapter 9, Ignatius uses *parousia* in reference to Christ's first coming: "But the Gospel hath a singular preeminence in the advent (*parousia*) of the Saviour, even our Lord Jesus Christ, and His passion and resurrection." The New Testament *only* uses *parousia* to refer to the return in glory, and not to the Lord's first manifestation (2 Peter 1:16 excepted). However Justin, Irenaeus and Athanasius (chapter 56.3) use *parousia* in the *same* way. Here then is another unifying factor tying Athanasius to the second-century Christian writers. In his letter to the *Magnesians*, chapter 8, Ignatius calls Christ the "Logos," thus following both Biblical precedent and philosophical trends of the time. Later Justin will follow (*First Apology*, 1, 10; etc.), as will Irenaeus (*A. H.*, IV,6,38) and Athanasius.

J. L. Neve has written that the Apostolic Fathers were more interested in the demands of the new Christian life than they were in the systematizing of their faith. This is why the great doctrines of the Christian religion such as the incarnation and the atonement had to wait for other men to enunciate them. The second century is much more

characterized by the pastoral exhortations and praises of the type expressed in the *Didache*, *I Clement* and *II Clement*.

II. THE INFLUENCE OF JUSTIN MARTYR AND THE APOLOGISTS ON ATHANASIUS' *THE INCARNATION*

In the middle of the second century, a group of men came forward who are corporately termed the Apologists. Heavily influenced by Platonic thought, they were philosophers rather than theologians. "Their general view of human nature," Kelly states, "is dichotomist, i.e. they consider it to be composed of two elements, body and soul."¹⁵ Since these men looked at Christianity through the glasses of philosophy, they tended to view Christ from a cosmological rather than a soteriological standpoint. Robertson says, "Hence, their view of His (Christ's) Divinity and of His relation to the Father is embarrassed. His eternity and His generation are felt to be hardly compatible; His distinct personality is maintained at the expense of His true Divinity."¹⁶ (Paul, Ignatius, Irenaeus and Athanasius, by beginning their view of Christ from a soteriological standpoint, had no problem in forming a united view of the person and work of Christ.) We will briefly look at the view of the work and person of Christ put forward by the most famous member of the Apologists, Justin Martyr. In addition, we will point out some of the parallels in Athanasius' *The Incarnation*.

Justin, in both his *Dialogue with Trypho* (chapter 85) and his *First Apology* (chapter 48), emphasizes that Christ's miracles prove His deity (*Apology*: "And it was predicted that our Christ should heal all diseases and raise the dead, hear what was said, there are these words: 'At his coming the lame shall leap as an hart, and the tongue of the stammerer shall be clear speaking; the blind shall see, and the lepers shall be cleansed; and the dead shall rise, and walk about.'"). Athanasius writes in chapter 18.4, "Or who that saw Him healing the diseases to which the human race is subject, can still think Him man and not God? For He cleansed lepers, made lame men to walk, opened the hearing of deaf men, made blind to see again, and in a word, drove away from men all diseases and infirmities." Concerning the true physical nature of Christ, Justin writes in his *Second Apology*, 13, "For next to God, we worship and love the Word who is from the unbegotten and ineffable God, since also He became man for our sakes, that, becoming a partaker of our sufferings, He might also bring us healings" (cf. *First Apology*, 46).

Justin's *Dialogue with Trypho* was probably the example Athanasius used in his apologetic aimed at the Jews in his chapters 33 to 40. (Irenaeus may have used Justin's *Dialogue* as an example in his *Epideixis*, as well.) Perhaps the only new twist in Athanasius at this point is his interesting chapter 40 where he writes that all prophecy concerning Christ has been answered and there is nothing left to wait for—except judgment.

¹⁵J. N. D. Kelly, *op. cit.*, p. 166.

¹⁶A. Robertson, tr., *op. cit.*, p. 23.

Justin follows Ignatius' practice of using *parousia* to refer to Christ's first coming (*Dialogue*, chapters 36, 49, 52). Athanasius uses *parousia* in chapter 52 to refer to Christ's first coming.

Justin in his heavy reliance on and use of philosophy in his tracts may have influenced Athanasius in this vein as well. In his use of Platonic thought concerning man's participation in and imitation of his Creator, Justin foresees Athanasius' use of the *same* thought. Justin's *First Apology*, chapter 13: "For the seed and imitation imparted according to capacity is one thing, and quite another is the thing itself, of which there is the participation and imitation according to the grace which is from Him"; Athanasius, chapter 57.3: "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 like what he desires, so that the eye, thus becoming light, may see the light of the sun." Justin has a strong ethical note in his doctrine of redemption that Athanasius gives support to in chapter 4, as well as in his tract, *Against the Heathen*.

Justin also gives shaded acknowledgment to the idea of "like begets like," religiously. This is a theme expressed *both* by Irenaeus and Athanasius (chapter 57). We find this in Justin's *First Apology*, chapter 21: "And we have learned that those only are deified who have lived near to God in holiness and virtue; and we believe that those who live wickedly and do not repent are punished in everlasting fire."

Justin had a "mixed bag" for a theology. On the one hand he could state, "For next to God, we worship and love the Word who is from the unbegotten and ineffable God, since also He became a man for our sakes, that, becoming a partaker of our sufferings, He might also bring us healing."¹⁷ On the other hand, he could write, "Moreover, the Son of God called Jesus, even if only a man by ordinary generation, yet on account of His wisdom, is worthy to be called the Son of God."¹⁸ And yet another example: "(Jesus Christ) becoming man according to His will, He taught us these things for the conversion and restoration of the human race."¹⁹ Finally, Justin compares Plato with Moses in the following remarkable sentence: "And the psychological discussion concerning the Son of God in the *Timaeus* of Plato, where he says, 'He placed him crosswise in the universe,' he borrowed in like manner from Moses."²⁰

By balancing these last statements with one like this,²¹ "If then the Father of all wished His Christ for the whole human family to take upon Him the curses of all, knowing that, after He had been crucified and was dead, He would raise Him up," Kelly feels he is able to say that Justin had his "feet firmly planted in the Church's living liturgical and Scriptural tradition."²² But I am inclined to agree with Robertson when

¹⁷Justin Martyr, *2nd Apology*, 13, in *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, tr. A. Roberts and J. Donaldson (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1956), Vol. 1, p. 192.

¹⁸Justin, *1st Apology*, 22, in *ibid.*, p. 170.

¹⁹*Ibid.*, 23, p. 170.

²⁰*Ibid.*, 60, p. 183.

²¹Justin, *Dialogue with Trypho, A Jew*, 95, in *ibid.*, p. 244.

²²J. N. D. Kelly, *op. cit.*, p. 170.

he states, concerning the Apologists, that "our concern is with their influence on the analysis of the object of faith; and here we see that unconsciously they have severed the Incarnate Son from the Eternal Father: not God but a subordinate divine being is revealed in Christ."²³ However, the attempt to balance philosophy with Christianity which characterized the Apologists, especially Justin, is easily seen in Athanasius. Only Athanasius keeps his priorities straight.

III. THE INFLUENCE OF IRENAEUS ON ATHANASIUS' *THE INCARNATION*

"The theologian who summed up the thought of the second century and dominated Christian orthodoxy before Origen was Irenaeus. He, for his part, was deeply indebted to the Apologists; although he was more of a self-conscious churchman than they, more openly attached and more ready to parade the Church's threefold 'rule of faith,' the framework of his thinking remained substantially the same as theirs."²⁴ It is Volz's view that Irenaeus was the first "genuine theologian" who stood in the apostolic tradition—that is, concerning the incarnation, he began his Christology from a soteriological framework as the Apostle Paul had done before him. Much of the discussion (what there was) over the work and person of Christ in the third century began from the base laid by Irenaeus, who died around 200. Two of the major third-century theologians, Methodius of Olympus and Hippolytus, are directly and clearly influenced (and even personally taught) by Irenaeus. Coxe has written concerning Hippolytus' *Refutation of All Heresies*, "We can scarcely overestimate the value of *The Refutation*, on account of the propinquity of its author to the apostolic age. Hippolytus was a disciple of St. Irenaeus, St. Irenaeus of St. Polycarp, St. Polycarp of St. John."²⁵ Furthermore, Robertson,²⁶ Kelly²⁷ and Prestige²⁸ all make favorable comparisons between the theology of Hippolytus and Tertullian. This alignment is seen most clearly, perhaps, in the fight against modalism. Clement of Alexandria, while the teacher of Origen, nevertheless followed Irenaeus in his general conception of the "logos." All this is to say that the influence of Irenaeus most assuredly did not stop with his death, but extended through the third century to the time of Athanasius in 318.

We will not deal here with the work of Origen, but concentrate on Irenaeus, Justin and the Apostolic Fathers. Even though Origen's strongest opponent was Methodius of Olympus (who, Robertson claims, "certainly speaks with the voice of Ignatius and Irenaeus"), there are important theological similarities between Irenaeus and Origen. First,

²³A. Robertson, tr., *op. cit.*, p. 23.

²⁴J. N. D. Kelly, *op. cit.*, p. 104.

²⁵A. C. Coxe in A. Roberts and J. Donaldson, tr., *op. cit.*, Vol. V, p. 7.

²⁶A. Robertson, tr., *op. cit.*, p. 24.

²⁷J. N. D. Kelly, *op. cit.*

²⁸G. L. Prestige, *Fathers and Heretics* (London: SPCK, 1948), pp. 30 f.

Origen's doctrine of God communicating to man begins with the soteriological rather than the cosmological framework. And second, there was the solid alliance of the theologies of Origen and Hippolytus in their fight against Callistus (and later Sabellius). With this Origenist aside out of the way, we now move on to Irenaeus and his influence on *The Incarnation* by Athanasius.

The best way to determine the influence of Irenaeus on Athanasius is to go right to their writings and let their own words indicate the connection. Irenaeus' major work, in this instance, is *Against Heresies*, written around 185. Unless otherwise noted his words will be from that work.

While some of Athanasius' Christian contemporaries may have objected to his using Platonic language and thought, such a practice was not new in Christian theological and literary history. Irenaeus, in III, 25, 5, directly quotes Plato (from *Timaeus*) with the same theological application as Athanasius manifests in chapter 3.3. Irenaeus: "Then, again, he (Plato) points out that the Maker and Framer of the universe is good. 'And to the good,' he says, 'no envy ever springs up with regard to anything'"; Athanasius: "For God is good or rather is essentially the source of goodness: nor could one that is good be niggardly of anything."

The ethical side of redemption is seen *similarly* by both Irenaeus and Athanasius (also Justin). Irenaeus writes in IV, 20, 7: "And for this reason did the Word become the dispenser of the paternal grace for the benefit of men for ... revealing God to man through many dispensations, lest man falling away from God altogether, should cease to exist." Athanasius, in chapter 4.4, states the following: "For transgression of the commandment was turning them back to their natural state, so that just as they had their being out of nothing, so also, as might be expected, they might look for corruption into nothing in the course of time. For if, out of a former normal state of non-existence, they were called into being by the Presence and lovingkindness of the Word...."

In Irenaeus, III, 19, 1, we read concerning the "logos": "For it was for this end (the gift of adoption) that the Word of God was made man, and He who was the Son of God became the son of man, that man, having been taken into the Word, and receiving the adoption might become the Son of God. For by no other means could we have attained to incorruptibility and immortality, unless we had been united to incorruptibility and immortality." In Athanasius 7.5 and 8.1 we see the following ideas expressed: "For His it was once more both to bring the corruptible to incorruption, and to maintain intact the just claim of the Father upon all.... For this purpose, then, the incorporeal and incorruptible and immaterial Word of God comes to our realm, howbeit He was not far from us above."

Irenaeus, in III, 22, 1, 2, 4, gives a clear comparison between the Virgin Mary and the newly created earth in the analogy between Adam and Christ, while Athanasius in chapter 8 and chapter 18.5 gives precisely the *same* extended argument.

Irenaeus, in III, 23, 2, gives an illustration of mankind's salvation

being like the liberation of a people who have been made captive by their enemies, while Athanasius, in chapter 9.3, illustrates the *same* Godwardness of mankind's salvation with a story of a king coming into a city to protect it against bandits and enemy attacks.

Athanasius gives us a history of revelation in chapters 11 to 13. It takes us through the four stages of the self-revelation of God: God's image (11), universe (12), Scripture (12) and, finally, God's Son (13). *This exact scheme* is followed by Irenaeus in II, 9, 1, and generally in II, chapters 1 through 9. Meijering says of this order, "This seems to be a scheme preformed by tradition: Irenaeus distinguished between the tradition coming down directly from Adam, the revelation given through the prophets, the knowledge of the Creator through creation, and the apostolic tradition."²⁹

Irenaeus, in V, 14, emphasizes the fleshly appearance of Christ by beginning his treatment with reference to the Pauline use of "flesh and blood" for Jesus Christ; Athanasius, with exactly the *same* emphasis in chapter 18.1, begins his treatment with a reference to the "inspired writers" understanding that "the body" was a true body.

Irenaeus, in III, 11, 5, uses the wedding at Cana and the transformation of the water into wine as a sign that the Word is God and Creator. Athanasius uses the Cana miracle in exactly the *same* way in chapter 18.6.

Concerning the schisms in the body of Christ, Irenaeus writes in IV, 33, 7, "He shall also judge those who give rise to schisms, who are destitute of the love of God, and who look to their own special advantage rather than to the unity of the church; and who for trifling reasons, or any kind of reason which occurs to them, cut in pieces and divide the great and glorious body of Christ, and so far as in them lies, positively destroy it...." Athanasius, for his part, writes in chapter 24.4, "Whence neither did He suffer the death of John, His head being severed, nor, as Isaiah, was He sawn in sunder; in order that even in death He might still keep His body undivided and in perfect soundness, and no pretext be afforded to those that would divide the Church."

Irenaeus, in V, 17, 4, writes, "Through the extension of the hands of a divine person, gathering together the two peoples to one God.' For these were two hands, because there were two peoples scattered to the ends of the earth; but there was one head in the middle, as there is but one God, who is above all, and through all, and in us all." Athanasius, in chapter 25.3, writes, "For it is only on the cross that a man dies with his hands out. Whence it was fitting for the Lord to bear this also and to spread out His hands, that with one He might draw the ancient people, and with the other those from the Gentiles, and unite both in Himself" (cf. Justin, Plato).

Irenaeus, in V, 15, gives many prophetic utterances as to the divinity and resurrection of Jesus. Athanasius, in his apologetic aimed specifically at the Jews, uses the *same* books and prophets from the

²⁹E. P. Meijering, *Orthodoxy and Platonism in Athanasius: Synthesis or Antithesis?* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1968), p. 110.

Scriptures to prove his points.³⁰

Irenaeus, in IV, 38, 1 and 2, talks about God creating everything alike, that is, "inferior to Him who created them." As such, all created things are in a unity with each other and are united with God. Athanasius, in chapter 42, uses the *same* language when, for instance, he writes, "For whatever idea they form of the whole, they must necessarily apply the like idea to the part. For man also, as I said before, is a part of the whole." Both Athanasius and Irenaeus are laying the groundwork for the rationale of the "logos being in man."

Irenaeus, in IV, 38, 1, makes the following comment on why Christ came as a man and not as a particular part of the cosmos: "And for this cause our Lord, in these last times ... came to us, not as He might have come, but as we were capable of beholding Him. He might easily have come to us in His immortal glory, in that case we could never have endured the greatness of the glory." Athanasius writes in chapter 43.2, "For the way for one aiming at display would be, just to appear and to dazzle the beholders; but for one seeking to heal and teach the way is, not simply to sojourn here, but to give himself to the aid of those in want, and to appear as they who need him can bear it." Both writers at this point are discussing the "healing" and "nourishment" of mankind by God.

Speaking of the deification of man's nature by union with Christ, Irenaeus in IV, 38, and in V, 9, 2, speaks of "establishing the Spirit of God in their hearts" and that "He made men like unto Himself, that is, in their own power." Athanasius writes in chapter 54.3, "For in him was made man that we might be made God; and He manifested Himself by a body that we might receive the idea of the unseen Father; and He endured the insolence of men that we might inherit immortality."

Irenaeus, in IV, 27, 2, and 28, 1 and 2, speaks of Christ's *first* physical coming as "*protē*" and "*deuterō parousia*." Again, this term is used in the New Testament almost exclusively for the *second* coming, 2 Peter 1:16 being the sole exception. Athanasius, however, apparently following Irenaeus, Justin and Ignatius, uses *parousia* in chapter 56.3 to refer to the incarnation.

An interesting sidelight is that Irenaeus in his preface to Book IV shows unusual modesty by writing, "This was the reason my predecessors—much superior men to myself, too—were unable ... to refute the Valentinians satisfactorily." Athanasius, *likewise*, shows his modesty in chapter 56.2 when he writes, "But we impart of what we have learned from inspired teachers." And this is not a reference to the apostles!

The use of metonymies to describe transference of divine qualities to man is *remarkably similar* in at least one instance in Irenaeus and Athanasius. Irenaeus, in IV, 20, 5, writes, "For those who see the light are within the light, and partake of its brilliancy; even so, those who see God are in God, and receive of His splendor." Athanasius, in chapter 57.3, writes the following: "For just as if a man wished to see the light of

³⁰Athanasius, *The Incarnation of the Word of God*, 33-38, in A. Robertson, tr., *op. cit.*, pp. 54-57.

the sun, he would at any rate wipe and brighten his eye, purifying himself in some sort like what he desires, so that the eye thus becoming light may see the light of the sun.”

Both Irenaeus and Athanasius use the Cana wedding and the changing of the water into wine for the same purpose—that is, miracles prove the deity of Jesus, the Word. First a quote from Irenaeus: “The incomprehensible acting thus by means of the comprehensible, and the Invisible by the visible; since there is none beyond Him, but He exists in the bosom of the Father.”³¹ Now a quote from Athanasius: “Consistently, therefore, the Word of God took a body and has made use of a human instrument, in order to quicken the body also, and as He is known in creation by His works so to work in man as well, and to show Himself everywhere leaving nothing void of His own divinity, and of the knowledge of Him.”³²

Finally Irenaeus, following the lead of Barnabas and Ignatius, emphasizes the defeat of death as a motivating factor in the “logos” becoming flesh. In his *Demonstration of the Apostolic Preaching*, chapter 31, he writes that “the Word was made flesh in order that sin should be deprived of its power over us through the very flesh which it had ruled and dominated.”³³ Athanasius, *accordingly*, wrote in chapter 8.4: “And thus taking from our bodies one of like nature, because all were under penalty of the corruption of death He gave it over to death in the stead of all and offered it to the Father—doing this ... that firstly all being held to have died in Him, the law involving the ruin of men might be undone.”

IV. CONCLUSION

In viewing the second-century Christian influences on *The Incarnation* one must always keep in mind that one is skipping the alleged single most influential writer on Athanasius—namely, Origen. Robertson gives much space to Origenist theology in Athanasius. In fact, most commentators maintain that at the time of *The Incarnation* Athanasius was under heavy Origenist influences. But, Robertson writes, “It has been said by Harnack that the theology of Athanasius underwent no development, but was the same from first to last. The truth of this verdict is, I think, limited by the fact that the Origenism of Athanasius distinctly undergoes a change, or rather fades away, in his later works. A non-Origenist element is present from the first, and after the contest with Arianism begins, Origen’s ideas recede more and more from view.”³⁴

I would maintain that the “non-Origenist element” present from the first can, in fact, be traced back to Irenaeus and the second-century Christians. Further, I would maintain that the “non-Origenist element”

³¹Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, III, 11, 5, in A. Roberts and J. Donaldson, tr., *op. cit.*, p. 427.

³²Athanasius, in A. Robertson, tr., *op. cit.*, 45, 1, p. 61.

³³G. L. Prestige, *op. cit.*, p. 34.

³⁴A. Robertson, tr., *op. cit.*, p. 68.

comprises the basis for the theology of *The Incarnation*. Moreover, I would submit that much of *The Incarnation* is derived from these early Christians, more or less directly. In other words, despite the geographical proximity and ecclesiastical associations between Athanasius and Origen the theological connections between the two Church Fathers is more contrived and assumed than real. His real theological forefathers did not live in the third century, but in the second and first centuries. In chapter 56.2, Athanasius writes, "But we impart of what we have learned from inspired teachers who have been conversant with them (the Scriptures), who have also become martyrs for the deity of Christ, to your zeal for learning, in turn." The Greek word *martyres* could also be translated "witnesses." Meijering has a comment on Athanasius' teachers: "But in those other writings he also mentions some names of other non-Alexandrian theologians, viz., Ignatius and Dionysius of Rome. He certainly knew more, since he speaks for instance about the teachers who came after Ignatius. We regard it as highly likely that he was acquainted with the works of Irenaeus. This becomes probable from the existence of a papyrus with a section of Irenaeus' work which dates from the third century in Egypt."³⁵

Volz maintains that Irenaeus' main contribution to future theology is his theory of recapitulation—that is, the analogy between Adam and man, Christ and Adam. We find this in *Against Heresies*, III, 22, and in V, 1. Volz further holds that "Irenaeus, 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."³⁶ He then quotes Irenaeus, *A. H.*, III, 19: "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 God and man, by His relationship to both, to bring both to friendship and concord." Athanasius takes most of *The Incarnation* to discuss this same thought and beautifully wraps up his treatment of the fleshly death of Christ in chapter 44.

Athanasius personified the implicit and explicit traditions of the Fathers and the teachings of the New Testament. Both Robertson and Volz would agree with this judgment. Edward Hardy states, "*The Incarnation* is the point of departure of later patristic thought."³⁷ The men who fought for the faith in the second century developed no systematic approach to theology—or any major doctrine, for that matter. Prestige would partially exempt Clement of Alexandria, and Irenaeus (*The Demonstration of the Apostolic Preaching*), from this judgment. While both Origen and Tertullian also wrote systematic theologies, Athanasius alone remained in the apostolic tradition to the end of his life. In the

³⁵E. P. Meijering, *op. cit.*, p. 105.

³⁶C. A. Volz, *Athanasius on the Incarnation* (St. Louis: Concordia Seminary, 1959), p. 37.

³⁷*Ibid.*, p. 43.

fourth century he alone would (and could) continually point to the Fathers for his tradition and foundation, much like Polycarp, Ignatius and Irenaeus before him. He alone maintained a fine and mutually beneficial relationship between theology and philosophy, somewhat as Justin did. He alone kept his feet planted in Biblical exegesis, as did the early Fathers.

Holland makes the point that when Athanasius wrote in chapter 54.3, "For He was made man that we might be made God," he was simply using a "stock sentence" used in connection with one of the most prevalent doctrines of the Patristic age—namely, Christianity's point of contact with paganism—and that he was not veering off onto a neo-platonic strain of thought. With this I quite agree.

A distinctly Patristic influence is found in Athanasius' doctrine of the "logos." Plato and his hierarchical Godhead crept into Origen and even Justin, but Irenaeus remained pure and Athanasius jumped over one hundred years back to Irenaeus to get his doctrine of the Godhead. So he and Irenaeus both teach that the Son (logos) is not inferior to the Father. Here then is a clear break in Platonic ontology for Athanasius at a time when Platonic influences were great in Christian theology.

We also see the same combination of ethical redemption and physical redemption that was missing in previous theologians (except Irenaeus). Justin stressed ethical redemption (as did Origen), but he played down the physical aspect of the atonement. McGiffert has fittingly written, "In John and Ignatius and Athanasius Paul's interest in redemption by the transformation of human nature through union with the divine was controlling."³⁸

Finally, it is no small thing that Irenaeus and Athanasius were both Greek-educated, for their thought patterns seem to be remarkably similar. At the same time it is clear from their writings that Clement of Rome, Polycarp, Ignatius, and Justin all knew Greek well enough to effectively communicate difficult concepts to Greek believers in their native language.

It seems clear to me, in the final analysis, that when Athanasius stood against the world he was standing not in a stream polluted with heresy but in the stream of solid orthodoxy of Irenaeus, Ignatius, Polycarp, Paul and John.

³⁸A. C. McGiffert, *op. cit.*, p. 145.